

Paine Albert Bigelow

**Mr. Turtle's Flying Adventure.
Hollow Tree Stories**



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MR. TURTLE'S
FLYING ADVENTURE

MR. TURTLE TELLS ABOUT
HIS CHILDHOOD AND
EXPLAINS A VERY OLD FABLE

ONCE upon a time, when it was early summer in the Big Deep Woods, the Hollow Tree people and Jack Rabbit went over to spend the day with Mr. Turtle, who lives in a very nice stone house which he built himself on the edge of the Wide Blue Water. Mr. Turtle fishes a good deal, and makes most of his living that way, and knows all the best places, so when his friends came he said that perhaps they would enjoy fishing a little – which they could do and sit in a pleasant place at the same time, and talk, and look out over the Wide Blue Water, which was especially blue at this season.

That just suited the Hollow Tree people, for they enjoyed fishing when they had somebody to pick out a good place, and Mr. 'Possum found a nice stump to lean back against, and presently went to sleep, but was waked up soon after, when a big catfish nearly jerked his pole out of his hands. Mr. 'Possum had to use all his strength to pull it out.

Then he was so proud he didn't think about going to sleep again, and told how all his family had been quite smart at catching fish; and pretty soon Jack Rabbit caught a good-sized perch, and Mr. 'Coon hooked a croppie, which got away the first time, though he caught it the next; and Mr. Crow caught a "punkin-seed," which made the others laugh, because it is a funny little fish; while Mr. Turtle just went right along pulling out one kind after another, without saying a word, because fishing is his business and doesn't excite him.

Then by and by the fish stopped biting, as they 'most always do, by spells, and the Deep Woods people leaned back and looked out over the Wide Blue Water, and away out there saw Mr. Eagle swoop down and pick up something which looked at first like a shoe-string; then they saw it wriggle, and knew it was a small water-snake, which was going to be Mr. Eagle's dinner; and they talked about it and wondered how he could enjoy such food.

Mr. Turtle said that Mr. Eagle enjoyed a good many kinds of food, and that he was reminded of an adventure he once had himself with Mr. Eagle, when he (Mr. Turtle, of course) was quite small. Then they all asked Mr. Turtle to tell them his

adventure, because they thought it must have been exciting if it was anything like the snake's adventure which they had just witnessed. Mr. Turtle said it was – quite a good deal like it, in some ways – then he said:

"That was the only time I ever flew, or ever had a chance to, or ever wanted to, that I can remember. Very likely you have already heard how once, a long time ago, I thought I could fly, and persuaded an eagle to take me up in the air to give me a start. That old story has been told a good deal, and I believe has even been put into some of Mr. Man's books for his children to read."

Mr. Turtle paused, and the others all said they did remember something of a story of that sort, but never thought it had really happened, because, knowing Mr. Turtle as they did, they didn't believe any of his family would try such an experiment.

"Well," said Mr. Turtle, "it did really happen, though not in the way you have heard. You are right about thinking my family would not care to experiment in that way, and would not do it unless somebody else arranged it for them and gave the experiment a good start."

Mr. Turtle went on to say that in this case it was Mr. Eagle and one of the ancient ancestors of the little water-snake he had just carried off that had started the experiment, though he thought none of it had been really planned.

"I was very small then," Mr. Turtle went on, "about the size of Mr. Man's fist, though I suppose much heavier, for my shell was very thick for my age, and everybody said that if I lived

a thousand years or so I might have a shell as big and thick as the one that Father Storm Turtle, up at the Forks, uses to make the thunder with.¹ Then they would laugh and say that Old Man Moccasin, up at the Drifts, would certainly have trouble with his digestion if he ever caught me; which used to scare my mother, for Old Man Moccasin was the biggest water-snake that anybody ever saw, and there was nobody around the Wide Blue Water that didn't give him room, especially fish-fry, and Mr. Frog, and young turtles like me, and even some older ones. My mother used to warn us children all the time, and scold us every day about going away so far from the house and not keeping a good watch-out for Old Man Moccasin, who would surely get us, she said, unless we were more careful. Then she would tell us to look out for Mr. Eagle, too, who was likely any time to come soaring about, and would pick up any food he saw lying handy.

"Well, it used to scare us when we thought about it. Old Man Moccasin was seven feet long, and I judge about half a foot thick. He could lift himself two feet out of the water when he was swimming, and with his far-sighted glasses on could see a mile. Mr. Eagle was fully twice as big as any of the Eagle family I know of nowadays, and didn't need any glasses to see an article the size of a bug floating on the Wide Blue Water, no matter how high he was flying. We tried to keep a lookout in several directions, but, of course, as we got older without accidents, we grew careless, and our mother used to count us every night and be surprised that

¹ "Mr. Turtle's Thunder Story" in *The Hollow Tree and Deep Woods Book*.

we were all there, and give us a good scolding to go to bed on.

"Nothing happened to any of us for a good while, and then it happened to me. I was the biggest and strongest of our lot, and had the thickest shell, and I liked to show how grown-up I was, and would swim out farther, and make believe I wasn't afraid any more of Mr. Eagle and Old Man Moccasin, which wasn't true, of course, for Mr. Eagle could have handled me with one claw and Old Man Moccasin could have swallowed me like a pill and enjoyed the operation.

"Well, one day I was showing off more than usual and had paddled out farther toward the Drifts, saying to the others that I was going to pay a call on Old Man Moccasin. I kept on farther than I intended, for it was a nice summer day and the water felt good. I didn't know how far I had gone until I turned around to look, and then I didn't think about that any more, for a quarter of a mile away, and between me and the shore, was Old Man Moccasin, coming straight in my direction. He was a good two feet out of the water and had on his far-sighted glasses, and I knew he was after me. He was coming, too. He was swimming with a wide, wavy motion, and making a little curl of white foam in front, and leaving a long trail behind.

"I was so scared, at first, that I couldn't do anything. Then I thought I'd better dive, but I knew that Old Man Moccasin could swim faster under the water than on top of it, and see just as well. I began to paddle for dear life toward the other side of the Wide Blue Water, which was a long way off, with Old Man Moccasin

gaining fast. I knew he was bound to overtake me before I got across, and I was getting weaker every minute, from being so scared and trying so hard, and I could hear Old Man Moccasin's steady swimming noise coming closer all the time.

"Of course it wasn't very long until I gave up. I was too worn out to swim another stroke. Old Man Moccasin was only about twenty feet away, and when I looked back at him over my shoulder I saw that he was smiling because he was so sure he had me. It was an awful smile, and I don't like to remember it often, even now, and that was ever so long ago, as much as three hundred and fourteen or fifteen years, this spring.

"Well, when I saw Old Man Moccasin at that close distance, and smiling in that glad way, and his spectacles shining, because he was so pleased at the prospect, I said to myself, I'm gone now, for certain, unless something happens right off; though, of course, I didn't see how anything *could* happen, placed as I was. But just as I said those words, something did happen – and about the last thing I would have expected. The first I saw was a big shadow, and the first I heard was a kind of swish in the air, and the first I knew I wasn't in the water any more, but was on the way to the sky with Mr. Eagle, who had one great claw around my hind leg and another hooked over my shell, not seeming to mind my weight at all, and paying no attention to Old Man Moccasin, who was beating his tail on the water and calling Mr. Eagle bad names and threatening him with everything he could think of. I didn't know where I was going, and couldn't see that I was much

better off than before, but I did enjoy seeing Old Man Moccasin carry on about losing me, and I called a few things to him that didn't make him feel better. I said Mr. Eagle and I were good friends, and asked him how he liked the trick we had played on him. I even sang out to him:

"Old Man Moccasin,
See you by and by;
Mr. Eagle's teaching me
How to learn to fly.'

which was a poem, and about the only one I ever made, but it seemed to just come into my head as we went sailing along. Mr. Eagle, he heard it, too, and said:

"'Look here,' he said, 'what are you talking about? You don't think you could ever learn to fly, I hope?'

"'Why, yes, Mr. Eagle,' I said, 'if I just had somebody like you to give me a few lessons. Of course, nobody could ever fly as well as you can, but I'm sure I could learn to fly some.'

"Then I thanked him for having saved me from Old Man Moccasin, and said how kind he was, and told him how my folks had always told us what a great bird Mr. Eagle was – so strong and grand, and the best flyer in the world – and how we must always admire and respect him and not get in his way, and how I thought if I could only fly a little – perhaps about as much as a hen – I could keep from being caught by Old Man Moccasin, which was the worst thing that could happen, and wouldn't Mr.

Eagle please give me a lesson.

"Then Mr. Eagle said, very politely, that he guessed he'd keep me from being caught by Old Man Moccasin, but it wouldn't be by teaching me to fly.

"'You couldn't fly any more than a stone,' he said, 'and a stone can't fly at all.'

"'But a stone can't swim, either, Mr. Eagle,' I said, 'and I can swim fine. I could learn to swim right through the air – I know I could – I can tell by the way I feel,' and I made some big motions with my front legs, and kicked with my free hind leg to show him how I would do it; and I really did feel, the way that air was blowing past, so fresh and strong, that if he would let go of me I could swim in it a little, anyway.

"But Mr. Eagle laughed, and said:

"'You have to have wings to fly with,' he said. 'You couldn't fly a foot. If I should drop you, you'd go down like a shot, and would probably break all to pieces!'

"I was looking down as he spoke, and I noticed that we were passing over Mr. Man's marsh meadows, for we were not flying very high, and I could see locations quite plain, and even some objects. I knew those meadows were soft in places, for I had been there once to a spring overflow picnic. There were also a great number of little hay-piles, which Mr. Man had raked up, getting ready to make his big stacks when the hay was dry. So I said, as quick as I could:

"'Oh, Mr. Eagle, I am certain I could fly this minute. I never

felt so much like it in my life. Just give me a big swing, Mr. Eagle, and let me try. If I fall and break, it won't be your fault, and you can take the pieces home to your family. I'll be handier for them that way than any other.'

"When Mr. Eagle heard that, he laughed, and said:

"Well, that's so, anyway. You people always are a tough proposition for my young folks. Much obliged for the suggestion.'

"And just as he said that, Mr. Eagle quit flying straight ahead and started to circle around, as if he were looking for something, and pretty soon I saw down there a flat stone, and Mr. Eagle saw it, too, and stopped still in the air right over it, as near as he could judge, making all the time a big flapping sound with his wings, until he got me aimed to suit him, and I could feel him beginning to loosen up his hold on my hind leg and shell. Then, all of a sudden, he let me go.

"Now fly!' he says, and down I went.

"Well, Mr. Eagle certainly told the truth about the way he said I'd drop. I made the biggest kind of swimming motions in the direction of one of those little haycocks, but if I made any headway in that direction I couldn't notice it. I didn't have time, anyway. It seemed to me that I struck bottom almost before I started from the top; still, I must have turned myself over, for I landed on my back, exactly in the center of that flat stone, Mr. Eagle being a center shot.

"He was wrong, though, about me breaking to pieces, and so was the story you've heard. Our family don't break very easy, and

as I said before, my shell was thick and tough for my age. It was the stone that broke, and probably saved my life, for if I had hit in a soft place in that marsh meadow I'd have gone down out of sight and never been able to dig out.

"As it was, I bounced some, and landed right side up close to one of those little haycocks, and had just about sense and strength enough left to scrabble under it before Mr. Eagle came swooping down after me, for he saw what had happened and didn't lose any time.

"But he was too late, for I was under that haycock, and Mr. Eagle had never had much practice in pitching hay. He just clawed at it on different sides and abused me as hard as he could for deceiving him, as he called it, and occasionally I called back to him, and tried to soothe him, and told him I was sorry not to come out and thank him in person, but I was so shaken up by the fall that I must rest and collect myself. Then, by and by he pretended to be very sweet, and said I had done so well the first time, I ought to take another lesson, and if I'd come out we'd try it again.

"But I said I couldn't possibly take another lesson to-day, and for him to come back to-morrow, when I had got over the first one; and then I heard him talking to himself and saying it was growing late and he must be getting home with something to eat for those brats, and pretty soon I heard his big wing sound; but I didn't come out, for I thought he was most likely just trying to fool me, and was sailing around overhead and waiting, which I

still think he was, for a while. After a long time, though, I worked over where I could see out a little, and then I found it was night, and, of course, Mr. Eagle had really gone home.

"So then I worked along across the meadows, being pretty sore and especially lame in the left hind leg, where Mr. Eagle had gripped me, though I felt better when I got into the Wide Blue Water and was swimming toward home. It took me all night to get there, and the folks were so worried they couldn't sleep, for some one had seen Old Man Moccasin out in the middle of the water, chasing something, during the afternoon.

"Well, of course I told everything that had happened, and almost everybody in the Wide Blue Water came to hear about it, and they told it to others, and Old Man Moccasin heard so much about how Mr. Eagle had fooled him, and how I had fooled Mr. Eagle, that he moved to another drift, farther down, and probably lives there still. And Mr. Eagle heard so much about the way he tried to teach me to fly that he made up a story of his own and flew in all directions, telling it; and that is the story most people know about to-day and the one that Mr. Man put into his books. But it isn't true, and I can prove it."

Mr. Turtle got up and turned around toward the Hollow Tree people. He had his coat off, and he reached back and pointed to a place about in the center of his shell.

"Feel right there," he said, which Mr. Rabbit did, and said:

"Why, there's quite a lump there. It hardly shows, but you can feel it plainly."

"Yes," said Mr. Turtle, "that's where I struck. It was quite sore for a good while. There was a lump there, at first, as big as an egg. It flattened a good deal afterward, but it never quite went away. Feel how smooth it is. It kept just about as it was when it happened."

Then all those other Deep Woods people came up and felt of the queer lump on Mr. Turtle's back, and said how perfectly that proved everything and how Mr. Turtle always could prove things, and they noticed the inscription about the old race with Mr. Hare, and said in some ways Mr. Turtle was about the most wonderful person anywhere and they were certainly proud to be his friends.

Then Mr. Turtle said they might all sit there and talk about it a little, while he went in to cook the fish and make a pan of biscuits and a nice salad for dinner.

THE DEEP WOODS ELOPEMENT

MR. 'POSSUM TELLS ABOUT AUNT MELISSY AND UNCLE SILAS AND THE ROMANCE OF MINTY GLENWOOD

ONE night in the Hollow Tree, when the 'Coon and 'Possum and the Old Black Crow had finished their supper and were sitting around the fire, smoking, Mr. 'Possum said that he thought he had heard Mr. Frog trying off a few notes to-day, over in the Wide Grasslands, so that he knew that it must be coming spring, and Mr. 'Coon said that over Mr. Man's way he had smelled burning leaves, which was a pretty sure sign. Then Mr. Crow said that some of his wild relatives had been cawing about lately, and that was a sign, too. Then they all smoked some more, and looked in the fire, and were glad that winter was about over, and presently Mr. 'Possum said that every time he smelled the spring smell, and heard the spring sounds, it reminded him of something that happened a long time ago, when he was quite young and lived with his Uncle Silas and Aunt Melissy Lovejoy, over beyond the Wide Blue Water. Then the 'Coon and the Old

Black Crow begged Mr. 'Possum to tell about it, because they said Mr. 'Possum's stories always sounded so unbelievable, and yet always turned out to be almost founded on fact.

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