

When Old Mr. Bat Got His Wings

by Thornton W. Burgess

It happens that the Merry Little Breezes, who, as you know, are the children of Old Mother West Wind, are quite as fond of stories as is Peter Rabbit. In fact, whenever they suspect that Peter is going to ask some one for a story, they manage to be about so that they may hear it too. Now the Merry Little Breezes are very fond of Grandfather Frog and many, many times they have helped him get a good dinner by blowing foolish green flies within his reach. It was after one of these times that Grandfather Frog promised them a story.

Now the Merry Little Breezes did not intend to let Grandfather Frog forget that promise, so one afternoon when they had grown tired of romping on the Green Meadows, they danced over to the Smiling Pool and settled around the big, green lily-pad on which Grandfather Frog was dozing. All together they shouted:

“We know you're old;
We know you're wise;
And what you say
We dearly prize.
So tell a tale
Of olden days,
And then, mayhap,
We'll go our ways.”

“Chug-a-rum! What shall it be about?” demanded Grandfather Frog, waking up quite good-natured.

“Tell us why Flitter the Bat can fly when none of the other animals can,” cried one of the Merry Little Breezes.

Grandfather Frog cleared his throat several times, and then he began, and this is the story he told:

“Once upon a time when the world was young, old Mr. Bat, the many times great-grandfather of Flitter, whom you all know, lived in a cave on the edge of the Green Forest. Old Mr. Bat was little, quite as little as Flitter is now. He didn't have any wings then. No, Sir, old Mr. Bat had no wings.

“Now old Mr. Bat's teeth were small and not made for cracking hard seeds and things of that sort, so he lived mostly on insects. He used to hunt for them under sticks and stones. Sometimes he had hard work to find enough for a meal, because, you know, so many other Green Forest people were hunting for them too.

“Now old Mr. Bat's eyes were very small, very, very small indeed, and the bright sun hurt them. So old Mr. Bat used to stay in his cave all day and hunt for his meals only after jolly Mr. Sun had gone to bed behind the Purple Hills. When he did come out most of the crawling bugs had been caught by others, and it was hard work finding them. So often Mr. Bat went hungry.

“One evening old Mr. Bat noticed that at twilight a great many bugs fly about. He sat on a big stone at the mouth of his cave and watched. It seemed to him that the air was full of bugs. By and by a big fat fellow came so near that old Mr. Bat forgot where he was and jumped for him—jumped right off: the top of the big stone. Of course he got a hard tumble, but he didn't mind it a bit, not a bit, for he had caught the bug. After that, old Mr. Bat used to spend most of the time he was awake jumping for flying bugs.

“One night he made a very long jump from a *very* high stone and got such a fall that all the breath was knocked out of his funny little body. When he had gotten his breath back he discovered that some one was looking down and smiling at him. It was Old Mother Nature.

“Pretty hard work to get a dinner that way, isn't it, Mr. Bat?" asked Old Mother Nature.

“Mr. Bat allowed that it was.

“How would you like to fly!" asked Old Mother Nature.

“Mr. Bat thought that that would be very fine indeed, but that was quite out of the question because, as you know, he hadn't any wings.

“Old Mother Nature said no more, but something seemed to be pleasing her greatly as she left Mr. Bat.

“The next evening when old Mr. Bat awoke, he really didn't know whether he was himself or not. No, Sir, he didn't. His legs were much longer than they used to be and really of no use at all for walking. Between them was a queer thin skin. He couldn't run. He couldn't even crawl very well.

“At last, after much work, he managed to get to the top of a big rock. He was very hungry, and when a big, fat bug came along, he forgot all about his troubles and tried to jump. But instead of jumping as he always had, he just tumbled off the big rock. As he fell he spread out his legs. What do you think happened? Why, old Mr. Bat found that he could fly!

“And ever since that long-ago time the Bats have lived in dark caves and have been able to fly,” concluded Grandfather Frog.

“Splendid!” cried the Merry Little Breezes. “And we thank you ever and ever so much!” Then they had a race to see who could be the first to blow a foolish green fly over to Grandfather Frog.

Source:

Burgess, Thornton. “When Old Mr. Bat Got His Wings.” *Mother West Wind “When” Stories*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1920. Electronic.