

HOW THE BURRO GOT HIS EARS AND HIS VOICE

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IT was a Sunday, and the clear blue sky above the Arizona desert had begun to take on its usual eventide rainbow hues, as the Sun sank nearer the horizon beyond the Tucson Mountain to the west.

Five-year-old Billy Pierce, recovering from an illness, had been wrapped in a blanket and carried to the front porch of his bungalow home. Here he rested happily in his father's arms, and gazed about him at scenes that he had not been able to view for some time — the gay flowers in his mother's garden, the freshly cut green lawn, the lovely hues of the changing sky, and the far-off mountains to the north.

Soon he said, "Dad, do you know a new story?"

"I'm afraid not, Billy," answered his father. "Seems to me I've told you every story I ever heard."

Just then Billy's burro, Sally, in the corral back of the bungalow, began to call.

The peculiar sound so loud on the quiet evening air startled Mr. Pierce. Then he laughed softly and said, "There's your Arizona nightingale singing for her supper, Billy."

"Aw, Dad, that's no nightingale. A nightingale's a bird! That was just my burro calling. Why did you call her an Arizona nightingale?"

"Cowboys out on the range call burros that to make fun of their unmelodious voices. Nightingales sing night and day. Burros call night and day, too. But

we have no nightingales in Arizona so far as I've heard, and we do have many burros. So the cowboys think it's funny to call them our nightingales, because the burro's voice is so dreadful sounding when compared with the sweet song of a nightingale. Anyhow, Sally called just in time to remind me of a story that I haven't thought of in years. My granddad used to tell it to me when I was a little chap like you."

"Is it a true story, Dad?"

"No, son. It's a story to call our attention to the fact that even animal mothers protect and train their little ones, so that they may know how best to care for themselves when they are grown, and go out in the world to shift for themselves. And it also points out to us how we learned to develop our organs so they could serve us better, as well as voices so that we could give expression to our feelings and our thoughts. My granddad said the name of the story is 'How the Burro Got His Ears and His Voice'."

Billy laughed softly and snuggled down in his father's arms before he said, "Sounds funny, Dad! Please tell it to me."

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This story is of long-ago time, and is about a mother burro and her son, Jacky. The mother's name was Mrs. Jenny. She belonged to a prospector who early one spring morning put a pack saddle on her back, loaded it with picks, shovels, dried beans, flour, and other supplies, and drove her up to his mine in the Catalina Mountains over there to the north. Here the prospector expected to keep Mrs. Jenny busy working for him all through the summer.

But Mrs. Jenny had a different plan for herself. She didn't like to work, and so she had set her heart on a nice long vacation in the cool shade of the trees on the mountain, where the grass grew rich and tender, and the mountain streams rushed cold and refreshing down to the desert below.

One night when her master thought Mrs. Jenny had begun to like her new home so much that she would be glad to stay there without restraint, he didn't bell and hobble her as he usually did. Mrs. Jenny had been watching for this freedom to be given her, and before morning she was miles away in the deep forest, where she felt sure that she would never be discovered. Here she made a home for herself in an old abandoned miner's shack, and here her son Jacky was born.

All went well with the little fellow and his mamma until Jacky was four month old. Then Mrs. Jenny began to worry over the fact that Jacky was too young to stand the severe cold of the coming winter.

So she began to teach him to take care of himself so that he could go down the mountain to her relatives on the desert, where she firmly decided that he should spend the winter. She guided him to places where the grass would be tenderest for his growing teeth, and to streams where the water would be cleanest and freshest for him to drink.

Along with the rest of his education, Mrs. Jenny impressed upon Jacky the value of listening, so that he would be able to detect sounds that would warn him of danger. And although his continual pointing and turning of his ears this way and that as he listened

for warning sounds caused Jacky's ears to grow much longer than burros' ears usually were, Mrs. Jenny did not mind that. She decided it was better for him to have long ears even if they were not very beautiful, than prettier short ears that could not catch distant sounds as well as Jacky's now could.

One cold morning when Mrs. Jenny saw Jacky shiver as he snuggled close to her side, she decided that it was fully time that he should be on his way to where it would be much warmer for him.

So she said to him in her silent way of talking, "Jacky, it will be nice and warm down on the desert where your grandma lives, and I have decided that you must go and pay her a nice long visit."

"That'll be super!" said Jacky in words that he had not yet learned how to make audible. "We'll have a grand time down there in the nice warm sunshine — won't we?"

"But I can't go with you," said his mamma. "My master'll be home by this time. He'll be watching for me. After the long spell of freedom I've had, the thought of returning to a life of hard work doesn't appeal to me at all."

"But I don't want to go all by myself," grumbled Jacky.

"It'll be a long, hard trip for you, I know, dear," Mother Jenny sympathized with him. "But you're a big boy now, and I feel sure that with all the knowledge you have gained from me, you'll be able to make it with great credit to me and to yourself, too."

"Do I have to go right away?" Jacky pleaded.

"I believe you should, dear. But we'll enjoy our-

selves and not worry about it today. Then tomorrow morning we'll get ourselves a nice breakfast, and when the warm sun has driven the chill out of the air, I feel sure you'll be thinking it'll be a good thing to get away from here. The nights will grow warmer the farther down the mountain you go. And once you get through the pass where Mr. John, the hermit, lives, you'll be quite safe."

Jacky shuddered. "If Mr. John catches me, will he eat me?"

"Not unless he's awfully, *awfully* hungry," answered his mamma. "But you must watch out that no wild animals catch you as you go down the trail. You'd be a nice, tender morsel for them now, but by the time you are a year old you'll be so tough that no animal will try to eat you."

"Maybe I'd better stay here till I'm a year old," fearfully asserted Jacky.

"Oh, no indeed! You might freeze to death before spring, for the winters here are dreadfully cold. You just listen as I have taught you to, every step of the way as you go along down the trail, and if you hear any disturbing sounds, you just crouch down on the ground, tuck your head, tail, and black hoofs under your belly, keep very still, and with your gray coat maybe you'll be mistaken for a rock."

Shortly after sunrise the following morning, Mrs. Jenny woke Jacky, hovered around him till he'd eaten a good breakfast, then led him to a plainly marked trail on the mountain side, rubbed noses with him and hurried away.

Jacky traveled and traveled all day long, and as

night came on he crouched down close to a tree. Here he shivered with fear that some big wild animal would discover he was not a rock, in spite of the fact that he did as his mamma had told him and tried to appear like one.

Toward evening of the next day Jacky came within sight of Mr. John's house. It was built close to the trail in a narrow pass in the mountain, just as Jacky's mamma had told him, and Jacky could plainly see a man near the house. He wore an old straw hat and had a long gray beard. Just now he was bending over some wood he was sawing.

Jacky felt his heart almost stop beating with fear when he saw the old man, for Mrs. Jenny had said that Mr. John would surely be his master and make him work hard if Jacky was not able to get past his house without being captured.

"Maybe if I lie down and rest a while," decided Jacky in his effort to quiet his fears, "Mr. John will finish sawing his wood and go into the house. Then I can easily slip by without his seeing me."

But Jacky was tired, the day was warm, and he had no sooner comfortably settled himself than he fell fast asleep.

He had slept a little while when Mr. John — walking noiselessly by in his moccasined feet — discovered him.

"Ha, ha!" gloated Mr. John. "Here is where I get a fine burden bearer for my next year's work! Get up, Jacky, and come home with me!"

Startled from his slumber, Jacky could not bring himself to open his eyes and see for himself that the

thundering voice he heard belonged to Mr. John.

"I'll make you get up!" said Mr. John. He went to Jacky's head, caught hold of his ears, and tugged until he saw the ears stretch toward him more than a half foot in length. In his astonishment at such an unusual sight, Mr. John let go of Jacky's ears.

Instantly Jacky scrambled to his feet and raced off down the mountain trail as fast as his legs would carry him. When he had reached what he considered a safe distance, Jacky glanced back over his shoulder and saw Mr. John standing where he had left him. His old straw hat was over one ear, and he was evidently still so astonished at the sight of such long ears on such a little animal that he could not move.

Jacky was so overjoyed to find himself now safely away from Mr. John, that his heart could not hold all his emotion. It forced his mouth open to let some of the joy out, and to Jacky's surprise, "He-he-hee-e!" came out of his throat.

Alarmed at the sound Jacky gasped, and "Haw-aw-aw!" came from where the "Hee-hee!" had come.

For a moment Jacky was too frightened to move. Then as he trotted off down the trail to put yet greater distance between himself and Mr. John, he decided, "Aw, that's nothing to be alarmed about. Those sounds were right within myself! Power to make those sounds must be inside all my folks. Now it's up to me to perfect those sounds, so that when I get down to Grandma's place, I can teach her and all her family how to make them, too. Then we'll be able to call to each other no matter how far one of us may be from the other."

The rest of the way down the mountain Jacky practiced and practiced his new-found accomplishment until by the time he had reached the corral where his grandma and some of his other relatives were, it seemed the easiest thing in the world for him to express his joy at finding them by, "Hee-Haw!"

Grandma Burro trotted swiftly up to rub noses with him. "Jacky! Darling! How glad I am to see you!" she told him in her quiet way. "But your ears! Your voice! Most, most wonderful in one of us! You must have done marvelous work to have deserved to be given such astonishing things."

"I haven't done a thing marvelous at all, Grandma," answered Jacky. "I've just brought out what is in my own self. And there's nothing astonishing about those things either, Grandma. For what's in me is in every one of us. All it needs is bringing out. You've heard it said 'What we don't use, we lose'?"

"Often, dearie!"

"Well, I've decided there's another saying just as true as that one. 'What we don't develop in our own selves we never can use!' Now tomorrow, after I'm rested, I'm going to tell every one of you who wants to know, just how I got my long ears and my voice!"

Jacky kept his word. The next day he gathered all his relatives about him, and began to tell them just how he had developed his ears and his voice. His relatives told their children and their friends.

Soon all burros everywhere were following Jacky's advice and practicing self-development. And they certainly have been practicing ever since because today all burros have loud voices and long ears.