

CHAPTER X

A Strange Ride and How It Ended

DANNY Meadow Mouse often had sat watching Skimmer the Swallow sailing around up in the blue, blue sky. He had watched Ol' Mistah Buzzard go up, up, up, until he was nothing but a tiny speck, and Danny had wondered how it would seem to be way up above the Green Meadows and the Green Forest and look down. It had seemed to him that it must be very wonderful and beautiful. Sometimes he had wished that he had wings and could go up in the air and look down. And now here he was, he, Danny Meadow Mouse, actually doing that very thing!

But Danny could see nothing wonderful or beautiful now. No, indeed! Everything was terrible, for you see Danny Meadow Mouse wasn't flying himself. He was being carried. Yes, sir, Danny Meadow Mouse was being carried through the air in the cruel claws of Hooty the Owl! And all because Danny had forgotten--forgotten to watch up in the

sky for danger.

Poor, poor Danny Meadow Mouse! Hooty's great cruel claws hurt him dreadfully! But it wasn't the pain that was the worst. No, indeed! It wasn't the pain! It was the thought of what would happen when Hooty reached his home in the Green Forest, for he knew that there Hooty would gobble him up, bones and all. As he flew, Hooty kept chuckling, and Danny Meadow Mouse knew just what those chuckles meant. They meant that Hooty was thinking of the good meal he was going to have.

Hanging there in Hooty's great cruel claws, Danny looked down on the snow-covered Green Meadows he loved so well. They seemed a frightfully long way below him, though really they were not far at all, for Hooty was flying very low. But Danny Meadow Mouse had never in all his life been so high up before, and so it seemed to him that he was way, way up in the sky, and he shut his eyes so as not to see. But he couldn't keep them shut. No, sir, he couldn't keep them shut! He just *had* to keep opening them. There was the dear old Green Forest drawing nearer and nearer. It always had looked very beautiful to Danny Meadow Mouse, but now it looked terrible, very terrible indeed, because over in it, hidden away there in some dark place, was the home of Hooty the Owl.

Just ahead of him was the Old Briar-patch where Peter Rabbit lives so safely. Every old bramble in it was covered with snow and it was very, very beautiful. Really everything was just as beautiful as ever--the moonlight, the Green Forest, the snow-covered Green Meadows, the Old Briar-patch. The only change was in Danny Meadow Mouse himself, and it was all because he had forgotten.

Suddenly Danny began to wriggle and struggle. "Keep still!" snapped Hooty the Owl.

But Danny only struggled harder than ever. It seemed to him that Hooty wasn't holding him as tightly as at first. He felt one of Hooty's claws slip. It tore his coat and hurt dreadfully, but it slipped! The fact is, Hooty had only grabbed Danny Meadow Mouse by the loose part of his coat, and up in the air he couldn't get hold of Danny any better. Danny kicked, squirmed and twisted, and twisted, squirmed, and kicked. He felt his coat tear and of course the skin with it, but he kept right on, for now he was hanging almost free. Hooty had started down now, so as to get a better hold. Danny gave one more kick and then--he felt himself falling!

Danny Meadow Mouse shut his eyes and held his breath. Down, down, down he fell. It seemed to him that he never would strike the snow-covered meadows! Really he fell only a very little distance.

But it seemed a terrible distance to Danny. He hit something that scratched him, and then plump! he landed in the soft snow right in the very middle of the Old Briar-patch, and the last thing he remembered was hearing the scream of disappointment and rage of Hooty the Owl.