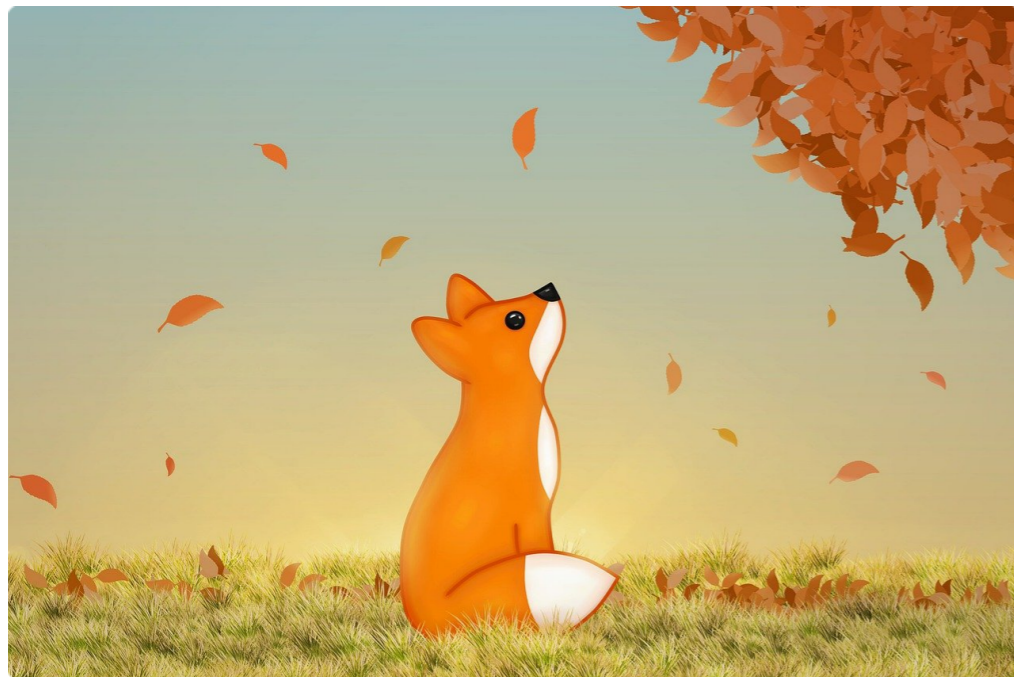


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# Mr. Fox cuts the cottontails



Mr. Fox decided that the only way to get all the wood animals to have a good opinion of him was to give a big dinner, for he had somehow got rather a bad name among the animals for being so tricky.

So all day long he went about telling all the animals that when it was dark—quite dark—they were to come to his house and dine. There were the Squirrels and the Coons, the Possums and the Bear family and all the Rabbit family, including Susie Cottontail and her brother Jimmie and many others.

You may be sure that no one ate any dinner that day. They all saved their appetites for Mr. Fox's night-time feast, for, as Mr. Coon expressed it, "we should be very ungrateful to Mr. Fox if we did not take to his dinner our very best appetites; therefore our stomachs should be empty."

As soon as it was dark, so that Mr. Dog could not see them, all the animals began to slowly creep toward Mr. Fox's home. Mr. Fox let them in one by one and was careful to draw all the shades and stuff the keyhole so the light would not show outside if anything happened that Mr. Dog should be roaming through the woods.

At last all the animals but Jimmie and Susie Cottontail were there, and everyone began to wonder where they could be and what kept them so late.

It happened that Jimmie and Susie Cottontail were not at all sure they would enjoy Mr. Fox's dinner, and they had run over to the farm on the hill to have a dinner of some garden stuff of which they were fond.

They had stayed longer than they had intended, and when they started for Mr. Fox's house were not as cautious as they usually were about throwing Mr. Dog off their track. Just as they were entering the wood who should come bounding after them but Mr. Dog, who had followed them from the farm, and off ran Jimmie and Susie Cottontail looking for a hole in which to hide.

Mr. Fox's house was the first refuge they came to, and in the door they burst, with Mr. Dog at their heels. Of course there was no dinner and the party was spoiled, for everybody ran, and Mr. Dog, not knowing which one to chase when he saw so many, went home without having caught anyone.

The next day Mr. Fox was talking with his friend, Mr. Coon. "No one of the animals would have gotten us into such a fix but those Cottontails," he said.

"In the first place, their ears are so short they never heard quickly like some others of that family, and then those tails—why they can be seen for yards and yards. I should have known better than to ask them. And everyone knows they have no sense. The Cottontails run into the first opening they see and never keep on running as their cousins do. I have had my lesson. I shall cut them off my visiting list from now on."

And that is the reason the Cottontail family are never invited to any dinners that the wood folk give—their trails can be too easily followed by Mr. Dog.

