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Bumper, The White Rabbit

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Not until it approached very close did he duck his head and look up

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Illustrations

Not until it approached very close did he duck his head and look up

He couldn't believe it was anything but a magic carrot

They tried to land on his back and claw him

INTRODUCTION TO THE TWILIGHT ANIMAL STORIES

By the Author

All little boys and girls who love animals should become acquainted with Bumper the white rabbit, with Bobby Gray Squirrel, with Buster the bear, and with White Tail the deer, for they are all a jolly lot, brave and fearless in danger, and so lovable that you won't lay down any one of the books without saying wistfully, "I almost wish I had them really and truly as friends and not just storybook acquaintances." That, of course, is a splendid wish; but none of us could afford to have a big menagerie of wild animals, and that's just what you would have to do if you went outside of the books. Bumper had many friends, such as Mr. Blind Rabbit, Fuzzy Wuzz and Goggle Eyes, his country cousins; and Bobby Gray Squirrel had his near cousins, Stripe the chipmunk and Webb the flying squirrel; while Buster and White Tail were favored with an endless number of friends and relatives. If we turned them all loose from the books, and put them in a ten-acre lot—but no, ten acres wouldn't be big enough to accommodate them, perhaps not a hundred acres.

So we will leave them just where they are—in the books—and read about them, and let our imaginations take us to them where we can see them playing, skipping, singing, and sometimes fighting, and if we read very carefully, and *think* as we go along, we may come to know them even better than if we went out hunting for them.

Another thing we should remember. By leaving them in the books, hundreds and thousands of other boys and girls can enjoy them, too, sharing with us the pleasures of the imagination, which after all is one of the greatest things in the world. In gathering them together in a real menagerie, we would be selfish both to Bumper, Bobby, Buster, White Tail and their friends as well as to thousands of other little readers who could not share them with us. So these books of *Twilight Animal Stories* are dedicated to all little boys and girls who love wild animals. All others are forbidden to read them! They wouldn't understand them if they did.

So come out into the woods with me, and let us listen and watch,
and I promise you it will be worth while.

Bumper the White Rabbit

STORY I

WHERE BUMPER CAME FROM

There was once an old woman who had so many rabbits that she hardly knew what to do. They ate her out of house and home, and kept the cupboard so bare she often had to go to bed hungry. But none of the rabbits suffered this way. They all had their supper, and their breakfast, too, even if there wasn't a crust left in the old woman's cupboard.

There were big rabbits and little rabbits; lean ones and fat ones; comical little youngsters who played pranks upon their elders, and staid, serious old ones who never laughed or smiled the livelong day; boy rabbits and girl rabbits, mother rabbits and father rabbits, and goodness knows how many aunts, uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins, second cousins and distant relatives-in-law! They all lived under one big roof in the [Pg 10] backyard of the good old woman who kept them, and they had such jolly times together that it seemed a shame to separate them.

But once every day the old woman chose several of her pets, and carried them away in a basket to a certain street corner of the city where she offered them for sale. She was dreadfully poor, and often when she returned home at night, counting her money, she would murmur: "It's a cabbage for them or a loaf of bread for myself. I can't get both."

She didn't always get the loaf of bread, but the rabbits always had their cabbage. They were all pink-eyed, white rabbits, and people were willing to pay good prices for them. But the whitest and pinkest-eyed of them all was Bumper, a tiny rabbit when he was born, and not very big when the old woman took him away on his first trip to the street corner. Bumper had never seen so many people before, and he was a little shy and frightened at first; but Jimsy and Wheedles, his brothers, laughed at his fears, and told him not to mind.

After that he plucked up courage, and when a little girl suddenly ran out of the crowd and picked him up in her arms, he tried not to be afraid. "Oh, you sweet little thing!" the girl exclaimed, pinching

his ears softly. "Where [Pg 11] did you come from, and where did you get those pink eyes and those long, fluffy ears?"

Then the girl kissed Bumper and rubbed his nose against her soft, fresh young cheek; but when the old lady approached, all smiles, and said, "Want him, dear?" she put him down in the basket again.

"Want him? Of course, I want him!" she replied a little scornfully. "But I can't buy him to-day. I spent all my birthday money on candies and cakes. Take him now before I steal him and run away."

She was a pretty girl, with red hair, a dimple in her chin, and one big freckle on the end of her nose; but her eyes were blue, and they made Bumper think of the sky which he could see through a hole in the roof of his house. I suppose it was because he had pink eyes that he thought blue was so becoming to little girls.

That night when he got home, Bumper was bursting with excitement. The day's experience was enough to cause this, but the words of the little girl who had spent all of her birthday money for candies and cakes were fresh in his mind. The first thing he did when he got in his box was to pester his mother with so many questions that she had hard work answering them.

"A little girl asked me where I came from, [Pg 12] mother, and I couldn't answer her. Where did I come from?"

"Why, dear, from a snowball, of course. How else could you be so white?"

"And have I pink eyes?" That was the little girl's second question.

"What color did you think they were?" asked Bumper's mother, smiling. "Look at the eyes of your brothers and sisters."

Bumper looked in Jimsy's and Wheedle's eyes, and saw they were pink, but he was still doubtful. "But mine," he added, "are you sure they're pink? They might be green or yellow —"

Mother rabbit laughed and hopped over to a basin of water which the good old woman kept filled for her pets. "Look in that," she said, "and then tell me what you see."

Trembling with excitement, Bumper plunged both front paws in the basin, and the water rippled in little waves so that he could see

nothing. He was terribly disappointed at first, for the water was a little dirty, and he was afraid the black specks floating in it might be the reflection of his eyes. Then the water cleared as the dirt settled at the bottom, and straight up from the depths there glowed two tiny pink spots. Bumper watched them in silence until his mother asked: "What do you see, dear?" [Pg 13]

"Two pink stars!" he murmured.

Mother rabbit, like all fond mothers, smiled and leaned over to kiss the wet nose of her little one. Jimsy and Wheedles and all the other rabbits were anxious to see the two pink stars in the water, and they crowded around the basin to get a look. They held their breath in amazement, for wonder of wonders! instead of two, there were a dozen tiny pink stars! They twinkled and flashed, and when they bobbed their heads up the stars faded away or disappeared entirely.

Mother rabbit, who was very fond of her little ones, smiled proudly, and said:

"All my children have pink eyes!"

"But don't all rabbits have pink eyes?" asked Bumper, whose little brain was still bursting with questions.

"No, dear, they do not—only those rabbits that come from snow-balls have pink eyes."

"Oh!" exclaimed one and all, and particularly Bumper, who had started all this probing into the family history.

Then the last question of the little girl popped up into his head, and without waiting to catch his breath, or to give his mother time to think up a suitable answer, he blurted it out.

"Where did I get these long, fluffy ears, [Pg 14] mother? The little girl said they were long and fluffy."

Just to make sure he had not been deceived, he pulled them right down between his two front paws, and looked at them. They were, indeed, long, silky and fluffy, and as white as snow.

Mother rabbit shook her head slowly just as if she intended to scold, and then said in the softest, gentlest of voices:

"I'm afraid that little girl has been putting vain ideas into your head, dear. You must be careful, and not let compliments about your eyes and ears spoil you. If you do people won't like you."

Bumper promised not to be spoilt by listening to what little girls said, and then eagerly repeated his question.

"Why, that is simple enough," Mother rabbit answered, having had time to think. "When you were only a little snowball, we had to hang you up to dry, and that pulled your ears out."

That was an answer good enough for any rabbit, and Bumper should have been satisfied, but he had a very inquisitive mind.

"But why didn't I melt when I was hung up to dry?" he asked quickly. "Snowballs melt in the sun, don't they?"

"Yes," gravely, "so they do, dear, if you leave [Pg 15] them in the sun too long. But it was mother's business to see that you didn't melt. It's like baking bread or cake. If you leave the dough in the oven too long it burns up, and then it isn't either bread or cake. It's very hard to know just when it's done, and it's harder"—sighing aloud—"for mothers to know just when a snowball is turning into a white rabbit, and when it's beginning to melt away into nothing. Now don't ask me any more questions to-night. It's bed time, and little rabbits with pink eyes should be fast asleep."

Which was true, but Bumper went to sleep dreaming of a million questions he would ask his mother in the morning.

[Pg 16]

STORY II

WHY BUMPER WAS LEFT AT HOME

Bumper woke up the next morning so hungry that he couldn't think of any of the million questions to ask until he'd finished eating his breakfast. Besides a cabbage, there were some carrots and beet tops the old woman had fished out of a grocer's backyard, and Bumper had to jump lively to get his share. Jimsy and Wheedles were already on their second carrot when he opened his eyes.

"You'll never catch up with me!" said Jimsy, greedily. "I'm one carrot ahead of you."

"And I'm one and a half," mumbled Wheedles, with his mouth full.

"I don't care. Sleep is better for you than so much eating. I had a longer nap, and such beautiful dreams! Oh, I do hope some of them will come true."

"Tell us about them," said Jimsy, forgetting to eat. "I never have dreams."

"Neither do I," complained Wheedles. "You must tell us about your dreams." [Pg 17]

"As soon as I finish my breakfast I will," replied Bumper. "Yes, they were beautiful dreams! I thought I was in a big place filled with crisp lettuce and golden carrots, and a girl with red hair picked me up in her arms and carried me away."

Bumper stopped talking while his brothers looked in amazement at him. They had heard the day before his story of the red-haired girl who wanted to buy him, and they were interested. But while they stopped and waited for him to proceed, Bumper chewed away at his carrot until it was all gone. Then, picking up a second one, he said: "Now I'm up with you. I'm on my second carrot. To-morrow morning I'll tell you the rest of the dream."

Jimsy and Wheedles were greatly surprised and angered at the trick Bumper had played upon them, and they immediately began eating their carrots again as fast as they could.

They were in the midst of their breakfast when the old woman came in the backyard with her basket. All the rabbits set up a commotion then, for they knew she would choose some of them to take away and sell. There were two reasons why they all wanted to be chosen.

One was they liked the change from their narrow quarters to the street corner and the sights [Pg 18] of the city. Another was they all hoped some day to be sold and taken away to a big house where they would be petted and fed until their little stomachs would nearly burst open. They were a little crowded in their home, and new baby rabbits were coming all the time so that if some of them weren't sold they'd soon be walking all over each other.

"Now, which ones shall I take to-day?" the old woman mumbled, smiling upon all of them.

They all bobbed their heads and blinked their pink eyes, and Jimsy jumped over Bumper's back and hopped right into the woman's hands.

"Well, Jimsy," she said, "you seem very anxious to go, so I'll take you for one."

Wheedles tried the same trick, but it didn't work the second time. "No, Wheedles, you've got a cold," she said, pushing him back. "People don't want to buy rabbits that have colds."

Bumper had no cold, and he decided to try his luck, but Topsy, a big rabbit, got in his way, and nearly bowled him over. Bumper squealed, and the old woman pushed Topsy away.

"No, you can't go for being so rough," she scolded. "Poor little Bumper, did Topsy hurt you?"

Bumper was sure then that she intended to take him along with Jimsy; but no! she put [Pg 19] him down gently, and selected three others. Bumper's disappointment was so great that a tear came into one of his pink eyes.

It was mother who consoled him when the old woman had filled her basket and left the yard. "Never mind, dear, your time will come. You're younger than Jimsy."

"But why should I always be left at home?" complained Bumper.