

THE ADVENTURES OF JERRY MUSKRAT

CHAPTER 21: JERRY MUSKRAT KEEPS WATCH



BY THORNTON W. BURGESS



“The way in which to find things out,
And what goes on all round about,
Is just to keep my two eyes peeled
And two ears all the time unsealed.”

So said Jerry Muskrat, as he settled himself comfortably on one end of the new dam across the Laughing Brook deep in the Green Forest and watched the dark shadows creep farther and farther out into the strange pond made by the new dam.

“I’m going to find out who it is that built this dam, and who it is that filled the hole I made in it! I’m going to find out if I have to move up here and live all summer!” The way in which Jerry said this and snapped his teeth together showed that he meant just what he said.

You see Jerry had spent another long, weary day opening the hole in the dam once more, only to have it closed again while he slept. That had been enough for Jerry. He hadn’t tried again. Instead he had made up his mind that he would find out who was playing such a trick on him. He would just watch until they came, and then if they were not bigger than he, or there were not too many of them, he would—well, the way Jerry gritted and clashed those sharp teeth of his sounded as if he meant to do something pretty bad.

Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter had given up in disgust and started for the Big

River. They are great travelers, anyway, and so didn’t mind so much because there was no longer water enough in the Laughing Brook and the Smiling Pool. Grandfather Frog and Spotty the Turtle, who are such very, very slow travelers, had decided that the Big River was too far away, and so they would stay and live in the strange pond for a while, though it wasn’t nearly so nice as their dear Smiling Pool. They had gone to sleep now, each in his own secret place where he would be safe for the night.

So Jerry Muskrat sat alone and watched. The black shadows crept farther and farther across the pond and grew blacker and blacker. Jerry didn’t mind this, because, as you know, his eyes are made for seeing in the dark, and he dearly loves the night. Jerry had sat there a long time without moving. He was listening and watching. By and by he saw something that made him draw in his breath and anger leap into his eyes. It was a little silver line on the water, and it was coming straight towards the dam where he sat. Jerry knew that it was made by some one swimming.

“Ha!” said Jerry. “Now we shall see!”

Nearer and nearer came the silver line. Then Jerry made out the head of the swimmer. Suddenly all the anger left Jerry. He didn’t have room for anger; a great fear had crowded it out. The head was bigger than that of any Muskrat Jerry had ever seen. It was bigger than the head of any of Billy Mink’s relatives. It was the head

of a stranger, a stranger so big that Jerry felt very, very small and hoped with all his might that the stranger would not see him.

Jerry held his breath as the stranger swam past and then climbed out on the dam. He looked very much like Jerry himself, only ever and ever so much bigger. And his tail! Jerry had never seen such a tail. It was very broad and flat. Suddenly the big stranger turned and looked straight at Jerry.

“Hello, Jerry Muskrat!” said he. “Don’t you know me?”

Jerry was too frightened to speak.

“I’m your big cousin from the North; I’m Paddy the Beaver, and if you leave my dam alone, I think we’ll be good friends,” continued the stranger.

“I—I—I hope so,” said Jerry in a very faint voice, trying to be polite, but with his teeth chattering with fear.