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The Chipmunk Who Chattered Too Much

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Once upon a time, when Native Americans and animals lived together in the same forest and animals could speak, the Chipmunk was the greatest talker of them all.

He lived in a lodge in the middle of the woods with his grandfather who was very old and wise as well. But the Chipmunk was young, and very daring. He was able to run so fast and climb trees, and jump from one branch to another that he thought nothing in the world could harm him. He had a louder voice then than he has now. He chattered all day long, boasting about himself. At last he became very tiresome to the other animals.

They came at last and spoke to the Chipmunk's grandfather about him.

"Your grandson chatters so loudly," scolded the Blue Jay, "that the birds are not able to hear me when I warn them of danger in the forest."

And the Frog came to the Chipmunk's grandfather with tears in his eyes. "Your grandson chatters so loudly," croaked the Frog, "that no one can hear me when I sing on the edge of the stream in the evening."

It was quite true. The Chipmunk talked and boasted all the time. He chattered as he started out from his lodge in the morning and all the way down the path to let every one know that he was on his way. He chattered when he came to a nut tree and when he picked up some nuts. He had pockets in his cheeks, so he could chatter even when he came home with a mouthful of nuts. There seemed to be no way of keeping this young Chipmunk quiet, and at last his grandfather decided to speak to him about it.

“You are not using your voice as it was meant that you should, my son,” said the Chipmunk’s grandfather. “All the creatures in feathers and fur in the forest speak for a reason. The Ground Hog whistles to call his young, and the Frog croaks when wild beasts creep toward the lodges, and the Robin sings of rain. But you, my son, chatter for no reason except your foolish pride. Beware! the Great Chief will hear you and catch you some day if you do not stop!”



The Chipmunk thought that night of what his grandfather had said. But when morning came, he forgot all about it and took his noisy way through the woods again. He made just as much noise as he could, even after he had reached a hickory-nut tree, and climbed up among the branches.

Suddenly, though, he was still. He heard the leaves on the ground rustle and the twigs crackle with heavy footsteps. Peering down between the branches, the Chipmunk saw the Great Chief of whom his grandfather had warned him. He looked as tall as a young tree and as dark as a thunder cloud. He carried a long bow and a quiver of arrows. He had come for the Chipmunk, and he waited under the tree, looking up among the branches to see when he should come down.

But the leaves on the branches hid the Chipmunk. He gathered a handful of nuts and tossed them down. The Great Chief was thrown off his guard by the trick. He jumped, thinking it was the Chipmunk, but the little fellow scampered down the other side of the tree. He got home to his lodge in safety.

The next day the Chipmunk was even more noisy than ever as he started out. He reached a tree, climbed up in it, and again the Great Chief came with his bow and arrows to kill the chattering little pest. But the Chipmunk gathered a handful of twigs which he threw down at the feet of the Great Chief.

“Here I come,” the Chipmunk chattered. As the Great Chief watched to see him follow the twigs he dropped down on the other side of the tree and once more reached home safe.

When the Chipmunk started out the third morning he had a great piece of news to tell the whole world. He told it just as loudly as he could.

“The Great Chief can’t catch me. He can’t catch me,” boasted the Chipmunk.

He kept on chattering this after he had scampered up a tree, and a very bold plan entered his head.

The Great Chief came at last. He strode angrily until he came to the tree where the Chipmunk sat looking down at him.

“Come down! Come down from this tree!” called the Great Chief in a loud voice.

That was just what the Chipmunk planned to do. He was going to come down and dare the Great Chief to catch him. He felt that he would be safe in doing this. So the Chipmunk came down and stood a second, chattering to the Great Chief, who was so surprised that he did not move at first.

Then the Chipmunk ran and the Great Chief ran after him. It was a race for life, the Chipmunk soon found out, for the Great Chief gained at every step. The Chipmunk leaped and jumped, and panted for breath. On, and on they went, in and out among the trees. The Chipmunk lost his loud voice in fear and no other member of the family has had such a loud one since that day. He could see his lodge with his grandfather waiting for him in the door, but it did not seem possible that he could reach it.

Oh, there he was at the door; but just as he went inside the Great Chief took hold of the Chipmunk with his strong fingers. Although the Chipmunk pulled himself loose, he had a row of long white stripes on his back where the Great Chief had clutched him.

And every other Chipmunk, since then, has had white stripes on his back, because of the first Chipmunk who chattered too much.

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