Old Mother West Wind Tales

Revised, Updated, and Retold for Today's Children

An adaptation of the classic stories by
Thornton W. Burgess



Written and Illustrated by
Muz Murray

Inner Garden
Publishing

©2022, Muz Murray. All rights reserved.

This is a work of fiction and the characters in this book are entirely fictional. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead is entirely coincidental.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the author.

ISBN 978-1-9996327-4-8 (paperback)
ISBN 978-1-9996327-5-5 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-1-9996327-6-2 (ebook)

Cover Design: Muz Murray
Graphics Assistance: Zi Hounti
Formatting & Graphics: Virtual Paintbrush Book Design

www.muzmurray.com

Table of Contents

1. Mrs. Redwing's Speckled Eggs.....1

2. Why Grandfather Frog Has No Tail.....14

3. The Wilful Little Breeze 23

4. Why Jimmy Skunk Wears Stripes 36

5. Reddy Fox Goes Fishing.....50

6. Jimmy Skunk Looks For Beetles 63

7. Billy Brock's Swimming Competition.....74

8. Pee-Tee Rabbit Plays Another Prank.....88

9. How Sammy Jay Was Found Out 100

10. How Reddy Fox Got A Fright 112

11. Otty Otter's Birthday Party.....119

12. Sneezle The Weasel &
Reddy Fox Play Tricks.....129

13. Little Zoëy Otter's Slippery Slide.....145

14. The Tale Of Tiddly Tom Trout..... 158

15. Toby-Cockles And The Acorn Race 166

16. The Best Thing In The World 183

Endword from the Author 191

Photo Credits 199

About the Author 201

Chapter 1

Mrs. Redwing's Speckled Eggs



In the light of dawn, Old Mother West Wind, every morn, blew down from her home in the Purple Hills.

Over her shoulders she slung a bag—a great big bag—and in the bag are all of Old Mother West Wind's children, the Merry Little Breezes.

Old Mother West Wind came down from the Purple Hills to the Grassy Green Meadow. As she flowed along, she sang to herself a little song:

"All sailing ships upon the ocean wait;
So I must hurry, hurry on!
And windmills will never turn if I am late,
So I must hurry, hurry on".

And rippling over the Grassy Green Meadow, Old Mother West Wind opens her bag. She turns it upside down and shakes it hard. Out tumble all the Merry Little Breezes like small puffy clouds. "Off you go now, "says she, "for I mustn't lag". The Merry little Breezes begin to spin round and round for joy. For now they knew they could play in the Grassy Green Meadow for the rest of the day. And when it's time for the Smiley Ol' Sun to go down, Old Mother West Wind would always return to carry them home to the Purple Hills where they belong. And she'd put them to bed with a kiss and a song.

At first, the Merry Little Breezes bounded over the waving grass and the Laughing Brook, to see their furry fat friend the groundhog, Johnny Chuck. They found him sitting just outside his front door, in his braces and baggy britches. He was chomping away at a corn cob from the farmer's field for his breakfast.

One of the mischievous Merry Breezes named *Swish*, snatched a corn leaf right out of Johnny Chuck's mouth, and whisked it away over the field. Another one playfully pulled his whiskers about. And another called *Swooshy,* laughingly

whistled a wind up Johnny Chuck's back. He gave a loud shout when his furry hair pickled up like a hedgehog and stood sticking out.

Johnny Woodchuck pretended to be very cross indeed. But he really didn't mind a bit. He loved the Merry Little Breezes and played with them every day. And if Johnny Chuck was teased a lot, they were kind to him as well. For often, old Farmer Brown came down the hill with his gun, hoping to take a pot-shot at their favourite chum. Then swiftly they'd waft the smell of Farmer Brown's clothes right over to tickle Johnny's twitchy black nose.

Then up jumps quickly, Johnny Chuck, and way down his hole he goes. Then the creepers fall down to hide his front door, so the farmer could never find out where Johnny Chuck lived, that's for sure.

But why was Farmer Brown so angry with him? Well, I'm sorry to say—that besides his favourite food of alfalfa, coltsfoot and clover—Johnny would often wend his way over to Farmer Brown's garden. And there he would scoff all the scrumptious carrots and broccoli tops. And anything else he spied in the big veggie-patch. He'd creep in at dawn, while Farmer Brown was still abed. And by the time his dog Bowser had barked and woken him up, and he ran out with his gun, he found Johnny Chuck had already fled. And furiously, he would wonder why he

never, *ever,* got a chance to fire his gun at Johnny Chuck's fat head.

But he never, *ever* could. And he never, *ever* would.

When the Merry Little Breezes had finished their fun with Johnny Chuck, they flowed over the Grassy Green Meadow, unseen, to the huge Pollywig Pool, where they appeared once again like little pink clouds in a dream. They wished a breezy "Good morning!" to Grandfather Frog, who majestically sat on his huge lily-pad, dabbling his toes in the water so cool.

And very smart he looked in his russet-red waistcoat and the purple tailcoat that he wore. He had been feasting on fat bottle-green flies for his breakfast. But he was still hoping for more. He was just sitting there staring with a watchful eye, for another fat bottle-green fly to fly by.

"*Chuggarum*," said Grandfather Frog, which was his way of saying good morning—don't ask me why—or he'd say it whenever he'd eaten a fat bottle-green fly. The Merry Little Breezes settled down on the pond, easily able to float like little cloud boats. Just then, a fat bottle-green fly came lazily buzzing on by. Up jumped Grandfather Frog! As he leapt in the air, his tongue flicked out in a flash. When he landed back on the leaf, the lily-pad bounced up and down on the pond like a huge trampoline. And no wonder! For Grandfather Frog had the biggest round bum that they'd ever seen!

And there was no more sign of that buzzing fly of bottle-green.

Grandfather Frog then burped with pride, and looked quite content and satisfied. He rubbed his hand around his rounded tum, and once more chortled, “Chuggerum!”

“What is the news, Grandfather Frog?” cried the Merry Little Breezes. “Ah now!” said Grandfather Frog. “Mrs. Redwing has laid a clutch of pretty speckled eggs in her nest. Where is it? Well if you want to know, it’s way over yonder, on the edge of the Slurmy Swamp where the bulrushes grow”.

“Oh! What do they look like? We’d all like to know!” cried the Merry Little Breezes. So off they all sped, rolling over the Grassy Green Meadow to the Slurmy Swamp where the bulrushes grow.

Now unfortunately, someone else had seen where Mrs. Redwing had flown in and out of her cosy little nest. And that someone was Tommy Brown, the farmer’s boy. He was planning to steal the speckled eggs for his collection, because he knew how pretty they were. However, the swamp was too soggy for him to get close to the nest in his holey old shoes on the day before. But this morning he had set off in his new welly-boots, and now he could easily reach for a handful of eggs, he was sure.

When the Merry Little Breezes reached the Slurmy Swamp where the bulrushes grow, they found poor Mrs. Redwing in great distress.

“Oh-oh! My chicks are nearly ready to hatch,” said she, “But the farmer’s boy, Tommy Brown is coming this way! And he might find my nest any moment, I fear”. And indeed, they could all hear him sloshing around in the reeds and getting quite near. Suddenly they could see his straw hat bobbing above the bulrushes tall. He was surely about to discover them all!

“Oh dear!” cried Swooshy the Breeze, with a frown. “We must save Mrs. Redwing’s speckled eggs from that beady-eyed boy, Tommy Brown!”



With a quick gusty puff, she swept up and whisked Tommy Brown's old straw hat off his head. "Come on! We must lead him a jolly old dance!" the Merry Breeze said. And she hurled the straw hat up in the air and over a bush. Of course, the farm boy had to set off in a rush to capture his hat. But just as he stooped to pick it up, another Little Breeze named *Whiffles*—with a *huff* and a *puff*—blew it much further away. Then they all took it in turns with the fun, just to keep Tommy Brown on the run.

And each time he bent down to pick up his hat, another one blew it away in the air. They bowled it over the Pollywig Pool and the Laughing Brook. And it went skimming away across the Grassy Green Meadow. And flew right over the head of surprised Johnny Chuck.

Poor Tommy Brown kept running after it: red in the face and breathing hard. He was getting really cross. But his hat went on bowling away over the meadow to the edge of the Windily Wood. And there Swooshy slung the old straw hat into the brambles as far as she could.

By the time a well-scratched Tommy Brown had his hat back on his head, he had forgotten all about Mrs. Redwing and her speckled eggs. And he was thinking about his breakfast instead. Just then, he heard the breakfast horn blowing back up at the farm. A sound the field workers welcomed to call them in for their meal. So afraid of missing his breakfast, Tommy Brown turned

on his heel. And off he went as fast as he could, up the hill on the Little Lone Path through the Windily Wood.

Now all the Merry Little Breezes rippled back over the Grassy Green Meadow to the Slurmy Swamp where the bulrushes grow. And there they found Mother Redwing singing for joy. And the Merry Little Breezes danced with delight at the sight. For out of those pretty new speckled eggs, that Tommy Brown had wanted to snatch, five sweet baby Redwings had managed to hatch!

Nature Notes

Groundhogs



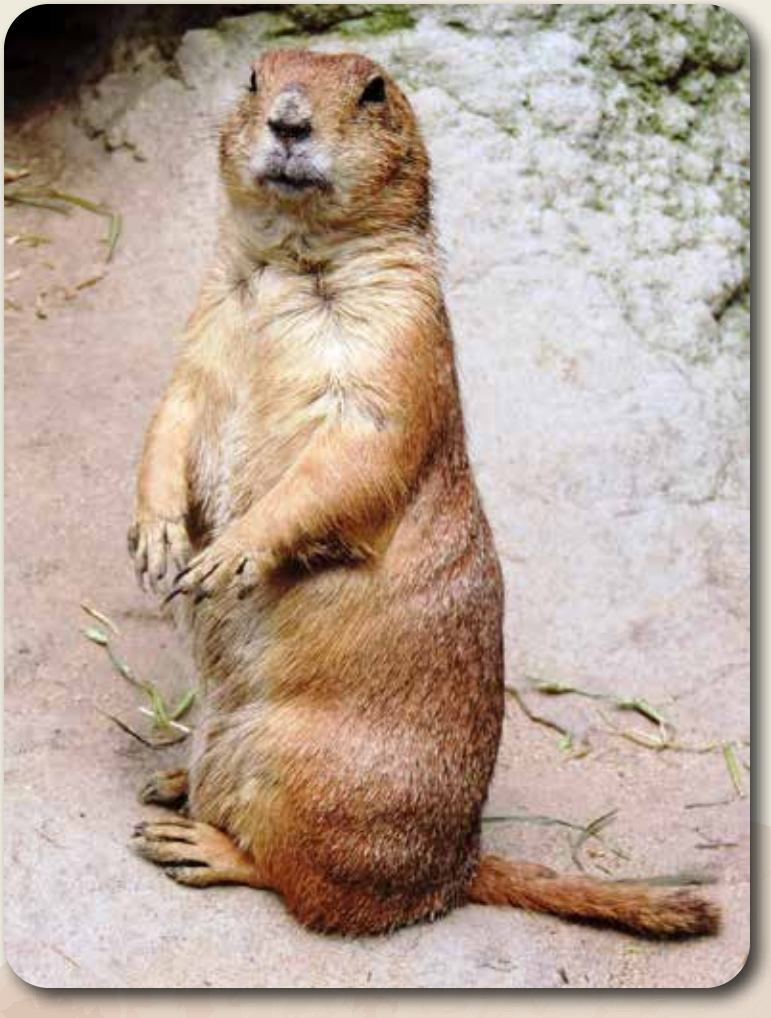
We don't have any groundhogs in the British Isles, but there are plenty in America and Canada, right up to Alaska, where they are also called woodchucks. The woodchuck name has nothing to do with wood, but comes from *'wuchak'*—the name the Native Americans call them. And in some southern states of the USA, they are called 'whistle pigs,' because they stand up on their hind legs and make a high-pitched whistling sound to warn others when there are enemies around.

But they are not hogs at all, just as guinea-pigs are not any kind of pig. Although they are rather fat-looking marmots, they actually belong to the squirrel family. However, they rarely bother to climb trees, unless to escape from a fox or a dog, or to scout out the scene all around. They are also pretty good swimmers if the need arises.

They have huge front teeth called *incisors*, which never

stop growing, so they have to chew a lot to keep wearing them down. Their favourite food is vegetarian, such as clover, alfalfa, dandelion, wild grasses, apples, fruits, vegetables, and unfortunately—farmer's crops in the field. But when those things are scarce, they will sometimes eat tree-bark and twigs, slugs and snails, grubs, grasshoppers and other insects, and even small animals, as well as eggs and small birds.

Groundhogs are fantastic diggers and make huge



burrows (up to 45 feet long) with several exits for escape. They even make a separate cave for a toilet, so they don't have to go outside to pee and poo. But they can be a real nuisance if they dig under the foundations of buildings, which can make the walls crack, or drain away farmer's ponds when they tunnel below. Farming machinery sometimes gets stuck in the holes they have made in the fields. So the farmers are not pleased. O deary me, no.

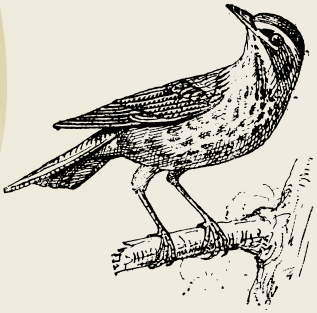
Baby groundhogs (called kits or chucklings) are born blind and hairless (around April or May); so Momma Groundhog waits until their fur has grown and their eyes are open, before she takes them outside. By September the young go off to find homes of their own.

In late autumn they all go to sleep in their burrows and hibernate, not waking up until spring, in April or May. They keep warm with two lots of fur, a short thick undercoat and a longer coat of hairs giving them a fuzzy appearance.

If a groundhog gets scared, the hairs on its tail spring upright, making it look like it's dragging a hairbrush behind. But normally they are very fierce and always ready to bite and to fight. So although they may seem cuddly, it's not a good idea to keep them as pets.

Some groundhogs may awaken as early as February, which has given rise to the charmingly nonsensical tradition of '*Groundhog Day*' celebrated in several American townships, which supposes that a groundhog can tell the weather if it sees its shadow on awakening, which means there will be six more weeks of winter. This is a whimsical idea that actually comes from an obscure German tradition about the habits of badgers.

Redwings



Redwings are the smallest kind of thrush, so they are rarely seen. They are found all over Britain. But far more make their nests in the USA. Their favourite foods are berries and worms.

You are unlikely to see them in your garden, as they much prefer feeding out in the hedgerows and fields. But there is a more likely chance to spot them in the winter, when few other birds are around. Because only then they might come to bird tables when there's snow on the ground.

They are a greeny-grey colour, and wear a stripy black and white waistcoat and a creamy curve like an eyebrow over each eye, with the distinctive red slash on the flank just under the wing, that gives them their name.

