

SOUTH AMERICAN JUNGLE TALES

BY

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HOW THE RAYS DEFENDED THE FORD

In South America there is a river called the Yabebirì; and it flows through the city of Misiones. In this river there are many rays, a kind of mud fish like the salt-water skate; and the river, indeed, gets its name from them: "Yabebirì" means the "river of ray fish." The ray is a wide, flat fish with a long, slender tail. The tail is very bony; and when it strikes you it cuts, and leaves poison in the wound.

There are so many rays in the river that it is dangerous even to put your foot into the water. I once knew a man who had his heel pricked by a ray. He had to walk more than two miles home, groaning with pain all the way and fainting several times from the poison. The pain from a ray bite is one of the sharpest pains one can feel.

But there are also other kinds of fish in the Yabebirì; and most of them are good to eat. That is why some evil men once began to fish for them with dynamite. They put the dynamite under water and set it off. The shock of the explosion stunned and killed all the fish nearby; and not only the big fish, but also the little ones, which cannot be eaten. It is very cruel and wasteful to hunt fish with dynamite.

However, there was a man who lived on the bank of the river; and he was sorry for the poor fish, especially the little ones; and he told the bad men that they must stop bombing the fish. At first they were angry and said they would do what they liked. But the man was known everywhere to be an upright, honest man, and finally they obeyed him and set off no more bombs in the river.

And the fish were grateful to this man, whom they had come to know the moment he approached the edge of the water. Whenever he walked along the bank smoking his pipe, the rays especially would swim along the bottom to keep him company. He, of course, did not know he had so many friends in the river. He lived there just because he liked the place.

Now, it happened one afternoon that a fox came running down to the river; and putting his forepaws into the water he called:

“Hey there, you ray fish! Quick! Quick! Here comes that friend of yours! He’s in trouble!”

All the rays who heard came swimming up anxiously to the edge of the water.

“What’s the matter? Where is he?” they asked.

“Here he comes!” answered the fox. “He has been fighting with a panther, and is trying to get away! He wants to get over to that island! Let him cross, for he is a very good man!”

“Of course we will! Of course we will!” the rays answered. “As for the panther, we will fix him!”

“Yes, but remember a panther is a panther!” said the fox; by which he meant that a panther is almost as hard to fight with as a tiger. And the fox gave a little jump and ran back into the woods, so as not to be near when the panther came.

A second or two later, the branches along the river bank were pushed aside, and the man came running down to the water’s edge. He was all bleeding and his shirt was torn. From a scratch on his face the blood was streaming down off his chin, and his sleeves were wet with blood also. It was clear that the man was very badly hurt; for he almost fell as he ran out into the river. When he put his feet into the water, the rays moved aside so that their tails would not touch him; and he waded across to the island, with the water coming up to his breast. On the other side he fell to the ground fainting from loss of blood.

The rays did not have much time to sit there pitying him. Some distance behind the man the panther came jumping along with great leaps to catch him. The big wildcat stopped on the bank, and gave a great roar; but up and down the river the rays went calling; “The Panther! The Panther!” and they gathered together near the shore to attack him if he tried to cross.

The panther looked up and down the stream, and finally he spied the man lying helpless on the island. He, too, was badly wounded and dripping with blood; but he was determined to eat the man at any cost. With another great howl, he leaped into the water.

Almost instantly, however, he felt as though a hundred pins and needles were sticking into his paws. You see, the rays were trying to block the ford, and were stinging him with the stingers in their tails. He gave one big jump

back to the river bank and stood there roaring, and holding one paw up in the air because it hurt him to step on it. After a moment he looked down into the water and saw that it was all black and muddy. The rays were coming in great crowds and stirring up the bottom of the river.

“Ah hah!” said the panther: “Ah hah! I see! It is you, you bad, wicked ray fish! It was you who gave me all those stings! Well now, just get out of the way!”

“We will not get out of the way,” answered the rays.

“Away, I tell you!” said the panther.

“We won’t!” said the rays. “He is a good man. It is not right to kill him!”

“He gave me these wounds you see,” said the panther. “I must punish him!”

“And you gave him his wounds, too,” said the rays. “But that is all a matter for you folks in the woods to settle. So long as this man is on the river, he is in our province and we intend to protect him!”

“Get out of my way!” said the panther.

“Not never!” said the rays. You see, the rays had never been to school; and they said “not never” and “not nothing” the way children sometimes do and never ought to do, not never!

“Well, we’ll see!” said the panther, with another great roar; and he ran up the bank to get a start for one great jump. The panther understood that the rays were packed close in along the shore; and he figured that if he could jump away out into the stream he would get beyond them and their stingers, and finally reach the wounded man on the island.

But some of the rays saw what he was going to do, and they began to shout to one another:

“Out to mid-stream! Out to mid-stream! He’s going to jump! He’s going to jump!”

The panther did succeed in making a very long leap, and for some seconds after he struck the water he felt no pain. He gave a great roar of delight, thinking he had deceived his enemies. But then, all of a sudden, sting here and sting there, in front, in back, on his sides! The rays were upon him again, driving their poisonous stingers into his skin. For a moment, the panther thought it was as easy to go forward as back, and he kept on. But the rays were now all over along the island; so the panther turned and went back to the shore he had left.

He was now about done. He just had to lie down on his side to keep the bottoms of his feet off the ground; and his stomach went up and down as he breathed deeply from fatigue and pain. He was growing dizzy, also, because the poison from the stings was getting into his brain.

The rays were not satisfied, however. They kept crowding up along the shore because they knew that panthers never go alone, but always with a mate. This mate would come, and they would again have to defend the ford.

And so it was. Soon the she-panther came down roaring through the bushes to rescue her husband. She looked across to the island where the man was lying wounded; and then at her mate, who lay there panting at her feet; and then down into the water, which was black with rays.

“Ray fish!” she called.

“Well, madam?” answered the rays.

“Let me cross the river!”

“No crossing here for panthers!” said the rays.

“I’ll bite the tails off every one of you!” said the she-panther.

“Even without our tails, we won’t let you cross!” said the rays.

“For the last time, out of my way!” said the she-panther.

“Not never!” said the rays.

The she-panther now put one foot into the water; but a ray struck at her with its stinger, and made a sting right between two of her toes.

“Oooouch!” growled the she-panther.

“We have at least one tail left!” mocked the rays.

But the she-panther began to scowl now. When panthers are thinking very hard they scowl. This one scowled her face into deep wrinkles; which meant that she had a very important idea. She did not let on what it was, however. She just trotted off up the bank into the woods without saying another word.

But the rays understood what she was up to. She was going to some place farther along the stream where there were no rays and would swim across before they could reach her. And a great fright came over them. Rays cannot swim very fast, and they knew that the she-panther would get there before they did.

“Oh, oh!” they cried to each other. “Now our poor man-friend is done for. How can we let the rays down there know we must prevent the panther from crossing at any cost?”

But a little ray, who was a very bright and clever little fish, spoke up and said:

“Get the shiners to carry a message! Shiners can swim like lightning; and they too ought to be grateful to the man for stopping those bombs!”

“That’s it! That’s it! Let’s send the shiners!”

A school of shiners happened to be just going by; and the rays sent them off with a message to all the rays along the river:

“Sting the she-panther if she tries to cross! Hold the ford against the she-panther!”

Though the shiners swam very, very fast, they were barely in time. The panther was already in the water, and had begun to swim out beyond her depth. In fact, she was almost over on the other side toward the island. But when her paws struck bottom and she began to wade again, the rays were on hand. They rushed in packs upon her legs and feet, stinging them with tens, hundreds, thousands of stings. At the same time more rays crowded in between the panther and the shore. Roaring with pain and anger, she finally swam back to the place where she had jumped in, and rolled about on the ground in agony. When she came back to where her husband was lying, her paws and legs were all swollen from the poison.

The rays, for their part, were getting very tired from all this stinging and hurrying to and fro. And they were not much relieved when they saw the panther and the she-panther get up all of a sudden and go off into the woods. What were they up to now? The rays were very much worried, and they gathered together in council.

“Do you know what I think?” said the oldest ray. “I think they have gone off to get all the other panthers. When they come back, they will be too much for us and they will surely get across!”

“That is so!” said the other rays, the older and more experienced ones. “At least one or two will get across. That will be the end of our friend, the man! Suppose we go and have a talk with him!”

For the first time they now went over to where the man was lying. They had been too busy up to then to think of him.

The man had lost a great deal of blood, and was still lying on the ground; but he was able to sit up enough to talk. The rays told him how they had been defending the ford against the panthers who had been trying to eat him. The man could hardly keep in his tears as he thought of the friendship

these fishes had for him. He thanked them by reaching out his hand and stroking the nearest ones on the nose. But then he moaned:

“Alas! You cannot save me! When the panthers come back there will be many of them; and if they want to get across they can.”

“No they can’t,” said a little ray. “No they can’t! Nobody but a friend of ours can cross this ford!”

“I’m afraid they will be too much for you,” said the man sadly. After a moment’s thought he added:

“There might be one way to stop them. If there were someone to go and get my rifle ... I have a Winchester, with a box of bullets ... but the only friends I have near here are fish ... and fish can’t bring me a rifle!”

“Well...?” asked the rays anxiously.

“Yes ... yes ...” said the man, rubbing his forehead with his right hand, as though trying to collect his thoughts. “Let’s see.... Once I had a friend, a river hog, whom I tamed and kept in my house to play with my children. One day he got homesick and went back to the woods to live. I don’t know what became of him ... but I think he came to this neighborhood!”

The rays gave one great shout of joy:

“We know him! We know him! He lives in the cave just below here in the river bank. We remember now that he once told us he knew you very well. We will send him to get the rifle.”

No sooner said than done! A shiner, who was the fastest swimmer in his school, started off down the river to where the river hog lived. It was not far away; and before long the river hog came up on the bank across the river. The man picked up a fishbone from the ground near him; and dipping it in some blood that was on his hand wrote on a dry leaf this letter to his wife:

“Dear Wife: Send me my Winchester by this river hog, with a full box of a hundred bullets.

(Signed) The Man.”

He was just finishing the letter when the whole river valley began to tremble with the most frightful roars. The panthers were coming back in a large company to force a crossing and devour their enemy. Quickly two rays stuck their heads out of the water. The man handed them the leaf with the letter written on it; and holding it up clear of the water, they swam over

to where the river hog was. He took it in his mouth and ran off as fast as he could toward the man's house.

And he had no time to lose. The roaring was now very close to the river and every moment it was getting nearer. The rays called anxiously to the shiners, who were hovering in the water nearby waiting for orders:

“Quick, shiners! Swim up and down the river, and give a general alarm! Have all the rays gather about the island on every side! We will see whether these panthers get across!”

And up and down the river the shiners darted, streaking the surface with tiny black wakes, so fast did they move. The rays began coming out from the mud, from under the stones, from the mouths of the brooks, from all along the river. They assembled in solid masses, almost, around the island, bent on keeping the panthers back at whatever cost. And meanwhile the shiners came streaming up and down past the island, raising new recruits and ready to give the word when the panthers appeared.

And the panthers did appear, at last. With a great roar an army of them came leaping down to the river bank. There were a hundred of them, perhaps; at least all the panthers in the woods around Misiones. But, on the other hand, the river was now packed with rays, who were ready to die, rather than let a single panther across.

“Get out of our way!” roared the panthers.

“No trespassing on this river!” said the rays.

“Gangway!” called the panthers.

“Keep out!” said the rays.

“If you don't get out of the way, we will eat every ray, and every son of a ray, and every grandson of a ray, not counting the women and children!” said the panthers.

“Perhaps,” said the rays; “but no panther, nor any son, grandson, daughter, granddaughter, sister, brother, wife, aunt or uncle of a panther will ever get across this ford!”

“For one last time, get out of the way!”

“Not never!” said the rays.

And the battle began.

With enormous bounds and jumps and leaps, the panthers plunged into the river. But they landed on an almost solid floor of ray fish. The rays plunged their stingers into the panthers' feet, and at each prick the panthers would send up the most bloodcurdling roars. Meanwhile the panthers were

clawing and kicking at the rays, making frightful splashes in the water and tossing up ray fish by the barrel full. Hundreds and hundreds of rays were caught and torn by the panthers' claws, and went floating down the Yabebirì, which was soon all tinged with ray blood. But the panthers were getting terribly stung, too; and many of them had to go back to the shore, where they lay roaring and whining, holding their swollen paws up in the air. Though many more of the rays were being trampled on, and scratched and bitten, they held their ground. Sometimes when a ray had been tossed into the air by a panther's paw, he would return to the fight after he had fallen back into the water.

The combat had now lasted as long as half an hour. By that time the panthers were tired out and had gone back to the shore they came from, where they sat down to rest and to lick the stings on their paws.

Not one of them had been able to cross the ford, however. But the rays were in a terrible plight. Thousands of them had been killed; and those that still remained were about tired to death.

"We cannot stand a second attack like this one," said the rays. "Hey, shiners! Go up and down the river again, and bring us reinforcements! We must have every single last ray there is in the Yabebirì!"

And again the shiners were off up and down the river, flecking the surface of the water with the wakes they left. The rays now thought they should consult the man again.

"We cannot hold out much longer!" said the rays. And some of them actually wept for the poor man who was going to be eaten by the panthers.

"Never mind, please, my dear little rays!" answered the man. "You have done enough for me! It's a pity that any more of you should die. Now you had better let the panthers come across."

"Not never!" cried the rays. "So long as there is a ray left alive, we shall defend the man who defended us and saved our lives from the bombers."

"My dear friends," said the man in reply, "I think I am bound to die anyway, I am so badly wounded. But I can promise you that when that Winchester arrives, you will see some exciting things. That much I am sure of!"

"Yes, we know! We know!" said the rays. But they could not continue the conversation: the battle was on again. The panthers had now rested, and were crouching all on the river bank, ready to take off with great leaps and bounds.

“We’ll give you one last chance!” they called to the rays. “Now be reasonable! Get out of our way!”

“Not never!” said the rays, crowding up close along the shore in front of the panthers.

In a flash, the panthers were in the water again, and the same terrible fight as before was taking place. The Yabebirì from shore to shore was one mass of bloody foam. Hundreds and hundreds of rays were tossed into the air, while the panthers bellowed from the pain in their paws. But not a panther and not a ray gave an inch of ground.

However, the panthers were little by little forcing their way forward. In vain the shiners darted up and down the river calling in more and more rays to battle. There were no rays left anywhere along the stream. Every last ray was either fighting desperately in the army around the island, or was floating bruised and bleeding down the current. Such as were still left were all but helpless from the fatigue of their great efforts.

And now they realized that the battle was lost. Five of the biggest panthers had broken through the lines of the rays, and were swimming through clear water straight toward the island. The poor rays decided they would rather die than see their poor friend eaten by the panthers.

“Retreat to the island!” they called to each other. “Back to the island!”

But this was too late, alas. Two more panthers had now broken through the line; and when the rays started for the island, every last panther on the shore jumped into the water and made for the wounded man. Ten, twenty, fifty, perhaps a hundred panthers could be seen swimming with just their heads out of water.

But what was that down there? The rays had been so busy fighting they had not noticed before. From a point on the shore some distance below the ford a brown, fuzzy animal had gone into the water, and had been swimming all this time toward the island. It was the river hog, paddling along as fast as he could with his head and neck out of the water and the Winchester in his mouth. He was holding his head away up like that to keep the rifle dry. On the end of the rifle hung the man’s cartridge belt, full of bullets.

The man gave a great cry of joy; for the river hog was quite a distance ahead of the panthers, and he would be ashore by the time they began to wade again. And the river hog did get there in no time. The man was too weak to move much; so the river hog pulled him around by the collar so

that he lay facing the panthers. In this position the man loaded the rifle and took aim.

The rays, meanwhile, were heart broken. Crushed, scratched, bruised, bleeding, worn out from struggling, they saw that they had lost the battle. The panthers were almost over to the island. In a few moments their friend would be eaten alive!

C-r-r-ack! C-r-r-r-ack! Bing! Bing. The rays who had their eyes out of water suddenly saw a panther, who was just coming up out of the river toward the man, give a great leap into the air and fall back to the ground in a heap.

The rays understood! “Hoo-ray! Hoo-ray Hoo-ray!” shouted the rays. “The man has the rifle! He is saved! We have won!” And they dirtied all the water, so much mud did they stir up by the dancing they started on the bottom of the river. C-r-r-r-ack! C-r-r-ack! Bing-g-g! Bing-g-g! The rifle kept going off and the bullets kept singing through the air. At each shot a panther fell dead on the sand or sank drowning under the water. The shooting did not last more than a minute and a half, however. After ten or a dozen panthers had been killed, the others swam back to the opposite shore and ran off into the woods.

The panthers that were killed in the water, sank to the bottom where the horn-pouts ate them. Others kept afloat, and the shiners went down the Yabebirì with them, all the way to the Parana, having a great feast off panther meat, and jumping and hopping along the top of the water to express their delight. When the friends of the wounded man came to get him, they skinned the panthers that were lying on the shore; and the man’s wife had a set of new rugs for her dining room.

Soon the man got well again. And the rays, who have a great many children each year, were as numerous as ever after one season. The man was so grateful for what they had done in trying to save his life, that he built a bungalow on the island and went there to live during his vacations. On nights in summer, when the moon was shining, he would go out in front of his bungalow and sit down on a rock over the water to smoke his pipe. The rays would creep up softly over the bottom and point him out to fish who did not know him. “There he is, see? The panthers came across over here; we stood in line over there. And when the panthers broke through, the man took his rifle, and....”

THE STORY OF TWO RACCOON CUBS AND TWO MAN CUBS

Once there was a mother raccoon who had three cubs; they all lived in the woods eating fruits and berries and birds' eggs. Whenever they were on a tree top and heard a noise, they would jump head foremost to the ground and scamper off with their tails in the air.

One day when the cubs had grown to be quite large sized raccoons, their mother took them up all together to the top of an orange tree—you must know that in South America orange trees, which came originally from Spain, now grow wild in the forest—and spoke to them as follows:

“Cublets, you are almost big enough to be called raccoons; and it is time you began to hunt for your meals by yourselves. It is very important for you to know how to do this, because, when you get to be old, you will go around all alone in the world, as all raccoons do. The oldest of you likes snails and cockroaches. He must hunt around woodpiles and under trunks of rotting trees, where there are always plenty of snails and cockroaches. The next to the oldest of you seems to like oranges. Up to the month of December there will be plenty of oranges right here in this grove. The youngest of you is always asking for birds' eggs. Well, there are birds' nests everywhere. All he will have to do is hunt. But one thing, however: he must never go down to the farm looking for eggs. It is very bad for raccoons to go near farms.

“Cublets, there is one thing more you must all be afraid of: dogs! dogs! Never go near a dog! Once I had a fight with a dog. Do you see this broken tooth? Well, I broke it in a fight with a dog! And so I know what I am talking about! And behind dogs come people, with guns, and the guns make a great noise, and kill raccoons. Whenever you hear a dog, or a man, or a gun, jump for your lives no matter how high the tree is, and run, run, run! If you don't they will kill you as sure as preaching!”

That is what the mother raccoon said to her cublets. Whereupon, they all got down from the tree top, and went each his own way, nosing about in the leaves from right to left and from left to right, as though they were looking for something they had lost. For that is the way raccoons hunt.

The biggest of the cubs, who liked snails and cockroaches, looked under every piece of dead wood he came to and overturned the piles of dead leaves. Soon he had eaten such a fine meal that he grew sleepy and lay down in a nice cozy bed of leaves and went to sleep. The second one, who liked oranges, did not move from that very grove. He just went from one tree to another eating the best oranges; and he did not have to jump from a tree top once; for neither men, nor dogs, nor guns, came anywhere near him.

But the youngest, who would have nothing but birds' eggs, had a harder time of it. He hunted and hunted over the hillsides all day long and found only two birds' nests—one belonging to a toucan, with three eggs in it, and the other belonging to a wood dove, with two eggs in it. Five tiny little eggs! That was not very much to eat for a raccoon almost big enough to go to school. When evening came the little cub was as hungry as he had been that morning; and he sat down, all cold and tired and lonesome, on the very edge of the forest.

From the place where he was sitting he could look down on the green fields of the farm, and he thought of what his mother had said about such places.

“Now, why did mamma say that? Why shouldn't I go looking for eggs down along those fences on the farm?”

And just as he was saying this all to himself, what should he hear but the song of a strange bird: “Cock-a-doodle-doo-oo-oo”; coming from far, far away and from the direction of the farmhouse.

“My, did you ever hear a bird sing so loud?” said the cublet to himself. “What a big bird it must be! And its eggs must be the size of a cocoanut!”

“Cock-a-doodle-doo-oo-oo,” came the bird's song again. The hungry little raccoon just couldn't do without one of those eggs the size of a cocoanut. The bird was singing somewhere off to the right. So he made a short cut through the woods toward the field on the other side.

The sun was setting, but the raccoon cub ran with his tail in the air. At last he came to the edge of the woods, and looked down again into the fields.

“Cock-a-doodle-doo-oo-oo!”

Not far away now he could see the farmhouse. There was a man in the yard. The man was wearing long boots, and leading a horse by the bridle into a barn. On the fence in the barnyard, the little raccoon saw his bird.

“What a silly little ’coon I am,” he said to himself. “That isn’t a bird! That’s a rooster! Mamma showed him to me one day, when we were on top of a big tree up in the woods. Roosters have a fine song; and they have a great many hens that lay sweet eggs. I think I could eat a dozen of those eggs, right now!”

For some time the little raccoon sat looking at the rooster and the barn and the farmhouse, and thinking of what his mother had said. But at last he thought: “Mamma is far away! She will never know”; and he made up his mind that as soon as it was dark he would run down to that hen coop and see what he could find.

Before long the sun had gone completely and it was so dark you could hardly see your hand before your face. Walking on tiptoe, the little raccoon came out from the shadow of the woods, and began making his way toward the farmhouse.

When he got into the yard, he stopped and listened carefully. Not a sound! The little raccoon was as happy as could be: he was going to eat a hundred, a thousand, two thousand of those eggs! He looked around for the hen coop. There it was! He stole up to the door and peered in.

On the ground, and right in front of the door, what should he see but an egg? And such a large egg! If it was not as big as a cocoanut, it was at least as big as an orange! And how brightly it shone in the dark! “Guess I’ll keep that egg for dessert,” thought the cub for a moment. But his mouth began to water and water, and he simply couldn’t wait. He stepped up and put his front teeth into that egg. But—

Trac-c-c!

He had hardly touched it when there was a sharp snapping noise. The little raccoon felt a hard blow strike him in the face, while a stinging pain caught him in his right forepaw.

“Mamma! Mamma!” he called, jumping wildly this way and that. But he could not get his foot loose. He was caught in a trap! And just at that moment a dog began to bark!

All that time when the little raccoon had been waiting in the woods for night to come, so that he could go down to get his eggs in the hen coop, the

man who owned the farmhouse had been playing with his children on the lawn in the yard. One of them was a little girl five years old; and the other was a little boy six years old. Both had golden hair. They were chasing their father about and falling down every so often on the grass. Then they would get up again and run some more. The man would also pretend to fall and the three of them were having a splendid time.

When it grew dark, the man said:

“Now let’s go and set our trap in the hen coop, so that if the weasel comes to-night to kill our chickens and eat our eggs, we will catch him.”

They went and set the trap. Then the family had dinner, and the little boy and the little girl were put to bed.

But they were both very much excited about the trap and the weasel. They could not sleep. Finally they sat up in their beds and began to throw pillows at each other. Their father and mother were reading down in the dining room. They heard what the children were doing; but they said nothing.

Suddenly the pillow-throwing stopped; and after a moment the little boy called:

“Papa! Papa! The weasel is in the trap. Don’t you hear Tuké barking? Let us go too, papa!”

Tuké, you see, was the name of the dog!

Their father said they might, provided they put their shoes on. He would never let them go out at night, barefooted, for fear of coral or rattlesnakes.

So they went in their pajamas, just as they were.

And what, if you please, did they find in the trap? Their father stooped down in the doorway of the hen coop, holding Tuké back by the collar. When he stood up, he was holding a little raccoon by the tail; and the little raccoon was snapping and whistling and screaming “Mamma! Mamma!” in a sharp, shrill voice like a cricket’s.

“Oh, don’t kill him, papa! He is such a pretty little ’coon!” said the boy and the girl. “Give him to us, and we will tame him!”

“Very well,” said the father. “You may have him. But don’t forget that raccoons drink water when they are thirsty, the same as little boys and girls.”

He said this because once he had caught a wildcat and given it to them for a pet. They fed it plenty of meat from the pantry. But they didn’t dream that it needed water. And the poor wildcat died.

The cage where the wildcat had been kept was still standing near the hen coop. They put the raccoon into the cage, and went back into the house. This time, when they went to bed, they fell fast asleep at once.

About midnight, when everything was still, the little raccoon, who had a very sore foot from the cuts made in it by the teeth of the trap, saw three shadows come creeping up toward his cage; for the moon was now shining faintly. They came closer and closer, moving softly and noiselessly over the ground. His heart gave a great leap when he discovered that it was his mother and his two brothers, who had been looking for him everywhere.

“Mamma! Mamma!” he began to cry from his cage, but soft-like, so as not to wake up the dog. “Here I am, here I am. Oh, get me out of here! I’m afraid! I’m afraid! Mamma! Mamma! Mamma!” The little raccoon was choking with tears!

The mother and the two brother raccoons were as happy as could be to find him! They rubbed their noses against him through the wires in the cage, and tried to stroke him with their paws. Then they set to work to get him out, if they could. First they examined the wiring of the cage, and one after another they worked at it with their teeth. But the wire was thick and tough, and they could do nothing with it. Then an idea came to the mother raccoon.

“People cut wires with files! Where can we get a file? A file is a long piece of iron with three sides, like the rattle of a rattlesnake. You push it away from you across the wire, and then you draw it toward you. Finally the wire breaks. Let’s hunt around in the blacksmith shop, and we may find one.”

They hurried off to the shop where the farmer kept his tools. Soon they found the file and came back with it to the cage. Thinking it must be very hard to file off a wire, they all took hold of the file and started pushing it back and forth between two of the wires. They pushed so hard that the cage began to shake all over and made a terrible noise. In fact, it made such a loud noise that Tuké woke up and set to barking at the top of his voice. The raccoons were frightened out of their wits; and for fear the dog might ask them where they got that file, they scampered off, with their tails in the air, toward the forest.

The little boy and the little girl woke up very early in the morning to go to see their new pet, who had been brooding sadly in his cage all night long.

“What shall we call him?” asked the little boy.

“Seventeen,” answered the little girl. “I can count to seventeen!”

And what did “Seventeen” have for breakfast? One of those hen’s eggs he had tried so hard to get the night before. And after the hen’s egg, a grasshopper, and then a piece of meat, and then a bunch of grapes and finally a lump of chocolate! By the end of the day, he was letting the two children reach their finger through the cage to scratch his head; and so pleased was he at all that was now happening to him that he liked being a prisoner in a cage almost as much as being a free raccoon cub on the mountain side. He was all taken up with the nice things that were placed in his coop for him to eat; and he liked those two yellow-headed children who kept coming to look at him!

That night and the following one, Tuké, the dog, slept so close to “Seventeen’s” cage that when his mother and his two brothers came back to make another try at rescuing him, they did not dare approach. But on the third night everything was as it should be. They went directly to the shop, got the file, and hurried to the cage.

“But mamma,” said the little raccoon, “I guess I’d rather stay where I am. They feed me all the eggs I want, and they are very kind to me. Today they told me that if I was good, they would soon let me go about the yard loose. There are two of them, with yellow hair. And they are man cubs, just as we are ’coon cubs. We shall have a fine time playing together.”

The three wild raccoons were very sad to hear all this; but they made the best of it, and went away, just promising to come back and see “Seventeen” every night.

And so they did. Each evening, as soon as it was dark and whether it was fair or rainy, the mother raccoon came with her two cublets to see their little brother. He gave them bread and chocolate, which he handed out between the wires of his cage; and they ate it on the ground nearby.

In two weeks, he was let loose to run about the yard; and every night he went back to his cage of his own accord to sleep. He had his ears tweaked a number of times, when the farmer caught him too close to the hen coop; otherwise he had no trouble at all. The two children became much attached to him; and when the wild raccoons heard how kind those man cubs were to their little brother, they began to be as fond of them as he was.

But one night, when it was very dark and very hot and a thunderstorm was gathering on the mountains, the wild raccoons called to “Seventeen” in

vain. “Seventeen! Seventeen! Seventeen!” But he did not answer. In great alarm they crept up to the cage and looked in.

Pstt!

They drew back just in time. There in the door of the cage a big rattlesnake lay coiled. They had almost touched him with their noses. And now they knew why “Seventeen” failed to answer! The rattlesnake had bitten him and probably he was already dead.

The three raccoons decided they must first punish the rattlesnake. They rushed upon him from three directions and snipped his head off before he knew what they were about. Then they hurried inside the cage. “Seventeen” was lying there on the floor in a pool of blood, his feet up in the air, and his sides shaking as he panted for breath. They caressed him with their tongues and licked his body all over for more than a quarter of an hour. But it did no good. “Seventeen” finally opened his mouth and stopped breathing altogether. He was dead. Raccoons ordinarily are not much harmed by rattlesnake poison. Some other animals are not hurt at all. But this snake had bitten “Seventeen” right through an artery; and he had died, not of the poison, but from loss of blood.

The mother raccoon and her two cublets wept over his body for a long time; then, since they could do nothing further for him, they left the cage where he had been so happy and went back to the woods. But they kept thinking all the time: “What will the two man cubs say when they find that their little playmate is dead? They will probably be very, very sad and cry a long time!” They had grown to love the man cubs just from what “Seventeen” had said of them; and one thought was in their three heads—to relieve the sorrow of the two man cubs as best they could.

They talked the matter over earnestly; and at last they agreed to the following plan. The second youngest cublet looked almost like the raccoon who was dead. He had the same markings, was about the same size, and carried himself in much the same way. Why shouldn’t he go and crawl into the cage, taking the place of his brother? The man cubs would probably be surprised; but nothing more. The four of them had talked about everything that went on at the farm so much, that the new raccoon could easily pretend he had been there all along. He might do it so well even, that the man cubs would not notice anything at all.

So they ran back to the cage, and the little raccoon took the place of his dead brother. The mother raccoon and her remaining cub took hold of

“Seventeen” with their teeth and dragged him away off to the woods, where they buried him under the leaves.

The next day, the man cubs were surprised at a number of strange habits “Seventeen” seemed to have learned during the night. But the new cub was just as affectionate to them as the real “Seventeen” had been; and they never guessed what had happened. The two man cubs played about with the raccoon cub all day long as usual; and at night the two wild raccoons came to pay their usual visit. The tame raccoon saved bits of his boiled eggs for them each time; and they would sit down and eat them on the ground in front of the cage. He told them all that happened at the farm; and they told him all the news about doings in the woods.

THE PARROT THAT LOST ITS TAIL

In the woods near a farm lived a flock of parrots. Every morning, the parrots went and ate sweet corn in the garden of the farm. Afternoons they spent in the orange orchards eating oranges. They always made a great to-do with their screaming and jawing; but they kept a sentinel posted on one of the tree tops to let them know if the farmer was coming.

Parrots are very much disliked by farmers in countries where parrots grow wild. They bite into an ear of corn and the rest of the ear rots when the next rain comes. Besides, parrots are very good to eat when they are nicely broiled. At least the farmers of South America think so. That is why people hunt them a great deal with shotguns.

One day the hired man on this farm managed to shoot the sentinel of the flock of parrots. The parrot fell from the tree top with a broken wing. But he made a good fight of it on the ground, biting and scratching the man several times before he was made a prisoner. You see, the man noticed that the bird was not very badly injured; and he thought he would take it home as a present for the farmer's children.

The farmer's wife put the broken wing in splints and tied a bandage tight around the parrot's body. The bird sat quite still for many days, until he was entirely cured. Meanwhile he had become quite tame. The children called him Pedrito; and Pedrito learned to hold out his claw to shake hands; he liked to perch on people's shoulders, and to tweek their ears gently with his bill.

Pedrito did not have to be kept in a cage. He spent the whole day out in the orange and eucalyptus trees in the yard of the farmhouse. He had a great time making sport of the hens when they cackled. The people of the family had tea in the afternoon, and then Pedrito would always come into the dining room and climb up with his claws and beak over the tablecloth to get his bread-and-milk. What Pedrito liked best of all was bread dipped in tea and milk.

The children talked to Pedrito so much, and he had so much to say to them, that finally he could pronounce quite a number of words in the language of people. He could say: "Good day, Pedrito!" and "nice papa, nice papa"; "papa for Pedrito!" "Papa" is the word for bread-and-milk in South America. And he said many things that he should not have; for parrots, like children, learn naughty words very easily.

On rainy days Pedrito would sit on a chair back and grumble and grumble for hours at a time. When the sun came out again he would begin to fly about screaming at the top of his voice with pleasure.

Pedrito, in short, was a very happy and a very fortunate creature. He was as free as a bird can be. At the same time he had his afternoon tea like rich people.

Now it happened that one week it rained every day and Pedrito sat indoors glum and disconsolate all the time, and saying the most bitter and unhappy things to himself. But at last one morning the sun came out bright and glorious. Pedrito could not contain himself: "Nice day, nice day, Pedrito!" "Nice papa, nice papa," "Papa for Pedrito!" "Your paw, Pedrito!" So he went flitting about the yard, talking gayly to himself, to the hens, to everyone, including the beautiful, splendid sun itself. From a tree top he saw the river in the distance, a silvery, shining thread winding across the plain. And he flew off in that direction, flying, flying, flying, till he was quite tired and had to stop on a tree to rest.

Suddenly, on the ground far under him, Pedrito saw something shining through the trees, two bright green lights, as big as overgrown lightning bugs.

"Wonder what that is?" thought Pedrito to himself. "Nice papa! Papa for Pedrito. Wonder what that is? Good day, Pedrito! Your paw, Pedrito!..." And he chattered on, just talking nonsense, and mixing his words up so that you could scarcely have understood him. Meantime he was jumping down from branch to branch to get as close as possible to the two bright gleaming lights. At last he saw that they were the eyes of a jaguar, who was crouching low on the ground and staring up at him intently.

But who could be afraid of anything on a nice day like that? Not Pedrito, at any rate. "Good day, jaguar!" said he. "Nice papa! Papa for Pedrito! Your paw, Pedrito!"

The jaguar tried to make his voice as gentle as he could; but it was with a growl that he answered: "GOOD DAY, POLL-PARROT!"

“Good day, good day, jaguar! Papa, papa, papa for Pedrito! Nice papa!”

You see, it was getting on toward four o’clock in the afternoon; and all this talk about “papa” was intended to remind the jaguar that it was tea-time. Pedrito had forgotten that jaguars don’t serve tea, nor bread-and-milk, as a rule.

“Nice tea, nice papa! Papa for Pedrito! Won’t you have tea with me today, jaguar?”

The jaguar began to get angry; for he thought all this chatter was intended to make fun of him. Besides, he was very hungry, and had made up his mind to eat this garrulous bird.

“Nice bird! Nice bird!” he growled. “Please come a little closer! I’m deaf and can’t understand what you say.”

The jaguar was not deaf. All he wanted was to get the parrot to come down one more branch, where he could reach him with his paws. But Pedrito was thinking how pleased the children in the family would be to see such a sleek jaguar coming in for tea. He hopped down one more branch and began again: “Nice papa! Papa for Pedrito! Come home with me, jaguar!”

“Just a little closer!” said the jaguar. “I can’t hear!”

“Nice Bird! Nice Bird!” he growled,
“Please come a little closer.”

And Pedrito edged a little nearer: “Nice papa!”

“Closer still!” growled the jaguar.

And the parrot went down still another branch. But just then the jaguar leaped high in the air—oh, twice, three times his own length, as high as a house perhaps, and barely managed to reach Pedrito with the tips of his claws. He did not succeed in catching the bird but he did tear out every single feather in Pedrito’s tail.

“There!” said the jaguar, “go and get your bread-and-milk! Nice papa! Nice papa! Lucky for you I didn’t get my paws on you!”

Terrified and smarting from pain, the parrot took to his wings. He could not fly very well, however; for birds without a tail are much like ships without their rudders: they cannot keep to one direction. He made the most

alarming zigzags this way and that, to the right and to the left, and up and down. All the birds who met him thought surely he had gone crazy; and took good care to keep out of his way.

However, he got home again at last, and the people were having tea in the dining room. But the first thing that Pedrito did was to go and look at himself in the mirror. Poor, poor Pedrito! He was the ugliest, most ridiculous bird on earth! Not a feather to his tail! His coat of down all ruffled and bleeding! Shivering with chills of fright all over! How could any self-respecting bird appear in society in such disarray?

Though he would have given almost anything in the world for his usual bread-and-milk that day, he flew off to a hollow eucalyptus tree he knew about, crawled in through a hole, and nestled down in the dark, still shivering with cold and drooping his head and wings in shame.

In the dining room, meantime, everybody was wondering where the parrot was. "Pedrito! Pedrito!" the children came calling to the door. "Pedrito! Papa, Pedrito. Nice papa! Papa for Pedrito!"

But Pedrito did not say a word. Pedrito did not stir. He just sat there in his hole, sullen, gloomy, and disconsolate. The children looked for him everywhere, but he did not appear. Everybody thought he had gotten lost, perhaps, or that some cat had eaten him; and the little ones began to cry.

So the days went by. And every day, at tea-time, the farmer's family remembered Pedrito and how he used to come and have tea with them. Poor Pedrito! Pedrito was dead! No one would ever see Pedrito again!

But Pedrito was not dead at all. He was just a proud bird; and would have been ashamed to let anybody see him without his tail. He waited in his hole till everybody went to bed; then he would come out, get something to eat, and return to his hiding place again. Each morning, just after daylight, and before anybody was up, he would go into the kitchen and look at himself in the mirror, getting more and more bad-tempered meanwhile because his feathers grew so slowly.

Until one afternoon, when the family had gathered in the dining room for tea as usual, who should come into the room but Pedrito! He walked in just as though nothing at all had happened, perched for a moment on a chair back, and then climbed up the tablecloth to get his bread-and-milk. The people just laughed and wept for joy, and clapped their hands especially to see what pretty feathers the bird had. "Pedrito! Why Pedrito! Where in the

world have you been? What happened to you? And what pretty, pretty feathers!”

You see, they did not know that they were new feathers; and Pedrito, for his part, said not a word. He was not going to tell them anything about it. He just ate one piece of bread-and-milk after another. “Papa, Pedrito! Nice papa! Papa for Pedrito!” Of course, he said a few things like that. But otherwise, not a word.

That was why the farmer was very much surprised the next day when Pedrito flew down out of a tree top and alighted on his shoulder, chattering and chattering as though he had something very exciting on his mind. In two minutes, Pedrito told him all about it—how, in his joy at the nice weather, he had flown down to the Parana; how he had invited the jaguar to tea; and how the jaguar had deceived him and left his tail without a feather. “Without a feather, a single blessed feather!” the parrot repeated, in rage at such an indignity. And he ended by asking the farmer to go and shoot that jaguar.

It happened that they needed a new mat for the fireplace in the dining room, and the farmer was very glad to hear there was a jaguar in the neighborhood. He went into the house to get his gun, and then set out with Pedrito toward the river. They agreed that when Pedrito saw the jaguar he would begin to scream to attract the beast’s attention. In that way the man could come up close and get a good shot with his gun.

And that is just what happened. Pedrito flew up to a tree top and began to talk as noisily as he could, meanwhile looking in all directions to see if the jaguar were about. Soon he heard some branches crackling under the tree on the ground; and peering down he saw the two green lights fixed upon him. “Nice day!” he began. “Nice papa! Papa for Pedrito! Your paw, Pedrito!”

The jaguar was very cross to see that this same parrot had come around again and with prettier feathers than before. “You will not get away this time!” he growled to himself, glaring up at Pedrito more fiercely than before.

“Closer! Closer! I’m deaf! I can’t hear what you say!”

And Pedrito, as he had done the other time, came down first one branch and then another, talking all the time at the top of his voice:

“Papa for Pedrito! Nice papa! At the foot of this tree! Your paw, Pedrito! At the foot of this tree!”

The jaguar grew suspicious at these new words, and, rising part way on his hind legs, he growled:

“Who is that you are talking to? Why do you say I am at the foot of this tree!”

“Good day, Pedrito! Papa, papa for Pedrito!” answered the parrot; and he came down one more branch, and still another.

“Closer, closer!” growled the jaguar.

Pedrito could see that the farmer was stealing up very stealthily with his gun. And he was glad of that, for one more branch and he would be almost in the jaguar’s claws.

“Papa, papa for Pedrito! Nice papa! Are you almost ready?” he called.

“Closer, closer,” growled the jaguar, getting ready to spring.

“Your paw, Pedrito! He’s ready to jump! Papa, Pedrito!”

And the jaguar, in fact, leaped into the air. But this time Pedrito was ready for him. He took lightly to his wings and flew up to the tree top far out of reach of the terrible claws. The farmer, meanwhile, had been taking careful aim; and just as the jaguar reached the ground, there was a loud report. Nine balls of lead as large as peas entered the heart of the jaguar, who gave one great roar and fell over dead.

Pedrito was chattering about in great glee; because now he could fly around in the forest without fear of being eaten; and his tail feathers would never be torn out again. The farmer, too, was happy; because a jaguar is very hard to find anyway; and the skin of this one made a very beautiful rug indeed.

When they got back home again, everybody learned why Pedrito had been away so long, and how he had hidden in the hollow tree to grow his feathers back again. And the children were very proud that their pet had trapped the jaguar so cleverly.

Thereafter there was a happy life in the farmer’s home for a long, long time. But the parrot never forgot what the jaguar had tried to do to him. In the afternoon when tea was being served in the dining room, he would go over to the skin lying in front of the fireplace and invite the jaguar to have bread-and-milk with him: “Papa, nice papa! Papa for Pedrito! Papa for jaguar? Nice papa!”

And when everybody laughed, Pedrito would laugh too.

THE BLIND DOE

Once upon a time there was a deer—a doe—who gave birth to two little deers; and, as is very rare with such animals, the little deers were twins. However, a wildcat ate one of them; and the second, a female, had to live her childhood without a playmate.

She was such a beautiful little creature, nevertheless, that all the mother deers in the forest wished she belonged to them; and to show their affection they were always nipping gently at her ribs with their lips.

Every morning when the little deer got up out of bed, her mother would make her say the catechism which all deers learn when they are babies:

I. I must smell of each green leaf before I eat it; because some green leaves are poisonous.

II. I must stop and look carefully up and down the brook before I lower my head to drink; for otherwise an alligator may eat me.

III. I must lift my head every half hour and sniff carefully in all directions; otherwise a panther may steal up and catch me.

IV. I must look ahead of me when I am grazing in a meadow; otherwise a snake may bite me.

All good fawns learn this catechism by heart; and when this little deer could say it all by herself, her mother began to let her go away from home alone.

One afternoon in summer, when the fawn was wandering over the mountain side looking for the tenderest tufts of grass, she saw a tree with a hollow trunk in front of her. Inside it a number of small slate-colored bags were hanging.

“What in the world is that?” said the little deer to herself. She had never seen anything of just that kind! Now deers, like people, are inclined to be a bit disrespectful towards things they don’t understand. Those puffy slate-colored bags seemed to her about the most ridiculous things there was on earth! So she butted them with all her might.

She now saw that she had made a great dent in the bags, which began to drip with drops of shining fluid. At the same time a swarm of reddish flies, with narrow waists, came out, buzzing around and walking about, over their broken nest.

The little deer edged nearer. Curiously, those red flies did not seem to mind at all! And what about that juicy-looking stuff? Carefully, gently, the fawn stretched out her head till she was able to touch one of the drops of fluid with the tip of her tongue.

What a surprise, what a wonderful surprise, for such a little, and such an inexperienced deer! She smacked her lips and licked her nose with her tongue, hurrying to lap up all the drops she could find. For they were honey, honey of the sweetest kind. And the red flies were bees! They did not sting because they had no stingers! There are bees like that, you know, in South America.

Not content with the few drops that were slowly oozing out of the cracks in the bags, the little deer now broke all the nests down and ate every bit of the honey in them; then, leaping and jumping with pride and delight, she hurried home to tell her mother all about it.

But the mother deer frowned severely:

“Look out for bees’ nests, my child!” she exclaimed earnestly. “Honey is very good to eat; but it is dangerous to get at it. Keep away from all the nests you see!”

“But bees don’t sting, mamma!” the little deer objected gleefully. “Hornets sting, and wasps sting; but bees, no!”

“That isn’t so, my dear!” the mother answered. “You had good luck, that’s all. Bees are quite as bad as wasps. Now mind me, child, or some day you’ll be sorry.”

“All right, mamma, I’ll be careful,” said the little deer.

But the first thing she did the very next morning was to take one of the paths that people had made over the mountains. She had figured out that, running along in the open, she could cover more ground and see the bees’ nests better!

And at last the search of the little deer was successful. She came upon a nest of bees—as she thought—black ones this time, with yellow sashes about their belts; and many of them were walking over the outside of the nest. The nest, also, was of a different color, and much larger than the bags the little deer had found the day before. But such things made no difference

to her. "If the nest is larger," she concluded simply, "the honey is probably sweeter and there's more of it!"

But then she suddenly remembered all that her mother had said. "Oh, mother is too afraid! All mothers are too afraid!" And she finished by giving a lusty butt at the nest.

In a second or two she had bitterly repented of her folly. The "bees" were ordinary bees and there were thousands of them. They rushed forth from the nest in a great swarm, settled all over the head, neck, and shoulders of the little deer, and even under her belly and on her tail. And they stung her all over, but worst of all about the eyes. There were more than ten stings to each eye!

The little deer, wild with pain and fright, began to run screaming away. She ran and ran. But finally she had to stop, because she could no longer see where she was going. Her eyes were all swollen; so swollen she could not open them. Trembling with fear and smarting with pain, she stopped where she was and began to cry piteously:

"Mamma!... Mamma!"

The mother deer was much worried when the afternoon wore on and her child did not come home; and at last she started out to look for her, following by smell, as deers can, the tracks of her little one over the hillsides. What was her despair when, finally, she heard the disobedient fawn weeping in the distance; and how much blacker her despair became when she found that the child was blind!

Slowly the two deers started home again, the fawn's nose resting on her mother's hip. And along the road all the old bucks and does came up to examine the little one's eyes and give their opinions as to a cure. The mother deer did not know what to do. She had no plasters nor poultices to soothe the pain in her child's eyes. She learned ultimately that across the mountains lived a man who was skillful with remedies. This man was a hunter, and traded in venison. But, from all reports, she concluded that he was quite a kind-hearted person.

Though the doe shivered at the thought of visiting a man who made his living on the slaughter of deer, she was willing to risk anything for her offspring. However, she had never met the man personally, and she thought it best to ask for a letter of introduction from the Anteater, who was supposed to be on very good terms with all the human kind.

It was night; and the panthers and wildcats were rampant through all the forest; but the mother deer did not wait an instant. She covered her little one carefully with branches so that no one could find her, and then made off toward the Anteater's house. She went so fast and so far that she was faint with fatigue when she arrived there; and once, on the road, she escaped only by merest chance from the fangs of a mountain lion.

The Anteater was one of the smaller members of his tribe—a yellow little fellow with a black cape thrown over his shoulders and reaching down to the waist, where it was tied under his belly with black strings.

Just how or why the Anteater became so friendly with the hunter, no one in the forest knew; but some day the truth will be known, doubtless.

At any rate, the poor doe arrived at the house where the Anteater lived.

“Tan! Tan! Tan!” she knocked, panting.

“Who's that?” answered the Anteater sleepily.

“It's me!” said the doe; though she corrected herself almost immediately, and said: “It is I—a deer, the mother of the twins!”

“I see,” said the Anteater. “So it's you! Well, what do you want?”

“I want you to introduce me to the hunter. The fawn, my daughter, is blind!”

“You don't say so? That little fawn that everybody makes so much of? She's a dear little thing! I don't have to be asked twice to do a favor when that child is concerned! I'll introduce you gladly. But you won't need a letter. Just show the man this, and he'll do all you ask.”

The Anteater rummaged around in the leaves for a while and at last stretched his tail out. On the tip of it was the head of a snake, completely dried, and with the poison fangs still in it.

“Thanks ever so much,” exclaimed the doe. “But that man is a venison hunter! Do you think this is all I need?”

“Quite!” the Anteater averred.

“You are a very kind-hearted Anteater,” the doe replied, her eyes filling with tears. But she did not prolong the conversation. It was getting to be very late, and she had to be at the hunter's lodge by daybreak.

She hurried back to her house and got the fawn, who still lay there weeping in her bed. Together they made their way toward the village where the hunter lived. They stole along very softly, keeping close to the walls of the houses, so that the dogs would not see nor hear them.

At the door of the hunter's cottage the mother knocked loudly:

“Tan! Tan! Tan!”

And the little deer knocked as loudly as she could.

“Ta! Ta! Ta!”

“Who’s there?” a voice called from within.

“It’s us,” said the fawn.

“It’s we,” corrected the mother. “We are friends of the Anteater, and we have the snake’s head!”

“I see,” said the hunter opening the door. “What can I do for you?”

“My daughter, this little fawn here, is blind. Can you help her?”

And the mother deer told the whole story about her child and the bees.

“Hum!” said the man. “Just let me see what ails this nice young lady!”

Reentering the cottage, the hunter soon came back with a rather high stool, on which he set the fawn in such a manner that he could examine her eyes without bending over. Then he took out a big lens and began to look at the stings, while the mother deer stood by, holding a lantern around her neck so that the “doctor” could see better. For the sun had not yet risen.

“Oh, there’s nothing to worry about,” the hunter said to the fond parent, helping her little one out of the chair. “It’s only a matter of time and care. Wrap her head up, and keep a bandage with this ointment across her eyes. Then keep her in the dark for twenty days. After that, have her wear these yellow glasses for a week or two; and by that time she will be all right.”

“Thanks, many, many thanks,” said the mother deer warmly and gratefully. “And now, sir, how much do I owe you?”

“Nothing at all, nothing at all, madam,” the hunter replied with a smile. “But one thing more: look out for the dogs in the next house. A man lives there who keeps hounds especially for chasing deer.”

At this news the mother deer and her child were so scared they hardly dared breathe; and as they went away they walked on tiptoe, and stopped every few feet. Even at that the dogs heard them and gave chase for nearly a mile into the forest. But the mother deer found a narrow path, opening into the bush where the blind fawn could run quite safely; and they made good their escape.

The little deer got well, just as the hunter had said she would; though the care and trouble it cost the mother to keep her fawn shut up for twenty long days inside a hollow tree, she only knew. Inside there you could not have seen your hand before your face! But at last, one morning, the mother deer brushed aside the branches she had woven across the hole in the tree so

tightly as to keep out all light; and the fawn, now with the yellow glasses on her nose, came out into the broad day.

“Oh, I can see now, mamma, I can see all right!”

And the mother deer, to tell the truth, had to go and hide her head in a clump of bushes to conceal the tears of joy that came to her eyes when she saw her little one cured at last. In two weeks, the glasses were laid aside.

As time wore on, the fawn, though happy to be quite herself again, began to grow sad. She was anxious to repay the hunter for his kindness to her; and she could think of no possible way of doing it.

One day, however, an idea occurred to her. As she was trotting along the shore of a pond she came upon a feather which a blue heron had let fall there. “I wonder if that good man would like it?” she thought. And she picked it up.

Then, one night when it was raining hard and the dogs would probably be under cover, she started out for the hunter’s cottage.

The man was reading in his bedroom, feeling quite cozy besides, for he had just completed a thatched roof for his cabin when the rain began. Now he was quite safe and dry out of reach of the storm.

“Tan! Tan! Tan!”

When he opened the door, the little deer, whom he had treated and of whom he had often thought since then, was standing there in the rain, with the heron’s plume, all wet and drooping, in her mouth.

“Here is something I have brought for you,” the fawn explained.

But the hunter began to laugh.

The little deer went off home in great shame and sorrow. She thought the man had laughed in ridicule of her poor gift! So thereafter she went looking for a better, bigger feather to give her benefactor; and this time she found some plumes that were truly splendid ones; and she was careful to keep them clean and dry.

Again she went back, one night, to the hunter’s cabin; and this time he did not laugh. He was a courteous, polite man; and he understood that, the other time, he had hurt his little friend’s feelings by laughing at her. Instead, he now invited her indoors, drew the high chair up to the table and gave her a saucerful of honey. Gobble, gobble! The little deer lapped the sweet up in mad delight.

From that time on, the two became great friends. The fawn spent a great deal of her time collecting heron plumes, which the man sold for a large

sum of money. And every time she came in with a feather, the hunter gave her a jar of honey; and occasionally he offered her a cigar, which the little deer ate, but, of course, did not smoke. Smoking is bad even for deers.

Whole nights the two friends thus spent together, talking in front of the open fire, while the wind was howling outside; for the deer made her visits only in stormy weather when dogs would be sure not to be about. In a short time whenever the skies were dark and gave promise of a bad night, the hunter began to expect these visits. He would light a lamp, set a jar of honey on the table, take out a book and begin to read, waiting for the “Tan! Tan! Tan!” of the little deer, who remained his loyal friend all her life.

THE ALLIGATOR WAR

It was a very big river in a region of South America that had never been visited by white men; and in it lived many, many alligators—perhaps a hundred, perhaps a thousand. For dinner they ate fish, which they caught in the stream, and for supper they ate deer and other animals that came down to the water side to drink. On hot afternoons in summer they stretched out and sunned themselves on the bank. But they liked nights when the moon was shining best of all. Then they swam out into the river and sported and played, lashing the water to foam with their tails, while the spray ran off their beautiful skins in all the colors of the rainbow.

These alligators had lived quite happy lives for a long, long time. But at last one afternoon, when they were all sleeping on the sand, snoring and snoring, one alligator woke up and cocked his ears—the way alligators cock their ears. He listened and listened, and, to be sure, faintly, and from a great distance, came a sound: *Chug! Chug! Chug!*

“Hey!” the alligator called to the alligator sleeping next to him, “Hey! Wake up! Danger!”

“Danger of what?” asked the other, opening his eyes sleepily, and getting up.

“I don’t know!” replied the first alligator.

“That’s a noise I never heard before. Listen!”

The other alligator listened: *Chug! Chug! Chug!*

In great alarm the two alligators went calling up and down the river bank: “Danger! Danger!” And all their sisters and brothers and mothers and fathers and uncles and aunts woke up and began running this way and that with their tails curled up in the air. But the excitement did not serve to calm their fears. *Chug! Chug! Chug!* The noise was growing louder every moment; and at last, away off down the stream, they could see something moving along the surface of the river, leaving a trail of gray smoke behind it and beating the water on either side to foam: *Chush! Chush! Chush!*

The alligators looked at each other in the greatest astonishment: “What on earth is that?”

But there was one old alligator, the wisest and most experienced of them all. He was so old that only two sound teeth were left in his jaws—one in the upper jaw and one in the lower jaw. Once, also, when he was a boy, fond of adventure, he had made a trip down the river all the way to the sea.

“I know what it is,” said he. “It’s a whale. Whales are big fish, they shoot water up through their noses, and it falls down on them behind.”

At this news, the little alligators began to scream at the top of their lungs, “It’s a whale! It’s a whale! It’s a whale!” and they made for the water intending to duck out of sight.

But the big alligator cuffed with his tail a little alligator that was screaming nearby with his mouth open wide. “Dry up!” said he. “There’s nothing to be afraid of! I know all about whales! Whales are the afraidest people there are!” And the little alligators stopped their noise.

But they grew frightened again a moment afterwards. The gray smoke suddenly turned to an inky black, and the *Chush! Chush! Chush!* was now so loud that all the alligators took to the water, with only their eyes and the tips of their noses showing at the surface.

Cho-ash-h-h! Cho-ash-h-h! Cho-ash-h-h! The strange monster came rapidly up the stream. The alligators saw it go crashing past them, belching great clouds of smoke from the middle of its back, and splashing into the water heavily with the big revolving things it had on either side.

It was a steamer, the first steamer that had ever made its way up the Parana. *Chush! Chush! Chush!* It seemed to be getting further away again. *Chug! Chug! Chug!* It had disappeared from view.

One by one, the alligators climbed up out of the water onto the bank again. They were all quite cross with the old alligator who had told them wrongly that it was a whale.

“It was not a whale!” they shouted in his ear—for he was rather hard of hearing. “Well, what was it that just went by?”

The old alligator then explained that it was a steamboat full of fire; and that the alligators would all die if the boat continued to go up and down the river.

The other alligators only laughed, however. Why would the alligators die if the boat kept going up and down the river? It had passed by without so much as speaking to them! That old alligator didn’t really know so much as

he pretended to! And since they were very hungry they all went fishing in the stream. But alas! There was not a fish to be found! The steamboat had frightened every single one of them away.

“Well, what did I tell you?” said the old alligator. “You see: we haven’t anything left to eat! All the fish have been frightened away! However—let’s just wait till tomorrow. Perhaps the boat won’t come back again. In that case, the fish will get over their fright and come back so that we can eat them.” But the next day, the steamboat came crashing by again on its way back down the river, spouting black smoke as it had done before, and setting the whole river boiling with its paddle wheels.

“Well!” exclaimed the alligators. “What do you think of that? The boat came yesterday. The boat came today. The boat will come tomorrow. The fish will stay away; and nothing will come down here at night to drink. We are done for!”

But an idea occurred to one of the brighter alligators: “Let’s dam the river!” he proposed. “The steamboat won’t be able to climb a dam!”

“That’s the talk! That’s the talk! A dam! A dam! Let’s build a dam!” And the alligators all made for the shore as fast as they could.

They went up into the woods along the bank and began to cut down trees of the hardest wood they could find—walnut and mahogany, mostly. They felled more than ten thousand of them altogether, sawing the trunks through with the kind of saw that alligators have on the tops of their tails. They dragged the trees down into the water and stood them up about a yard apart, all the way across the river, driving the pointed ends deep into the mud and weaving the branches together. No steamboat, big or little, would ever be able to pass that dam! No one would frighten the fish away again! They would have a good dinner the following day and every day! And since it was late at night by the time the dam was done, they all fell sound asleep on the river bank.

Chug! Chug! Chug! Chush! Chush! Chush! Cho-ash-h-h-h! Cho-ash-h-h-h! Cho-ash-h-h-h!

They were still asleep, the next day, when the boat came up; but the alligators barely opened their eyes and then tried to go to sleep again. What did they care about the boat? It could make all the noise it wanted, but it would never get by the dam!

And that is what happened. Soon the noise from the boat stopped. The men who were steering on the bridge took out their spy-glasses and began

to study the strange obstruction that had been thrown up across the river. Finally a small boat was sent to look into it more closely. Only then did the alligators get up from where they were sleeping, run down into the water, and swim out behind the dam, where they lay floating and looking downstream between the piles. They could not help laughing, nevertheless, at the joke they had played on the steamboat!

The small boat came up, and the men in it saw how the alligators had made a dam across the river. They went back to the steamer, but soon after, came rowing up toward the dam again.

“Hey, you, alligators!”

“What can we do for you?” answered the alligators, sticking their heads through between the piles in the dam.

“That dam is in our way!” said the men.

“Tell us something we don’t know!” answered the alligators.

“But we can’t get by!”

“I’ll say so!”

“Well, take the old thing out of the way!”

“Nosireesir!”

The men in the boat talked it over for a while and then they called:

“Alligators!”

“What can we do for you?”

“Will you take the dam away?”

“No!”

“No?”

“No!”

“Very well! See you later!”

“The later the better,” said the alligators.

The rowboat went back to the steamer, while the alligators, as happy as could be, clapped their tails as loud as they could on the water. No boat could ever get by that dam, and drive the fish away again!

But the next day the steamboat returned; and when the alligators looked at it, they could not say a word from their surprise: it was not the same boat at all, but a larger one, painted gray like a mouse! How many steamboats were there, anyway? And this one probably would want to pass the dam! Well, just let it try! No, sir! No steamboat, little or big, would ever get through that dam!

“They shall not pass!” said the alligators, each taking up his station behind the piles in the dam.

The new boat, like the other one, stopped some distance below the dam; and again a little boat came rowing toward them. This time there were eight sailors in it, with one officer. The officer shouted:

“Hey, you, alligators!”

“What’s the matter?” answered the alligators.

“Going to get that dam out of there?”

“No!”

“No?”

“No!”

“Very well!” said the officer. “In that case, we shall have to shoot it down!”

“Shoot it up if you want to!” said the alligators.

And the boat returned to the steamer.

But now, this mouse-gray steamboat was not an ordinary steamboat: it was a warship, with armor plate and terribly powerful guns. The old alligator who had made the trip to the river mouth suddenly remembered, and just in time to shout to the other alligators: “Duck for your lives! Duck! She’s going to shoot! Keep down deep under water.”

The alligators dived all at the same time, and headed for the shore, where they halted, keeping all their bodies out of sight except for their noses and their eyes. A great cloud of flame and smoke burst from the vessel’s side, followed by a deafening report. An immense solid shot hurtled through the air and struck the dam exactly in the middle. Two or three tree trunks were cut away into splinters and drifted off downstream. Another shot, a third, and finally a fourth, each tearing a great hole in the dam. Finally the piles were entirely destroyed; not a tree, not a splinter, not a piece of bark, was left; and the alligators, still sitting with their eyes and noses just out of water, saw the warship come steaming by and blowing its whistle in derision at them.

Then the alligators came out on the bank and held a council of war. “Our dam was not strong enough,” said they; “we must make a new and much thicker one.”

So they worked again all that afternoon and night, cutting down the very biggest trees they could find, and making a much better dam than they had built before. When the gunboat appeared the next day, they were sleeping

soundly and had to hurry to get behind the piles of the dam by the time the rowboat arrived there.

“Hey, alligators!” called the same officer.

“See who’s here again!” said the alligators, jeeringly.

“Get that new dam out of there!”

“Never in the world!”

“Well, we’ll blow it up, the way we did the other!”

“Blaze away, and good luck to you!”

You see, the alligators talked so big because they were sure the dam they had made this time would hold up against the most terrible cannon balls in the world. And the sailors must have thought so, too; for after they had fired the first shot a tremendous explosion occurred in the dam. The gunboat was using shells, which burst among the timbers of the dam and broke the thickest trees into tiny, tiny bits. A second shell exploded right near the first, and a third near the second. So the shots went all along the dam, each tearing away a long strip of it till nothing, nothing, nothing was left. Again the warship came steaming by, closer in toward shore on this occasion, so that the sailors could make fun of the alligators by putting their hands to their mouths and holloing.

“So that’s it!” said the alligators, climbing up out of the water. “We must all die, because the steamboats will keep coming and going, up and down, and leaving us not a fish in the world to eat!”

The littlest alligators were already whimpering; for they had had no dinner for three days; and it was a crowd of very sad alligators that gathered on the river shore to hear what the old alligator now had to say.

“We have only one hope left,” he began. “We must go and see the Sturgeon! When I was a boy, I took that trip down to the sea along with him. He liked the salt water better than I did, and went quite a way out into the ocean. There he saw a sea fight between two of these boats; and he brought home a torpedo that had failed to explode. Suppose we go and ask him to give it to us. It is true the Sturgeon has never liked us alligators; but I got along with him pretty well myself. He is a good fellow, at bottom, and surely he will not want to see us all starve!”

The fact was that some years before an alligator had eaten one of the Sturgeon’s favorite grandchildren; and for that reason the Sturgeon had refused ever since to call on the alligators or receive visits from them. Nevertheless, the alligators now tramped off in a body to the big cave under

the bank of the river where they knew the Sturgeon stayed, with his torpedo beside him. There are sturgeons as much as six feet long, you know, and this one with the torpedo was of that kind.

“Mr. Sturgeon! Mr. Sturgeon!” called the alligators at the entrance of the cave. No one of them dared go in, you see, on account of that matter of the sturgeon’s grandchild.

“Who is it?” answered the Sturgeon.

“We’re the alligators,” the latter replied in a chorus.

“I have nothing to do with alligators,” grumbled the Sturgeon crossly.

But now the old alligator with the two teeth stepped forward and said:

“Why, hello, Sturgy. Don’t you remember Ally, your old friend that took that trip down the river, when we were boys?”

“Well, well! Where have you been keeping yourself all these years,” said the Sturgeon, surprised and pleased to hear his old friend’s voice. “Sorry I didn’t know it was you! How goes it? What can I do for you?”

“We’ve come to ask you for that torpedo you found, remember? You see, there’s a warship keeps coming up and down our river scaring all the fish away. She’s a whopper, I’ll tell you, armor plate, guns, the whole thing! We made one dam and she knocked it down. We made another and she blew it up. The fish have all gone away and we haven’t had a bite to eat in near onto a week. Now you give us your torpedo and we’ll do the rest!”

The Sturgeon sat thinking for a long time, scratching his chin with one of his fins. At last he answered:

“As for the torpedo, all right! You can have it in spite of what you did to my eldest son’s first-born. But there’s one trouble: who knows how to work the thing?”

The alligators were all silent. Not one of them had ever seen a torpedo.

“Well,” said the Sturgeon, proudly, “I can see I’ll have to go with you myself. I’ve lived next to that torpedo a long time. I know all about torpedoes.”

The first task was to bring the torpedo down to the dam. The alligators got into line, the one behind taking in his mouth the tail of the one in front. When the line was formed it was fully a quarter of a mile long. The Sturgeon pushed the torpedo out into the current, and got under it so as to hold it up near the top of the water on his back. Then he took the tail of the last alligator in his teeth, and gave the signal to go ahead. The Sturgeon kept the torpedo afloat, while the alligators towed him along. In this way they

went so fast that a wide wake followed on after the torpedo; and by the next morning they were back at the place where the dam was made.

As the little alligators who had stayed at home reported, the warship had already gone by upstream. But this pleased the others all the more. Now they would build a new dam, stronger than ever before, and catch the steamer in a trap, so that it would never get home again.

They worked all that day and all the next night, making a thick, almost solid dike, with barely enough room between the piles for the alligators to stick their heads through. They had just finished when the gunboat came into view.

Again the rowboat approached with the eight men and their officer. The alligators crowded behind the dam in great excitement, moving their paws to hold their own with the current; for this time, they were downstream.

“Hey, alligators!” called the officer.

“Well?” answered the alligators.

“Still another dam?”

“If at first you don’t succeed, try, try, again!”

“Get that dam out of there!”

“No, sir!”

“You won’t?”

“We won’t!”

“Very well! Now you alligators just listen! If you won’t be reasonable, we are going to knock this dam down, too. But to save you the trouble of building a fourth, we are going to shoot every blessed alligator around here. Yes, every single last alligator, women and children, big ones, little ones, fat ones, lean ones, and even that old codger sitting there with only two teeth left in his jaws!”

The old alligator understood that the officer was trying to insult him with that reference to his two teeth, and he answered:

“Young man, what you say is true. I have only two teeth left, not counting one or two others that are broken off. But do you know what those two teeth are going to eat for dinner?” As he said this the old alligator opened his mouth wide, wide, wide.

“Well, what are they going to eat?” asked one of the sailors.

“A little dude of a naval officer I see in a boat over there!”—and the old alligator dived under water and disappeared from view.

Meantime the Sturgeon had brought the torpedo to the very center of the dam, where four alligators were holding it fast to the river bottom waiting for orders to bring it up to the top of the water. The other alligators had gathered along the shore, with their noses and eyes alone in sight as usual.

The rowboat went back to the ship. When he saw the men climbing aboard, the Sturgeon went down to his torpedo.

Suddenly there was a loud detonation. The warship had begun firing, and the first shell struck and exploded in the middle of the dam. A great gap opened in it.

“Now! Now!” called the Sturgeon sharply, on seeing that there was room for the torpedo to go through. “Let her go! Let her go!”

As the torpedo came to the surface, the Sturgeon steered it to the opening in the dam, took aim hurriedly with one eye closed, and pulled at the trigger of the torpedo with his teeth. The propeller of the torpedo began to revolve, and it started off upstream toward the gunboat.

And it was high time. At that instant a second shot exploded in the dam, tearing away another large section.

From the wake the torpedo left behind it in the water the men on the vessel saw the danger they were in, but it was too late to do anything about it. The torpedo struck the ship in the middle, and went off.

You can never guess the terrible noise that torpedo made. It blew the warship into fifteen thousand million pieces, tossing guns, and smokestacks, and shells and rowboats—everything, hundreds and hundreds of yards away.

The alligators all screamed with triumph and made as fast as they could for the dam. Down through the opening bits of wood came floating, with a number of sailors swimming as hard as they could for the shore. As the men passed through, the alligators put their paws to their mouths and holloed, as the men had done to them three days before. They decided not to eat a single one of the sailors, though some of them deserved it without a doubt. Except that when a man dressed in a blue uniform with gold braid came by, the old alligator jumped into the water off the dam, and snap! snap! ate him in two mouthfuls.

“Who was that man?” asked an ignorant young alligator, who never learned his lessons in school and never knew what was going on.

“It’s the officer of the boat,” answered the Sturgeon. “My old friend, Ally, said he was going to eat him, and eaten him he has!”

The alligators tore down the rest of the dam, because they knew that no boats would be coming by that way again.

The Sturgeon, who had quite fallen in love with the gold lace of the officer, asked that it be given him in payment for the use of his torpedo. The alligators said he might have it for the trouble of picking it out of the old alligator's mouth, where it had caught on the two teeth. They gave him also the officer's belt and sword. The Sturgeon put the belt on just behind his front fins, and buckled the sword to it. Thus togged out, he swam up and down for more than an hour in front of the assembled alligators, who admired his beautiful spotted skin as something almost as pretty as the coral snake's, and who opened their mouths wide at the splendor of his uniform. Finally they escorted him in honor back to his cave under the river bank, thanking him over and over again, and giving him three cheers as they went off.

When they returned to their usual place they found the fish had already returned. The next day another steamboat came by; but the alligators did not care, because the fish were getting used to it by this time and seemed not to be afraid. Since then the boats have been going back and forth all the time, carrying oranges. And the alligators open their eyes when they hear the *chug! chug! chug!* of a steamboat and laugh at the thought of how scared they were the first time, and of how they sank the warship.

But no warship has ever gone up the river since the old alligator ate the officer.

HOW THE FLAMINGOES GOT THEIR STOCKINGS

Once the snakes decided that they would give a costume ball; and to make the affair a truly brilliant one they sent invitations to the frogs, the toads, the alligators and the fish.

The fish replied that since they had no legs they would not be able to do much dancing; whereupon, as a special courtesy to them, the ball was held on the shore of the Parana. The fish swam up to the very beach and sat looking on with their heads out of water. When anything pleased them they splashed with their tails.

To make as good an appearance as possible, the alligators put necklaces of bananas around their throats; and they came to the ball smoking big Paraguay cigars. The toads stuck fish scales all over their bodies; and when they walked, they moved their forelegs out and in as though they were swimming. They strutted up and down the beach with very glum, determined faces; and the fish kept calling to them, making fun of their scales. The frogs were satisfied to leave their smooth green skins just as they were; but they bathed themselves in perfume and walked on their hind legs. Besides, each one carried a lightning bug, which waved to and fro like a lantern, at the end of a string in the frog's hand.

But the best costumes of all were worn by the snakes. All of them, without exception, had dancing gowns of the color of their skins. There were red snakes, and brown snakes, and pink snakes, and yellow snakes—each with a garment of tulle to match. The *yarara*, who is a kind of rattler, came in a single-piece robe of gray tulle with brick-colored stripes—for that is the way the *yarara* dresses even when he is not going to a ball. The coral snakes were prettier still. They draped themselves in a gauze of reds, whites and blacks; and when they danced, they wound themselves round and round like corkscrews, rising on the tips of their tails, coiling and uncoiling, balancing this way and that. They were the most graceful and beautiful of all the snakes, and the guests applauded them wildly.

The flamingoes were the only ones who seemed not to be having a good time. Stupid birds that they were, they had not thought of any costumes at all. They came with the plain white legs they had at that time and the thick, twisted bills they have even now. Naturally they were envious of all the gowns they saw, but most of all, of the fancy dress of the coral snakes. Every time one of these went by them, courtesying, pirouetting, balancing, the flamingoes writhed with jealousy. For no one, meanwhile, was asking them to dance.

“I know what we must do,” said one of the flamingoes at last. “We must go and get some stockings for our legs—pink, black and white like the coral snakes themselves—then they will all fall in love with us!”

The whole flock of them took wing immediately and flew across the river to a village nearby. They went to the store and knocked:

“Tan! Tan! Tan!”

“Who is it?” called the storekeeper.

“We’re the flamingoes. We have come to get some stockings—pink, black, and white.”

“Are you crazy?” the storekeeper answered. “I keep stockings for people, not for silly birds. Besides, stockings of such colors! You won’t find any in town, either!”

The flamingoes went on to another store:

“Tan! Tan! Tan! We are looking for stockings—pink, black and white. Have you any?”

“Pink, black and white stockings! Don’t you know decent people don’t wear such things? You must be crazy! Who are you, anyway?”

“We are the flamingoes,” the flamingoes replied.

“In that case you are silly flamingoes! Better go somewhere else!”

They went to still a third store:

“Tan! Tan! Pink, black and white stockings! Got any?”

“Pink, black and white nonsense!” called the storekeeper. “Only birds with big noses like yours could ask for such a thing. Don’t make tracks on my floor!”

And the man swept them into the street with a broom.

So the flamingoes went from store to store, and everywhere people called them silly, stupid birds.

However, an owl, a mischievous *tatu*, who had just been down to the river to get some water, and had heard all about the ball and the flamingoes,

met them on his way back and thought he would have some fun with them.

“Good evening, good evening, flamingoes,” he said, making a deep bow, though, of course, it was just to ridicule the foolish birds. “I know what you are looking for. I doubt if you can get any such stockings in town. You might find them in Buenos Aires; but you would have to order them by mail. My sister-in-law, the barn owl, has stockings like that, however. Why don’t you go around and see her? She can give you her own and borrow others from her family.”

“Thanks! Thanks, ever so much!” said the flamingoes; and they flew off to the cellar of a barn where the barn owl lived.

“Tan! Tan! Good evening, Mrs. Owl,” they said. “A relation of yours, Mr. Tatu, advised us to call on you. Tonight, as you know, the snakes are giving a costume ball, and we have no costumes. If you could lend us your pink, black and white stockings, the coral snakes would be sure to fall in love with us!”

“Pleased to accommodate you,” said the barn owl. “Will you wait just a moment?”

She flew away and was gone some time. When she came back she had the stockings with her. But they were not real stockings. They were nothing but skins from coral snakes which the owl had caught and eaten during the previous days.

“Perhaps these will do,” she remarked. “But if you wear them at the ball, I advise you to do strictly as I say: dance all night long, and don’t stop a moment. For if you do, you will get into trouble, I assure you!”

The flamingoes listened to what she said; but, stupidly, did not try to guess what she could have meant by such counsel. They saw no danger in the pretty stockings. Delightedly they doubled up their claws like fists, stuck them through the snakeskins, which were like so many long rubber tubes, and flew back as quickly as they could to the ball.

When the guests at the dance saw the flamingoes in such handsome stockings, they were as jealous as could be. You see, the coral snakes were the lions of the evening, and after the flamingoes came back, they would dance with no one but the flamingoes. Remembering the instructions of the barn owl, the flamingoes kept their feet going all the time, and the snakes could not see very clearly just what those wonderful stockings were.

After a time, however, they grew suspicious. When a flamingo came dancing by, the snakes would get down off the ends of their tails to examine

its feet more closely. The coral snakes, more than anybody else, began to get uneasy. They could not take their eyes off those stockings, and they got as near as they could, trying to touch the legs of the flamingoes with the tips of their tongues—for snakes use their tongues to feel with, much as people use their hands. But the flamingoes kept dancing and dancing all the while, though by this time they were getting so tired they were about ready to give up.

The coral snakes understood that sooner or later the flamingoes would have to stop. So they borrowed the lightning bugs from the frogs, to be ready when the flamingoes fell from sheer exhaustion.

And in fact, it was not long before one of the birds, all tired out, tripped over the cigar in an alligator's mouth, and fell down on her side. The coral snakes all ran toward her with their lanterns, and held the lightning bugs up so close that they could see the feet of the flamingo as clearly as could be.

“Aha! Aha! Stockings, eh? Stockings, eh?” The coral snakes began to hiss so loudly that people could hear them on the other side of the Parana.

The cry was taken up by all the snakes: “They are not wearing stockings! We know what they have done! The flamingoes have been killing brothers of ours, and they are wearing their skins as stockings! Those pretty legs each stand for the murder of a coral snake!”

At this uproar, the flamingoes took fright and tried to fly away. But they were so tired from all the dancing that not one of them could move a wing. The coral snakes darted upon them, and began to bite at their legs, tearing off the false stockings bit by bit, and, in their rage, sinking their fangs deep into the feet and legs of the flamingoes.

The flamingoes, terrified and mad with pain, hopped this way and that, trying to shake their enemies off. But the snakes did not let go till every last shred of stocking had been torn away. Then they crawled off, to rearrange their gauze costumes that had been much rumped in the fray. They did not try to kill the flamingoes then and there; for most coral snakes are poisonous; and they were sure the birds they had bitten would die sooner or later anyway.

But the flamingoes did not die. They hopped down to the river and waded out into the water to relieve their pain. Their feet and legs, which had been white before, had now turned red from the poison in the bites. They stood there for days and days, trying to cool the burning ache, and hoping to wash out the red.

“The flamingoes ... hopped down to the river, and waded out ... to relieve their pain.”

But they did not succeed. And they have not succeeded yet. The flamingoes still pass most of their time standing on their red legs out in the water. Occasionally they go ashore and walk up and down for a few moments to see if they are getting well. But the pain comes again at once, and they hurry back into the water. Even there they sometimes feel an ache in one of their feet; and they lift it out to warm it in their feathers. They stand that way on one leg for hours, I suppose because the other one is so stiff and lame.

That is why the flamingoes have red legs instead of white. And the fishes know it too. They keep coming up to the top of the water and crying “Red legs! Red legs! Red legs!” to make fun of the flamingoes for having tried to borrow costumes for a ball. On that account, the flamingoes are always at war with the fishes. As they wade up and down, and a fish comes up too close in order to shout “Red legs” at them, they dip their long bills down and catch it if they can.

THE LAZY BEE

In a beehive once there was a bee who would not work. She would go flying from blossom to blossom on the orange trees sucking out all the honey. But instead of taking it back to the hive she would eat it then and there.

She was a lazy bee. Every morning, the moment the sun had warmed the hive, she would come to the door and look out. On making sure that it was a lovely day, she would wash her face and comb her hair with her paws, the way flies do, and then go flitting off, as pleased as could be at the bright weather. So she would go buzzing and buzzing from flower to flower; and then after a time she would go back and see what the other bees were doing in the hive. So it would go on all day long.

Meantime the other bees would be working themselves to death trying to fill the hive full of honey; for honey is what they give the little bees to eat as soon as they are born. And these worker bees, very staid, respectable, earnest bees, began to scowl at the conduct of this shirker of a sister they had.

You must know that, at the door of every beehive, there are always a number of bees on watch, to see that no insects but bees get into the hive. These policemen, as a rule, are old bees, with a great deal of experience in life. Their backs are quite bald, because all the hair gets worn off from rubbing against the hive as they walk in and out of the door.

One day when the lazy bee was just dropping in to see what was going on in the hive, these policemen called her to one side:

“Sister,” said they, “it is time you did a little work. All us bees have to work!”

The little bee was quite scared when the policemen spoke to her, but she answered:

“I go flying about all day long, and get very tired!”

“We didn’t ask you how tired you got! We want to see how much work you can do! This is Warning Number 1!”

And they let her go on into the hive.

But the lazy little bee did not mend her ways. On the next evening the policemen stopped her again:

“Sister, we didn’t see you working today!”

The little bee was expecting something of the kind, and she had been thinking up what she would say all the way home.

“I’ll go to work one of these days,” she spoke up promptly; and with a cheerful, winsome smile.

“We don’t want you to go to work one of these days,” they answered gruffly. “We want you to go to work tomorrow morning. This is Warning Number 2!”

And they let her in.

The following night, when the lazy bee came home, she did not wait for the policemen to stop her. She went up to them sorrowfully and said:

“Yes, yes! I remember what I promised. I’m so sorry I wasn’t able to work today!”

“We didn’t ask how sorry you were, nor what you had promised. What we want from you is work. Today is the nineteenth of April. Tomorrow will be the twentieth of April. See to it that the twentieth of April does not pass without your putting at least one load of honey into the hive. This is Warning Number 3! You may enter!”

And the policemen who had been blocking the door stepped aside to let her in.

The lazy bee woke up with very good intentions the next morning; but the sun was so warm and bright and the flowers were so beautiful! The day passed the same as all the others; except that toward evening the weather changed. The sun went down behind a great bank of clouds and a strong icy wind began to blow.

The lazy little bee started for home as fast as she could, thinking how warm and cozy it would be inside the hive, with all that storm blowing out of doors. But on the porch of the beehive the policemen got in front of her.

“Where are you going, young lady?” said they.

“I am going in to bed. This is where I live!”

“You must be mistaken,” said the policemen. “Only busy worker bees live here! Lazy bees are not allowed inside this door!”

“Tomorrow, surely, surely, surely, I am going to work,” said the little bee.

“There is no tomorrow for lazy bees,” said the policemen; for they were old, wise bees, and knew philosophy. “Away with you!” And they pushed her off the doorstep.

The little bee did not know what to do. She flew around for a time; but soon it began to grow dark; the wind blew colder and colder, and drops of rain began to fall. Quite tired at last, she took hold of a leaf, intending to rest a moment; but she was chilled and numbed by the cold. She could not hang on, and fell a long distance to the ground.

She tried to get to her wings again, but they were too tired to work. So she started crawling over the ground toward the hive. Every stone, every stick she met, she had to climb over with great effort—so many hills and mountains they seemed to such a tiny bee. The raindrops were coming faster when, almost dead with cold and fright and fatigue, she arrived at the door of the hive.

“Oh, oh,” she moaned. “I am cold, and it is going to rain! I shall be sure to die out here!” And she crept up to the door.

But the fierce policemen again stopped her from going in.

“Forgive me, sisters,” the little bee said. “Please, let me go in!”

“Too late! Too late!” they answered.

“Please, sisters, I am so sleepy!” said the little bee.

“Too late! Too late!” said they.

“Please, sisters, I am cold!” said the little bee.

“Sorry! You can’t go in!” said they.

“Please, sisters, for one last time! I shall die out here!”

“You won’t die, lazy bee! One night will teach you the value of a warm bed earned by honest labor! Away from here!”

And they pushed her off the doorstep again.

By this time it was raining hard. The little bee felt her wings and fur getting wetter and wetter; and she was so cold and sleepy she did not know what to do. She crawled along as fast as she could over the ground, hoping to come to some place where it was dry and not so cold. At last she came to a tree and began to walk up the trunk. Suddenly, just as she had come to the crotch of two branches, she fell! She fell a long, long distance and landed finally on something soft. There was no wind and no rain blowing. On coming to her wits the little bee understood that she had fallen down through a hole inside a hollow tree.

And now the little bee had the fright of her life. Coiled up near her there was a snake, a green snake with a brick-colored back. That hollow tree was the snake's house; and the snake lay there looking at her with eyes that shone even in that darkness. Now, snakes eat bees, and like them. So when this little bee found herself so close to a fearful enemy of her kind, she just closed her eyes and murmured to herself:

"This is the last of me! Oh, how I wish I had worked!"

To her great surprise, however, the snake not only did not eat her, but spoke to her rather softly for such a terrible snake:

"How do you do, little bee? You must be a naughty little bee, to be out so late at night!"

"Yes," she murmured, her heart in her throat. "I have been a naughty bee. I did not work, and they won't let me in to go to my bed!"

"In that case, I shall not be so sorry to eat you!" answered the snake. "Surely there can be no harm at all in depriving the world of a useless little bee like you! I won't have to go out for dinner tonight. I shall eat you right here!"

The little bee was about as scared as a bee can be.

"That is not fair," she said. "It is not just! You have no right to eat me just because you are bigger than I am. Go and ask people if that isn't so! People know what is right and wrong!"

"Ah, ah!" said the snake, lifting his head higher, "so you have a good opinion of men? So you think that the men who steal your honey are more honest than snakes who eat you? You are not only a lazy bee. You are also a silly one!"

"It is not because men are dishonest that they take our honey," said the bee.

"Why is it then?" said the snake.

"It's because they are more intelligent than we are!" That is what the bee said; but the snake just laughed; and then he hissed:

"Well, if you must have it that way, it's because I'm more intelligent than you that I'm going to eat you now! Get ready to be eaten, lazy bee!"

And the snake drew back to strike, and lap up the bee at one gobble.

But the little bee had time to say:

"It's because you're duller than I am that you eat me!"

"Duller than you?" asked the snake, letting his head down again. "How is that, stupid?"

“However it is, it’s so!”

“I’ll have to be shown!” said the snake. “I will make a bargain with you. We will each do a trick; and the cleverest trick wins. If I win, I’ll eat you!”

“And if I win?” asked the little bee.

“If you win,” said the snake after some thought, “you may stay in here where it is warm all night. Is it a bargain?”

“It is,” said the bee.

The snake considered another moment or so and then began to laugh. He had thought of something a bee could not possibly do. He darted out of a hole in the tree so quickly the bee had scarcely time to wonder what he was up to; and just as quickly he came back with a seed pod from the eucalyptus tree that stood near the beehive and shaded it on days when the sun was hot. Now the seed pods of the eucalyptus tree are just the shape of a top; in fact, the boys and girls in Argentina call them “tops”—*trompitos*!

“Now you just watch and see what I’m a-going to do,” said the snake. “Watch now! Watch!...”

The snake wound the thin part of his tail around the top like a string; then, with a jump forward to his full length, he straightened his tail out. The “top” began to spin like mad on the bark floor there at the bottom of the hollow tree; and it spun and spun and spun, dancing, jumping, running off in this direction and then in that direction. And the snake laughed! And he laughed and he laughed and he laughed! No bee would ever be able to do a thing like that!

Finally the top got tired of spinning and fell over on its side.

“That is very clever!” said the bee, “I could never do that!”

“In that case, I shall have to eat you!” said the snake.

“Not just yet, please,” said the bee. “I can’t spin a top; but I can do something no one else can do!”

“What is that?” asked the snake.

“I can disappear!” said the bee.

“What do you mean, disappear?” said the snake, with some interest. “Disappear so that I can’t see you and without going away from here?”

“Without going away from here!”

“Without hiding in the ground?”

“Without hiding in the ground!”

“I give up!” said the snake. “Disappear! But if you don’t do as you say, I eat you, gobble, gobble, just like that!”

Now you must know that while the top was spinning round and round, the little bee had noticed something on the floor of the hollow tree she had not seen before: it was a little shrub, three or four inches high, with leaves about the size of a fifty-cent piece. She now walked over to the stem of this little shrub, taking care, however, not to touch it with her body. Then she said:

“Now it is my turn, Mr. Snake. Won’t you be so kind as to turn around, and count ‘one,’ ‘two,’ ‘three.’ At the word ‘three,’ you can look for me everywhere! I simply won’t be around!”

The snake looked the other way and ran off a “onetathree,” then turning around with his mouth wide open to have his dinner at last. You see, he counted so fast just to give the bee as little time as possible, under the contract they had made.

But if he opened his mouth wide for his dinner, he held it open in complete surprise. There was no bee to be found anywhere! He looked on the floor. He looked on the sides of the hollow tree. He looked in each nook and cranny. He looked the little shrub all over. Nothing! The bee had simply disappeared!

Now, the snake understood that if his trick of spinning the top with his tail was extraordinary, this trick of the bee was almost miraculous. Where had that good-for-nothing lazybones gone to? Here? No! There? No! Where then? Nowhere! There was no way to find the little bee!

“Well,” said the snake at last, “I give up! Where are you?”

A little voice seemed to come from a long way off, but still from the middle of the space inside the hollow tree.

“You won’t eat me if I reappear?” it said.

“No, I won’t eat you!” said the snake.

“Promise?”

“I promise! But where are you?”

“Here I am,” said the bee, coming out on one of the leaves of the little shrub.

It was not such a great mystery after all. That shrub was a Sensitive-plant, a plant that is very common in South America, especially in the North of the Republic of Argentina, where Sensitive-plants grow to quite a good size. The peculiarity of the Sensitive-plant is that it shrivels up its leaves at the slightest contact. The leaves of this shrub were unusually large, as is true of the Sensitive-plants around the city of Misiones. You see, the

moment the bee lighted on a leaf, it folded up tight about her, hiding her completely from view. Now, the snake had been living next to that plant all the season long, and had never noticed anything unusual about it. The little bee had paid attention to such things, however; and her knowledge this time had saved her life.

The snake was very much ashamed at being bested by such a little bee; and he was not very nice about it either. So much so, in fact, that the bee spent most of the night reminding him of the promise he had made not to eat her.

And it was a long, endless night for the little bee. She sat on the floor in one corner and the snake coiled up in the other corner opposite. Pretty soon it began to rain so hard that the water came pouring in through the hole at the top of the tree and made quite a puddle on the floor. The bee sat there and shivered and shivered; and every so often the snake would raise his head as though to swallow her at one gulp. "You promised! You promised! You promised!" And the snake would lower his head, sheepishlike, because he did not want the bee to think him a dishonest, as well as a stupid snake.

The little bee, who had been used to a warm hive at home and to warm sunlight out of doors, had never dreamed there could be so much cold anywhere as there was in that hollow tree. Nor had there ever been a night so long!

But the moment there was a trace of daylight at the hole in the top of the tree, the bee bade the snake good-by and crawled out. She tried her wings; and this time they worked all right. She flew in a bee-line straight for the door of the hive.

The policemen were standing there and she began to cry. But they simply stepped aside without saying a word, and let her in. They understood, you see, as wise old bees, that this wayward child was not the lazy bee they had driven away the evening before, but a sadder and wiser child who now knew something about the world she had to live in.

And they were right. Never before was there such a bee for working from morning till night, day in, day out, gathering pollen and honey from the flowers. When Autumn came she was the most respected bee in the hive and she was appointed teacher of the young bees who would do the work the following year. And her first lesson was something like this:

"It is not because bees are intelligent but because they work that makes them such wonderful little things. I used my intelligence only once—and

that was to save my life. I should not have gotten into that trouble, however, if I had worked, like all the other bees. I used to waste my strength just flying around doing nothing. I should not have been any more tired if I had worked. What I needed was a sense of duty; and I got it that night I spent with the snake in the hollow tree.

“Work, my little bees, work!—remembering that what we are all working for, the happiness of everybody, will be hard enough to get if each of us does his full duty. This is what people say, and it is just as true of bees. Work well and faithfully and you will be happy. There is no sounder philosophy for a man or for a bee!”

THE GIANT TORTOISE'S GOLDEN RULE

Once there was a man who lived in Buenos Aires and was a friend of the superintendent of the Zoo. This man had a very happy life, because he worked hard and enjoyed good health. But one day he fell ill, and the doctors told him he would never get well unless he left town and went to live in the country where there was good air and a warm climate. The man could not think of such a thing, however. He had five little brothers, and both his parents were dead. He had to provide the little boys with food and clothes, and get them ready for school in the morning. Who would care for them, if he went away? So he kept on with his work and his illness grew worse and worse.

One day a man from the Zoo met him on the street and said:

“You ought to go and live an out-of-door life for a while. Now, I have an idea. We need a collection of new specimens for our museum, and you are a good shot with a gun. Wouldn't you like to go up into the Andes and hunt for us? I will pay for your outfit, and get a woman to look after your little brothers. It will not cost you very much, and there will be plenty of money left for the boys.”

The sick man gladly accepted. He went off to the mountains, many, many miles beyond Misiones, where he camped in the open air and soon began to get better.

He lived quite by himself, doing his own cooking, washing his own clothes, and making his own bed, which was a bag with blankets in it. He did not use a tent, but slept in the bag out under the stars. When it rained he would throw up a shelter of branches, cover it with his waterproof, and sit down all cozy underneath, till the storm cleared. He ate partridges and venison, with the berries and wild fruits he found along the mountains. Whenever he saw some rare animal that the Zoo would want, he shot it, and dried its skin in the sun. In course of time, he made a big bundle of such skins, which he carried on his shoulder whenever he moved his camp to a

new place. Many beautifully spotted snakes he was able to catch alive; and these he kept in a big hollow gourd—for in South America wild squashes and pumpkins grow till they are as large as gasoline cans.

All this was very hard work but the man grew strong and healthy again. And what an appetite he had when supper time came around! One day when his provisions were getting low, he went out hunting with his gun. Soon he came to a wide lake, and what should he see on the shore but a huge panther that had caught a tortoise! The fierce animal had drawn the turtle up out of the water and was clawing between the two shells trying to scratch the meat out. As the man approached, the panther turned and, with a great roar, leaped toward him. The panther was not quick enough, however, for a bullet from the man's rifle caught him between the eyes and laid him low in his tracks.

“What a wonderful rug this skin will make for somebody!” the man exclaimed; and he carefully removed the hide and rolled it up to take home.

“I think I will have turtle soup for supper tonight,” the man continued as he turned toward the tortoise; for turtle-flesh is one of the richest and sweetest of all meats.

But he could not help feeling very sorry for the poor turtle when he saw what a plight she was in. The panther's claws had torn the flesh terribly; and a great gash in her throat had all but left her head severed from the rest of the body. Instead of killing the wounded turtle the hunter thought he would try to cure her of her hurts.

“He could not help feeling sorry for the
poor turtle....”

The camp was some distance away and the man was very tired. Besides, when he tried to lift the tortoise, he found she weighed nearly two hundred pounds. Finally he put a rope around her, and pulled and hauled till he dragged her along over the grass back to the camp.

The man had no extra pieces of cloth to make a bandage with, so he cut off a piece of his shirt and took the lining out of his coat. Finally he managed to bind up the tortoise's throat and stop the bleeding. Then he pushed her into a corner of the shelter, where she lay motionless for days

and days. Twice a day the man would come and wash the wound with water and liniment. When he thought the cut had healed, he took off the wrapping and the tortoise drew her head into her shell. The man kept visiting her every morning, however, tapping gently on the turtle's back to wake her up.

The tortoise got entirely well; but then something terrible happened. The man caught a fever in the swamps around the lake, and chills and pains began to wrack his body. One morning he could not get out of his sleeping bag, but just lay there groaning. His fever got rapidly worse, and a parching thirst burned at his throat. In his delirium he began to talk out loud: "Here I am all alone, away out here in the woods. I am surely going to die. There is no one even to bring me a drink of water."

But the tortoise, all this time, had not been sleeping so soundly as the man had thought. In fact, she had been slyly watching him as he worked about the camp. When the hunter did not get up that morning, the tortoise understood that something was wrong, and also that it was water he kept calling for.

"This man," thought the tortoise, "did not eat me that day, though he had me in his power and was hungry. Instead, he took care of me till I was well. A good tortoise ought surely to do as much for him!"

The big turtle—she stood as high as a chair and weighed, as I said, as much as a man—crawled off to the lakeside. There she hunted around till she found a small tortoise shell. She polished it with sand till it was bright and shiny. Then she filled it with pure cold water from a spring, crawled back to camp with it, and gave the man a drink.

"Now for something to eat," said the turtle.

Turtles know the most peculiar kinds of roots and grasses to eat when they are sick. This tortoise went out and gathered a supply of such herbs and fed them to the man; and he ate them without noticing who was finding his food for him, so nearly unconscious was he in his delirium. So day after day the tortoise went hunting and hunting over the mountain sides, looking for tenderer and tenderer grasses with stronger and stronger juices. And how sorry she was she could not climb trees where such fine berries and fruits were hanging!

Thus the hunter lay for a week or more, struggling between life and death and kept alive only by the herbs the tortoise brought him. And then one day, to the joy of the faithful animal, the man sat up in his sleeping bag. The fever had left him and his mind was clear. He looked around in surprise to

see the water and a bundle of grasses near him; for he was quite alone, save for the big turtle that still seemed to be sleeping in her corner.

“Alas, I am lost!” he moaned. “No one will ever come to me. The fever will return, and I cannot get any medicine nearer than Buenos Aires. If I could walk, I might get there; but I can’t, so I must die!”

And, just as he feared, the fever did return that evening worse than before; and the man fell back into unconsciousness.

But again the turtle had understood: “Yes, he will die, if he stays here! I must get him to Buenos Aires where there is some medicine!”

Carefully she dragged the bundle of skins up to the man and placed it in position on his body. Then she did the same with the gourd full of snakes. And what a task it was to get the gun in place on top of the whole pile! Finally she went out into the woods and bit off a number of tough, strong vines. These she stretched across the sleeping man and tied to his arms and legs in such a way as to keep the baggage from falling off. She dug her way under the sleeping bag till everything was balanced on her back; and then she started off toward Buenos Aires.

She crawled along for ten or twelve hours each day, swimming rivers and ponds, sinking deep into the mud of bogs, climbing hills and crossing sandy plains where the sun at midday scorched terribly. In his fever the man kept calling for water; and it was very trying to the poor tortoise to have to get the man off her back each time while she went looking for a drink for him. But she struggled forward just the same, and each night she knew she was that much nearer to Buenos Aires.

But the tortoise, after days and days of this toil, understood that her own strength was giving out. She did not complain, but she began to be afraid that she would die before getting the hunter to a place of safety. And one morning, in fact, she was so tired she was quite unable to move.

“Here I am dying all alone in the woods!” the man moaned from his bag. “No one will help me get to Buenos Aires! Oh, oh, I shall die here all alone!”

You see, the man had been unconscious all the time, and thought he was still lying in the shelter, away back in the mountains.

The words stirred the weary tortoise to fresh effort. She got the man up on her back again and went on.

But the moment came when she could not take another step forward. She had not been eating for some days, because she had not dared take the time

for hunting. Now she was too weak to do even that. So she drew her legs into her shell and closed her eyes, waiting for death to come, and mourning inside her turtle-heart that she had failed in saving the life of the man who had befriended her.

The sun went down and night fell. As the turtle chanced to open her eyes, she was surprised to see a reddish glow on the distant horizon; and she heard a voice—the voice of a wharf rat—talking near by. The rat was saying:

“My, what a turtle, what a turtle! I never saw such a big one in my life! And what is that on her back? A cord of wood?”

The poor turtle did not know that those lights came from Buenos Aires, and that the rat was a citizen of that town, out for a night’s foraging in the fields of the suburbs.

“It is not a cord of wood,” the turtle murmured, “It is a man, a sick man!”

“And what on earth are you doing here with a man on your back?” the rat inquired, laughing the way rats from the city laugh at their country cousins.

“I ... I was ...” the tortoise murmured faintly, “I was taking him to Buenos Aires to be cured ... but I shall never get there.... My strength has given out.... I am going to die ... we are both going to die, right here!”

“I never saw such a silly turtle!” the rat replied. “Don’t you know you’re in Buenos Aires now? Don’t you see those lights? They’re from the theater district. Go along straight ahead; and you’ll get there in no time!”

This encouraging news filled the tortoise with new life. She strained every muscle inside her shell and moved slowly but surely forward.

When it was daylight she found herself quite inside the town. And who should come along the street but the superintendent of the Zoo!

“My, what a turtle! What a big turtle!” he exclaimed. “And what in the world is she carrying on her back?”

The tortoise could not speak from sheer fatigue. She stopped, and the man came up to examine the strange outfit on her back. To his amazement, he recognized his friend in the man sleeping, pale and fever-stricken, inside the bag. He called a carriage and got the man home, sending for a doctor to come at once.

In course of time, the man got well. When he learned that the tortoise had brought him miles and miles on her back, all the way from the Andes to Buenos Aires, he could hardly believe the story. And out of gratitude he said he would make a home for her the rest of her life. His own cottage was

quite filled with his six little brothers; and there was no room for such a big pet in the house. But the director of the Zoo said he would find a place for her there, and care for her as tenderly as he would for his own daughter.

And that is what happened. The tortoise was given a house for herself alone, with a tank of water in the front yard, where she could swim if she wanted to. She was allowed to wander at will over all the gardens of the Zoo, though she spent a large part of her time near the monkey house, where there was most to eat.

And she is still living there. Go to the zoölogical park any day and you will see an enormously big tortoise crawling slowly along over the green grass. If you wait long enough you will see a man come up, stoop over and rap gently with his knuckles on her shell.

That's the tortoise we have been talking about—and that's the man!