

How Ricky the Rabbit Learnt to Show Respect

By Mrs Mann



Dappledown Farm was home to many animals. Up in the high fields, sheep grazed peacefully, whilst in the lower fields cows enjoyed the lush green grass before trudging along to the milking sheds. A cosy pigsty was home to Penelope and her large family of wriggling, squealing piglets, and a deep pond housed a whole community of ducks, geese and other water birds. Overseeing everything that went on, day in, day out, come rain or shine, was Old Ned the donkey. Nothing happened at Dappledown Farm without him noticing and the other animals respected his wise words and held him in high esteem. It was Ned who warned Mrs Duck not to build her nest so near to Otter's home. It was Ned who noticed when Gertie Goat got her nose stuck in the barbed wire of the goat pen and raised the alarm. And it was Ned who could always be relied upon for a good story – after all he had been on the farm for longer than any of the other animals and he had watched all the comings and goings from his vantage point at the stable door, like a sentry on duty, since before anyone could remember.

In a far corner of a field, just within sight of Old Ned's stable, was the warren which the rabbit family called home. Mr and Mrs Rabbit lived there with their rabbit children: Ronnie, Rosie, Rupert, Ruby and Ricky. Four of these children were good little rabbits, but Ricky Rabbit just couldn't seem to keep himself out of mischief. If Mother Rabbit's hammer had gone missing, you could bet it was Ricky who had hidden it. If the girls couldn't find their yoyos, well Ricky had probably used them to tie up one of his brothers! Father Rabbit was forever trying to locate his magnifying glass in order to read his newspaper – and it was often to be found in the middle of one of Ricky's latest experiments. It was for this reason that Ricky had earned himself the nickname, "Tricky Ricky".

"Oh Ricky," sighed his mother one fine morning as she cleared up his latest mess in the kitchen, "Your tricks will get you into big trouble one of these days." Ricky just laughed and scampered off to find his brothers and sisters.

On this particular morning, the little rabbit children met up in the yard near the stable and started chatting happily about their plans for the day.

"It's a beautiful day for exploring," declared Ricky. "I think we should head up to Witchety Woods and explore the secret trails. I hear there's treasure to be found if you dig in the right places!"

Old Ned the donkey stuck his head over the stable door.

"Now young fella-me-lad, I wouldn't be suggesting that to your brothers and sisters if I were you. There's no good will come from a group of young rabbits heading into that dark and dangerous place," he brayed gently.

"Nonsense!" retorted Ricky. "I know those woods. I'll lead the way and keep my brothers and sisters safe."

"You know those woods do you?" asked Old Ned with a frown and a shake of his shaggy mane. "Then you'll know of crafty Fergus the fox and his family who live up there? You'll have heard the tales about them? You'll know of grumpy old Brockle the badger? You'll have seen the bait traps, not to mention the poachers, and the dogs? There are all sorts of dangers lurking in those woods."

Ricky rolled his eyes at his siblings.

"Oh yes Mr Ned, I remember now. I won't go near the woods then, I promise!" he sing-songed, his paws crossed behind his back.

"Jolly good! I'm glad to hear it" said Old Ned, and he returned to munching his hay bale. Out of Ned's earshot, Ricky turned to his siblings again.

"Right, let's go. Last one to Witchety Woods is a softie!" he laughed with glee.

"But Old Ned told us not to go," objected Rosie and Ruby in unison.

"Yes, he said it was too dangerous," warned Rupert anxiously.

Ricky tossed his head and thumped his back feet crossly.

"What does that old donkey know?" he crowed. "I don't suppose he's left his stable in a long time. He probably can't even walk as far as the woods!"

"Ricky, don't be so rude!" frowned Ronnie. "Old Ned has always been kind to us. If he says the woods aren't safe, I think we should listen to him."

"Softie!" called Ricky, as he lolloped away. "I'm not listening to a silly old donkey! I'm off to have some fun." And with that, he was gone, streaking over the fields with his white tail flashing. Ronnie, Ruby, Rupert and Rosie exchanged anxious glances.

"I don't think we should follow him," whispered Rosie. Her siblings nodded their agreement. "Let's go back and play in the stable yard," they agreed.

It wasn't long before Old Ned spied the four little rabbits playing outside his stable door.

"Hello young-uns," he smiled, "Where's that brother of yours? I hope he listened to my warning about Witchety Woods. Many a young adventurer has come to a sticky end up there."

The little rabbits' eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Old Ned, Ricky did go up to the woods," cried Ruby. "He wouldn't listen."

Old Ned looked very grave, and he shook his grey head back and forth.

"Oh dear, oh dear!" he brayed. "Whatever shall we do? I fear he could be in real danger!"

At that very moment, a distant streak of brown fur came hurtling towards them with a much larger reddish brown shape close behind. The blur of fur zipped through the top fields, scattering the sheep; it raced through the lower fields, causing the cows to moo indignantly; and it kicked up the dust in the stable yard, as Ricky ran around and around, with his foxy pursuer rapidly gaining on him. The four terrified little rabbits shot under a tiny gap in the stable door and hid, quivering, under Old Ned's feeding trough. Seconds later they were joined by Ricky, ears flat, body at full stretch and fur standing on end. He was so exhausted he could barely catch his breath and he collapsed in a trembling heap at Old Ned's feet. Outside the sanctuary of the stable, dust flew and the hens in the hen house set up a frightened clucking and squawking, as Fergus Fox darted back and forth, looking hungrily for his next meal. For a breath, nobody moved or made a sound, but then Old Ned swung his heavy head from side to side, stamped his foot, took a deep breath, and let out the most tremendous "Hee-haw, hee-haw!". Startled, Fergus Fox stopped momentarily and looked about him. Old Ned made another great bellowing sound, and then another and another. The rabbits trembled, the hens clucked, the fox slunk towards the wire run of the coup, and Old Ned, using every ounce of strength and volume he possessed, kept on sounding the alarm.

In the farmhouse kitchen, the Farmer heard the noise and stuck her head out of the door to see what was causing such a commotion. Spying the wily old fox, she grabbed her frying pan and a metal spoon and ran out into the yard, banging it furiously and shouting "Get away! Get away with you!" Fergus Fox spun on his heels and gave a startled yap, before beating a hasty retreat back to his home in Witchety Woods.

"Gosh, jolly well done Ned," said the Farmer, wiping her brow. "If it wasn't for you that pesky fox would have caused some real damage around here. What a clever old

donkey you are to sense danger and sound the alarm.” Old Ned brayed softly and helped himself to a large mouthful of hay, whilst the hens clucked a chorus of “thank yous” and the little rabbits huddled together, wide eyed with horror at Ricky’s brush with Fergus the fox.

“Ricky, you could have been caught and eaten by Fergus Fox,” cried his siblings. “We all could have been! Thank goodness for Old Ned’s quick thinking. He saved us!”

The little rabbits scuttled home, Ricky with his head and his tail hung low.

When Mother and Father Rabbit heard what had happened, they were furious. Ricky had not only put himself at risk, but also risked the life of other animals on the farm, and all because he thought he knew best and didn’t listen to Old Ned.

“You should have paid attention to Old Ned,” scolded his mother. “He is the oldest and kindest and wisest animal on this farm, and he deserves your respect.”

Ricky burned with shame. He remembered his rude and unkind words about Old Ned. He knew he had some apologising to do...

“I am so sorry Old Ned,” Ricky cried. “I should have listened to you. I was a silly and disrespectful little rabbit. From now on I promise I will always listen to you and respect your wise words.”

“Thank you Ricky,” replied Ned quietly. “I may be old and slow, but I do know a thing or two about this farmland and the creatures that live on it. Now, off you go – and from now on try to stay out of trouble.”

From then onwards Ricky never forgot to show proper respect to the old donkey who had almost certainly saved his life that day. He still got himself into mischief from time to time, but he had learnt an important lessons about respecting his elders and listening when they had something important to say to him.

So, now you know how Ricky became known as **Respectful Rabbit**.