



The Crutch

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Ricky Raccoon and his friends Flora Skunk, Mitzi Mink, and Bizzie Beaver were playing a game of tag. Flora was running after Ricky. She was getting closer and closer. “I’m right behind you!” she called.

But just as Flora reached out to tag Ricky, she stumbled and fell. “*Ouch!*” she cried, holding her foot in pain. Ricky stopped and ran back. Mitzi and Bizzie came running over, too.

“What happened, Flora?” asked Ricky.

“*Oww,*” moaned Flora. “I stubbed my toe on a rock!”

“Oh, no!” said Mitzi. “Do you think you can walk?”

Mitzi and Bizzie helped Flora up, and she took a few steps. “*Oww!*” she exclaimed.

“Hey, I know what you need,” said Ricky. “A crutch!”

“Good idea, Ricky,” said Bizzie. “Maybe we can find a stick that would work.”

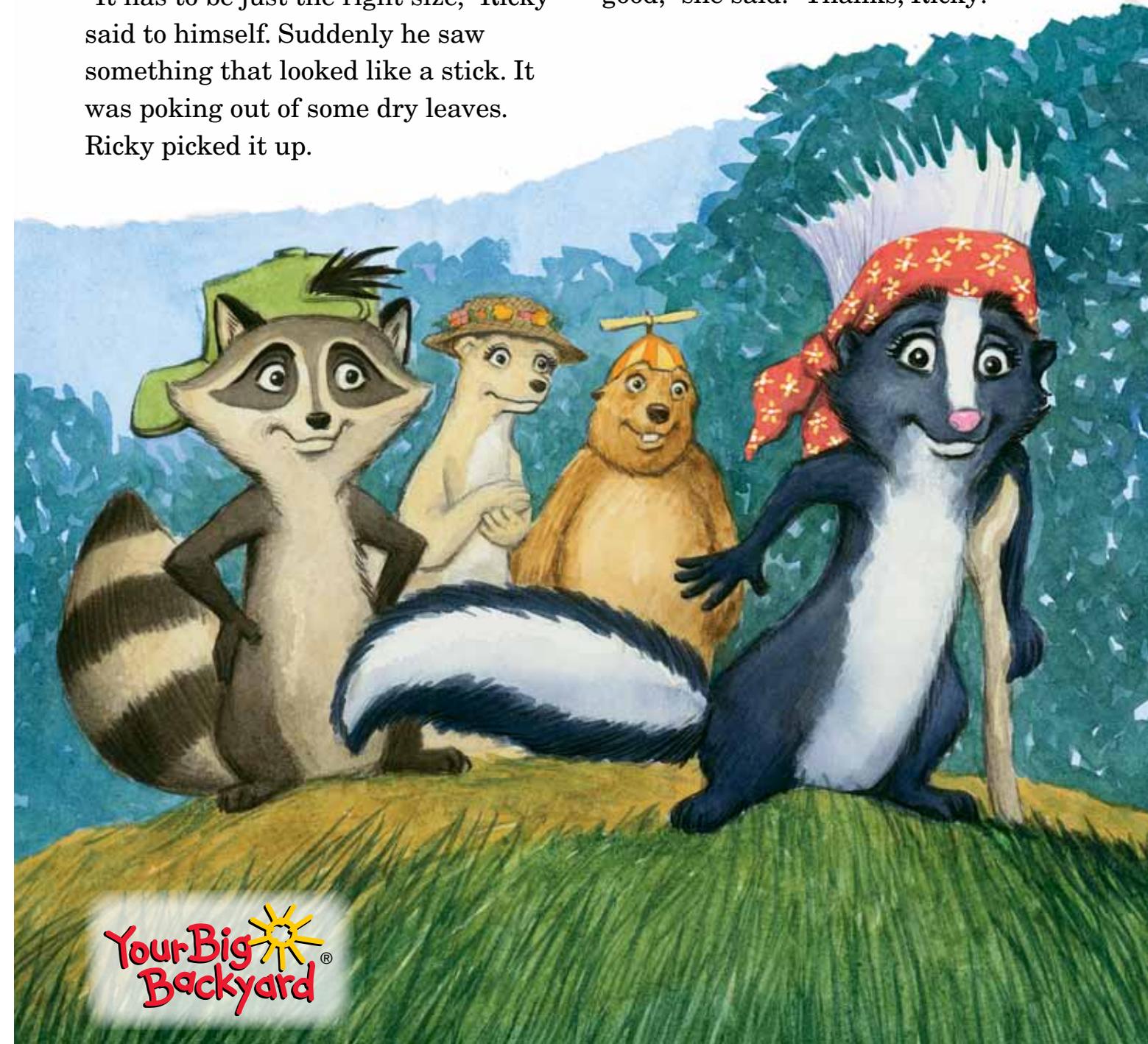
“Yes!” said Mitzi. “Let’s all look!”

They helped Flora limp over to a big rock to sit down. Then they spread out, searching for a stick that would make a good crutch.

“It has to be just the right size,” Ricky said to himself. Suddenly he saw something that looked like a stick. It was poking out of some dry leaves. Ricky picked it up.

“*Hmm,*” he said. “It’s kind of a funny-looking stick. But Flora could rest her arm right here near the end. He raced back to Flora, calling the others as he ran. “Hey, guys, I found a great crutch!”

They all gathered around as Flora tried out the crutch. She rested her arm in the fork of the stick. “Pretty good,” she said. “Thanks, Ricky!”





Bizzie looked thoughtful. “You know,” he said, “there’s something strange about that stick. I feel as if I’ve seen it before.” Bizzie stopped to think. “Hey, I know!” he shouted suddenly. “The other day I saw a deer. And it had antlers that looked just like that. That’s not a stick at all—it’s an antler!”

Ricky frowned. “Why would a deer’s antler be lying on the ground?”

The friends all thought about that for a minute.

“Well,” said Mitzi, “maybe the deer was running, and bumped into a tree, and the antler got knocked off.”

“Yeah,” said Bizzie. “And maybe it just needs to be screwed back on.”

Flora looked at the end of the antler. “I don’t think it would screw back on,” she said. “But I bet the deer would know how to put it back on.”

“We need to help that poor one-antlered deer find its antler!” said Ricky. “But how?”

“Maybe we could make signs and put them up around the woods,” said Mitzi.

“Great idea!” said Ricky. “Let’s go back to my place and make signs.”

“OK,” said Flora. She stood up. “My toe is feeling better now,” she said.

A little while later, the friends were sitting at Ricky’s picnic table watching Ricky make a sign. They watched as he carefully wrote the words, “Found: One Antler.”

“What else should I say?” asked Ricky. But before anyone could answer, their friend Mrs. Cardinal landed on the table.

“Hi, everyone,” said Mrs. C. “What are you all so busy with?”

“Hi, Mrs. C!” the friends replied. They explained what they were doing, and then showed Mrs. Cardinal the antler.

“Some poor deer lost one of its antlers,” Ricky said.

“Oh, I’m sure he’s lost the other by now, too,” Mrs. C said cheerfully.

“What? Both antlers missing?” exclaimed Bizzie. “The poor deer!”

“Oh, don’t worry,” said Mrs. Cardinal. “The antlers on boy deer drop off each year. Then they grow new ones the next year.”

“Really?” they all asked.

“Sure,” said Mrs. C. “And the antlers don’t go to waste. Some creatures, like mice, love to nibble on them.”

“I see,” said Flora. “The deer isn’t missing its antler. But some animals might be missing a meal!”

“Right!” said Ricky. “We’d better put this antler back where I found it.”

And that’s exactly what they did.

