

The Fox, the Goose and the Corn

By ANN AESOP



FARMER BROWN found it a part of his business that day to carry across the river some of his possessions, which possessions were a fox, a goose, and a basket of shelled corn.

On arriving at the place on the bank, from which he must launch, he found the little boat, or canoe, moored there altogether inadequate for his needs. He plainly saw that he and his chattels must go over in installments of two, maybe three at a time; but not possibly could the little craft convey them all at once.

"How shall I manage it?" he asked himself. "I might take the goose over first and leave her, and then come back for the fox or corn. But if I take the corn over next, when I leave it there to come back for the fox, the goose will eat it all up; and on the other hand if I take the fox and leave him with the goose he will eat the goose up. Whatever am I to do?"

Farmer Brown was not overly clever, as may be seen, nor overly industrious as will appear, when it is told of him, that he deliberately lighted his pipe and sat down on a log nearby to smoke as he thought the matter over.

While he sat pulling at his pipe, looking dreamily toward the other side of the river, Mr. Fox improved his opportunity to become better acquainted



with Miss Goose. He had designs on Miss Goose—she might answer his purpose in more ways than one. He went as close to her as his tether would allow.

"A beautiful morning we have for our voyage, Miss Goose, a beautiful morning. I'm glad it answers Farmer Brown's purpose to take us on this little journey to-day. The weather, especially when one rides in an open boat, has so much to do with one's enjoyment of an outing."

"Yes," answered Miss Goose, but quite icily, for, besides never having met Mr. Fox before this morning—and she had been brought up with strict ideas of etiquette—there were, she recalled, traditions in her family concerning the Fox family that gave her pause. She did not know how long ago, or in what manner, the enmity had been generated but she knew that the relations between the two families had always been strained. She could not recall having ever seen a Fox at any of the social functions at her home: the Ducks, the

Storks, the Pigeons and the Flamingos had been present at them but never a Fox. Nor could she remember hearing her parents speak of having been among those who dined with the Foxes in their holes.

"I met a young friend of yours a little while back," said Mr. Fox, ignoring the frostiness of Miss Goose's demeanor, "Mr. Gray Gander, of Buxton Grange."

Mr. Fox was not oblivious of the smile that came to Miss Goose's face. He seemed not to be looking at her, but out of the corner of his eye he saw that smile.

"Yes," he continued, following up his advantage, "he is as fine a young gander as I ever saw. I got well acquainted with him on my visits to the grange. Indeed our acquaintance ripened into an intimacy that we both enjoyed. He is a gander of larger scope, wider range of intelligence than any I have ever met. His conversation shows that he has seen much and thought more. We spoke frankly of the enmity between our forbears and pronounced it ridiculous. He said he would trust himself with me anywhere. In fact we had an engagement to take a moonlight stroll together but something interfered. (It was Mrs. Buxton's bull-dog that interfered, but Mr. Fox didn't think it wise to tell this.)

"Oh, he would not have been afraid," put in little Miss Goose, "he's as brave as he can be."

"Of course he is. And then too," continued Mr. Fox, who saw that he had Miss Goose's undivided attention and noted also the pleased look in her eyes, "Young Gander has the best of taste. I do not care to throw bouquets to myself, but the fact that he accepted me as a warm friend shows there is something in me worth while; and when he pays especial attention to one of the fair sex you may set it down in your memorandum book that the fair recipient is a peach."

"Did he pay attention to any one of the fair sex—especially?" asked Miss Goose.

Miss Goose tried to ask this in an unconcerned way but her voice trembled so that it sounded for all the world like the quack of a gosling.

"No, indeed. To be frank with you—though I hate to betray his confidence—he takes very little interest in any of the fair sex about him, and talks all the time about you."

"Me!"

"Yes, you. He says you were brought up on the same pond and liked each other when you were little and that he was going to run off some night and hunt you up."

"I did like him," simpered Miss Goose, "but I got mad at him one day and quit speaking to him for a while, but I'd like to see him again."

"Is that the way the affair now stands? Well, if I ever get this string from around my ankle, I'll go as straight to him as my legs can carry me. If there is anything I do like it is to patch up differences between estranged friends and to carry messages for sweethearts."

"I wish you could get to him and—take him my—my—love."

"Oh, it is hard to be fettered."

"If I were close enough to you I'd pick that string to pieces so you could go free."

"Thank you, thank you, my dear Miss Goose, for even though I should have to take the will for the deed it is such a pleasure to me to know you have the will to help me. It means a great deal to me to feel assured that you ignore the unjust reflections that have been made on me and that you give me instead of hate your friendship."

Mr. Fox made a most courtly bow as he delivered himself of these sentiments.

"I'm in trouble now," he continued after a little silence, "but from no fault of my own. No blame attaches to me in the matter though as you see I'm suffering as if guilty. Mr. Brown here associates me with an ugly piece of work. My brush got caught in a trap that was in my path as I was going home from a little club meeting that we young fellows had one night last week, and it seems that that very night some raccoon or other disreputable marauder made a predatory visit to his hen house, and he thought my unhappy plight



was proof conclusive of complicity, whereas it was a mere coincidence."

"Of course, of course," agreed Miss Goose.

"I must own up to trespassing, in that I was going across his field, instead of keeping to the highway. But to have gone the public route would have made the journey to my hole a great deal longer."

"Why of course you wanted to make that short cut. I can understand that. Do you suppose if we were going to the Park Lake I'd fly around by the road and not over the fields? I wish you could explain it to Farmer Brown," she added. "He might see his injustice."

"It's not worth while to try. Farmer Brown is a boorish lout with very little education, and knows nothing of the Fox language. He is thoroughly ignorant of latin and that is the dialect nearest akin to my own. In fact my name is a latin one—Vulpes. The world over, scholars call me Vulpes. I'm of very ancient lineage I assure you and my family is classic; their exploits were published in the most elegant vernacular of the age—the Greek, and the crests and coats of arms we adorn are more than I can tell you."

"But why do you not tell Mr. Hound and Mr. Collie about it. They might explain it to Farmer Brown—they seem to be such friends. You rarely ever see him without them at his heels."

"Well, yes"—Here Mr. Fox turned his face away to make a broad, broad grin. He wished some of his running mates were there then to see that grin!

"Well," he continued after a little pause, "hardly think Mr. Hound and Mr. Collie could themselves understand—stupid and unlearned as they are. Anyway they are not at all to my taste, with their coarse common ways, yelping and howling, and running with their noses down to the ground trying to smell the tracks made by their betters. No, it would be a cold day in June that I would get close enough to such canille as to send by their messages to Farmer Brown. I'm nothing if I'm not aristocratic. I'll not parley with dogs. Not in Captivity before condescension!"

As Mr. Fox said this he held his head up and dilated his nostrils in a way which he intended should impress Miss Goose with his importance. It did; and she began to think a great honor had been conferred on her in that she had been placed—even though for a short while—with the scion of such a distinguished family. She was young and had given little thought to genealogies and coats of arms, but here was somebody who had his own pedigree, maybe hers too, at his tongues' end. She looked down quite abashed, for she knew no claim the Goose family held to distinction, saving