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The Uninvited Guests

Abbie Phillips Walker

Mr. Crow was good and angry when he found out that there was a dinner to be held at the Four-Footed Club, and he was not invited.

"I don't care if I have only two feet. That ought not to keep me from getting an invitation even if I cannot become a member," said Mr. Crow, as he hopped about on the ground, picking at worms and bugs with an unusually hard peck.

"What is a leg or two among friends, I should like to know, and if I have not been a friend more than once to most of those four-footed fellows, I should like very much to be told what a friend really is.

"More than once I have cawed at Mr. Rabbit when he was in the garden up at Mr. Man's when I saw, a long way off, Mr. Dog coming, and then there is Mr. Fox. I told him where there was a nice fat hen on the ground all ready for him to eat.

"Of course I was not to blame that the hen was fixed with something that made Mr. Fox sick and nearly killed him, the kindness was just the same on my part.

"Then there is Mr. Raccoon. Didn't I tell him where the sugar cane was last year and he said himself he never ate better. Of course, I found out for sure when he went in the field that the man who stood there was only a scarecrow, but I did Mr. Raccoon a kindness just the same.

"And now they all are having a dinner and have not invited me. There is Woody Chuck; I wonder if he has been invited?"

Woody said he had and that he heard they were to have a fine dinner, which made Mr. Crow more angry than ever.

Up he flew to a limb of a tree, chattering as hard as he could, when he happened to look over in a field and there he saw Mrs. Skunk with her eight children following her one after another.

At first, they did not interest Mr. Crow at all, and then he suddenly thought of something. "I wonder if I could work that," he said. "That would let me pay off two debts at once. I believe I will try it, anyway."



Off he fled across the road to where Mrs. Skunk was walking with her young children. "How do you do, Mrs. Skunk? What a fine lot of children you have this year," he said.

Mr. Crow was up so high that he did not mind startling Mrs. Skunk, and he did scare her at first, but she soon saw who it was and stopped to speak to him.

"Oh, Mrs. Skunk," said Mr. Crow, "I have been selected to invite all the guests for the dinner tonight at the Four-Footed Club in the woods, and they wished me particularly to invite you and bring all of your children, and of course your husband as well!"

Mrs. Skunk was very much pleased when she heard this, for she and her husband did not often receive a welcome from the other woodfolk when they went near their homes.

"Well, now, that is kind of them," she said. "Tell them we will be there early."

"I would not go too early, my dear Mrs. Skunk," said sly Mr. Crow. "You know that most of those animals do not like to get out until it is very dark, so if I were you, I would not go until late."

Mrs. Skunk said she would do just as he said, for she did not go about much these days and did not know just how things should be done. Mr. Crow flew away to the woods before he had a good laugh over what he had done, for well he knew that Mrs. Skunk or any of her family would be far from welcome at the Four-Footed Club dinner that night.

"I guess they will wish they had asked a certain party with only two feet," he said, as he hopped about with glee at the thought of what might happen.

"Now all I have to do is to watch, and when they are all at the table, and the Skunk family is there too, I will fly over to the farm and see if I can find Mr. Dog.

"I do not dislike him, as a rule, but this particular Mr. Dog has bothered me a lot this year. Now, why should he go out into the cornfield and bark so when I fly down to pick up a bit of corn; I mean, pick up worms.

"Yes, he must be paid off, and if everything works well, I will break up that old club for the four-footed fellows and give Mr. Dog such a punishment he will not be thinking about me or the corn for several days at least."

That night Mr. Crow had to pick himself to keep awake until the guests began to arrive at the dinner at the Four-Footed Club, but he did keep awake, and after a while, the dinner began. They were all sitting around the table eating when Mr. Skunk and his wife, followed by their children, arrived. "Why, we are late," said Mr. Skunk, as they went in. "We understood that your dinner did not begin until quite late. Mr. Crow told us not to come early."

All the four-footed members stood up and looked in astonishment as the undesirable guests filed in to the club, but not one of them dared show by word or act that the guests were not welcome. "Don't get them angry for the world," whispered Mr. Fox to the ones nearest him.

"Come right in and sit down," said Mr. Fox, in his smoothest tone of voice. "We will have a table fixed for you at the other end of the room. You see that careless Mr. Crow, who invited you, told us you could not come."

But Mr. Skunk said he would not think of making all that trouble, and that they could squeeze in between the other guests just as well as not. They did not at all mind sitting close, and the children were so small they could be tucked in anywhere.

All seemed to have lost their appetites after the Skunk family arrived until Mrs. Skunk, looking across, said: "I am afraid we are not wanted. Everyone seems to have stopped eating and no one has said a word."

"Oh, my dear madam, we are delighted to see you all!" said all the club members and the other guests, and up they all jumped and began to laugh and talk as hard and fast as they could for fear she would be spiteful, for well they all knew she could be.

Mr. Crow heard all this from under the windowsill where he stood. He knew that Mr. Fox suspected him, and he was glad of that, for he wanted him to know he was the one who spoiled the dinner for the club.

Then off he flew to Mr. Dog and told him about the animals. "You could have a lot of fun if you went over now. The moon is bright enough for you to see, and they will never think of you at this time of night. My, I just bet they will run some!"

This was more than Mr. Dog could think about and stay at home; so over the fields to the woods, he ran and right up to the clubhouse door before anyone heard him.

With a bound and a bark, he jumped into the midst, and everybody ran—that is, everybody but the Skunk family. They went right on eating as if nothing had happened. Mr. Dog thought that was funny. He could scare every animal he had ever barked at, so he barked louder and then jumped at one of the little Skunks.

Quick as a wink, Mr. and Mrs. Skunk used their ever-ready weapon, and straight into the eyes and face of Mr. Dog, and before he could stop laughing, Mr. Crow, from the windowsill, saw Mr. Dog running as if he thought some dreadful thing was after him.

Mr. Crow did not stay either; he flew right away from that part of the woods to a

tree far away, but before he tucked his head under his wing, he said to himself, "Paid off Mr. Dog and the Four-Footed Club, too. I certainly managed matters well this time.

"I have never understood the saying about killing two birds with one stone. It has always sounded very cruel to me, but tonight I think I understand it. I paid off two debts with one night's work, for that Club won't meet again for many a day; not in that place at any rate, and Mr. Dog will be very busy, and if I am not much mistaken his meals will all be served a long way from the farmhouse. Oh! but I am a clever fellow, I am."

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