

CHAPTER XVI

Peter Rabbit's Hard Journey

PETER Rabbit sat in the old stone wall along one side of Farmer Brown's orchard, waiting for Mrs. Moon to put out her light and leave the world in darkness until jolly, round, red Mr. Sun should kick off his rosy bedclothes and begin his daily climb up in the blue, blue sky. In the winter, Mr. Sun is a late sleeper, and Peter knew that there would be two or three hours after Mrs. Moon put out her light when it would be quite dark. And Peter also knew too that by this time Hooty the Owl would probably have caught his dinner. So would old Granny Fox and Reddy Fox. Bowser the Hound would be too sleepy to be on the watch. It would be the very safest time for Peter to try to get to his home in the dear Old Briar-patch.

So Peter waited and waited. Twice Bowser the Hound, who had chased him into the old wall, came over and barked at him and tried to get at him. But the old wall kept Peter safe, and Bowser gave it up.

And all the time Peter sat waiting he was in great pain. You see that shiny wire was drawn so tight that it cut into his flesh and hurt dreadfully, and to the other end of the wire was fastened a piece of wood, part of the stake to which the snare had been made fast and which Peter had managed to gnaw and break off.

It was on account of this that Peter was waiting for Mrs. Moon to put out her light. He knew that with that stake dragging after him he would have to go very slowly, and he could not run any more risk of danger than he actually had to. So he waited and waited, and by and by, sure enough, Mrs. Moon put out her light. Peter waited a little longer, listening with all his might. Everything was still. Then Peter crept out of the old stone wall.

Right away trouble began. The stake dragging at the end of the wire fast to his leg caught among the stones and pulled Peter up short. My, how it did hurt! It made the tears come. But Peter shut his teeth hard, and turning back, he worked until he got the stake free. Then he started on once more, dragging the stake after him.

Very slowly across the orchard and under the fence on the other side crept Peter Rabbit, his leg so stiff and sore that he could hardly touch it to the snow, and all the time dragging that piece of stake,

which seemed to grow heavier and harder to drag every minute. Peter did not dare to go out across the open fields, for fear some danger might happen along, and he would have no place to hide. So he crept along close to the fences where bushes grow, and this made it very, very hard, for the dragging stake was forever catching in the bushes with a yank at the sore leg which brought Peter up short with a squeal of pain.

This was bad enough, but all the time Peter was filled with a dreadful fear that Hooty the Owl or Granny Fox might just happen along. He had to stop to rest very, very often, and then he would listen and listen. Over and over again he said to himself:

“Oh, dear, whatever did I go up to the young peach orchard for when I knew I had no business there? Why couldn’t I have been content with all the good things that were mine in the Green Forest and on the Green Meadows? Oh, dear! Oh, dear!”

Just as jolly, round, red Mr. Sun began to light up the Green Meadows, Peter Rabbit reached the dear Old Briar-patch. Danny Meadow Mouse was sitting on the edge of it anxiously watching for him. Peter crawled up and started to creep in along one of his little private paths. He got in himself, but the dragging stake caught among the brambles, and Peter just fell down in the snow right where he was,

too tired and worn out to move.