



WESLEY WOODCHUCK

By

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Wesley Woodchuck was just about the best whistler in the entire woodland community except perhaps Quentin Quail whose two note symphony was always perfect.

"Anyone can go around whistling Bob white all day" thought Wesley.

Wesley learned to whistle at his mother's knee. Although he did not realize it at the time, this lesson was for his own protection. When his mother, Wilhemina gave a shrill whistle, it meant hide! hide! danger is near. The collie dog from the nearby farm often roamed the surrounding fields in search of a woodchuck supper. His name was Caldwell.





Wesley hesitated
the first time he
heard Wilhemina's
warning, and barely
escaped Caldwell's
snapping jaws.
He scrambled
into

Barney Badger's den, which was nearby.
Luckily, Barney was not home, because
he did not welcome visitors.

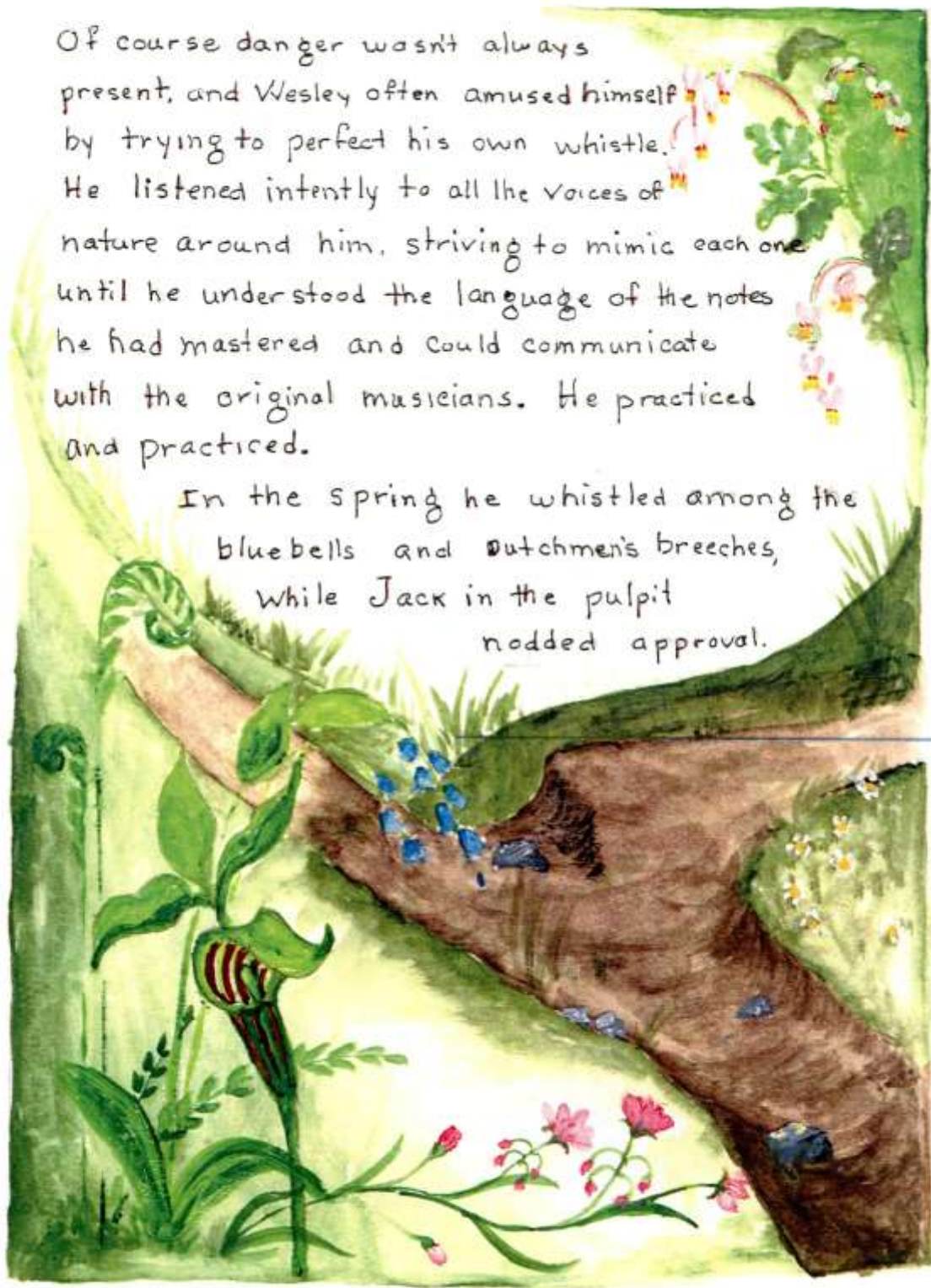
From that time on, Wesley
always stopped what he was
doing and found a safe
place to hide when his
mother gave the alarm
whistle.





Of course danger wasn't always present, and Wesley often amused himself by trying to perfect his own whistle. He listened intently to all the voices of nature around him, striving to mimic each one until he understood the language of the notes he had mastered and could communicate with the original muscicians. He practiced and practiced.

In the spring he whistled among the bluebells and Dutchmen's breeches, while Jack in the pulpit nodded approval.



All summer he whistled
as he explored the tall
grasses and prairie flowers

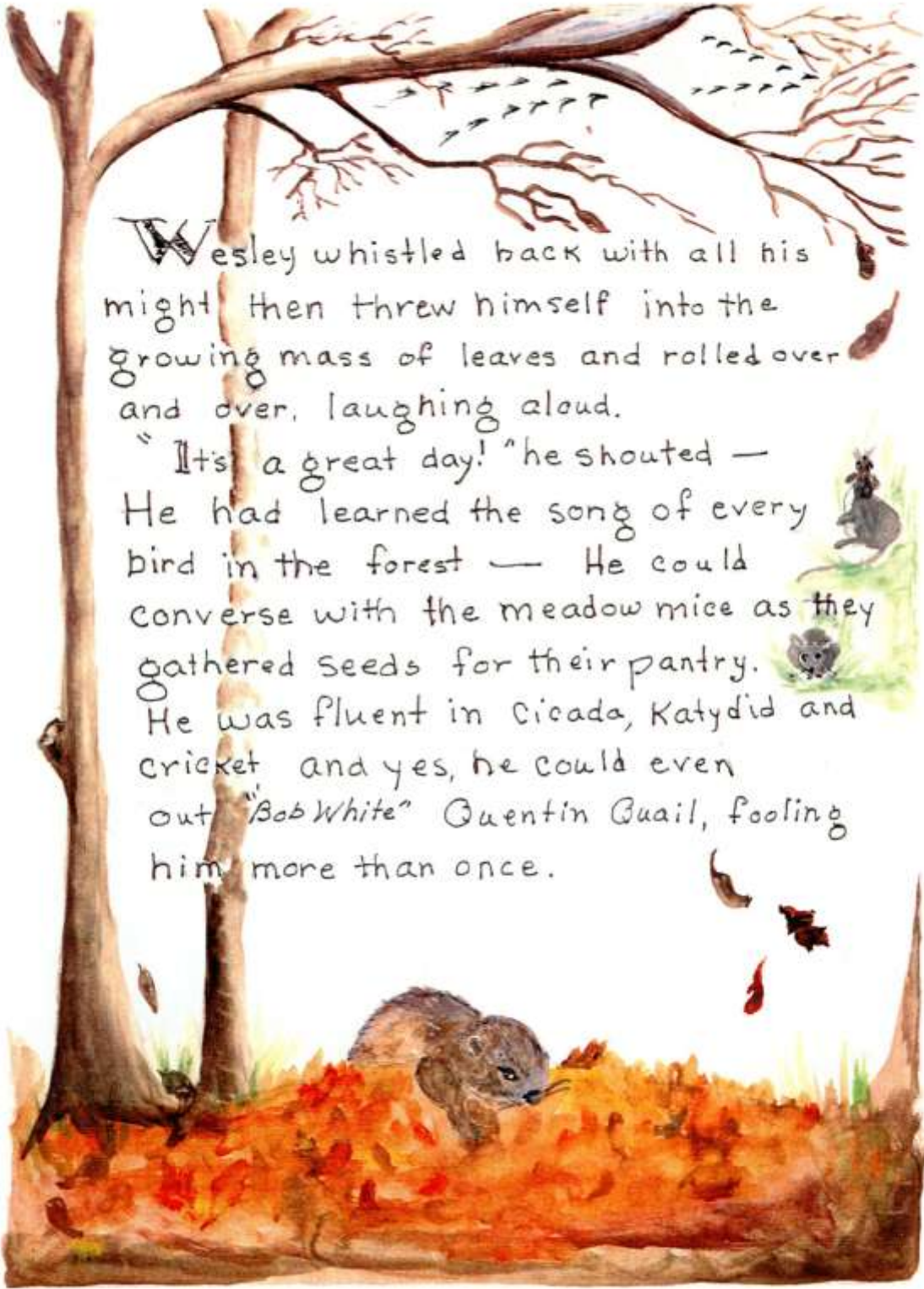




Autumn crept into the sassafras along the fence row, turning leaves from green to shades of golden brown, yellow and scarlet.

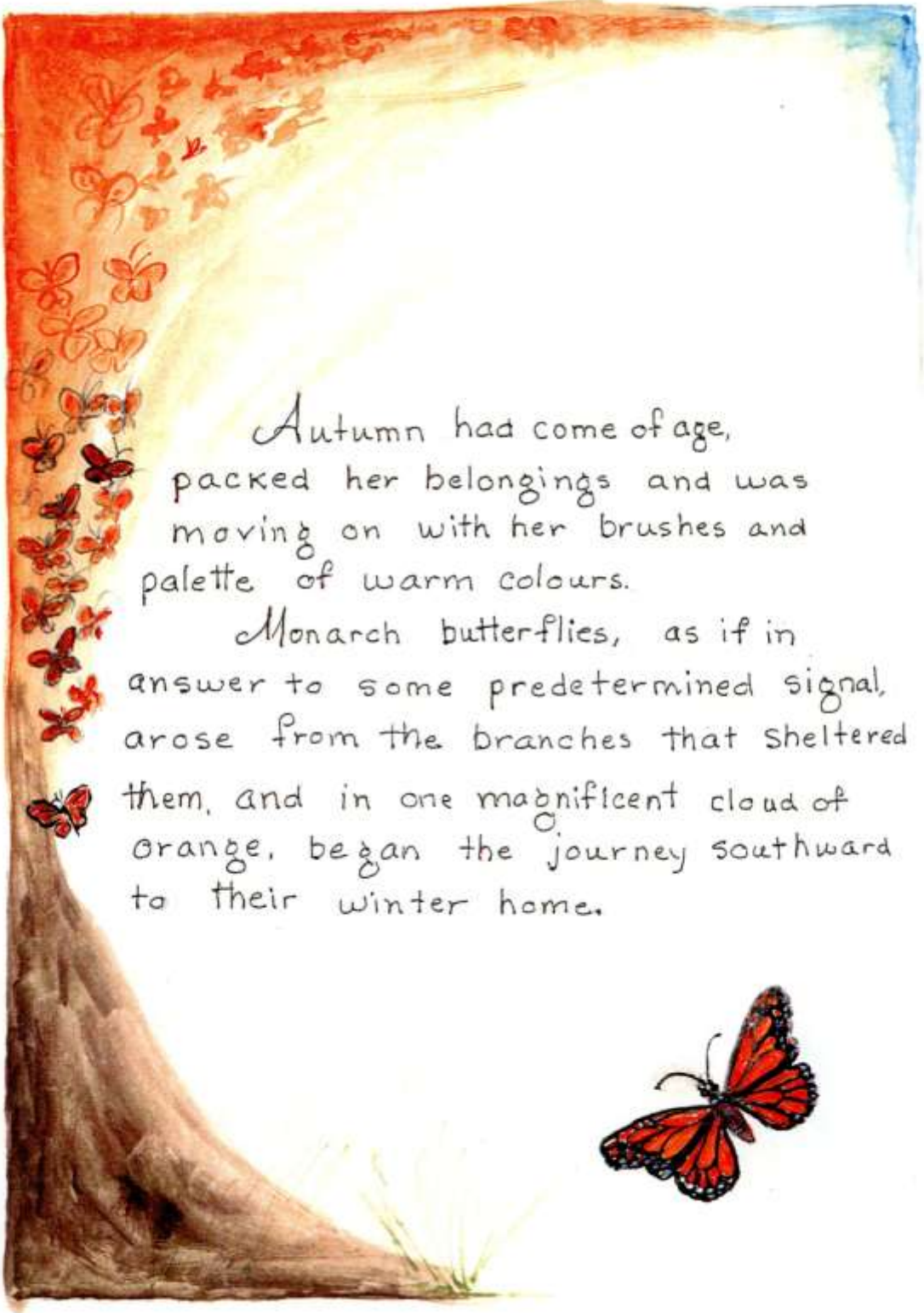
As he walked among the falling "mittens" that formed a thick carpet beneath his feet, he stopped mid-whistle. A strange, wonderful symphony played high above. Thousands upon thousands of Canadian geese and their cousins, the snow geese, deliberate in their flight toward warmer climes, saluted the "stay at homes" on their way.





Wesley whistled back with all his might then threw himself into the growing mass of leaves and rolled over and over, laughing aloud.

"It's a great day!" he shouted — He had learned the song of every bird in the forest — He could converse with the meadow mice as they gathered seeds for their pantry. He was fluent in Cicada, Katydid and cricket, and yes, he could even out "Bob White" Quentin Quail, fooling him more than once.



Autumn had come of age,
packed her belongings and was
moving on with her brushes and
palette of warm colours.

Monarch butterflies, as if in
answer to some predetermined signal,
arose from the branches that sheltered
them, and in one magnificent cloud of
orange, began the journey southward
to their winter home.

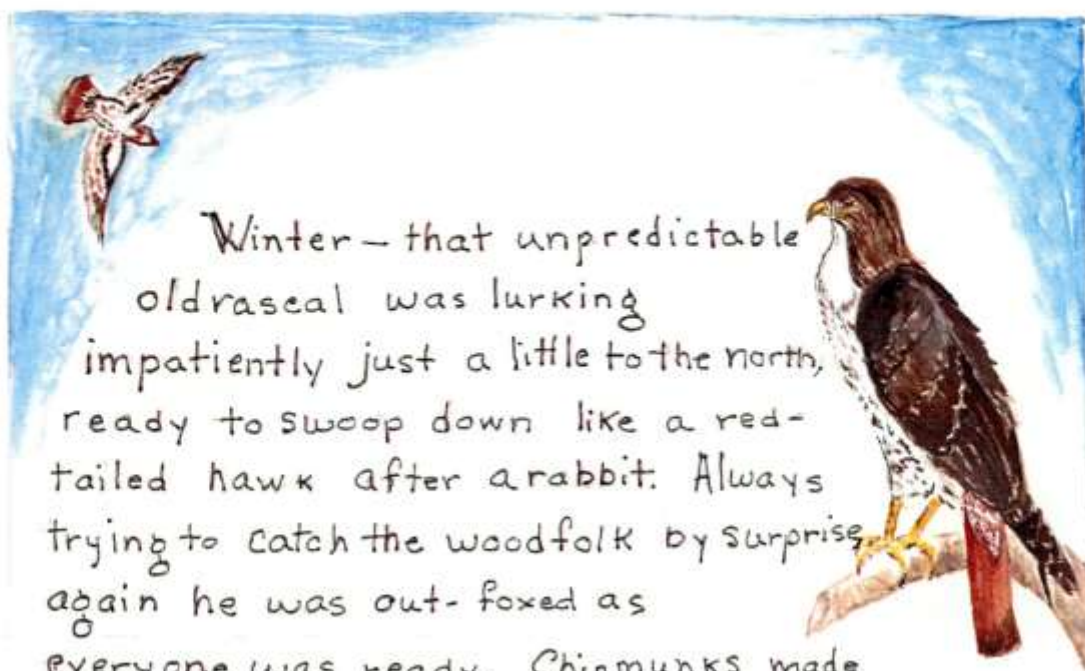




The land was becoming quiet,
no longer the incessant hum
buzz and chirp of insect industry
nor the song of the little house
wren or robin was to be heard.

Humming birds visited the
few remaining trumpets of
Nicotiana sylvestris (Woodland Tobacco)
for a last sip of nectar
and a tiny bit more energy
for their own departure.





Winter — that unpredictable
old rascal was lurking
impatiently just a little to the north,
ready to swoop down like a red-
tailed hawk after a rabbit. Always
trying to catch the woodfolk by surprise,
again he was out-foxed as
everyone was ready. Chipmunks made
one dash after another between dinner and
den, filling their cheeks with seeds
and burying them just below the surface,
ready for the impending snow.



Wesley, too, was prepared. Unlike many of his friends, he would sleep through the winter. He had become roly-poly from the abundance of the woodland, as well as the farmer's crops.

He would carve a semi-circle in the lush field of soybeans as he munched away, dashing back into the adjoining fence row of osage orange and undergrowth when danger threatened.

Now it was almost time to bid farewell to his summer companions, the birds, squirrels and rabbits, and hide himself away from the approaching cold of ice and snow in his cozy den.



Earlier in the summer, when he was ready to go out into the world on his own, he said goodbye to his mother and eagerly began to search for a place to make his den.

The perfect spot turned out to be beneath the foundation of an old granary, torn down long ago. It was on the farm where his old nemesis, Caldwell stood guard. A gooseberry bush with thorns to slow an intruder and conceal the opening of the den grew at the corner of the stone foundation. It would be a challenge, not to mention a dangerous task, but Wesley was determined to make this place his new home.





Ever on the lookout for Caldwell, he began to dig a little bit at a time, always while the old dog was napping. On several occasions Wesley would stop and hold his breath when Caldwell would open his eyes, sniff the air, yawn and go back to sleep.

One day, however he spied Wesley and the chase was on!

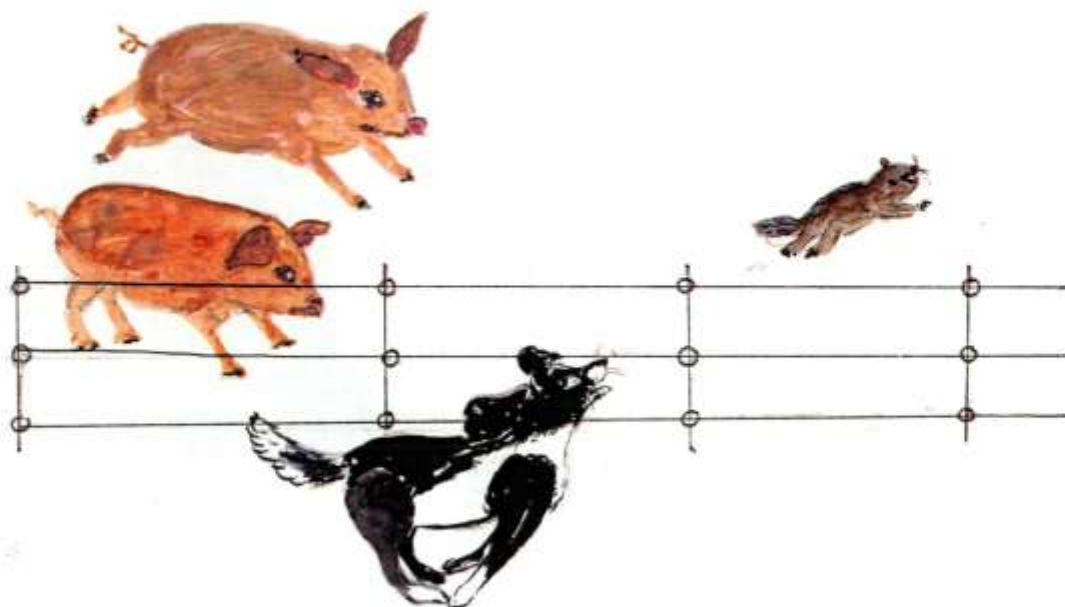




What a chase it was! Four times
around the granary, under the fence
by the horse in the pasture and through
the chicken yard,

 scattering feathers and squawking
fowl in every direction.





The electric fence around the pigpen was just high enough for Wesley to crawl under without touching. Caldwell, running at full speed was unable to stop in time, and hit the stinging wire with his wet nose. Yelping in pain, he ran back to his doghouse and whined the rest of the day in the darkest corner.





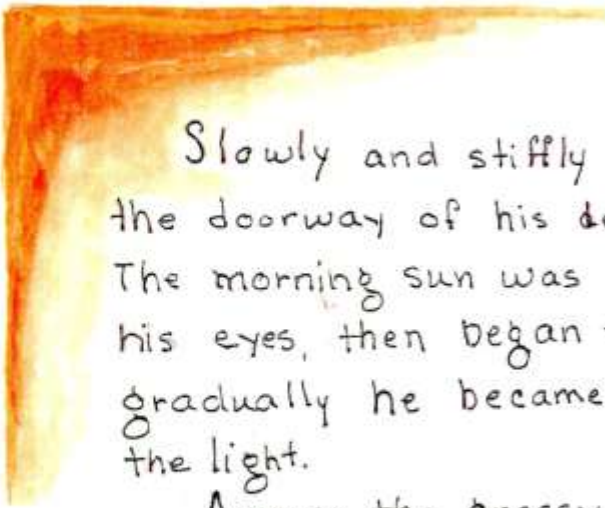
Wesley was quite out of breath, but safe for the moment. He whistled "Ha Ha didnt catch me" in Caldwell's direction. He rested for a while then resumed the task of making his den, and at last it was ready to call home. This was his sanctuary, warm and safe from intruders. After a few housekeeping chores, he settled in for the long sleep of his first winter alone, Snoozing away. Sustained by the heavy layer of fat he had acquired by his endless summer snacking, he was blissfully unaware of anything taking place outside his little world underground.



In February

The frozen earth began to warm
ever so slightly. The little creek
at the bottom of the rolling meadow
began to sing a few bell like notes
as it woke to the sun, and
Trickled with a few tiny
splashes here and there
over the smooth
shining stones.



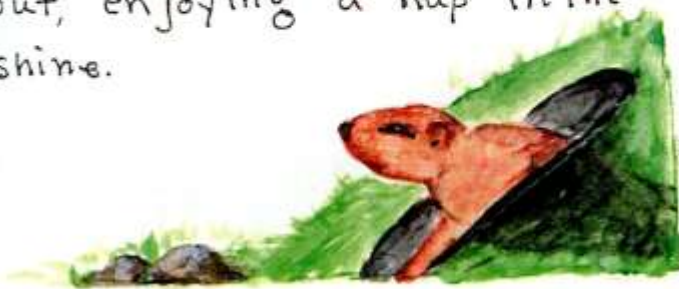


Slowly and stiffly Wesley crept to the doorway of his den and peered out. The morning sun was so bright he closed his eyes, then began to squint as gradually he became accustomed to the light.

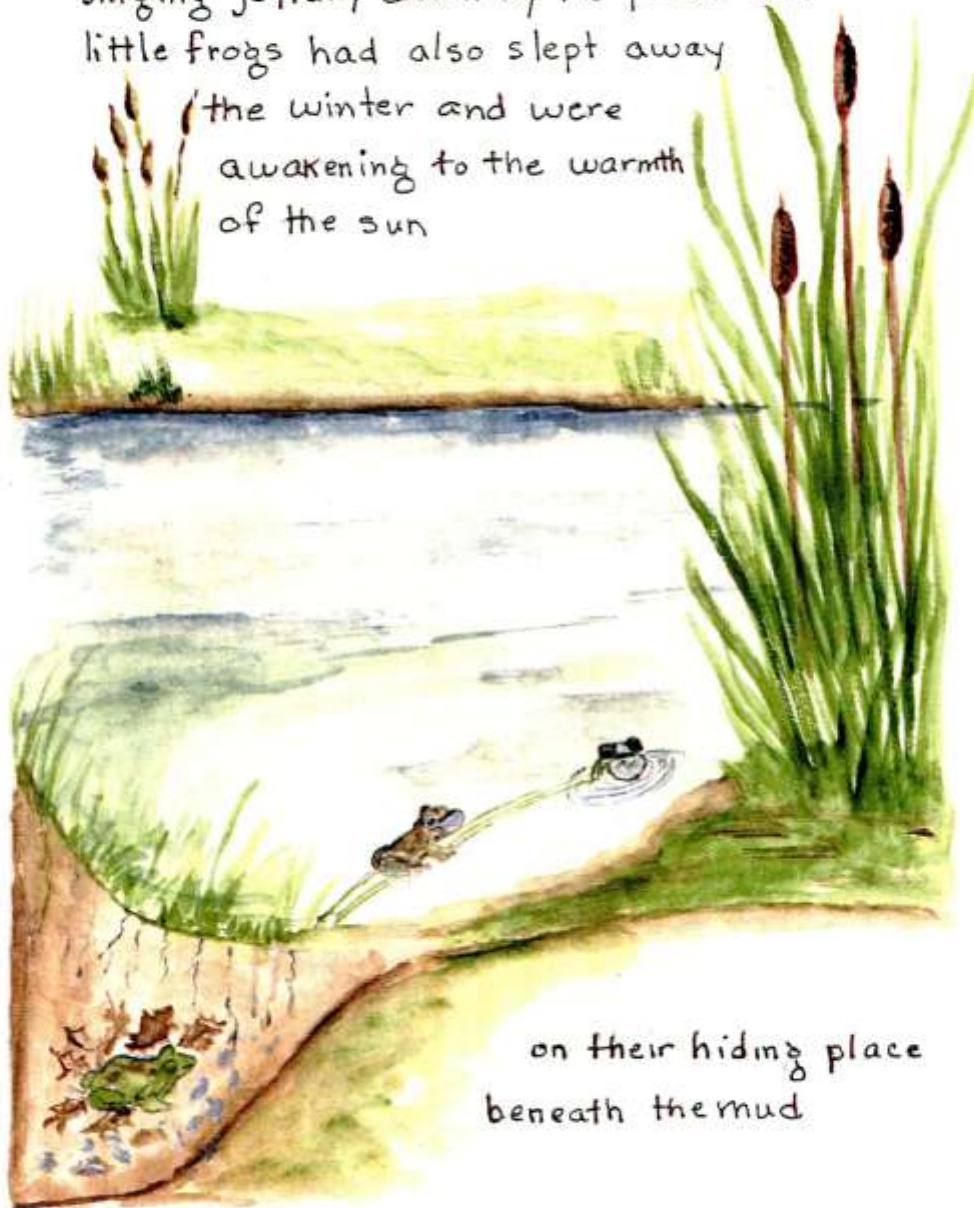
Across the grassy area between the granary and the farmhouse, he observed the outline of a familiar figure.

His old adversary, Caldwell had survived another winter, for the most part outside in his straw filled doghouse. On extremely cold nights, he was allowed inside, where he slept beside the fire. His duties as watch dog decreed that he should be vigilant against marauding weasels and foxes that plagued the hen house.

On this particular morning he was stretched out, enjoying a nap in the warm sunshine.



Wesley opened one eye slowly, then the other, and began to yawn and stretch a little. He heard the spring peepers singing joyfully down by the pond. The little frogs had also slept away the winter and were awakening to the warmth of the sun



on their hiding place
beneath the mud

Wasley looked all
about the
farm yard.

It appeared
to be relatively
safe. Cautiously
he stepped out of
his den onto the damp
cold earth.

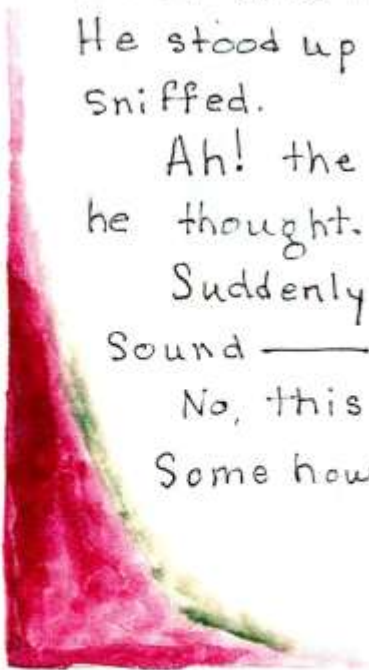


It was only partially
thawed and the air was crisp.
He stood up on his hind legs and
sniffed.

Ah! the wonderful smell of Spring
he thought.

Suddenly he was startled by a distant
Sound — a whistle — Quentin Quail?

No, this sound was different, yet
Some how strangely familiar



There it was again — Wesley attempted to answer, but he was long out of practice, and made only a faint squeak. Determined, he tried again, and again. Finally he took a deep breath, and this time almost met his standard of magnificence.

Then he heard it — an answer, a clear beautiful answer; almost the same whistle as his own, yet sweeter. He knew he must meet this musician. Fortunately, Caldwell was still asleep. Even the whistling hadn't made him stir.



Wesley started moving in the direction of the intriguing sound, listening whistling, pausing, then whistling again on the way. The sound became nearer, clearer until at last, descending the steep little woodland path toward the creek, he came face to face with the elusive instrumentalist. Wesley stared in amazement at a lovely lady woodchuck. He tried to speak, but was unable to make a sound. The pretty little stranger broke the silence. "My mother named me *Trillium* because I always whistle the same three notes, and your name is?" "Wa-Wa-Wa-Wesley" he stammered. "You sure do whistle nicely." "Thank you, I enjoyed hearing you too" said Trillium.





Thus began an enduring friendship that continued through the spring, and gradually blossomed into a deep mutual affection. In the natural way of things, they found an abandoned den large enough for the two of them. They turned it into a comfortable home that would accommodate the children that would eventually complete their family. They were far enough away from Caldwell, and well hidden from him and wild predators.



So it was that Wesley Woodchuck experienced a joyful and care-free childhood, learned from his mother Wilhemina the skills needed to survive, developed an admirable talent — grew up, found an equally talented mate — established a home, — raised a family — taught them to whistle — find food — evade predators and pitfalls — have woodchuck adventures and enjoy everyday blessings, all according to Nature's plan for each of her children....

(Even You^{and} I)



