



Ol' Mister Turtle and the Mischievous Minnow

By HARRISON CADY

OH DEAR!" sighed tiny Mister Wood Mouse wearily as he put his pack down beside him. "I just wish there was some way of getting across this river without making that long journey upstream to the old covered bridge. It wastes a whole day, and I never get back till long after firefly time."

"You're right, Mister Wood Mouse," piped up little Jimmy Muskrat from his seat on the mossy rock. "It's a terrible nuisance for you fellows who can't swim; but cheer up! Perhaps some day Ol' North Wind will uproot a tree and throw it across for a bridge."

"I'm afraid that will be a long wait, a very long wait," replied Mister Wood Mouse; and without more ado he shouldered his pack and, with a farewell nod to Jimmy, continued on his journey upstream.

"It's surely too bad," mused little Jimmy, "that a tiny chap like him has to make such a trip just to get over this stream when I can nearly toss a pebble across it. It seems as though there might be some way of crossing right here."

"Sure there might," said a brisk little voice; and right out from behind a clump of reeds stepped Mister Mink.

"If you and I were only stronger we would build a raft and tow all the little folks across or carry them right on our backs."

"I have it," shouted Jimmy, jumping right into the air. "Why not go into business and hire Ol' Mister Turtle to carry them across on the top of his shell?"

Old Mister Turtle, lazily sunning himself on a log, was suddenly

awakened by a lively tattoo on the back of his shell and, slowly poking out his funny head, he blinked and blinked as he saw little Jimmy Muskrat and Mister Mink standing before him.

"Ho! ho! That's the idea," chuckled Ol' Mister Turtle, when the scheme had been explained to him. "You take in the money, and I do the work."

"Well, we thought up the idea, didn't we?" asked Jimmy. "That may be," replied Ol' Mister Turtle. "But if there's going to be any ferry started, your old Uncle Hard-shell will be the boss and you two can tote the baggage."

Suddenly the brow of little Jimmy Muskrat grew very wrinkled as an idea popped into his head. "All right, Mister Turtle," he said. "You just go ahead and open the ferry, and Mister Mink and I will attend to the baggage."

"Whew! I guess he's fixed us all right," Mister Mink remarked after the two partners had reached a secluded nook. "Pears to me our business has failed before it started."

"Failed nothing!" little Jimmy Muskrat retorted with a mysterious look. "All we need is a little strategy and he'll take us in as partners yet. But I must see Li'l' Mister Minnow and Peter Possum right away"; and he dove into the water and disappeared beneath its surface.

AFEW days later the ferry was ready to open, for while Ol' Mister Turtle was slow in movement he was not slow to catch an idea. And my, my, what a gay little ferry it was! On either bank Ol' Mister Turtle had established a ferryhouse and a sturdy little dock. Time-tables had been posted and an old stump bore the sign: "Ye Hollow Stump Inn."

Little Jimmy Muskrat and Mister Mink, putting aside their disappointment, were both on hand to ferry the baggage, assisted by good Mister Beaver.

All the little people of the forest and meadows were on hand bright and early for the opening. They inspected the docks and the ferryhouses, and congratulated Ol' Mister Turtle on being a public benefactor, and he replied with a brilliant speech, telling how the scheme had occurred to him.

"He is not even going to give us credit for the idea," mourned Mister Mink.

"Perhaps he will later," replied little Jimmy knowingly.

Presently Ol' Mister Turtle, smiling from ear to ear, entered the stream and drew up beside the dock, while the little people jostled and crowded, eager to be the first aboard. Finally, when every seat was filled, he wagged his tail and rang the bell, and the great ferry started.

"It's a success right from the start," chuckled Ol' Mister Turtle to himself. "It looks as though I'd be rich."

IN A VERY short time—that is, short for Mister Turtle—the first trip was completed amid much cheering, and Mister Turtle hurriedly returned for another load.

"Whew! He's working with enthusiasm," exclaimed little Jimmy. "He made that trip much quicker than he ever did before."

Trips after trips were made. Finally Mr. and Mrs. Funny-Bunny arrived with their entire family, all eager to get across.

"I guess you'll have to divide up, there's so many of you," suggested Ol' Mister Turtle. "I'll take Mrs. Funny-Bunny and the baby bunnies first. We'll have to pack them in this wicker basket though. The little ones will never be able to sit on my shell."

Mrs. Funny-Bunny took a firm hold on the big basket.

"All aboard!" wheezed Ol' Mister Turtle. And then with a final cast-off he slowly moved out into the stream and headed for the opposite shore.

"Now is my time," said little Jimmy Muskrat to himself as he quickly dove into the very depths of the pool where Mister Minnow made his home. "Hurry! Hurry! Minnow!" he shouted excitedly.

And the little fish darted swiftly away toward Ol' Mister Turtle, who was placidly paddling his way across the stream. Quick as a wink Mister Minnow darted right under the ferryboat and, as he did so, one of his little fins just

grazed the sole of Ol' Mister Turtle's foot. Mister Turtle stopped short and raised his foot quickly only to have it grazed again.

"My, that tickles!" he exclaimed.

"Whew! Some rascal is trying to annoy me," he muttered as he felt the tickling sensation again. "I'll have to see about it."

Putting his head down just beneath the water's surface, he saw a tiny minnow dart swiftly under his shell and at the same time he felt the tickle again. "See here, Minnow," he called, "if you do that again you'll have trouble."

"Boo! You can't trouble me," shouted Mister Minnow, making another rush. "Why, you're nothing but a big, fat turtle."

And then he gave Ol' Mister Turtle the greatest and most irritating tickle of all.

Ol' Mister Turtle right then and there forgot all about himself and his precious passengers and, with a mad cry of "I'll fix you!" dove right down after Li'l' Mister Minnow.

And then what a time there was! For the passengers, taken by surprise, plunged—

SPLASH!!!—into the water, and with screams of fright they frantically struggled about. Little Jimmy Muskrat and Mister Mink plunged in and dragged them all to land, all but the bunny babies whose basket was caught by a mischievous eddy, and before it could be reached went whirling away downstream to where the rapids went racing over some hidden rocks.

"Help, help!" cried Mrs. Funny-Bunny. "There go my precious babies!"

"It's headed straight for the falls!" the crowd shouted. "And nothing can save those babies now."

Directly beside those falls was a tree and from that tree grew a branch which hung directly over the very brink of the waterfall. And sitting serenely on this branch, his little head cocked to one side, was a funny little possum.

"Oh, hum!" said he. "It's about time for things to happen."

And sure enough, hardly had he spoken when around the bend bobbed the basket, filled with the bunny babies, and along the bank came a scampering throng of frightened forest folk, crying for help.

BUT Mister Possum never moved. He only sat motionless.

"They're lost! They're lost! Those poor bunny babies!" the pursuers shouted, expecting to see the basket dashed over the falls while they looked helplessly on, unable to avert the terrible calamity.

But just then something happened.

The little possum overhead, with great presence of mind, suddenly dropped and swung from the branch by his long tail directly over the water. In a flash he had grabbed the basket, bunnies and all, and drawn it upward to safety.

And then what a shout of joy was heard!

"Here are your babies, mum," said the possum, turning to where Mrs. Funny-Bunny stood, too overcome to answer. Ol' Mister Turtle, crestfallen and dejected, could only sit on the bank and moan: "I'm ruined! I'm ruined! No one will ever want to ride again on my ferry."

"Yes, sir, you're ruined, all right," little Jimmy Muskrat told him; "that is, unless you take Mister Mink and myself into partnership to keep that minnow away."

"Done!" exclaimed Ol' Mister Turtle, a look of hope coming into his eyes.

"We'll all be partners from this time on, and we'll make Mister Possum an honorary member, as Life-Saver."

And so to this day the little ferry runs across the Winding Stream, and little Jimmy Muskrat has never once told of how he bribed Li'l' Mister Minnow into tickling Ol' Mister Turtle's feet.



If you want to see how Ol' Mister Turtle conducted the ferry, take your scissors and cut out the color pictures. Print the pictures out on cardstock. Or use regular paper and mount the cut-outs on some cardboard using paste or glue. Cut around the tabs at the dotted lines and bend them back so the pictures will stand upright. Line up the pictures as shown above.