

## Where Dippy the Loon Got the Name of Being Crazy

by Thornton W. Burgess

As you all know, Peter Rabbit is out and about at a time when most folks are snugly tucked in bed. The fact is, Peter is very fond of roaming around at night. He says he feels safer then in spite of the fact that some of his smartest enemies are also out and about, among them Hooty the Owl and Reddy Fox and Old Man Coyote. The two latter also hunt by day when the fancy takes them or they have been so unsuccessful at night that their stomachs won't give them any peace, and Peter is sure that though they can see very well at night, they can see still better in the light of day. Anyway, that is one of the reasons he gives for his own liking for roaming after jolly, round, red Mr. Sun has gone to bed behind the Purple Hills.

Now it happened one moonlight night that Peter had ventured way over almost to the Big River. He had heard Hooty the Owl's fierce hunting call far off in the Green Forest. He had heard Reddy Fox barking up in the Old Pasture. So Peter felt quite safe. He felt so safe that he had almost forgotten that there could be such a thing as fear. And then, from the direction of the Big River, there came such a sound as Peter never had heard before. It was a sound that made his heart seem to quite stop beating for an instant. It was a sound that sent cold chills racing and chasing all over him. It was a sound that made him wish with all his might that he was that instant right in the heart of the dear Old Briar-patch instead of way over there near the bank of the Big River.

He didn't waste much time getting back to the dear Old Briar-patch, once he was sure his heart hadn't really stopped beating. The way he went across the Green Meadows, lipperty-lipperty-lip, lipperty-lipperty-lip, was positive proof that in spite of his fright his heart was quite all right. He didn't run a little way, stop, run a little farther and stop again, as is his usual way. He kept lipperty-lipperty-lipping without a single stop until he reached the edge of the dear Old Briar-patch and once more felt really safe. Two or three times he had felt that he must stop to get his breath, but each time that sound, that dreadful sound, had seemed to be following right at his heels, and he had suddenly discovered that he didn't need to stop after all.

But having reached the dear Old Briar-patch Peter stopped and panted for breath while he anxiously watched for the appearance of some unknown enemy following him. It was then that he realized that that sound came from the Big River, and that whoever made it had not left the Big River at all. It made Peter feel a wee bit foolish as he thought how he had been sure that there was danger right at his very heels all the way home, when all the time there hadn't been any danger at all.

Peter sat there and listened, and despite the fact that he now felt absolutely safe, the cold chills ran over him every time he heard it. It was a voice; Peter was sure of that. It was a voice, but such a voice as Peter never in his life had heard before. It was quite as bad if not worse than the voice of Old Man Coyote. In a way it reminded him of Old Man Coyote's voice, but while Old Man Coyote's voice sounded like many voices in one, it was not so fearsome as this voice, for this voice sounded like a human voice, yet wasn't. Something inside Peter told him that it wasn't a human voice, in spite of its sounding so.

The next morning Peter ran over to the Smiling Pool to ask Grandfather Frog if he had any idea who could have such a voice as that. When he tried to tell Grandfather Frog what that voice was like,

he couldn't. He just couldn't describe it.

"It was the loneliest and craziest sound I've ever heard," declared Peter, "and that is all I can tell you. It was crazier than the voice of Old Man Coyote."

"That is all you need tell me," chuckled Grandfather Frog. "That was the voice of Dippy the Loon. And let me tell you something, Peter: you are not the first one to think his voice has a crazy sound. Oh, my, no! No, indeed! Why, a lot of people think Dippy *is* crazy, and when any one does queer things they say of him that he is 'crazy as a Loon.'

"But is he crazy?" asked Peter.

"Chug-a-rum!" exclaimed Grandfather Frog. "Chug-a-rum! Not half so crazy as you are, Peter, coming over here to the Smiling Pool in broad daylight. He likes to be thought crazy, just as his great-great-ever-so-great-grandfather did before him, that's all. Everybody thought his great-great-ever-so-great-grandfather was crazy, and it paid Mr. Loon to have them think so. So he did his best to make them keep thinking so."

"Tell me about it. Do please tell me about it, Grandfather Frog," begged Peter. "Please, please, please."

Now how could Grandfather Frog resist that? He couldn't. He didn't even try to. He just cleared his throat once or twice and began.

"Once on a time, long, long ago, lived the very first of all the Loons, the ever-and-ever-and-ever-so-great-grandfather of Dippy, whose voice frightened you so last night."

"How did you know it frightened me?" exclaimed Peter, for he had taken care not to tell Grandfather Frog anything about that.

Grandfather Frog chuckled and went right on with his story. "Right from the beginning Mr. Loon was a mighty independent fellow. It didn't take him long to find out that Old Mother Nature had too much to do to waste any time on those who didn't try to take care of themselves, and that those would live longest who were smartest and most independent. He had sharp eyes, had old Mr. Loon, just as Dippy has today, and he used them to good account. He saw at once that with so many birds and animals living on the land it was likely to get crowded after a while, and that when such became the case, it was going to be mighty hard work for some to get a living. So Mr. Loon went to Mother Nature and told her that if she had no objections he would like a pair of swimming feet and would live on the water.

"Now Old Mother Nature had just fitted out Mr. Duck with a pair of webbed feet that he might swim, so she was quite prepared to fit Mr. Loon out in like manner.

"'I suppose,' said she, 'that you want a bill like Mr. Duck's.'

"Mr. Loon shook his head. 'Thank you,' said he, 'but I would prefer a sharp bill to a broad one.'

"'How is that?' exclaimed Mother Nature. 'Mr. Duck has been delighted with his bill ever since I gave it to him.'

"And with good reason,' replied Mr. Loon. 'Did I propose to live as Mr. Duck lives, I should want a bill just like his, but I find that fish are more to my liking. Also I have noticed that there are fewer who eat fish.'

"So Mother Nature gave him the kind of bill he wanted, and Mr. Loon went about his business. He managed to get fish enough to keep from going hungry, but he found that the only way he could do it was to sit perfectly still until a fish swam within reach and then strike swiftly. In fact, his fishing was much like that of Mr. Heron, save that the latter stood instead of sitting. Success was chiefly the result of luck and patience.

"Now this sort of thing was not at all to the liking of Mr. Loon. He gloried in his strength and he wanted to hunt for his fish and catch them in fair chase instead of waiting for them to unsuspectingly swim within reach. He practised and practised swimming and diving, but he soon made up his mind that he never would be able to move through the water fast enough to catch a fish unless there was some change. He watched the fish swim, and he saw that the power which drove them through the water came from their tails. Mr. Loon grew very thoughtful.

"The next time Mother Nature came around to see how everybody was getting on, to hear complaints, and to grant such requests as seemed wise, Mr. Loon was on hand. 'If you please,' said he when his turn came, 'I would like my legs moved back to the lower end of my body.'

"Mother Nature was surprised. She looked it. 'But you'll hardly be able to walk at all with your legs there!' she exclaimed.

"Mr. Loon said that he knew that, and that he didn't want to walk. He would far rather spend all his time on the water. So Mother Nature granted his request. Mr. Loon thanked her and started for the water. He couldn't keep his balance. He simply flopped along, while all his neighbors, who had heard his queer request, jeered at him and called him crazy. He just didn't pay any attention, but flopped along until he reached the water. Then he swam away swiftly. When he was quite by himself with none to see, he dived, and as he had hoped, he found that he could drive himself through the water at great speed. He practised a while and then he went fishing. When he caught his first fish in a fair chase, he was so delighted that he shrieked and shouted and laughed in the wildest fashion far into the night. And those who had heard his strange request and thought him crazy were sure of it, as they listened to his wild laughter.

"So little by little it was spread about among all the other people that Mr. Loon was crazy, and he was left much to himself, which was just what he desired. He was quick to note that the sound of his voice sent shivers over some of his neighbors, and so he would shriek and laugh just to drive them away. It pleased him to have them think him crazy, and he kept it up.

"So it is with Dippy today, and last night you ran from the voice of a crazy Loon who isn't crazy at all, but likes to make people think he is," concluded Grandfather Frog.

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