

## CHAPTER XII

### *The Old Briar-Patch Has a New Tenant*

DANNY Meadow Mouse slowly opened his eyes and then closed them again quickly, as if afraid to look around. He could hear someone talking. It was a pleasant voice, not at all like the terrible voice of Hooty the Owl, which was the very last thing that Danny Meadow Mouse could remember. Danny lay still a minute and listened.

“Why, Danny Meadow Mouse, where in the world did you drop from?” asked the voice. It sounded like--why, very much like Peter Rabbit speaking. Danny opened his eyes again. It *was* Peter Rabbit.

“Where--where am I?” asked Danny Meadow Mouse in a very weak and small voice.

“In the middle of the dear Old Briar-patch with me,” replied Peter Rabbit. “But how did you get here? You seemed to drop right out of the sky.”

Danny Meadow Mouse shuddered. Suddenly he remembered everything: how Hooty the Owl had caught him in great cruel claws and had carried

him through the moonlight across the snow-covered Green Meadows; how he had felt Hooty’s claws slip and then had struggled and kicked and twisted and turned until his coat had torn and he had dropped down, down, down until he had landed in the soft snow and knocked all the breath out of his little body. The very last thing he could remember was Hooty’s fierce scream of rage and disappointment. Danny shuddered again.

Then a new thought came to him. He must get out of sight! Hooty might catch him again! Danny tried to scramble to his feet.

“Ouch! Oh!” groaned Danny and lay still again.

“There, there. Keep still, Danny Meadow Mouse. There’s nothing to be afraid of here,” said Peter Rabbit gently. His big eyes filled with tears as he looked at Danny Meadow Mouse, for Danny was all torn and hurt by the cruel claws of Hooty the Owl, and you know Peter has a very tender heart.

So Danny lay still, and while Peter Rabbit tried to make him comfortable and dress his hurts, he told Peter all about how he had forgotten to watch up in the sky and so had been caught by Hooty the Owl, and all about his terrible ride in Hooty’s cruel claws.

“Oh, dear, whatever shall I do now?” he ended.

“However shall I get back home to my warm house

of grass, my safe little tunnels under the snow, and my little store of seeds in the snug hollow in the old fence-post?”

Peter Rabbit looked thoughtful. “You can’t do it,” said he. “You simply can’t do it. It is such a long way for a little fellow like you that it wouldn’t be safe to try. If you went at night, Hooty the Owl might catch you again. If you tried in daylight, old Roughleg the Hawk would be almost sure to see you. And night or day old Granny Fox or Reddy Fox might come snooping around, and if they did, they would be sure to catch you. I tell you what, you stay right here! The dear Old Briar-patch is the safest place in the world. Why, just think, here you can come out in broad daylight and laugh at Granny and Reddy Fox and at old Roughleg the Hawk, because the good old brambles will keep them out, if they try to get you. You can make just as good tunnels under the snow here as you had there, and there are lots and lots of seeds on the ground to eat. You know I don’t care for them myself. I’m lonesome sometimes, living here all alone. You stay here, and we’ll have the Old Briar-patch to ourselves.”

Danny Meadow Mouse looked at Peter gratefully. “I will, and thank you ever so much, Peter Rabbit,” he said.

And this is how the dear Old Briar-patch happened

to have another tenant.