

THE ADVENTURES OF JERRY MUSKRAT

CHAPTER 22: JERRY LOSES HIS FEAR



BY THORNTON W. BURGESS

“Oh, tell me, you and you and you,
If it may hap you’ve ever heard
Of all that wond’rous is and great
The greatest is the spoken word?”

It’s true. It’s the truest thing that ever was. If you don’t believe it, you just go ask Jerry Muskrat. He’ll tell you it’s true, and Jerry knows. You see, it’s this way: Words are more than just sounds. Oh, my, yes! They are little messengers, and once they have been sent out, you can’t call them back. No, Sir, you can’t call them back, and sometimes that is a very sad thing, because—well, you see these little messengers always carry something to some one else, and that something may be anger or hate or fear or an untruth, and it is these things which make most of the trouble in this world. Or that something may be love or sympathy or helpfulness or kindness, and it is these things which put an end to most of the troubles in this world.

Just take the case of Jerry Muskrat. There he sat on the new dam, which had made the strange pond in the Green Forest, shaking with fear until his teeth chattered, as he watched a stranger very, very much bigger than he climb up on the dam. Jerry was afraid, because he had seen that the stranger could swim as well as he could, and as Jerry had no secret burrows there, he knew that he couldn’t get away from the stranger if he

wanted to. Somehow, Jerry knew without being told that the stranger had built the dam, and you know Jerry had twice made a hole in the dam to let the water out of the strange pond into the Laughing Brook. Jerry knew right down in his heart that if he had built that dam, he would be very, very angry with any one who tried to spoil it, and that is just what he had tried to do. So he sat with chattering teeth, too frightened to even try to run.

“I wish I had let some one else keep watch,” said Jerry to himself.

Then the big stranger had spoken. He had said: “Hello, Jerry Muskrat! Don’t you know me?” and his voice hadn’t sounded the least bit angry. Then he had told Jerry that he was his big cousin, Paddy the Beaver, and he hoped that they would be friends.

Now everything was just as it had been before—the strange pond, the dam, Jerry himself and the big stranger, and the black shadows of the night—and yet somehow, everything was different, all because a few pleasant words had been spoken. A great fear had fallen away from Jerry’s heart, and in its place was a great hope that after all there wasn’t to be any trouble. So he replied to Paddy the Beaver as politely as he knew how. Paddy was just as polite, and the first thing Jerry knew, instead of being enemies, as Jerry had all along made up his mind would be the case when he found the builder of the dam, here they were becoming the best

of friends, all because Paddy the Beaver had said the right thing in the right way.

“But you haven’t told me yet what you made those holes in my dam for, Cousin Jerry,” said Paddy the Beaver finally.

Jerry didn’t know just what to say. He was so pleased with his big new cousin that he didn’t want to hurt his feelings by telling him that he didn’t think that dam had any business to be across the Laughing Brook, and at the same time he wanted Paddy to know how he had spoiled the Laughing Brook and the Smiling Pool. At last he made up his mind to tell the whole story.