

The Adventures of Reddy Fox

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I. Granny Fox Gives Reddy a Scare

Reddy Fox lived with Granny Fox. You see, Reddy was one of a large family, so large that Mother Fox had hard work to feed so many hungry little mouths and so she had let Reddy go to live with old Granny Fox. Granny Fox was the wisest, slyest, smartest fox in all the country round, and now that Reddy had grown so big, she thought it about time that he began to learn the things that every fox should know. So every day she took him hunting with her and taught him all the things that she had learned about hunting: about how to steal Farmer Brown's chickens without awakening Bowser the Hound, and all about the thousand and one ways of fooling a dog which she had learned.

This morning Granny Fox had taken Reddy across the Green Meadows, up through the Green Forest, and over to the railroad track. Reddy had never been there before and he didn't know just what to make of it. Granny trotted ahead until they came to a long bridge. Then she stopped.

"Come here, Reddy, and look down," she commanded.

Reddy did as he was told, but a glance down made him giddy, so giddy that he nearly fell. Granny Fox grinned.

"Come across," said she, and ran lightly across to the other side.

But Reddy Fox was afraid. Yes, Sir, he was afraid to take one step on the long bridge. He was afraid that he would fall through into the water or onto the cruel rocks below. Granny Fox ran back to where Reddy sat.

"For shame, Reddy Fox!" said she. "What are you afraid of? Just don't look down and you will be safe enough. Now come along over with me."

But Reddy Fox hung back and begged to go home and whimpered. Suddenly Granny Fox sprang to her feet, as if in great fright. "Bowser the Hound! Come, Reddy, come!" she cried, and started across the bridge as fast as she could go.

Reddy didn't stop to look or to think. His one idea was to get away from Bowser the Hound. "Wait, Granny! Wait!" he cried, and started after her as fast as he could run. He was in the middle of the bridge before he remembered it at all. When he was at last safely across, it was to find old Granny Fox sitting down laughing at him. Then for the first time Reddy looked behind him to see where Bowser the Hound might be. He was nowhere to be seen. Could he have fallen off the bridge?

"Where is Bowser the Hound?" cried Reddy.

"Home in Farmer Brown's dooryard," replied Granny Fox dryly. Reddy stared at her for a minute. Then he began to understand that Granny Fox had simply scared him into running across the bridge. Reddy felt very cheap, very cheap indeed. "Now we'll run back again," said Granny Fox. And this time Reddy did.

II. Granny Shows Reddy a Trick

Every day Granny Fox led Reddy Fox over to the long railroad bridge and made him run back and forth across it until he had no fear of it whatever. At first it had made him dizzy, but now he could run across at the top of his speed and not mind it in the least. "I don't see what good it does to be able to run across a bridge; anyone can do that!" exclaimed Reddy one day.

Granny Fox smiled. "Do you remember the first time you tried to do it?" she asked.

Reddy hung his head. Of course he remembered--remembered that Granny had had to scare him into crossing that first time.

Suddenly Granny Fox lifted her head. "Hark!" she exclaimed.

Reddy pricked up his sharp, pointed ears. Way off back, in the direction from which they had come, they heard the baying of a dog. It wasn't the voice of Bowser the Hound but of a younger dog. Granny listened for a few minutes. The voice of the dog grew louder as it drew nearer.

"He certainly is following our track," said Granny Fox. "Now, Reddy, you run across the bridge and watch from the top of the little hill over there. Perhaps I can show you a trick that will teach you why I have made you learn to run across the bridge."

Reddy trotted across the long bridge and up to the top of the hill, as Granny had told him to. Then he sat down to watch. Granny trotted out in the middle of a field and sat down. Pretty soon a young hound broke out of the bushes, his nose in Granny's track. Then he looked up and saw her, and his voice grew still more savage and eager. Granny Fox started to run as soon as she was sure that the hound had seen her, but she did not run very fast. Reddy did not know what to make of it, for Granny seemed simply to be playing with the hound and not really trying to get away from him at all. Pretty soon Reddy heard another sound. It was a long, low rumble. Then there was a distant whistle. It was a train.

Granny heard it, too. As she ran, she began to work back toward the long bridge. The train was in sight now. Suddenly Granny Fox started across the bridge so fast that she looked like a little red streak. The dog was close at her heels when she started and he was so eager to catch her that he didn't see either the bridge or the train. But he couldn't begin to run as fast as Granny Fox. Oh, my, no! When she had reached the other side, he wasn't halfway across, and right behind him, whistling for him to get out of the way, was the train.

The hound gave one frightened yelp, and then he did the only thing he could do; he leaped down, down into the swift water below, and the last Reddy saw of him he was frantically trying to swim ashore.

"Now you know why I wanted you to learn to cross a bridge; it's a very nice way of getting rid of dogs," said Granny Fox, as she climbed up beside Reddy.

III. Bowser the Hound Isn't Fooled

Reddy Fox had been taught so much by Granny Fox that he began to feel very wise and very important. Reddy is naturally smart and he had been very quick to learn the tricks that old Granny Fox had taught him. But Reddy Fox is a boaster. Every day he swaggered about on the Green Meadows and bragged how smart he was. Blacky the Crow grew tired of Reddy's boasting.

"If you're so smart, what is the reason you always keep out of sight of Bowser the Hound?" asked Blacky. "For my part, I don't believe that you are smart enough to fool him."

A lot of little meadow people heard Blacky say this, and Reddy knew it. He also knew that if he didn't prove Blacky in the wrong he would be laughed at forever after. Suddenly he remembered the trick that Granny Fox had played on the young hound at the railroad bridge. Why not play the same trick on Bowser and invite Blacky the Crow to see him do it? He would.

"If you will be over at the railroad bridge when the train comes this afternoon, I'll show you how easy it is to fool Bowser the Hound," said Reddy.

Blacky agreed to be there, and Reddy started off to find out where Bowser was. Blacky told everyone he met how Reddy Fox had promised to fool Bowser

Blacky the Crow was on hand promptly that afternoon and with him came his cousin, Sammy Jay. Presently they saw Reddy Fox hurrying across the fields,

and behind him in full cry came Bowser the Hound. Just as old Granny Fox had done with the young hound, Reddy allowed Bowser to get very near him and then, as the train came roaring along, he raced across the long bridge just ahead of it. He had thought that Bowser would be so intent on catching him that he would not notice the train until he was on the bridge and it was too late, as had been the case with the young hound. Then Bowser would have to jump down into the swift river or be run over. As soon as Reddy was across the bridge, he jumped off the track and turned to see what would happen to Bowser the Hound. The train was halfway across the bridge, but Bowser was nowhere to be seen. He must have jumped already. Reddy sat down and grinned in the most self-satisfied way.

The long train roared past, and Reddy closed his eyes to shut out the dust and smoke. When he opened them again, he looked right into the wide-open mouth of Bowser the Hound, who was not ten feet away.

"Did you think you could fool me with that old trick?" roared Bowser.

Reddy didn't stop to make reply; he just started off at the top of his speed, a badly frightened little fox.

You see, Bowser the Hound knew all about that trick and he had just waited until the train had passed and then had run across the bridge right behind it.

And as Reddy Fox, out of breath and tired, ran to seek the aid of Granny Fox in getting rid of Bowser the Hound, he heard a sound that made him grind his teeth.

"Haw, haw, haw! How smart we are!"

It was Blacky the Crow.

IV. Reddy Fox Grows Bold

Reddy Fox was growing bold. Everybody said so, and what everybody says must be so. Reddy Fox had always been very sly and not bold at all. The truth is Reddy Fox had so many times fooled Bowser the Hound and Farmer Brown's boy that he had begun to think himself very smart indeed. He had really fooled himself. Yes, Sir, Reddy Fox had fooled himself. He thought himself so smart that nobody could fool him.

Now it is one of the worst habits in the world to think too much of one's self. And Reddy Fox had the habit. Oh, my, yes! Reddy Fox certainly did have the habit! When anyone mentioned Bowser the Hound, Reddy would turn up his nose and say: "Pooh! It's the easiest thing in the world to fool him."

You see, he had forgotten all about the time Bowser had fooled him at the railroad bridge.

Whenever Reddy saw Farmer Brown's boy he would say with the greatest scorn: "Who's afraid of him? Not I!"

So as Reddy Fox thought more and more of his own smartness, he grew bolder and bolder. Almost every night he visited Farmer Brown's henyard. Farmer Brown set traps all around the yard, but Reddy always found them and kept out of them. It got so that Unc' Billy Possum and Jimmy Skunk didn't dare go to the henhouse for eggs any more, for fear that they would get into one of the traps set for Reddy Fox. Of course they missed those fresh eggs and of course they blamed Reddy Fox.

"Never mind," said Jimmy Skunk, scowling down on the Green Meadows where Reddy Fox was taking a sun bath, "Farmer Brown's boy will get him yet! I hope he does!" Jimmy said this a little spitefully and just as if he really meant it.

Now when people think that they are very, very smart, they like to show off. You know it isn't any fun at all to feel smart unless others can see how smart you are.

So Reddy Fox, just to show off, grew very bold, very bold indeed. He actually went up to Farmer Brown's henyard in broad daylight, and almost under the nose of Bowser the Hound he caught the pet chicken of Farmer Brown's boy. 'Ol Mistah Buzzard, sailing overhead high up in the blue, blue sky, saw Reddy Fox and shook his bald head:

"Ah see Trouble on the way;
Yes, Ah do! Yes, Ah do!
Hope it ain't a-gwine to stay;
Yes, Ah do! Yes, Ah do!
Trouble am a spry ol' man,
Bound to find yo' if he can;
If he finds yo' bound to stick.
When Ah sees him, Ah runs quick!
Yes, Ah do! Yes, Ah do!"

But Reddy Fox thought himself so smart that it seemed as if he really were hunting for Ol' Mr. Trouble. And when he caught the pet chicken of Farmer Brown's boy, Ol' Mr. Trouble was right at his heels.

V. Reddy Grows Careless

Ol' Mistah Buzzard was right. Trouble was right at the heels of Reddy Fox, although Reddy wouldn't have believed it if he had been told. He had stolen that plump pet chicken of Farmer Brown's boy for no reason under the sun but to show off. He wanted everyone to know how bold he was. He thought himself so smart that he could do just exactly what he pleased and no one could stop him. He liked to strut around through the Green Forest and over the Green Meadows and brag about what he had done and what he could do.

Now people who brag and boast and who like to show off are almost sure to come to grief. And when they do, very few people are sorry for them. None of the

little meadow and forest people liked Reddy Fox, anyway, and they were getting so tired of his boasting that they just ached to see him get into trouble. Yes, Sir, they just ached to see Reddy get into trouble.

Peter Rabbit, happy-go-lucky Peter Rabbit, shook his head gravely when he heard how Reddy had stolen that pet chicken of Farmer Brown's boy, and was boasting about it to everyone.

"Reddy Fox is getting so puffed up that pretty soon he won't be able to see his own feet," said Peter Rabbit.

"Well, what if he doesn't?" demanded Jimmy Skunk.

Peter looked at Jimmy in disgust:

"He comes to grief, however fleet,
Who doesn't watch his flying feet.

"Jimmy Skunk, if you didn't have that little bag of scent that everybody is afraid of, you would be a lot more careful where you step," replied Peter. "If Reddy doesn't watch out, someday he'll step right into a trap.

Jimmy Skunk chuckled. "I wish he would!" said he.

Now when Farmer Brown's boy heard about the boldness of Reddy Fox, he shut his mouth tight in a way that was unpleasant to see and reached for his gun. "I can't afford to raise chickens to feed foxes!" said he. Then he whistled for Bowser the Hound, and together they started out. It wasn't long before Bowser found Reddy's tracks.

"Bow, wow, wow, wow!" roared Bowser the Hound.

Reddy Fox, taking a nap on the edge of the Green Forest, heard Bowser's big, deep voice. He pricked up his ears, then he grinned. "I feel just like a good run today," said he, and trotted off along the Crooked Little Path down the hill.

Now this was a beautiful summer day and Reddy knew that in summer men and boys seldom hunt foxes. "It's only Bowser the Hound," thought Reddy, "and when I've had a good run, I'll play a trick on him so that he will lose my track." So Reddy didn't use his eyes as he should have done. You see, he thought himself so smart that he had grown careless. Yes, Sir, Reddy Fox had grown careless. He kept looking back to see where Bowser the Hound was, but didn't look around to make sure that no other danger was near.

Ol' Mistah Buzzard, sailing round and round, way up in the blue, blue sky, could see everything going on down below. He could see Reddy Fox running along the edge of the Green Forest and every few minutes stopping to chuckle and listen to Bowser the Hound trying to pick out the trail Reddy had made so hard to follow by his twists and turns. And he saw something else, did Ol' Mistah Buzzard. It looked to him very much like the barrel of a gun sticking out from behind an old tree just ahead of Reddy.

"Ah reckon it's just like Ah said: Reddy Fox is gwine to meet trouble right smart soon," muttered Ol' Mistah Buzzard.

VI. Drummer the Woodpecker Drums in Vain

Once upon a time, before he had grown to think himself so very, very smart, Reddy Fox would never, never have thought of running without watching out in every direction. He would have seen that thing that looked like the barrel of a gun sticking out from behind the old tree toward which he was running, and he would have been very suspicious, very suspicious indeed. But now all Reddy could think of was what a splendid chance he had to show all the little meadow and forest people what a bold, smart fellow he was.

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