

Paine Albert Bigelow

How Mr. Rabbit Lost his Tail. Hollow Tree Stories



Albert Paine

**How Mr. Rabbit Lost his
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EXPLANATION OF MAP

The top of the map is South. This is always so with the Hollow Tree People. The cross on the shelf below the edge of the world (where the ladder is) is where Mr. Dog landed, and the ladder is the one brought by Mr. Man for him to climb back on. The tree that Mr. Man cut down shows too. The spot on the edge of the world is where the Hollow Tree People sometimes sit and hang their feet over, and talk. A good many paths show, but not all by a good deal. The bridge and plank near Mr. Turtle's house lead to the Wide Grass Lands and Big West Hills. The spots along the Foot Race show where Grandpaw Hare stopped, and the one across the fence shows where Mr. Turtle landed. Most of the other things tell what they are, and all the things are a good deal farther apart than they look. Of course there was not room on the map for everything.

MR. DOG PLAYS SANTA CLAUS

A STORY TOLD WHEN IT WAS SNOWING OUTSIDE, AND THE LITTLE LADY WAS WONDERING HOW IT WAS IN THE FAR DEEP WOODS

ONCE upon a time, said the Story Teller, the Robin, and Turtle, and Squirrel, and Jack Rabbit had all gone home for the winter, and nobody was left in the Hollow Tree except the 'Coon and 'Possum and the Old Black Crow. Of course the others used to come back and visit them pretty often, and Mr. Dog, too, now that he had got to be good friends with all the Deep Woods People, and they thought a great deal of him when they got to know him better. Mr. Dog told them a lot of things they had never heard of before, things that he'd learned at Mr. Man's house, and maybe that's one reason why they got to liking him so well.

He told them about Santa Claus, for one thing, and how the old fellow came down the chimney on Christmas Eve to bring presents to Mr. Man and his children, who always hung up their stockings for them, and Mr. Dog said that once he had hung up his stocking, too, and got a nice bone in it, that was so good he had buried and dug it up again as much as six times before spring. He said that Santa Claus always came to Mr. Man's house, and that whenever the children hung up their stockings they were always sure to get something in them.

Well, the Hollow Tree people had never heard of Santa Claus. They knew about Christmas, of course, because everybody, even the cows and sheep, know about that; but they had never heard of Santa Claus. You see, Santa Claus only comes to Mr. Man's house, but they didn't know that, either, so they thought if they just hung up their stockings he'd come there, too, and that's what they made up their minds to do. They talked about it a great deal together, and Mr. 'Possum looked over all his stockings to pick out the biggest one he had, and Mr. Crow made himself a new pair on purpose. Mr. 'Coon said he never knew Mr. Crow to make himself such big stockings before, but Mr. Crow said he was getting old and needed things bigger, and when he loaned one of his new stockings to Mr. 'Coon, Mr. 'Coon said, "That's so," and that he guessed they were about right after all. They didn't tell anybody about it at first, but by and by they told Mr. Dog what they were going to do, and when Mr. Dog heard it he wanted to laugh right out. You see, he knew Santa Claus never went anywhere except to Mr. Man's house, and he thought it would be a great joke on the Hollow Tree people when they hung up their stockings and didn't get anything.

But by and by Mr. Dog thought about something else. He thought it would be too bad for them to be disappointed that way. You see, Mr. Dog liked them all, now, and when he had thought about that a minute he made up his mind to do something. And this is what it was – he made up his mind to play Santa Claus!

He knew just how Santa Claus looked, 'cause he'd seen lots of his pictures at Mr. Man's house, and he thought it would be great fun to dress up that way and take a bag of presents to the Hollow Tree while they were all asleep and fill up the stockings of the 'Coon and 'Possum and the Old Black Crow. But first he had to be sure of some way of getting in, so he said to them he didn't see how they could expect Santa Claus, their chimneys were so small, and Mr. Crow said they could leave their latch string out down stairs, which was just what Mr. Dog wanted. Then they said they were going to have all the folks that had spent the summer with them over for Christmas dinner and to see the presents they had got in their stockings. They told Mr. Dog to drop over, too, if he could get away, and Mr. Dog said he would, and went off laughing to himself and ran all the way home because he felt so pleased at what he was going to do.

Well, he had to work pretty hard, I tell you, to get things ready. It wasn't so hard to get the presents as it was to rig up his Santa Claus dress. He found some long wool out in Mr. Man's barn for his white whiskers, and he put some that wasn't so long on the edges of his overcoat and boot tops and around an old hat he had. Then he borrowed a big sack he found out there, too, and fixed it up to swing over his back, just as he had seen Santa Claus do in the pictures. He had a lot of nice things to take along. Three tender young chickens he'd borrowed from Mr. Man, for one thing, and then he bought some new neckties for the Hollow Tree folks all around, and a big, striped candy cane for each one, because candy canes always looked well sticking out of a stocking. Besides all that, he had a new pipe for each, and a package of tobacco. You see, Mr. Dog lived with Mr. Man, and didn't ever have to buy much for himself, so he had always saved his money. He had even more things than that, but I can't remember just now what they were; and when he started out, all dressed up like Santa Claus, I tell you his bag was pretty heavy, and he almost wished before he got there that he hadn't started with quite so much.

It got heavier and heavier all the way, and he was glad enough to get there and find the latch string out. He set his bag down to rest a minute before climbing the stairs, and then opened the doors softly and listened. He didn't hear a thing except Mr. Crow and Mr. 'Coon and Mr. 'Possum breathing pretty low, and he knew they might wake up any minute, and he wouldn't have been caught there in the midst of things for a good deal. So he slipped up just as easy as anything, and when he got up in the big parlor room he almost had to laugh right out loud, for there were the stockings sure enough, all hung up in a row, and a card with a name on it over each one telling who it belonged to.

Then he listened again, and all at once he jumped and held his breath, for he heard Mr. 'Possum say something. But Mr. 'Possum was only talking in his sleep, and saying, "I'll take another piece, please," and Mr. Dog knew he was dreaming about the mince pie he'd had for supper.

So then he opened his bag and filled the stockings. He put in mixed candy and nuts and little things first, and then the pipes and tobacco and candy canes, so they'd show at the top, and hung a nice dressed chicken outside. I tell you, they looked fine! It almost made Mr. Dog wish he had a stocking of his own there to fill, and he forgot all about them waking up, and sat down in a chair to look at the stockings. It was a nice rocking chair, and over in a dark corner where they wouldn't be apt to see him, even if one of them did wake up and stick his head out of his room, so Mr. Dog felt pretty safe now, anyway. He rocked softly, and looked and looked at the nice stockings, and thought how pleased they'd be in the morning, and how tired he was. You've heard about people being as tired as a dog; and that's just how Mr. Dog felt. He was so tired he didn't feel a bit like starting home, and by and by – he never did know how it happened – but by and by Mr. Dog went sound asleep right there in his chair, with all his Santa Claus clothes on.

And there he sat, with his empty bag in his hand and the nice full stockings in front of him, all night long. Even when it came morning and began to get light Mr. Dog didn't know it; he just slept right on, he was that tired. Then pretty soon the door of Mr. 'Possum's room opened and he poked out his head. And just then the door of Mr. 'Coon's room opened and he poked out *his* head. Then the door of the Old Black Crow opened and out poked *his* head. They all looked toward the stockings, and they didn't see Mr. Dog, or even each other, at all. They saw their stockings, though, and Mr. 'Coon said all at once: —

"Oh, there's something in my stocking!"

And then Mr. Crow said: —

"Oh, there's something in my stocking, too!"

And Mr. 'Possum said: —

"Oh, there's something in all our stockings!"

And with that they gave a great hurrah all together, and rushed out and grabbed their stockings and turned around just in time to see Mr. Dog jump right straight up out of his chair, for he did not know where he was the least bit in the world.

"Oh, there's Santa Claus himself!" they all shouted together, and made a rush for their rooms, for they were scared almost to death. Then it all dawned on Mr. Dog in a second, and he commenced to laugh and hurrah to think what a joke it was on everybody. And when they heard Mr. Dog laugh they knew him right away, and they all came up and looked at him, and he had to tell just what he'd done and everything; so they emptied out their stockings on the floor and ate some of the presents and looked at the others, until they almost forgot about breakfast, just as children do on Christmas morning.

Then Mr. Crow said, all at once, that he'd make a little coffee, and that Mr. Dog must stay and have some, and by and by they made him promise to spend the day with them and be there when the Robin and the Squirrel and Mr. Turtle and Jack Rabbit came, which he did.

And it was snowing hard outside, which made it a nicer Christmas than if it hadn't been, and when all the others came they brought presents, too. And when they saw Mr. Dog dressed up as Santa Claus and heard how he'd gone to sleep and been caught, they laughed and laughed. And it snowed so hard that Mr. Dog had to stay for dinner, which he wanted to do more than anything, because he knew that then they would all sit around and tell stories.

MR. DOG AT THE CIRCUS

THE HOLLOW TREE PEOPLE LEARN SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT ABOUT SHOWS

THAT was a great Christmas in the Hollow Tree. The 'Coon and the 'Possum and the Old Black Crow had been getting ready for it for a long time, and brought in ever so many nice things to eat, which Mr. Crow had cooked for them, for Mr. Crow is the best cook of anybody in the Big Deep Woods. Then Mr. Dog had brought a lot of good things, too, which he had borrowed from Mr. Man's house, so they had the finest Christmas dinner that you can think of, and plenty for the next day, when it would be even better, because chicken and turkey and dressing and such things are always better the next day, and even the *third* day, with gravy, than they are when they are first cooked.

Then, when they were all through and were standing around, smoking their new pipes and looking at each other's new neckties and other Christmas things, Mr. Crow said that he and Mr. Squirrel would clear off the table if the others would get in some wood and stir up the fire and set the room to rights, so they could gather round and be comfortable by and by; and then, he said it might snow as much as it liked as long as they had plenty of wood and things to eat inside.

So then they all skurried around getting on their things to go out after wood – all except Mr. Crow and Mr. Squirrel, who set about clearing off the table and doing up the dishes. And pretty soon Mr. Dog and Mr. 'Coon and the rest were hopping about where the snow was falling so soft and silent among the big, leafless trees, gathering nice pieces of wood and brushing the snow off of them and piling them into the first down stairs of the Hollow Tree, which the 'Coon and 'Possum and Old Black Crow use for their wood house and general store room. It was great fun, and they didn't feel the least bit cold after their warm dinner and with all that brisk exercise.

Mr. Robin didn't help carry the wood in. He was hardly strong enough for that, but he hopped about and looked for good pieces, and when he found one he would call to Mr. 'Coon or Mr. 'Possum, or maybe to one of the others, to throw it on his shoulder and carry it in, and then he would tell whoever it happened to be how strong he was and how fine he looked with that great chunk on his shoulder, and would say that he didn't suppose there was another 'Coon, or 'Possum, or Turtle, or Rabbit, or Dog that could begin to stand up straight under such a chunk as that anywhere outside of a menagerie. Mr. Robin likes to say pleasant things to his friends, and is always popular. And each one tried to carry the biggest load of wood to show how strong he was, and pretty soon they had the lower room of the Hollow Tree piled up high with the finest chunks and kindling pieces to be found anywhere. Then they all hurried up stairs, stamping the snow off their feet, and gathered around the nice warm fire in the big parlor which was just below the three big hollow branches where the 'Coon and 'Possum and the Old Black Crow had their rooms.

Mr. Crow and Mr. Squirrel were through with the table by this time, and all hands lit their pipes, and looked into the fire, and smoked, and rested, and thought a little before they began talking – thinking, of course, of what a good time they were having, and how comfortable and nice it was to be inside and warm when such a big snow was falling outside.

Mr. 'Possum was the first one to say anything. He said he had been thinking of what Mr. Robin had said about them being outside of a menagerie, and that, come to think about it, he believed he didn't know what a menagerie was, unless it was a new name for a big dinner, as that was the only thing he could think of now that they were outside of, and he said if that was so, and if he

could get outside of two menageries, he thought he could carry in a bigger chunk than any two chunks there were down stairs.

Then all the others laughed a good deal, and Mr. 'Coon said he had thought that perhaps a menagerie was something to wear that would make anybody who had it on very strong, and able to stand up under a big load, and to eat as much as Mr. 'Possum could, or even more.

But Mr. Robin said that it didn't mean either of those things. He said he didn't really know what it did mean himself, but that it must be some kind of a place that had a great many large creatures in it, for he had quite often heard his grandmother call his grandfather the biggest goose outside of a menagerie, though, being very young then, Mr. Robin couldn't remember just what she had meant by it.

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