

Yowler and His Cousin Tufty

by Thornton W. Burgess

Jumper the Hare arrived at school a little late and quite out of breath from hurrying. His big soft eyes were shining with excitement. "You look as though you had had an adventure, Jumper," said Old Mother Nature.

"I have," replied Jumper. "It is a wonder I am here at all; I came to near furnishing Yowler the Bob Cat a breakfast that it makes me shiver just to think of it. I guess if I hadn't been thinking about him, he would have caught me."

"Tell us all about it," demanded Old Mother Nature.

"Seeing Black Pussy over here yesterday, and knowing that to-day's lesson was to be about Yowler, I couldn't get cats out of my mind all day yesterday," began Jumper. "Black Pussy doesn't worry me, but I must confess that if there is any one I fear, it is Yowler the Bob Cat. Just thinking about him make me nervous. The more I tried not to think about him, the more I did think about him, and the more I thought about him, the more nervous I got. Then just before dark, on the bank of the Laughing Brook, I found some tracks in the mud. Those tracks were almost round, and that fact was enough to tell me who had made them. They were Yowler's footprints, and they hadn't been made very long.

"Of course, seeing those footprints made me more nervous than ever, and every time I saw a leaf move I jumped inside. My heart felt as if it were up in my throat most of the time. I had a feeling that Yowler wasn't far away. I hate that Cat! I hate the way he hunts! He goes sneaking about, without making a sound, or else he lies in wait, ready to spring without warning on the first one who happens along. A fellow never knows where to watch out for Yowler.

"I spent nearly all night sitting under a little hemlock tree with branches very close to the ground. I sat there because I didn't dare do anything else. As long as I stayed there I felt reasonably safe, because Yowler would have to find me, and to do that he would have to cross an open place where I could see him. I knew that if I went roaming about I might walk right into his clutches.

"It was lucky I had sense enough to stay there. You know the moon was very bright last night. It made that open place in front of where I was hiding almost as light as day. Once I closed my eyes for just a minute. When I opened them, there was Yowler sneaking across that open place. Where he had come from, I don't know. He hadn't made a sound. Not a leaf rustled under his big feet. Right in the middle of that open place, where the moonlight was brightest, he stopped to listen, and I simply held my breath."

"Tell us how he looked," prompted Old Mother Nature.

"He looked just like what he is—a big Cat with a short tail," replied Jumper. "Just to look at him any one would know he was own cousin to Black Pussy. He had a round head, rather long legs, and was about twice as big as Black Pussy. His feet looked big, even for him. On the tips of his ears were a few long black hairs. His coat was yellowish to reddish-brown, with dark spots on it. His chin and throat were white, and underneath he was white spotted with black. There were spots all down his legs. He didn't have enough of a tail to call it a tail. It was whitish on the under side and had black

stripes on the upper side, and all the time he kept twitching it just the way Black Pussy twitches her tail when she is out hunting. All of a sudden he opened his mouth and gave such a yell that it is a wonder I didn't jump out of my skin. It frightened me so that I couldn't have moved if I had wanted to, which was a lucky thing for me. The instant he yelled he cocked his head on one side and listened. That yell must have wakened somebody and caused them to move, for Yowler turned suddenly and crept swiftly and without a sound out of sight. A minute later I heard a jump, and then I heard a fluttering. I think he caught one of the Grouse family."

"Yelling that way is one of Yowler's tricks," explained Old Mother Nature. "He does it for the same reason Hooty the Owl hoots. He hopes that it will startle some sleeper so that they will move. If they do, his keen ears are sure to hear it. Was that all of your adventure, Jumper?"

"No," replied Jumper. "I remained right where I was for the rest of the night. Just as daylight was beginning to steal through the Green Forest, I decided that it was safe to leave my hiding place and come over here. Half-way here I stopped for a few minutes in a thick clump of ferns. I was just about to start on again when I caught sight of something moving just back of an old stump. It was that foolish looking tail of Yowler's. Had he kept it still I wouldn't have seen him at all; but he was twitching it back and forth. He was crouched down close to the ground with all four feet drawn close together under him. There he crouched, and there I sat for the longest time. I didn't move, and he didn't move, save that foolish looking tail of his. I had begun to think that I would have to stay in that clump of ferns all day when suddenly Yowler sprang like a flash. There was a little squeak, and then I saw Yowler trot away with a Mouse in his mouth. I guess he must have seen that Mouse go in a hole and knew that if he waited long enough it would come out again. As soon as Yowler disappeared I hurried over here. That's all."

"That was a splendid account of Yowler and his way of hunting," said Old Mother Nature. "He does most of his hunting in just that way, sneaking about on the chance of surprising a Rabbit, Bird or Mouse, or else patiently watching and waiting beside a hole in which he knows some one has taken refuge. He hunts in the Green Forest exactly as Black Pussy, Farmer Brown's Cat, hunts Mice in the barn or Birds in the Old Orchard. In the spring Yowler destroys many eggs and young birds, not only those found in nests on the ground, but also those in nests in trees, for he is a splendid climber.

"Yowler is found in nearly all of the swampy, brushy and wooded parts of the whole country, excepting in the great forests of the Far North, where his cousin Tufty the Lynx lives. Yowler is himself a Lynx, the Bay Lynx. In some places he is called simply Wild Cat. In others he is called the Catamount. He is not so fond of the thick forests as he is of swamps, brush-grown hillsides, old pastures and places where there are great masses of briars. Rocky ledges where there are caves in which to hide and plenty of brush also suit him. He is a coward, but when cornered will fight, though he will run from a little Dog half his size and take to a tree. In the South he is quite common and there often steals Chickens and Turkeys, even young Pigs. He prefers to hunt at night, but sometimes is seen in broad daylight. Mrs. Yowler's kittens are born in a cave or in a hollow tree. Despite the fact that he is an expert climber, Yowler spends most of his time on the ground and is one of the worst enemies of Rabbits, Mice, Squirrels and ground Birds.

"In the great forests of the Far North lives Yowler's cousin, Tufty the Canada Lynx, also called Loup Cervier and Lucivee. He is nearly a third larger than Yowler. From the tip of each ear long tufts of black hair stand up. On each side of his face is a ruff of long hair. His tail is even shorter than Yowler's, and the tip of it is always wholly black. His general color is gray, mottled with brown. His face ruff is white with black border. Yowler's feet are large, but Tufty's are immense for his size. This is because

Tufty lives where the snow lies deep for many months, and these big, broad feet enable him to travel about on the snow without breaking through. He can travel with ease where Reddy Fox, not half his size and weight, would break through at every step. Tufty's ways are much like those of his cousin, Yowler, save that he is a dweller in the deep woods. Anything he can catch is food for Tufty, but his principal food is the Northern Hare. The color of his coat blends with the shadows so that he seems like a living shadow himself. In summer food is plentiful, and Tufty lives well, but in winter Tufty has hard work to get enough. Rarely does he know what a full stomach means then. Like Howler he can go a surprising length of time without food and still retain his strength. At that time of year he is a great traveler. He has to be, in order to live.

“There is no fiercer looking animal in all the Green Forest than Tufty the Lynx, but despite this he is, like most Cats, cowardly. Only when cornered will he fight. He is possessed of a lively curiosity, and often he will stealthily follow a hunter or trapper for miles. The fur of his coat is very long and handsome, and he is hunted and trapped for this. As he lives for the most part far from the homes of men, he does less damage to man than does his cousin, Yowler the Bob Cat. Tufty must depend wholly for his living on the little people of the Green Forest. Sometimes he will attack a Fox. The pretty little spotted babies of Lightfoot the Deer are victims whenever he can find them.

“The darker and deeper the Green Forest, the better Tufty likes it. He makes his den under great tangles of fallen trees or similar places. Mr. And Mrs. Tufty often hunt together, and in early winter the whole family often join in the hunt.

“Yowler and Tufty are the only members of the Cat family now found in the eastern part of the country. Formerly, their big cousin, Puma the Panther, lived in the East, but he has been so hunted by man that now he is found only in the mountains of the Far West and in a few of the wildest places in the South. I will tell you about him to-morrow.”

Source:

Burgess, Thornton. “Yowler and His Cousin Tufty.” *The Burgess Animal Book for Children*.
Electronic.