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The Exciting Adventures of WALDO

by

EARL and LINETTE BURTON

Illustrated by HELEN STONE

THE JUNIOR LITERARY GUILD
and
WHITTLESEY HOUSE
McGRAW-HILL BOOK COMPANY, INC.

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Chapter One

The warm autumn sun was shining on the old red shed, making it gleam like the ripe apple that still clung to the twisted tree growing beside one of the windows.

There were two men working in the shed. One was an old man, and the other was even older.

The Old, Old Man had a kind face and strong, big hands. One of his hands held a knife, which had a sharp steel blade that flashed in the yellow sunlight that came through the window. In his other hand the Old, Old Man held a block of white wood, which he began to cut with the knife.

The Old Man was standing beside a tall bench that was covered with many colors, where his paintbrushes had dripped. On the floor was a carpet of thin, soft wood shavings that crinkled like dry leaves when the man walked.

After a while the Old, Old Man with the knife turned to his helper and handed him the piece of wood he had been carving.

"There, Paulus," he said, as he stood erect to stretch his tired back, "put some paint on this one. Paint him nicely. We are finished now. This is the last duck we shall make this year."

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So "plop" went the last little duck of the season, and his small wooden heart almost splintered for joy when he felt the soft water ripple against his breast.

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Chapter Two

Soon it would be dark among the rushes, and the wind sighed sweetly through the branches of the weeping willow tree that swept its leaves in the water of the little stream.

The water felt soft and smooth and quiet as it moved past the little duck, who was stuck fast behind the thick green stems of the water weeds. Suddenly he looked down at the water and saw another duck.

"Ho," thought the little wooden duck, "how gay!" And he looked again. The duck that looked back at him from the water was indeed an odd creature. His bill was a *most* peculiar shape, which gave him a permanently startled expression.

"Hello, little friend," said the wooden duck happily. "I see that your bill is crooked, too. Did the duckmaster make a mistake in carving you?"

The duck in the water said nothing at all.

The wooden duck tried again. "Perhaps you are embarrassed because your bill is crooked. But look at me! The duckmaster said that mine was not a bit straight and I don't care . . . at least, not very much."

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A wide-awake cricket rubbed his long brown legs together.

"Crick-a-dee," he creaked. "Crick-a-dee," answered his friend from the branch of a bush filled with red berries. Waldo wanted very much to have a friend that he could talk to and who would talk to him.

On and on he floated, bobbing up and down whenever a ripple tickled his wooden feathers. After a while, Waldo closed his eyes again, for he was very tired.

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"Perhaps," he whispered to himself, "perhaps, if I go to sleep I will wake up in the morning and find this is all a dream. Perhaps I will be safely back in the duckmaster's little red shop with my friends. Perhaps . . ."

But Waldo was already asleep. And so through all the night he drifted gently down the stream, his yellow eyes closed and his black-crowned head tucked under his wing.

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Chapter Three

When Waldo felt the first beams of the morning sun warm on his back, his little yellow eyes flew open with a start.

"Ho!" he said. "What a dream *I* had! I dreamed I was floating down a lovely cool river and a whippoorwill called from a tall, dark tree. What a funny, foolish dream," and he chuckled a little duck laugh and yawned contentedly.

Slowly he looked about him, and he was so surprised at what he saw that he swallowed his chuckle.

For Waldo *had* floated many miles since he left the little old duckmaster and his friend, Paulus. The stream had grown much wider, so wide, in fact, that Waldo could hardly see the banks and the trees on either side. The blue-gold haze of early morning still clung to the edges of the water, and Waldo blinked his eyes very quickly trying to decide where he could possibly be.

"This is indeed a strange land," he said to the sunlight. "And I don't think I like being here all alone."

Ahead of Waldo, down the river, was a strange black thing that stretched across the water from bank to bank, making a way

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Chapter Four

The wind that whirled Waldo about and sent him bobbing along the whitecapped river waters had just blown in from the sea. All the way from Africa it had come, first warm with the dusty sunlight of the desert, then cool with the rain-washed smell of Spain. Across thousands of miles it came, dipping low to gather the salt taste of the ocean in its breath, then rising into the clouds to spill the water on the ships at sea.

The wind was tired when it finally reached the harbor. It was blowing in little gusts toward the giant sycamore tree it knew, where it could rest in the coolness of its branches. Just for fun it reached down and gave Waldo a playful push on his tail feathers.

"Gracious me!" cried Waldo. "Someone's pushing me." And he bounced crazily about until his bill pointed toward the distant river bank.

Once over his fright, however, Waldo began to enjoy himself, for the sun was September-warm on his back, the fresh salt air was cool and good, and the sky was filled with cotton clouds.

"Although I am still all alone and I would rather be with a friend, I feel that I am quite happy," thought Waldo. "And, be-

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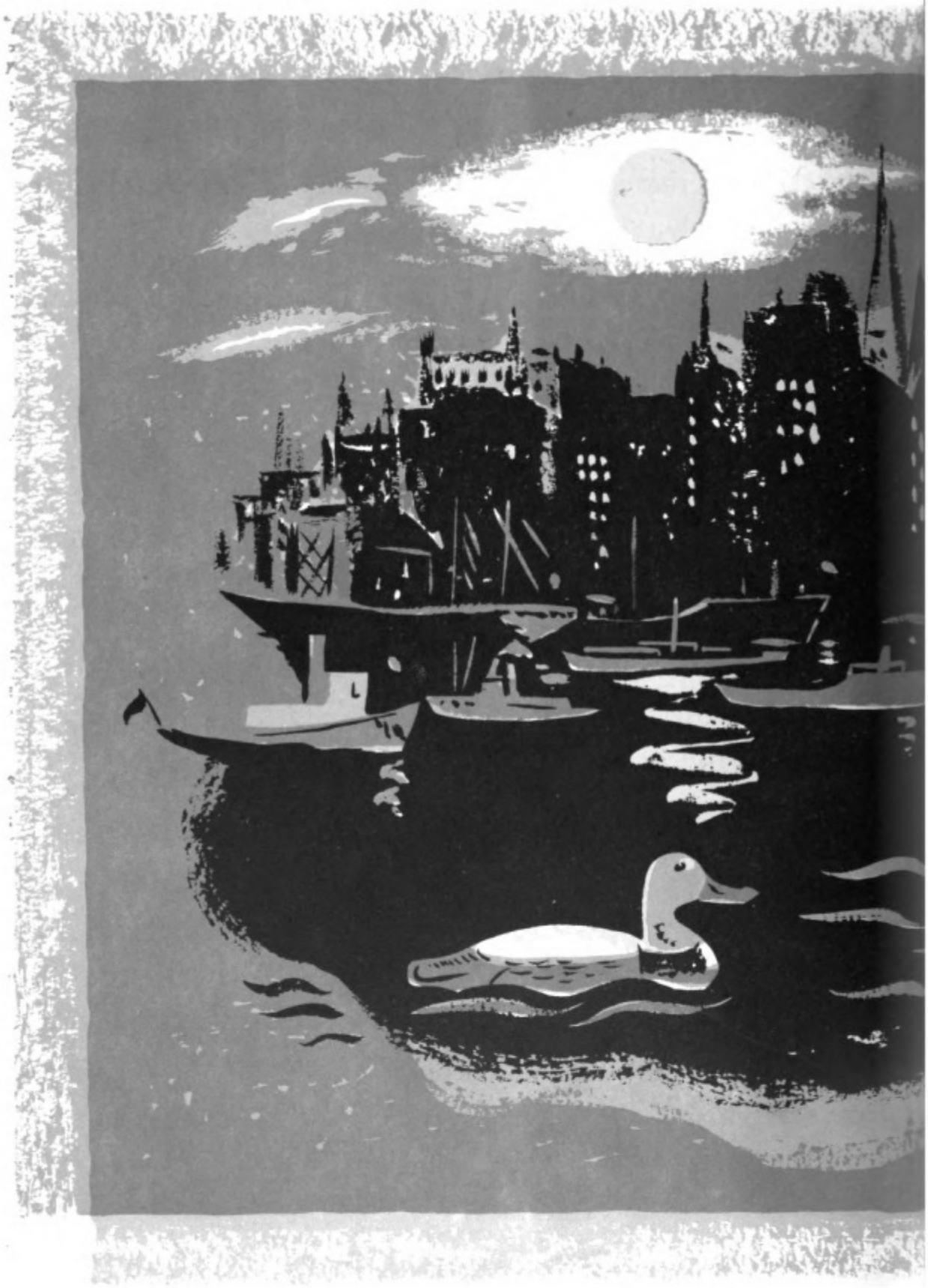

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Chapter Five

The rain slanted cold against Waldo's feathers and the water slapped against his bill, but Waldo felt warm and happy as he shook his head from side to side to whisk the raindrops from his eyes. For behind him, as he could see when he twisted his neck and looked over his shoulder, came the little red tugboat. Slowly at first, then more quickly, it huffed and puffed, and the billows of black smoke, like big blankets, hung low over the gray water.

"I wish that I could sing like a nightingale," quacked Waldo, "for I am happy at last. I am proving that I *am* very brave. It doesn't matter that I am just a wooden duck. And it doesn't matter that my bill is crooked and my tail feathers are chipped where little boys threw stones at me. For I am about to become a hero-duck and I shall wear a ribbon. I will save the tugboat from the storm by my clever navigation!"

A wave spun him closer toward the shore, and the red tugboat followed right behind his tail feathers.

Ahead of Waldo were rows of big wooden posts that looked like short telephone poles stuck in the water. The poles made two

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dirty salty water. At last, just when he was sure that he could not stand it another moment, he was tossed to the top of the water. Bobbing crazily and gasping for air, he drew a great full breath.

As the little tugboat, quite a distance from the dock now, turned slowly about, Waldo was drawn into the current of water behind it and found himself following the boat out into the broad river harbor.

"Oh, my," he sighed, "I suppose I am about to have another Adventure.

Waldo was right.

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Chapter Six

For a long time Waldo followed the tugboat, basking in the warm sun and sniffing little duck sniffs at the cool salt winds. With his eyes half closed he thought about how much had happened to him since he was plopped into the small stream by the duckmaster's helper.

Because Waldo was thinking so hard, he did not notice that his friend, the tugboat, had puffed off into the distance and had disappeared. Waldo had not noticed how far from shore he had drifted. In fact, if the truth were told, Waldo had been daydreaming in the great river harbor.

Because Waldo's eyes had been closed when he was thinking, he had not noticed the tall city buildings slipping by and he had not noticed when the harbor changed to the ocean. When Waldo stopped his dreaming there was no land in sight!

Everywhere was sunlight, sparkling on the whitecapped waves and dancing along the deep green water. The air was filled with sunlight, and the seagulls, for which Waldo now had a definite dislike, soared like tiny kites high above the water and seemed to catch the sunbeams in their claws.

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Into the ocean went the fishing nets.
Into the ocean went the cap of one of the fishermen.
And into the ocean went Waldo.

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Chapter Seven

Down . . . down, went Waldo into the frothing waves, and when he came coughing to the top of the water he was very, very angry.

"I am not enjoying my life one bit. It has been nothing but waves and more waves, and what I want most is dry land and a friend. Perhaps I am not a very seaworthy duck, but I don't care!"

The wind was whipping the waves into great green mountains of water. The rain was pelting against Waldo's cold wet back. The storm grew stronger and more fierce every minute.

"This is a *dreadful* storm," cried the little duck. "*Much* worse than the one when I rescued the tugboat."

It was a great storm indeed. The clouds grew even blacker, the waves roared higher, and the rain came down in such torrents that Waldo could not see beyond his own crooked bill. Had he been able to see, he would have known that he was being tossed toward the shore.

As it was, Waldo feared that he would never live to see another day. One moment he was on the top of the biggest wave in the

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The boy turned his back to the ocean, whistled to the shaggy dog, and started up the beach toward the sand dune. Waldo could feel the boy's heart thumping a happy tattoo, and even the shaggy dog seemed to smile.

"Perhaps I am about to have another Adventure," thought the little duck. "And perhaps—just perhaps—this time I shall like it."

Up and over the sand dune they went, the shaggy dog first, then the little boy, holding Waldo very gently in his arms.

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Chapter Nine

Twice during the next few weeks, Kit's father took Waldo and Kit with him when he went fishing, and Waldo was not at all afraid. After all, he was Kit's friend and Kit held him very tightly in his arms when the fishing boat rolled from wave to wave.

Sometimes Kit and Mobey, the dog, and Waldo went for long walks along the beach while the warm autumn sun shone. Mobey raced up and down the bank, barking at sandpipers, digging for shells, and chasing little waves back into the ocean. Kit threw pebbles into the blue sparkling water, and Waldo lay in the sand, watching it all very carefully with his bright yellow eyes.

One day Kit left the shaggy dog at home, asleep by the fire, and took Waldo to the other side of the spit of land on which he lived. The water was calm here and the sun was very warm on the little boy and his little duck.

"Waldo," said Kit, putting his friend down on the sand with his bill pointing straight out to sea, "I think I'll just go wading. Not very far. Just a little bit, because winter is coming and this may be the last warm day of the year."

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Chapter Ten

The day the Wild Ducks came was, for Waldo, a wonderful and exciting and very sad day.

Early one morning, when the mist was just beginning to rise along the beach and the waves boomed loud along the shore, Kit and Mobey, the dog, and Waldo went down to the water's edge to collect shells. Kit placed Waldo in the tall grass by a sand dune to protect him from the cold wind that blew in from the sea.

When the bucket was filled with seashells, Kit whistled for his dog and started up the path to his house. And for the first time since he had found Waldo, the little boy forgot all about his wooden duck and left him sitting on the sand.

But Waldo was not discouraged. "Kit will come back for me," he said to himself quite calmly. "So I shall just sit here and enjoy the sunrise."

The tide was coming in, and the waves grew bigger and bigger as the sun came up over the edge of the world. The wind was a winter wind and Waldo began to shiver, even when the sun rose quite high and shone on his back.

"I wish Kit would come back," said Waldo. And just as he said

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All day Kit was very sad. But in the evening, when the fire was lighted and his mother, and his father, and Mobey sat before the fireplace, Kit walked over to the corner where Waldo had been sitting all winter long.

Carefully he picked up the little wooden duck. He blew a fine cloud of dust from Waldo's back. He polished Waldo's crooked bill with his sleeve. Then he tucked the duck under his arm.

"I think I'll go to bed," he said, "and take my *friend* Waldo."

Waldo breathed a very soft sigh.

"Now, I shall never be sad again," the little wooden duck said to himself.

And he never was.

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