

## Johnny Chuck's Secret

by Thornton W. Burgess

Johnny Chuck pushed up the last bit of gravel from the hole he had dug between the roots of the old apple tree in a corner of the Green Meadows. He smoothed it down on the big, yellow mound he had made in front of his door. Then he sat up very straight on top of the mound, brushed his coat, shook the sand from his trousers and carefully cleaned his hands.

After he had rested a bit, he turned around and looked at his new home, for that is what it was, although he had not come there to live yet, and no one knew of it, no one but jolly, round, red Mr. Sun, who, peeping between the branches of the old apple tree, had caught Johnny Chuck at work. But *he* wouldn't tell, not jolly Mr. Sun! Looking down from the blue sky every day he sees all sorts of queer things and he learns all kinds of secrets, does Mr. Sun, but he never, never tells. No, Sir! Mr. Sun never tells one of them, not even to Old Mother West Wind when at night they go down together behind the Purple Hills.

So jolly, round, red Mr. Sun just smiled and smiled when he discovered Johnny Chuck's secret, for that is just what the new home under the apple tree was—a secret. Not even the Merry Little Breezes, who find out almost everything, had discovered it.

Johnny Chuck chuckled to himself as he planned a back door, a beautiful back door, hidden behind a tall clump of meadow grass where no one would think to look for a door. When he had satisfied himself as to just where he would put it, he once more sat up very straight on his nice, new mound and looked this way and looked that way to be sure that no one was near. Then he started for his old home along a secret little path he had made for himself.

Pretty soon he came to the Lone Little Path that went past his own home. He danced and he skipped along the Lone Little Path, and, because he was so happy, he tried to turn a somersault. But Johnny Chuck was so round and fat and rolly-poly that he just tumbled over in a heap.

"Well, well, well! What's the matter with you?" said a voice close beside him before he could pick himself up. It was Jimmy Skunk, who was out looking for some beetles for his dinner.

Johnny Chuck scrambled to his feet and looked foolish, very foolish indeed.

"There's nothing the matter with me, Jimmy Skunk," said Johnny. "There's nothing the matter with me. It's just because I've got a secret."

"A secret!" cried Jimmy Skunk. "What is it?"

"Yes, a secret, a really, truly secret," said Johnny Chuck, and looked very important.

"Tell me, Johnny Chuck. Come on, tell just *me*, and then we'll have the secret together," begged Jimmy Skunk.

Now Johnny Chuck was so tickled with his secret that it seemed as if he *must* share it with some one. He just couldn't keep it to himself any longer.

"You won't tell any one?" said Johnny Chuck.

Jimmy Skunk promised that he wouldn't tell a soul.

"Cross your heart," commanded Johnny Chuck.

Jimmy Skunk crossed his heart.

Then Johnny Chuck looked this way and looked that way to be sure that no one was listening. Finally he whispered in Jimmy Skunk's ear:

"I've got a new home under the old apple tree in a corner of the Green Meadows," said Johnny Chuck.

Of course Jimmy Skunk was very much surprised and very much interested, so Johnny Chuck told him all about it.

"Now, remember, it's a secret," said Johnny Chuck, as Jimmy Skunk started off down the Lone Little Path across the Green Meadows, to look for some beetles.

"I'll remember," said Jimmy Skunk.

"And don't tell!" called Johnny Chuck.

Jimmy Skunk promised that he wouldn't tell. Then Johnny Chuck started off up the Lone Little Path, whistling, and Jimmy Skunk trotted down the Lone Little Path onto the Green Meadows.

Jimmy Skunk was thinking so much about Johnny Chuck's new home that he quite forgot to look for beetles, and he almost ran into Peter Rabbit.

"Hello, Jimmy Skunk," said Peter Rabbit, "can't you see where you are going? It must be you have something on your mind; what is it?"

"I was thinking of Johnny Chuck's new home," said Jimmy Skunk.

"Johnny Chuck's new home!" exclaimed Peter Rabbit. "Has Johnny Chuck got a new home? Where is it?"

"Under the roots of the old apple tree in a corner of the Green Meadows," said Jimmy Skunk, and then he clapped both hands over his mouth. You see he hadn't really meant to tell. It just slipped out.

"Oh, but it's a secret!" cried Jimmy Skunk. "It's a secret, and you mustn't tell. I guess Johnny Chuck won't mind if you know, Peter Rabbit, but you mustn't tell any one else." Peter Rabbit promised he wouldn't.

Now Peter Rabbit is very inquisitive, very inquisitive indeed. So as soon as he had parted from Jimmy Skunk he made up his mind that he must see the new home of Johnny Chuck. So off he started

as fast as he could go towards the old apple tree in a corner of the Green Meadows. Half way there he met Reddy Fox.

"Hello, Peter Rabbit! Where are you going in such a hurry?" asked Reddy Fox.

"Over to the old apple tree to see Johnny Chuck's new home," replied Peter Rabbit as he tried to dodge past Reddy Fox. Then of a sudden he remembered and clapped both hands over his mouth.

"Oh, but it's a secret, Reddy Fox. It's a secret, and you mustn't tell!" cried Peter Rabbit.

But Reddy Fox wouldn't promise that he wouldn't tell, for in spite of his handsome coat and fine manners, Reddy Fox is a scamp. And, besides, he has no love for Johnny Chuck, for he has not forgotten how Johnny Chuck once made him run and called him a "fraid cat."

So when Reddy Fox left Peter Rabbit he grinned a wicked grin and hurried off to find Bobby Coon. He met him on his way to the Laughing Brook. Reddy Fox told Bobby Coon all about Johnny Chuck's secret and then hurried away after Peter Rabbit, for Reddy Fox also is very inquisitive.

Bobby Coon went on down to the Laughing Brook. There he met Billy Mink and told him about the new home Johnny Chuck had made under the old apple tree in a corner of the Green Meadows.

Pretty soon Billy Mink met Little Joe Otter and told him.

Then Little Joe Otter met Jerry Muskrat and told him.

Jerry Muskrat saw Blacky the Crow and told him, and Great-Grandfather Frog heard him.

Blacky the Crow met his first cousin, Sammy Jay, and told him.

Sammy Jay met Happy Jack Squirrel and told him.

Happy Jack met his cousin, Striped Chipmunk, and told him.

Striped Chipmunk passed the house of old Mr. Toad and told him.

The next morning, very early, before Old Mother West Wind had come down from the Purple Hills, Johnny Chuck stole over to his new home to begin work on his new back door. He had hardly begun to dig when he heard some one cough right behind him. He whirled around and there sat Peter Rabbit looking as innocent and surprised as if he had really just discovered the new home for the first time.

"What a splendid new home you have, Johnny Chuck!" said Peter Rabbit.

"Y—e—s," said Johnny Chuck, slowly. "It's a secret," he added suddenly. "You won't tell, will you, Peter Rabbit?"

Peter Rabbit promised that he wouldn't tell. Then Johnny Chuck felt better and went back to work as soon as Peter Rabbit left.

He had hardly begun, however, when some one just above him said: "Good morning, Johnny Chuck."

Johnny Chuck looked up and there in the old apple tree sat Blacky the Crow and his cousin, Sammy Jay.

Just then there was a rustle in the grass and out popped Billy Mink and Little Joe Otter and Jerry Muskrat and Happy Jack Squirrel and Striped Chipmunk and Bobby Coon. When Johnny Chuck had recovered from his surprise and looked over to the doorway of his new home there sat Reddy Fox on Johnny Chuck's precious new mound. It seemed as if all the little meadow people were there, all but Jimmy Skunk, who wisely stayed away.

"We've come to see your new home," said Striped Chipmunk, "and we think it's the nicest home we've seen for a long time."

"It's so nicely hidden away, it's really quite secret," said Reddy Fox, grinning wickedly.

Just then up raced the Merry Little Breezes and one of them had a message for Johnny Chuck from Great-Grandfather Frog. It was this:

"Whisper a secret to a friend and you shout it in the ear of the whole world."

After every one had admired the new home, they said good-bye and scattered over the Green Meadows. Then Johnny Chuck began to dig again, but this time he wasn't making his new back door. No indeed! Johnny Chuck was digging at that new mound of yellow gravel of which he had been so proud. Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun blinked to be sure that he saw aright, for Johnny Chuck was *filling up his new home* between the roots of the old apple tree. When he got through, there wasn't any new home.

Then Johnny Chuck brushed his coat carefully, shook the sand out of his trousers, wiped his hands and started off for his old home. And this time he didn't take his special hidden path, for Johnny Chuck didn't care who saw him go.

Late that afternoon, Johnny Chuck sat on his old doorstep, with his chin in his hands, watching Old Mother West Wind gathering her Merry Little Breezes into the big bag in which she carries them to their home behind the Purple Hills.

"'Whisper a secret to a friend and you shout it in the ear of the whole world.' Now what did Grandfather Frog mean by that?" thought Johnny Chuck. "Now I didn't tell anybody but Jimmy Skunk and Jimmy Skunk didn't tell anyone but Peter Rabbit and—and—"

Then Johnny Chuck began to chuckle and finally to laugh. "'Whisper a secret to a friend and you shout it in the ear of the whole world.' My gracious, what a loud voice I must have had and didn't know it!" said Johnny Chuck, wiping the tears of laughter from his eyes.

And the next day Johnny Chuck started to make a new home. Where? Oh, that's Johnny Chuck's secret. And no one but jolly, round, red Mr. Sun has found it out yet.

Source:

Burgess, Thornton. "Johnny Chuck's Secret." *Mother West Wind's Children*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap Publishers, 1911. Electronic.