

## Johnny Chuck's Great Fight

by Thornton W. Burgess

Johnny Chuck sat on the doorstep of his new home, looking away across the Green Meadows. Johnny Chuck felt very well satisfied with himself and with all the world. He yawned lazily and stretched and stretched and then settled himself comfortably to watch the Merry Little Breezes playing down by the Smiling Pool.

By and by he saw Peter Rabbit go bobbing along down the Lone Little Path. Lipperty, lipperty, lip, went Peter Rabbit and every other jump he looked behind him.

"Now what is Peter Rabbit up to?" said Johnny Chuck to himself, "and what does he keep looking behind him for?"

Johnny Chuck sat up a little straighter to watch Peter Rabbit hop down the Lone Little Path. Then of a sudden he caught sight of something that made him sit up straighter than ever and open his eyes very wide. Something was following Peter Rabbit. Yes, Sir, something was bobbing along right at Peter Rabbit's heels.

Johnny Chuck forgot the Merry Little Breezes. He forgot how warm it was and how lazy he felt. He forgot everything else in his curiosity to learn what it could be following so closely at Peter Rabbit's heels.

Presently Peter Rabbit stopped and sat up very straight and then—Johnny Chuck nearly tumbled over in sheer surprise! He rubbed his eyes to make sure that he saw aright, for there were two Peter Rabbits! Yes, Sir, there were *two* Peter Rabbits, only one was very small, very small indeed.

"Oh!" said Johnny Chuck, "that must be Peter Rabbit's baby brother!"

Then he began to chuckle till his fat sides shook. There sat Peter Rabbit with his funny long ears standing straight up, and there right behind him, dressed exactly like him, sat Peter Rabbit's baby brother with *his* funny little long ears standing straight up. When Peter Rabbit wiggled *his* right ear, his baby brother wiggled his right ear. When Peter Rabbit scratched his left ear, his baby brother scratched *his* left ear. Whatever Peter Rabbit did, his baby brother did too.

Presently Peter Rabbit started on down the Lone Little Path—lipperty, lipperty, lip, and right at his heels went his baby brother—lipperty, lipperty, lip. Johnny Chuck watched them out of sight, and then he settled himself on his doorstep once more to enjoy a sun bath. Every once in a while he chuckled to himself as he remembered how funny Peter Rabbit's baby brother had looked. Presently Johnny Chuck fell asleep.

Jolly, round, red Mr. Sun had climbed quite high in the sky when Johnny Chuck awoke. He yawned and stretched and stretched and yawned, and then he sat up to look over the Green Meadows. Then he became wide awake, very wide awake indeed! Way down on the Green Meadows he caught a glimpse of something red jumping about in the long meadow grass.

"That must be Reddy Fox," thought Johnny Chuck. "Yes, it surely is Reddy Fox. Now I wonder



what mischief he is up to."

Then he saw all the Merry Little Breezes racing towards Reddy Fox as fast as they could go. And there was Sammy Jay screaming at the top of his voice, and his cousin, Blacky the Crow. Happy Jack Squirrel was dancing up and down excitedly on the branch of an old elm close by.

Johnny Chuck waited to see no more, but started down the Lone Little Path to find out what it all was about. Half way down the Lone Little Path he met Peter Rabbit running as hard as he could. His long ears were laid flat back, his big eyes seemed to pop right out of his head, and he was running as Johnny Chuck had never seen him run before.

"What are you running so for, Peter Rabbit?" asked Johnny Chuck.

"To get Bowser the Hound," shouted Peter Rabbit over his shoulder, as he tried to run faster.

"Now what can be the matter?" said Johnny Chuck to himself, "to send Peter Rabbit after Bowser the Hound?" He knew that, like all the other little meadow people, there was nothing of which Peter Rabbit was so afraid as Farmer Brown's great dog, Bowser the Hound.

Johnny Chuck hurried down the Lone Little Path as fast as his short legs could take his fat, rolly-poly self.

Presently he came out onto the Green Meadows, and there he saw a sight that set every nerve in his round little body a-tingle with rage.

Reddy Fox had found Peter Rabbit's baby brother and was doing his best to frighten him to death.

"I'm going to eat you now," shouted Reddy Fox, and then he sprang on Peter Rabbit's baby brother and gave him a cuff that sent him heels over head sprawling in the grass.

"Coward! Coward, Reddy Fox!" shrieked Sammy Jay.

"Shame! Shame!" shouted the Merry Little Breezes.

"You're nothing but a great big bully!" yelled Blacky the Crow.

But no one did anything to help Peter Rabbit's baby brother, for Reddy Fox is so much bigger than any of the rest of them, except Bobby Coon, that all the little meadow people are afraid of him.

But Reddy Fox just laughed at them, and nipped the long ears of Peter Rabbit's little brother so hard that he cried with the pain.

Now all were so intent watching Reddy Fox torment the baby brother of Peter Rabbit that no one had seen Johnny Chuck coming down the Lone Little Path. And for a few minutes no one recognized the furious little yellow-brown bundle that suddenly knocked Reddy Fox over and seized him by the throat. You see it didn't look a bit like Johnny Chuck. Every hair was standing on end, he was so mad, and this made him appear twice as big as they had ever seen him before.



"Coward! Coward! Coward!" shrieked Johnny Chuck as he shook Reddy Fox by the throat. And then began the greatest fight that the Green Meadows had ever seen.

Now Johnny Chuck is not naturally a fighter. Oh my, no! He is so good-natured and so sunny-hearted that he seldom quarrels with any one. But when he has to fight, there isn't a cowardly hair on him, not the teeniest, weeniest one. No one ever has a chance to cry, "'Fraid cat! Cry baby!" after Johnny Chuck.

So though, like all the other little meadow people, he was usually just a little afraid of Reddy Fox, because Reddy is so much bigger, he forgot all about it as soon as he caught sight of Reddy Fox tormenting Peter Rabbit's little brother. He didn't stop to think of what might happen to himself. He didn't stop to think at all. He just gritted his teeth and in a flash had Reddy Fox on his back.

Such a fight was never seen before on the Green Meadows! Reddy Fox is a bully and a coward, for he never fights with any one of his own size if he can help it, but when he has to fight, he fights hard. And he certainly had to fight now.

"Bully!" hissed Johnny Chuck as with his stout little hind feet he ripped the bright red coat of Reddy Fox. "You great big bully!"

Over and over they rolled, Johnny Chuck on top, then Reddy Fox on top, then Johnny Chuck up again, clawing and snarling.

It seemed as if news of the fight had gone over all the Green Meadows, for the little meadow people came running from every direction—Billy Mink, Little Joe Otter, Jerry Muskrat, Striped Chipmunk, Jimmy Skunk, old Mr. Toad. Even Great-Grandfather Frog, who left his big lily pad, and came hurrying with great jumps across the Green Meadows. They formed a ring around Reddy Fox and Johnny Chuck and danced with excitement. And all wanted Johnny Chuck to win.

Peter Rabbit's poor little brother, so sore and lame from the knocking about from Reddy Fox, and so frightened that he hardly dared breathe, lay flat on the ground under a little bush and was forgotten by all but the Merry Little Breezes, who covered him up with some dead grass, and kissed him and whispered to him not to be afraid now. How Peter Rabbit's little brother did hope that Johnny Chuck would win! His great, big, round, soft eyes were wide with terror as he thought of what might happen to him if Reddy Fox should whip Johnny Chuck.

But Reddy Fox wasn't whipping Johnny Chuck. Try as he would, he could not get a good hold on that round, fat, little body. And Johnny Chuck's stout claws were ripping his red coat and white vest and Johnny Chuck's sharp teeth were gripping him so that they could not be shaken loose. Pretty soon Reddy Fox began to think of nothing but getting away. Every one was shouting for Johnny Chuck. Every time Reddy Fox was underneath, he would hear a great shout from all the little meadow people, and he knew that they were glad.

Now Johnny Chuck was round and fat and roly-poly, and when one is round and fat and roly-poly, one's breath is apt to be short. So it was with Johnny Chuck. He had fought so hard that his breath was nearly gone. Finally he loosed his hold on Reddy Fox for just a second to draw in a good breath. Reddy Fox saw his chance, and, with a quick pull and spring, he broke away.

How all the little meadow people did scatter! You see they were very brave, very brave indeed,



so long as Johnny Chuck had Reddy Fox down, but now that Reddy Fox was free, each one was suddenly afraid and thought only of himself. Jimmy Skunk knocked Jerry Muskrat flat in his hurry to get away. Billy Mink trod on Great-Grandfather Frog's big feet and didn't even say "Excuse me." Striped Chipmunk ran head first into a big thistle and squealed as much from fear as pain.

But Reddy Fox paid no attention to any of them. He just wanted to get away, and off he started, limping as fast as he could go up the Lone Little Path. Such a looking sight! His beautiful red coat was in tatters. His face was scratched. He hobbled as he ran. And just as he broke away, Johnny Chuck made a grab and pulled a great mouthful of hair out of the splendid tail Reddy Fox was so proud of.

When the little meadow people saw that Reddy Fox was actually running away, they stopped running themselves, and all began to shout: "Reddy Fox is a coward and a bully! Coward! Coward!" Then they crowded around Johnny Chuck and all began talking at once about his great fight.

Just then they heard a great noise up on the hill. They saw Reddy Fox coming back down the Lone Little Path, and he was using his legs just as well as he knew how. Right behind him, his great mouth open and waking all the echoes with his big voice, was Bowser the Hound.

You see, although Peter Rabbit couldn't fight for his little baby brother and is usually very, very timid, he isn't altogether a coward. Indeed, he had been very brave, very brave indeed. He had gone up to Farmer Brown's and had jumped right under the nose of Bowser the Hound. Now that is something that Bowser the Hound never can stand. So off he had started after Peter Rabbit. And Peter Rabbit had started back for the Green Meadows as fast as his long legs could take him, for he knew that if once Bowser the Hound caught sight of Reddy Fox, he would forget all about such a little thing as a saucy rabbit.

Sure enough, half way down the Lone Little Path they met Reddy Fox sneaking off home, and, when Bowser the Hound saw him, he straightway forgot all about Peter Rabbit, and, with a great roar, started after Reddy Fox.

When Johnny Chuck had carefully brushed his coat and all the little meadow people had wished him good luck, he started off up the Lone Little Path for home, the Merry Little Breezes dancing ahead and Peter Rabbit coming lipperty, lipperty, lip behind, and right between them hopped Peter Rabbit's little brother, who thought Johnny Chuck the greatest hero in the world.

When they reached Johnny Chuck's old home, Peter Rabbit and Peter Rabbit's little brother tried to tell him how thankful they were to him, but Johnny Chuck just laughed and said: "It was nothing at all, just nothing at all."

When at last all had gone, even the Merry Little Breezes, Johnny Chuck slipped away to his new home, which is his secret, you know, which no one knows but jolly, round, red Mr. Sun, who won't tell.

"I hope," said Johnny Chuck, as he stretched himself out on the mound of warm sand by his doorway, for he was very tired, "I hope," said Johnny Chuck, sighing contentedly, "that Reddy Fox got away from Bowser the Hound!"

And Reddy Fox did.



Source:

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