

FINIGUS SHREW AND THE SMART ALECK

A story Grandad Brandsberg first told to his daughters and grandchildren many years ago.

Finigus Shrew came trotting down the path towards the corner of the stone wall. Harry the chipmunk, who had been watching from his perch high in the wall, scampered down to the ground and ran up the path to meet his friend, “good old Finny.”

“Hey, what’s your big hurry?” Harry asked, jittering with curiosity.

“Something important. Got to hurry.” Finny brushed past Harry and went jogging on down the path. Harry ran after him, deciding to make a race of his big hurry. *He may be the littlest guy around here*, Harry thought to himself, *but he’s sure a good guy*. Catching up.

Harry chirped at his little friend, “What’s so important?”

“*Goin’ fishin’* . Gotta hurry, or else that dang’ weasel will beat me to my favorite spot. If you’re comin’ with me, you got to hurry.”

“Okay, okay,” Harry said, beginning to whistle one of his favorite tunes.

Along the way, the pair met Joe Cottontail. Harry, who saw Joe first, yelled, “Hey, Joe, wanna go fishin’?”

Joe shook his head with a wry expression and answered. “It’s not my taste—I don’t like fish very good. It smells.”

“Oh? Heck, come on anyway.” Harry teased. “It’s a lot of fun.”

“Well, okay. I guess I might as well,” Joe decided. “I never went fishin’ before, anyway.” Besides, he had never heard of *any* rabbit going fishing. So the three hurried on to the brook...

The morning was meant just for fishing. Sunlight danced on all the dew-sprinkled leaves and made them look like they were all covered with diamonds. A cluster of wild daisies were just waking up and stretching out their petals for another summer day of sunbathing. And the brook babbled a happy welcome, which the three accepted gleefully.

"It's not very far from here," the little shrew puffed.

"I'm glad it's not very far from here," added the cottontail, who had already worked up a sweat. Harry didn't say anything. He just skipped along with one eye on the brook.

Suddenly, Finny stopped. His back was rigid and the velvety hair on the back of his neck bristled. Finny saw something he did not like.

Just around the bend, Harry could see Aleck Weasel lazily leaning against the trunk of a ragweed, merrily spinning the crank on a shiny new fishing reel.

"What're ya doin' in my favorite fishin' place, you scrubby old weasel?" hissed Finny, every split-ounce of him ready to fight.

Aleck wisely scratched his head and slowly answered. "Why, old chap, I thought I'd recline here to do a bit of relaxing, meditating, and of course, some angling. That's fishing to you, you know."

"*Is zat so?*" retorted little Finny.

"Yes, my good fellow, *zat's so.*" Aleck said, sending the shiny fishrod whizzing back and forth. With a plunk, his sinker splashed into the far side of the brook.

"Where's all your fish, ya big goose?" Finigus jeered.

"*Yeah. Where are they?*" the chipmunk asked. He wasn't afraid of any shaggy old weasel.

Joe Cottontail didn't say anything. I don't trust that weasel, he thought to himself.

Aleck smiled sweetly. "But, boy, I've been here for just a very few moments," he explained.

"Humph," Finny said, stomping away downstream along the brook.

Joe started to join Finny. "Aw, stay here," Harry said, touching the rabbit on the shoulder.

"Awright," the rabbit answered nervously, twitching his nose.

"Say, *Mister Alexander Weasel...*" Harry started to say loudly.

"Yea?"

"Say, Mister Alexander Weasel, you must be the *smartest fella in the whole wide world*, aren't you?"

"Of course. I know *everything*. Why, I've been around the world. I've studied algebra and I speak at least 74 languages, including French and Pig Latin."

"*Yeah?* How far is it around the world then?" Joe Cottontail asked, losing his shyness. *He doesn't know any more than I do*, Joe and Harry were both thinking.

"Sonny," Aleck said, "if you start out early in the morning, you can make it in two days and a night. Anyway I did. Say, did I ever tell you about the time I ate supper with the King of Australia, or the time I beat the Prince of Tanganyika in a game of marbles? You should have been there. And then there was the time..."

By the time Finny got back with his minnows slung over his shoulder, Harry was tired of hearing the weasel's bragging, but Joe was still listening with wide eyes.

Aleck saw the fish and jumped to his feet. "*Them's my fish*," he growled.

"They aren't either your fish," Finny shouted. "If you're so smart, where's all the fish you caught? I bet you don't even know how to fish."

Aleck was embarrassed. "Maybe I could improve my technique just a little," he gulped. "But please, good sir, show me your great technique. I'd be delighted to emulate your expertise."

"You would, huh?" Finny said scornfully. "Just watch this." Finny handed his fish to Joe, who held the stringer in one hand and his nose with the other. Fish smell," Joe mumbled

The shrew winked at his friends and walked over to a twig that hung out over the water. With a hop and two little jumps. Finny was out on the end of the twig, swaying over the swishing stream. He lay down on the twig, leaned down, and started to stir the water with his whiskers. Joe was scared that Finny would fall in. Harry smiled at the weasel, who was REALLY watching. Pretty soon a minnow started towards the twig. Joe dropped Finny's fish and put his paws over his eyes.

All at once Finny splashed into the water and splashed out again with a minnow in his mouth. "There!" he said, tossing the fish to Aleck.

"Yeah, and *you got all wet.*" the weasel sneered. *I don't want to get all wet.*"

"Me, neither," Harry said.

"I don't like water." Joe added. *"It's all wet."*

"Just my feet are wet," Finny said, proudly showing how dry his coat was.

"By gosh," the surprised weasel said. Then he frowned again. "Aw, anybody can do that."

"Yeah?" Finny said with an interested look.

"Yeah. I'll just take a hop out on that limb and snatch up the next fish that comes along. You just watch me." Aleck said, backing up.

Joe covered his eyes with his paws again.

Dashing for the twig, Aleck stumbled and tripped on the edge of the bank; he flew head first into the middle of the brook. He splashed to the other side of the stream. Water ran down his nose, and his tail dripped like a wet dishrag. Without saying anything, he trudged away and out of sight.

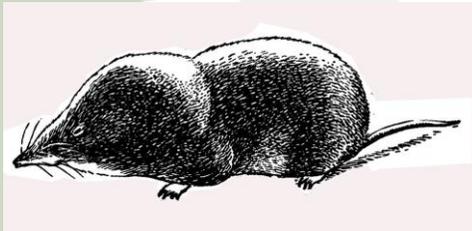
“He’s just a Smart Aleck,” Finny said, grinning a little bit.

Harry picked up the fish. “Let’s go home,” he said, throwing a paw over Finny’s shoulder.

“Fishin’s fun,” Joe Cottontail said. And he hopped away, following his two pals.

–The End–

NOTICE: You may keep one copy of this story as a gift from Granddad George Brandsberg. You may not sell or reproduce this story. It is presented here solely for the pleasure of the children in your family. Copyright 2016 by George Brandsberg.



Short-tailed Shrew

CEDARTIP