

SILVERWINGS AND THE BEAVER

BY FRANK RICHARDS



(We are delighted to have been given by Una Hamilton Wright another of the fairy-stories which her uncle created especially for her when she was a little girl)

Silverwings the Fairy was flying one day over the Earth, when she dropped her fairy wand, and it fell into a deep river. The fairy flew down to the bank of the river, but she could not see the wand, which had sunk in deep water. And poor Silverwings said: "Oh, whatever shall I do?"

Now it happened that on the river was a beaver's dam. It was built of branches and leaves and twigs, and in it the beavers had their little houses. All the beavers had gone out that day to hunt for food, excepting Bobo, a young beaver, who was too lazy to work. Bobo hid himself in a bush till the other beavers were out of sight, and then he came out, and lay in the sunshine on the river-bank. And so it happened that Silverwings saw him there.

"Please, beaver," said Silverwings, "dive into the river and fetch up my fairy wand. I cannot go back to fairy land without it."

Bobo yawned.

"Too much trouble" he answered. "Sorry and all that, miss, but I never take trouble if I can help it."

"You are a very lazy beaver," said Silverwings.

Bobo nodded. "So they tell me," he answered.

"You are very lazy indeed," said Silverwings.

"My dear young lady," said Bobo, "Don't tell me that any more. I've heard that from the King Beaver, and the Queen Beaver, and the other beavers, till I'm quite fed up. Say something new."

"What am I to do without my wand?" said Silverwings.

"If that's a riddle," said Bobo, "I don't know the answer. Ask me an easier one."

"It's not much trouble for a beaver to dive into the river," said Silverwings.

"Not much," agreed Bobo, "but some! And I don't like any trouble at all. Sorry but it's not in my line."

"If you will fetch up my wand," said Silverwings, "I will do three things for you in return. You will only have to call out "Please, Silverwings" and whatever you wish shall be done, and this shall happen three times."

Now when Bobo heard that, he began to take notice. And lazy as he was, he got up, and dived into the river, and fetched up the fairy wand. He gave it to Silverwings, and she flew away to fairy land, and Bobo went to sleep on the river bank.

When the other beavers came home at sunset, they saw him there, and they were very angry because he had not helped them in hunting for food. So they woke him up, and the King Beaver said:

"Bobo, why did you not come hunting?"

"I stayed at home to mend the dam," said Bobo, who was a very untruthful beaver. "There was a leak in it, and I was afraid that the water would come in, and we should all catch colds."

"And you have mended it?" asked the King Beaver.

"I was just going to," said Bobo, "but I wanted to make a good job of it, so I thought it over and over and over, and I was still thinking it over when you came home.

"You were fast asleep!" exclaimed the King Beaver.

"Oh, no, not at all," said Bobo.

"Your eyes were shut!" said the King Beaver.

"I think better with my eyes shut," said Bobo.

But the beavers did not believe him, and they took him into the house on the dam on the river, and told him that in the morning he should have a beating for being so lazy.

In the morning, Bobo was very much alarmed. He did not like the idea of being beaten at all. And suddenly he remembered Silverwings, and called out very loud:

"Please, Silverwings."

Then Silverwings appeared, and said:

"What do you want, Bobo?"

"The beavers are going to beat me this morning," said Bobo. "They make out that I am lazy. Now please make me into a big, immense, enormous beaver, so big that they will not dare to come near me."

So Silverwings touched him with her wand, and immediately he became a great, big, enormous beaver, three times as big as any beaver that ever was seen. Then she flew away.

Now Bobo was so big that he quite filled up his room in the dam, and when the King Beaver and the other beavers came to beat him, they were so frightened that they all ran away at once, and went a long way down the river, where they built a new dam to live in.

Bobo laughed very much, feeling very proud of having frightened away all the beavers, and went to sleep again.

But when he woke up late in the day, and thought of going out to fish for his dinner, he found that he was so big that he could not get out of the dam. He rolled over and over, and struggled, and wriggled, but he could not get out, and at last he was so tired that he went to sleep again, hungry as he was. When he woke up next morning, he was fearfully hungry, and he struggled so hard to get out, that the wall fell out of the dam, and Bobo fell into the water. Now Bobo had always been able to swim, like all beavers, but now he was so big, and so heavy, that he sank to the bottom of the river, and could not come up again. And he was very nearly downed, when suddenly he remembered Silverwings, and cried out as loud as he could:

"Please Silverwings! Change me into a fish!"

And immediately he was changed into a fish. Now fishes can breathe under water, so Bobo felt all right at once. He swam about in the river, and found some little things that fishes eat, and ate them for his breakfast, and then he drifted along, letting the river take him on its current, as he was too lazy to swim against the current.

"Why, this is much better than being a beaver," thought Bobo. "No trouble at all now. This is a jolly life."

He was just thinking this, when he found himself caught in something in the river. It was a large net which a fisherman had placed in the river, right across from one bank to the other, to catch all the fish that came along with the current. Bobo was caught in the net before he knew what was happening.

"Oh dear!" said Bobo. "This isn't half so good as being a beaver, after all. I've got to get out of this."

He wriggled for a long time, but he could not get out of the net. And then he remembered Silverwings again, and called out:

"Please, Silverwings, change me into a caterpillar, so that I can crawl out of this beastly net."

And immediately he was changed into a caterpillar, and he crawled through the meshes of the net, and crawled to the bank where he was very glad to lie in the sun and dry himself.

After a time, he sat up on his tail and looked around him. In this place the bank of the river was very rocky and stony, and there were no trees or leaves for a caterpillar to eat, and Bobo was getting very hungry again. So he called out:

"Please, Silverwings, change me into a bird, so that I can fly away from this unpleasant place."

But he did not change into a bird: he was still a caterpillar. So he called out again:

"Silverwings! Bother you, Silverwings, can't you hear? Change me into a bird, will you?"

But still he did not change into a bird: and then he remembered that he had had his three wishes, and there was nothing more to come. First he had been changed into a great big enormous beaver, and then into a fish, and then into a caterpillar: so now he had to remain a caterpillar.

When Bobo understood this, he was very much alarmed and dismayed. He crawled along the bank, but he could not find anything that a caterpillar could eat, and he grew hungrier and hungrier. But presently, as he crawled along, he saw a pretty fairy sitting on the bank, and recognised Silverwings. So he crawled up to her and said:

"I say, I'm awfully hungry. Will you get me something to eat? You can do it quite easily with your fairy wand."

Silverwings yawned.

"Too much trouble," she answered. "Sorry and all that, but I never take any trouble if I can help it."

Then Bobo remembered what he had said to Silverwings when she first asked him to get her wand out of the river, and he was very much ashamed. But he said:

"You are a very lazy fairy."

Silverwings nodded. "So they tell me," she answered.

"What am I to do without anything to eat?" exclaimed Bobo.

"If that's a riddle," said Silverwings, "I don't know the answer. Ask me an easier one."

"It's not much trouble for a fairy to wave her wand," said Bobo.

"Not much," agreed Silverwings, "But some! And I don't like any trouble at all. It's not in my line."

Then Bobo looked very sorrowful, just as sorrowful as a caterpillar could possibly look.

"Oh dear," he said, "I wish I hadn't been such a lazy beaver. Now I shall have to be a caterpillar all my life, and it won't be very long, because I've nothing to eat. Boo-hoo!"

Then Silverwings took pity on him, and she said:

"If I touch you with my wand, and change you back into a beaver, will you be a good beaver, and an industrious beaver, and help the other beavers, and never tell stories any more?"

"What-ho!" said Bobo, brightening up, "I will! Honest Injun!"

So Silverwings touched him with her wand, and immediately he became a beaver again: and he ran away back to the other beavers; and when he told them how sorry he was, they let him off the beating, and he lived happily with the other beavers ever afterwards.

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