

# **The Haughty Ground Hog**

by Clara Dillingham Pierson

Not far from the home of the Rabbits was another burrow where the Ground Hog lived, and there was a very kindly feeling between the neighbors. They liked the same food, and as there was plenty for all, they often nibbled together near the edge of the forest. The little Rabbits were fond of him and liked to listen to his stories. Once the biggest little Rabbit had run into the Ground Hog's burrow by mistake when he was frightened, and that was the beginning of a great friendship between them.

They were a queer-looking couple, for the Rabbit was small and quick and dainty, while the Ground Hog, with his stout body covered with thick, reddish fur, his broad, flat head, and his short legs, was a clumsy fellow. To be sure, he could get out of sight quickly if he had to, but he never scampered around and kicked up his heels for the fun of it, as the Rabbits did. He was too dignified to do that. He came of an old family and he could remember who his grandfather was. There were but few people in the forest who could do that; so, of course, he could not frisk like his neighbors.

Perhaps if the Ground Hog had not belonged to so old a family, he might have had a better time. Yet the thought that he could remember his grandfather was a great pleasure to him, and when he was talking he would often remark in the most careless way, "as my grandfather used to say"; or, "That reminds me of something my grandfather once did." Some people said that he did this to show off; but it may be that they were envious.

However that may have been, the Ground Hog was certainly a haughty fellow, and if he had not been so gentle and kind a neighbor people would not have liked him. Only once had he been known to get angry, and that was when a saucy young Chipmunk had spoken of him as a Woodchuck. "Woodchuck! Woodchuck!" he had grunted. "You young Bushy-tail, I am a Ground Hog, and the Ground Hog family lived in this forest long before you ever opened your eyes. People with good manners do not call us 'Woodchucks.' We do not like the name. My grandfather could not endure it."

It was not very long after this that he told the wondering young Rabbits about his grandfather. When talking, the Ground Hog rested by the edge of his burrow, sitting on his haunches, and waving his queer little forepaws whenever he told anything especially important. And this was the story:

"Perhaps you may have heard me speak of my grandfather. Ah, he was a Ground Hog worth seeing! He was large, and, although when I knew him the black fur on his back was streaked with gray, he was still handsome. He was clever, too. I have often heard my father say that he could dig the deepest and best burrow in the forest. And then he had such fine manners! There was not another Ground Hog in the country around who could eat as noisily as he, and it is said that when he was courting my grandmother she chose him because of the elegant way in which he sat up on his haunches. I have been told, children, that I am very much like him."

Just here, a Red-headed Woodpecker gave a loud "Rat-a-tat-tat" on the tree above the Ground Hog's head, and there was a look around her bill as though she wanted to laugh. The Ground Hog slowly turned his head to look at her as she flew away. "Quite a good-looking young person," he said, "but badly brought up. She should know better than to disturb those who are talking. What was I saying, children?"

"You were telling how well your grandfather sat up on his haunches," said the smallest little Rabbit.

"So I was! So I was! I must tell you how my grandfather came to know the world so well. When he was only a young fellow, he made his home for a time by a Hen house, and so heard the talk of the barn-yard people. Once he heard them tell how the farmer watched on a certain winter day to see my grandfather come out of his burrow. Of course, you children all know how we Ground Hogs do; in the fall we are very fat, and when the cold weather comes we go to sleep in our burrows to wait for spring. Sometimes we awaken and stretch, but we go to sleep again very soon. Then, when spring comes we are slender and have healthy appetites.

"The Hens treated my grandfather with great politeness, and the Black Brahma Cock showed plainly how honored they felt to have him there. They said that they were so glad my grandfather stayed out of his burrow awhile on this winter day when the farmer was watching, because they were in a hurry for warm weather. My grandfather did not know what they meant by that, but he was too wise to say so, and he found out by asking questions, that if a Ground Hog leaves his burrow on this certain day in winter, and sees his shadow, and goes back again, it will be cold for a long time after that. If he does not see his shadow, and stays out, it will soon be warm.

"You see now, children, how important our family is; and yet we are so modest that we had not even known that we made the weather until the Hens told my grandfather. But that is the way! Really great people often think the least of themselves."

"And do you make the weather?" asked the smallest little Rabbit.

"I suppose we do," said the Ground Hog, with a smile. "It is a great care. I often say to myself: 'Shall I have it warm, or shall I have it cold?' It worries me so that sometimes I can hardly eat."

"And how do you know when the day comes for you to make the weather?" said the smallest little rabbit.

"Ahem! Well-er! I am sorry to say that my grandfather did not find out exactly what day it is that they watch for us, so I have to guess at that. But to think that we Ground Hogs make the weather for all the other people! It is worth a great deal to belong to such a family. I suppose I might have been a Weasel, a Fox, an Owl, or an Oriole. And it is a great thing to have known one's grandfather."

The little Rabbits sat very still, wishing that they had known their grandfather, when suddenly the biggest one said: "If you should stay out of your burrow when that day comes, and another Ground Hog should go back into his burrow, how would the weather know what to do?"

"Children," said the old Ground Hog, "I think your mother is calling to you. You might better go to see. Good-by." And he waved his paw politely.

The seven little Rabbits scampered away, but their mother was not calling them. She wasn't even there, and when they went back they couldn't find the Ground Hog. They wondered how he happened to make such a mistake. The Red-headed Woodpecker who came along at about that time, twisted her head on one side and said: "Made-a-mistake! Rat-a-tat-tat! Not he!"

Source:

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