



CLASSIC LIVING BOOK

THE BURGESS  
FLOWER BOOK

Thornton Burgess

ill. Louis Agassiz Fuertes

COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

B&W EDITION



# The Burgess Flower Book For Children

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THORNTON BURGESS

ILLUSTRATED BY  
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## I. PETER RABBIT FINDS SIGNS OF SPRING

“Winsome Bluebird’s on the way;  
He is due here any day.”

OLD MOTHER West Wind’s children, the Merry Little Breezes, sang this softly as they danced over the Green Meadows and around the Old Briar patch. Peter Rabbit pricked up his long ears.

“How do you know? Who told you so?” he demanded.

“Nobody told us so; we just feel it, Peter,” cried the Merry Little Breezes, and kept on singing as they danced.

“Huh!” exclaimed Peter. “Feeling isn’t knowing. Perhaps Winsome is on his way and perhaps he isn’t. I hope he is, for that would mean that Mistress Spring is on her way too, and she can’t get here too soon to suit me. But I would feel a lot more sure of it if I could see some signs.”

“Use your eyes, Peter! Use your eyes! There are flowers in bloom already, for we’ve seen them. What better sign that Mistress Spring is coming do you want?” chanted the Merry Little Breezes.

Peter jumped a foot off the ground. “Say, are you crazy?” he cried. “Look at this snow all over the Green Meadows! Do you expect me to believe any such story as that?”

“We don’t care whether you believe it or not, it is so!” cried the Merry Little Breezes, dancing around Peter and throwing snow in his face.

“Welcome Robin’s on the wing;  
Very soon you’ll hear him sing.”

With this the Merry Little Breezes danced away across the Green Meadows towards the Green Forest, leaving Peter to stare after them as if quite sure that they really were as crazy as they seemed.

“Of course, it isn’t true,” muttered Peter. “The very idea of saying that they have seen flowers in bloom when the ground is still frozen and there is snow everywhere! I don’t believe a word of it.”

Nevertheless Peter couldn’t get it out of his mind that the Merry Little Breezes had seen something that he hadn’t. Thoughts of the glad springtime began to chase each other through his funny little head. Presently he began to have a queer feeling — which little by little he recognized as the very feeling the Merry Little Breezes had spoken of, — the feeling that Mistress Spring really and truly was on her way.

“Huh!” exclaimed Peter just as before, and shook himself. But he couldn’t shake off that feeling. Then he thought again of what the Merry Little Breezes had said about signs and about using his eyes. “Huh!” said he again. “I guess if there is anything to see I would see it! There’s nothing the matter with my eyes, and I haven’t seen any signs of spring yet. Flowers in bloom! The very idea!”

Now, of course, Peter didn’t really believe that the Merry Little Breezes had told an untruth. No, indeed! He thought that they were either just trying to tease him, or that they had been mistaken. But he couldn’t get rid of the thought that perhaps they had seen something which he hadn’t seen; and nothing upsets Peter more than the thought that others may know more than he does about what is going on in the Green Forest and on the Green Meadows.

“If there are any signs of spring which they have seen, I’d like to know where they are,” muttered Peter, as he hopped all through the dear Old Briar-patch, looking sharply at all the bushes and little trees and brambles to see if any of the sleeping buds showed any signs of waking. But they didn’t, and Peter felt satisfied that there were no signs of spring in the Old Briar-patch. Certainly there were none on the Green Meadows, for these were still covered with snow.



Then Peter made up his mind to visit the Green Forest just to make sure that he had missed nothing there. Nowhere could he see the least sign of the coming of Mistress Spring. Snow was everywhere. An idea popped into his head. "If they saw any flowers, it must be that they saw them through a window of Farmer Brown's house. I've seen them there myself," thought he. "But flowers up there are no sign of spring."

A few minutes later Peter came to that part of the Green Forest where in places it was swampy. You know a swampy space is where the ground is always very wet. This was the warmest place in all the Green Forest. The snow had disappeared in spots and in one of these a tiny stream of water was coming from a place where it bubbled out of the ground. It was a spring, and the tiny stream was the beginning of the Laughing Brook. Peter stopped on the edge of it. Just then along came the Merry Little Breezes and one of them tickled his nose with a queer smell. Peter sniffed.

"It smells to me as if Jimmy Skunk had left a little of that scent of his around here, but I haven't seen Jimmy's tracks anywhere," thought Peter. Again he sniffed. This time it seemed as if that smell came right out of the water in front of him. He stared at it a minute and for the first time noticed several queer brown-and-green things, like pointed hoods, standing in the water. Peter leaned forward to look at one a little closer, and right then he made a discovery. That smell, like Jimmy Skunk's perfume, came from that queer little hood! Peter hopped a step nearer that he might see better. On one side of that queer hood was an opening, a narrow opening. He was all curiosity now. He held his nose while he peeped in that narrow opening. You see, he didn't like that smell, and so close to that little hood it was very strong.

At first he saw nothing. But a moment later he discovered, down at the bottom of that little hood, a sort of thick stem all covered with something yellow. Peter's eyes seemed to pop right out as he looked harder than ever. Then he saw that the thick stem was covered with very, very tiny flowers, all yellow with the dust-like gold which most flowers have, and which is called pollen.

Peter jumped a foot straight up in the air. “Why, the Merry Little Breezes did tell the truth!” he exclaimed.

“Of course, we did!” cried the Merry Little Breezes, who had been watching him. “We always tell the truth. These are the first flowers of the year, the flowers of the Skunk Cabbage,<sup>1</sup> and the sure sign that Mistress Spring is on her way.”

Peter remembered the big broad leaves he had so often seen growing here and in other swampy, places in the summer. He looked all about, but he didn’t see even one. He wrinkled his brows in a puzzled way. “I thought the Skunk Cabbage was a big green plant,” said he.

“So it is,” laughed one of the Merry Little Breezes. “These are its flowers. They bloom before the leaves show at all. Queer, isn’t it?”

“I should say so!” replied Peter. “I didn’t know it had any flowers. I’ve seen these things early in the spring many times, but I didn’t know what they were. I never thought anything about them.”

“That comes of not using your eyes, Peter,” cried a Merry Little Breeze. “There are many wonderful things all about you every day which you never see at all.”

“What is there wonderful about these?” demanded Peter a little sharply, for he felt a little put out that any one should think he didn’t see all there was to be seen.

“Isn’t it wonderful that these little flowers can come up and be brave enough and strong enough to bloom when Jack Frost is still making everybody shiver?” asked the Merry Little Breeze.

Peter nodded. “That’s so,” he said slowly. “I didn’t think of that. It is wonderful. I don’t see how they do it.” He looked at the tiny flowers with new interest. He saw how thick was the little brown-and-green hood inside of which they were blooming, and how warm and cozy it was in there with only a narrow opening for the light and air to enter. Then he began to understand how Old Mother Nature was protecting them.

“It is wonderful,” he repeated. “I certainly have learned something today. I’ve always watched for the coming of Winsome Bluebird as the first sure sign of sweet Mistress Spring and

1 Look at the picture of the Skunk Cabbage on page 5.



**YELLOW ADDER'S-TONGUE**  
*Erythronium americanum*



**SKUNK CABBAGE**  
*Symplocarpus foetidus*

never once have thought that there might be other signs. Do you know, I rather like this smell now. It is — why, it is a sort of promise that winter will soon be over. Now I must hurry to tell Mrs. Peter the splendid news that the first flowers of the year are in bloom.”

## II. TWO SURPRISES IN THE GREEN FOREST

“**D**EE, DEE, dee, chickadee! Where are you going in such a hurry, Peter Rabbit?” cried a merry voice, as Peter was scampering down the Lone Little Path to reach the edge of the Green Forest on his way to the dear Old Briar-patch to tell Mrs. Peter the good news.

Peter stopped abruptly. “Hello, Tommy Tit,” he cried. “I’ve just made the most wonderful discovery. I’ve found the first sure sign that Mistress Spring is on her way and will soon be here.”

Tommy Tit the Chickadee flitted down to a twig just above Peter’s head. “Is that so, Peter?” he cried, pretending to be very much surprised. “Is that so? What is it?”

“I’ve found flowers in bloom!” cried Peter. “Yes, sir, I’ve found flowers in bloom. I wouldn’t have believed it if I hadn’t seen them with my own eyes.”

Tommy Tit’s bright little eyes twinkled.

“What flowers are they, and where are they?” he asked.

“They are the flowers of the Skunk Cabbage, and they are in those funny little brown-and-green hoods down by the spring in the swamp!” cried Peter, and looked at Tommy as if he expected him to be greatly surprised.

“Dee, dee, dee! Do you call those flowers?” demanded Tommy rather scornfully.

“Certainly they are flowers,” replied Peter rather sharply. “What is more, they are the very first flowers of the year. I think it is the most wonderful thing I’ve ever heard of that they are actually blooming now before the snow has gone.”

Tommy Tit began to chuckle.

“What are you laughing at?” demanded Peter.

“To see you so excited over something I have known about for a long time,” replied Tommy Tit. “I suppose those really are flowers, but I don’t think much of them myself. They do come first of all, but they are not much ahead of some real flowers, flowers worth seeing. I saw some of the latter only a few moments ago, and they certainly did my eyes good.”

Peter sat up very straight and stared very hard at Tommy Tit. “Do you mean to tell me that there are other flowers in bloom now?” he demanded. “I don’t believe it, Tommy Tit.”

Again Tommy Tit chuckled. “Peter,” said he, “for a fellow who has lived in the Green Forest and on the Green Meadows as long as you have, you don’t know much. No, sir, you don’t know much. There are other flowers in bloom right this minute in the Green Forest, and I suspect that if I went to look for them I could find some right out on the Green Meadows, if there are any places where the snow has melted away. It doesn’t make a bit of difference to me if you don’t believe what I have told you. But if you will run up on the hillside back there and use your eyes as they were meant to be used, you will find some of the dearest, sweetest, bravest little flowers of all the year. I just love them. I watch for them every spring, and when I see them I know that winter is really over. Good-by, Peter.” Before Peter could say another word Tommy Tit had flown away.

Peter was of two minds, as the saying is. He wanted to hurry home to tell Mrs. Peter of his wonderful discovery, and he wanted to go up on that hillside to see if Tommy Tit had told the truth. Somehow he just couldn’t believe it. Then, too, his pride was hurt. He couldn’t bear to think that he didn’t know all there was to know. He started on towards home, but he only made a few hops before he stopped. Curiosity would not let him go on. Suddenly he turned and away he went, lipperty-lipperty-lip, for that hillside.

When Peter reached the foot of the hill he began to go up slowly. Snow lay in big patches all over it. “Of course,” said Peter to himself, “those flowers will be where the snow has been melted longest.” So he picked out the largest open spot and carefully hopped back and forth all over it. But all he found was a carpet of dead, brown leaves. Then he visited the next

largest open spot with the same result. So he went from open spot to open spot until he had visited all of any size. Not a sign of a flower had he seen.

At last he sat down to rest. He was disappointed. Yes, sir, he was disappointed. "I don't believe Tommy Tit saw any flowers at all," muttered Peter. "No, sir, I don't believe he saw a single flower. He was jealous. He was jealous and he just made up that story. I'll rest a few minutes and then I'll hurry home to the dear Old Briar-patch."

Now right in front of Peter was one of the smallest open places on that hillside. It was so small that he hadn't thought it worth looking at. But as he sat there, his eyes just happened to rest on that little bare space in front of him. Suddenly Peter blinked and sat up very straight. Then he blinked two or three times more and gave a little gasp of surprise and unbelief. Right in the middle of that little bare space, standing bravely up above the dead, brown leaves, was something that looked very much like a flower! Yes, sir, it did so.

Peter jumped off the snow and hopped over to it. His face wore such a funny expression. Unbelief struggled with belief. But Peter knows that if he cannot believe his eyes he cannot believe anything. There under his very nose was the daintiest of little starlike flowers, a little lavender blossom bravely smiling up at him.

"Oh!" cried Peter under his breath. Then for a long time he simply sat there gazing at that little flower without saying a word.

It was a *Hepatica*.<sup>2</sup> It was about four inches high at the top of a woolly-looking stem, for that stem was covered with tiny fine hairs. Beside it, not yet ready to open, was a bud, and Peter saw at once that this also was covered with fine hairs and that it hung bent over. Though Peter didn't know it, this was to protect it from storms. Looking down, Peter saw other buds just starting up from the middle of a cluster of queer-shaped leathery-looking leaves. Some were green and some were purplish, and all lay almost flat.

Somewhat hesitatingly Peter stretched out his wobbly little nose and sniffed at that little blossom. "Why, it has a sweet

2      Look at the picture of the *Hepatica* on page 10.



HEPATICA  
*Hepatica triloba*



SPRING BEAUTY  
*Claytonia virginica*



smell!" he exclaimed.

"Have you just found that out?" asked a voice behind Peter. There was Tommy Tit, his small black eyes twinkling down at Peter.

"Yes," Peter owned up truthfully. "I remember seeing Hepaticas every spring, though I didn't know they came so early; but I hadn't noticed that they had any smell at all."

"Some don't," replied Tommy Tit. "Some, like this, are sweet-scented, and others have no scent at all. Even the sweet-scented ones lose that scent when they become old."

"I didn't know Hepaticas were this color, either," said Peter.

"Many of them are not," replied Tommy Tit. "Some are white and some are pinkish and others are almost blue."

"You seem to know all about them," said Peter a little enviously.

"Oh, no, I don't know all about them," replied Tommy. "But I've used my eyes and know some things. Do you know that they close at night?"

Peter's eyes opened very wide. "No," said he. "Do they?"

Tommy Tit nodded his black-capped little head vigorously. "Yes, sir," said he. "They even close on dark days. That is, they do until they get so old that they have begun to fade. Hello, it is beginning to snow! Just as if we hadn't had snow enough for one year! I think I'll get under cover."

So Tommy Tit flew away and left Peter sitting there, still staring at that little flower. Peter didn't mind a little snow. He knew it wouldn't amount to much, and somehow he didn't want to leave just yet. So he sat there looking at the brave little Hepatica. Presently he made a discovery that caused him to squeal right out. That little blossom was slowly closing. It didn't like the snow. Besides, it had grown quite dark. Slowly the little blossom closed and then Peter saw that its outer covering was overgrown with little fine hairs just as was the covering of the buds. "Why!" said Peter to himself, "the Hepaticas have regular little fur coats to keep them warm."

What Peter didn't find out until long afterward was that these same little hairs serve quite another purpose. They keep the ants and other crawling insects from climbing up and stealing the sweet juice which is called nectar, and which is hidden

in the heart of each flower.

Another thing that Peter didn't learn until long afterward is that the colored parts which look like petals are not petals but are what are called sepals. The Hepatica has no true petals.

Finally Peter decided that nothing more was to be learned by sitting there, and once more he started for the dear Old Briar-patch, lipperty-lipperty-lip. He had so much to tell Mrs. Peter that it seemed to him he couldn't get home soon enough. "Flowers are wonderful. They truly are wonderful," thought Peter, as he scampered along. "I didn't know they were interesting at all. But they are, and I am going to find out all I can about as many of them as I can. Here it is early March and winter not yet really gone, and already I have found two kinds of flowers in bloom. I wonder what the next one will be."

It was a week before Peter got back to that hillside in the Green Forest. By that time all the snow had melted. That first brave little Hepatica had faded, but here and there all over that hillside were other little groups of Hepaticas. And Peter found that what Tommy Tit had told him was true; some were pink, and some were white, and some were a lavender which was almost blue, and some were sweet-scented, and some had no scent at all. But all were beautiful. "I love them," whispered Peter to himself. "I just love them. Now I know that sweet Mistress Spring is almost here."

Peter climbed up to the top of the hill. It was rocky up there. Peter likes to climb among the rocks sometimes. He didn't think of flowers up there, and so when he discovered a little cluster of tiny white, five-pointed, starlike flowers with yellow centers, growing, as it seemed, out of the very rock on which he sat, it is a question whether he was more surprised than delighted.

The stem was about four inches high and Peter looked at once to see if it also were covered with tiny hairs. It was. What is more, those tiny hairs were somewhat sticky. The stems sprang from the middle of a rosette of small, smooth, oval leaves with scalloped edges growing very close to the ground. It was then that he discovered that this little plant was not growing out of the rock, as at first glance it had seemed to be. There was a little crack in the rock filled with earth, and it was out of this that

the plant was growing.

Peter looked all about. "I wish Tommy Tit was here," said he right out loud.

"Why?" demanded a very small voice. "I don't wish he was here."

Peter looked this way and that way, but could see no one.

"Where are you?" he demanded somewhat crossly. Just then he happened to glance at that cluster of tiny flowers. There, at work getting nectar from them, was a very small member of the Bee family. "Oh, excuse me!" exclaimed Peter.

The little Bee kept right on working. "What do you want of Tommy Tit?" she demanded.

"I want him to tell me what kind of a plant this is," replied Peter.

"It's the Saxifrage, the Early Saxifrage.<sup>3</sup> I thought everybody knew Saxifrage when they saw it," snapped the little Bee, keeping right on with her work.

"Isn't this a queer place for it to be growing?" asked Peter rather timidly.

"No, it isn't," retorted the little Bee. "It would be queer for it to be growing anywhere else. The Saxifrage loves the rocks. That is where you will always find it. They do say that people used to believe that it could split rocks and that is how it came by its name. Of course it can't do anything of the kind. That is all nonsense. But it does love to grow in little cracks like this one. That is where I always look for it. I'm very fond of the Saxifrage, because it comes when there are so few other flowers. Now I must go look for some more."

Away flew the busy little Bee and left Peter to think over the new knowledge he had gained.

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3      Look at the picture of the Early Saxifrage on page 14.



EARLY SAXIFRAGE  
*Saxifraga virginiensis*



LARGER MOUSE-EAR CHICKWEED  
*Cerastium vulgatum*