



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Tricky Red Fox

Abbie Phillips Walker

It had been a long and cold winter for the woods folk, and while they did not really suffer, they were pretty lean-looking by early spring. Mr. Bear did not suffer, of course, because he was asleep, but Reddy Fox did not have as good a winter as he liked, and besides that, he knew he was not handsome to behold when he was thin.

One morning, he came out of his door and stretched himself in the sun, looking up and down the road to see if he could see anything of a stray goose or chicken that might have wandered away from the hilltop farm.

But the woods were as still as could be, with not an animal in sight, and Mr. Fox tried to think of someone of his friends that might have found a duck or fat hen the night before where he could go for breakfast. He trotted over to Billy Possum's house, but Billy had the toothache and was in bed.

Then Reddy went to old Mr. Raccoon's house, but he was so old he had to depend on his son Tom Raccoon for his food, and when Tom saw Reddy, he knew what he was after and told Reddy Fox that he had come to the wrong place to get his breakfast.

"Get up early, as I do, and get it yourself," said Tom Raccoon, giving the door a bang right in the face of Reddy Fox.

"He is a very bad-mannered fellow," said Reddy Fox, as he trotted away.

"He is a sly, greedy fellow," said Tom Raccoon to his father, "but he can't work any of his tricks on me. Let him go over the hill to the farm as I have to."

"Oh, this is a hard, cold wood to live in," said Reddy Fox. "I wish someone would give a dinner and invite me to dine with him."

Reddy Fox had an idea right then. He stopped and smiled, and then he trotted off to Mr. Bear's house deep in the woods.

He listened at the door, but all was still; then he went to the pantry window and carefully tried to lift the sash. It was fastened on the inside, and Reddy smiled very broadly. "He has a full pantry, or it would not be so securely locked," he said.



Reddy Fox went to a little pool and took a long drink of water to brace himself for his run, and then over the hill, he went to the farm, and when he came back, he had a nice fat pig over his shoulder.

In front of Mr. Bear's house, he stopped and listened at the door, yet he could hear Mr. Bear grunting and stretching as if he were awaking from his long winter's nap.

"Mr. Bear! Mr. Bear!" called Reddy Fox.

Mr. Bear opened the door, and when he saw the fat pig, he smiled.

"How do you feel after your nap?" asked Reddy, and without waiting for a reply, he said: "All the wood folk want to have a real sociable time this spring, and each one is going to give a dinner. We have been waiting for you to wake up. I am going to give one tonight, and Mr. Raccoon tomorrow night, and Mr. Possum the night after, and Mr. Squirrel the night after that, and Jack Rabbit the night after that, and-"

"Where do I come in?" asked Mr. Bear. "I want to give a dinner, but if I wait until the night after all the others have one, all the good things in my pantry will spoil; they will not keep a day after I get up in the spring."

"Oh, well," said Reddy Fox, "if you feel that way about it, why not give one right off? I'll put this pig in your cellar, and you take the left path, and I'll take the right one through the woods, and in a short time, we will have all the wood folk here."

Mr. Bear said that would just suit him, and he would take a piece of pie in his hand to eat as he went along, for he was pretty hungry, not having eaten anything all winter.

Off they started, but Reddy Fox went only a short distance, and then he hid behind a tree until Mr. Bear was out of sight.

Back to Mr. Bear's house went Reddy Fox and into the pantry, and it didn't take him long to eat all the good things he found on the shelves — that is, all his

stomach could hold; then he took a basket and filled that full of Mr. Bear's preserves and cake and pies, and off he went, leaving Mr. Bear's pantry quite bare.

"I'll leave the pig for Mr. Bear," he said. "I don't care for pigs, anyway, unless I cannot get anything else, and I couldn't this morning."

By and by, Mr. Bear returned, and with him all the animals that lived along the path at the left; they waited and waited for Reddy Fox and the animals along the path at the right through the woods, but no one came.

"We can set the table, anyway," said Mr. Bear at last, but when he saw the empty shelves in the pantry, he ran back to the waiting guests with a loud growl.

"You might have known Reddy Fox was up to something," said Tom Raccoon. "You will never see him again unless you go to his house when he does not expect you, and for some time, he will be on the lookout for you."

"There isn't a thing to eat in the woods. It is too early for the berries, and the rest of us have eaten all our winter supply," said Mr. Squirrel.

Then Mr. Bear thought of the pig in the cellar. "We can have roast pig," he said, running down the cellar steps.

But the pig had rooted its way out and run off home, and Mr. Bear came back growling very angrily.

"There is but one way to get even with Reddy Fox," said Tom Raccoon, "and that is to cut him off our visiting-list. It will be good weather soon, and we all will have plenty to eat; then we will give some fine dinners and not invite Reddy Fox or even speak to him."

And that was just what happened to Reddy Fox. All the wood folk stopped speaking to him, and no one would let him in when he called to see them, and all summer he sat alone on his steps while the rest of the animals held dinner parties and had a good time.

"I guess, after all, it does not pay to be tricky with your friends," said Reddy one night. "I wish I had not eaten all Mr. Bear's good things this spring. I would rather have gone hungry than to have lost all my friends."

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