

THE TALE OF SLY TOD

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TOD AT HOME

Tod was a sly old fox. He had a fine coat of thick hair, which was more red than brown. His tail was red too, with a white tip. And oh, how bushy and long it was!

‘Ha! Ha!’ Tod used to say. “The men who have been out on the hunt for me many a time would like to have my tail, I know. If their dogs could catch me and kill me, those men would cut off my tail and keep it to look at.

‘But I do not mean to let the men catch me. No, no! I’m much too sly for that. I know all their tricks, and the tricks of their dogs as well.’

Tod’s eyes were very quick and bright, and his nose and ears had sharp points. He had strong paws with which he was able to dig very well.

He had dug his house in the ground, in a steep bank by the side of a brook. Big trees grew all around, and Tod’s hole was just at



the root of one of these trees. A thick bush hid the front of the hole.

Men often went out with their dogs to hunt Tod, for he did a lot of harm in the farm-yards round about. He used to go into the yards when it was dark, to find a nice plump hen or a goose for his supper.

So you may be sure that the farmers did not like him at all. One of these days we will catch him see if we don't!' said they.

A FINE MEAL

Tod did not often go out in the day-time to find his food. 'The best time for me is when it is dark,' he used to say. 'Then I am not seen, but I can see quite well.'

So late one day off he set for a farmyard which he knew quite well.

I am sure to find a few nice eggs here,' he said to himself. 'Old Cluck, the black hen, will have laid some, I know.'

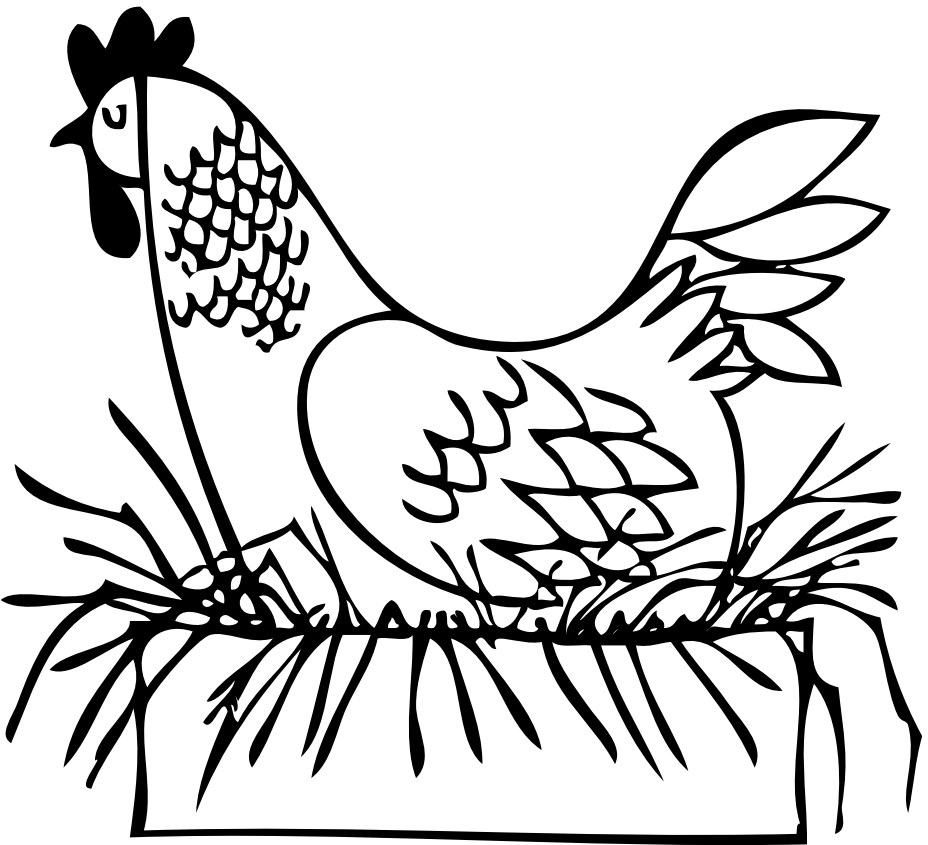
He crept up to the henhouse without the least sound. Then he had a peep through the wee window at the side. There, to his great joy, sat Cluck on her eggs.

I must not drive her off the nest,' thought Tod. 'For if I do, the silly old thing will screech and flutter, and make no end of a fuss. Then the farmer's wife will come out, and there will be a fine to-do, I must get Cluck off the eggs, if I can, but, all the same, she must not see me.'

He soon saw what to do. On a low wall

near by stood a small bowl made of wood. It held some grain which was the hen's food. Very quietly Tod got on top of the wall, and gave the bowl a push with his nose. Down it fell on the ground, and the grain was all spilt.

Tod crept along the wall like a cat, until he was a short way off. Then he lay down flat, with his nose on his paws, to watch.



By and by he saw old Cluck poke her head out of the hen-house door. She had seen the spilt grain in a heap on the ground. But she had not seen Tod, and she did not see him now, as he lay on the wall.

No one else was about. With a cluck of joy, she poked her head out a little more. She took one step from the door, then two, then three, and at last she was at the grain.

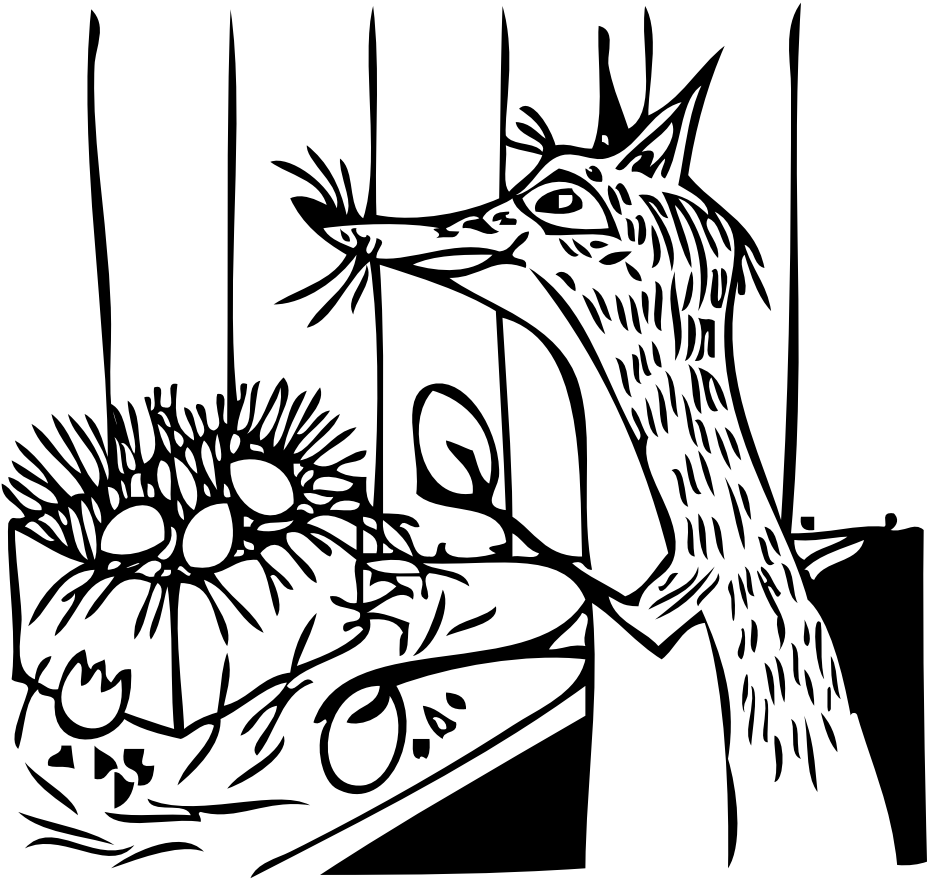
Peck! Peck! she went. 'Cluck! Cluck!' How good it was! She did not often get such a lot of grain all at once, I can tell you!

'Now is my time!' said Sly Tod.

He got off the wall very, very softly, and stole up to the henhouse. Still Cluck did not see him; she was too busy with the grain.

He crept in at the door; and in a snug nook of the hen-house he saw the nest. It had six eggs in it.

With great care, Tod broke the shells with his teeth. Then he was able to suck the eggs inside them, one by one, and each egg



seemed more sweet than the last.

‘I must say that Cluck can lay fine eggs,’ said Tod, as he slunk out of the hen-house when there were no more eggs to suck. He left the farmyard with one more look at the old black hen, who was still at the grain. What a noise she will make when she finds the empty egg-shells!’ he said gleefully.

IN A TRAP

Next day the noise that the farmer's wife made, when she found that Tod had paid them a visit, was even louder than old Cluck's!

The farmer too was extremely angry. 'I mean to set a trap for him this very day. I am quite tired of his tricks, I can tell you.'

That same night Tod went out on the hunt, as he did every night when the sun had set. On his way home he went by a path which he often took. This path lay under the trees of a thick wood, and it led to Tod's hole.

The path was very dark by this time but Tod did not mind the dark a bit. He could see just as well in the dark as he could in the day-time.

But he had to pass through a thick clump of bushes which grew on the path. Just as he did so, there was a click and a snap. Then came a yelp of pain from Tod. He was



held fast by his paw in a trap!

But he did not mind the pain so much as not being able to get free.

‘As soon as the sun gets up,’ he said to himself, ‘some man will come and find the trap, and then there will be an end of me. I must get out of this as soon as I can.’

So he tried to pull his paw out of the trap.

Tug! Tug! How it hurt him! But he would not give up.

The trap had not been set well. It was loose where it should have been tight, and this was most lucky for Tod. Thus, with many a twist and tug, he got his paw free from it at last.

Oh, how glad he was! He began to limp off to his hole in a great hurry. He did not care about the pain. He just wanted to get far away from that horrid trap as soon as he could.

A VISIT TO THE FARM-YARD

For some time after he had been in the trap, Tod did not stir far from his hole. His foot was too sore for him to go a great way from home. But after a while, when the paw was well once more, he made up his mind to go and look for something nice to eat.

‘ I know a farm where I might catch a



a chick or two, or maybe a young goose, which would make me a a good meal,' he said to himself.

Tod got to the farm in a short time, and then he had a good look round him.

All was quiet there. The hens had gone to roost in the hen-house, and the chicks were safe with them. The henhouse had been shut up with great care. The farmer's wife had seen to that!



So Tod had no chance of a meal from there. He had one more look round him. Ah! There, at the far end of the farmyard, was the duckpond.

The moon shone down upon it. It shone upon something else as well—ten plump young geese at the edge of the pond. They sat in a row, with their heads under their wings, fast asleep.

Tod stole up to the geese without a sound and pounced on the first goose he came to. It had hardly time to see him, and no time at all to cry out. With his sharp, strong teeth, he gave it just one nip at the back of the neck. Then there was an end of that goose!

Tod began to eat it at once. How good it was! ‘They are fine young geese,’ said he, with a lick of his lips. And he went on to the next one.

But someone was awake in the farmyard that night. That someone was Dandy, the big farmyard cock. He stood up on the top

bar of the white gate, in the light of the moon. He had a good look all round, and after that he gave his wings a flap or two, and held up his head to crow:

“Cock-a-doodle doo!
Who can this be? Who?
Come and catch him, do!
Cock-a-doodle-doo-o!”

The gate and the pond were quite near to the farm-house. The farmer and his wife were in bed at that hour. But Dandy’s crow woke the farmer out of his sleep with a start.

‘Why is Dandy crowing in the middle of the night?’ said he. ‘What can the matter be?’

He got up and popped his head out of the window. What do you think was the first thing he saw? Why, Sly Tod by the pond among the geese, and only six geese left alive out of the ten!

As quick as a flash, the farmer got his gun. ‘Now I shall have him at last!’ said he

as he took aim.

BANG! The gun went off, Tod made a dive into the pond. He swam across it, and got to the other side, safe and sound.

‘Oh, I have missed him!’ cried the farmer.

And he shut the window in a rage. But Sly Tod ran home over the hill as fast as he could go, and went happily to sleep.



‘TALLY HO!’

One fine day, soon after the sun rose, Tod was coming home to his den. He had been out all the night before, and wanted to reach his den before he was seen. But all at once he came to a full stop. Some far-off sounds made him set up his ears—the loud notes of a horn, and then the deep barks of excited dogs!

‘The dogs have traced me by smell,’ cried Tod. Soon they will catch sight of me, and then we shall have a run! I’ll show them a thing or two, before I have done!

And off he set like the wind. Far behind him raced the men, the horses, and the dogs. The men wore gay pink coats; they tore along at a great speed on their big, fast horses, but the dogs were a long way in front of them.

The dogs, you see, knew very well that they were on the track of Sly Tod, and they did not mean to wait.



Very soon the hunts-men caught sight of Tod, a tiny red speck on the green hillside.

‘The fox!’ cried the first huntsman as soon as he saw him. ‘The fox! Now’s our chance. On, dogs, on! Tally Ho! Tally Ho!’

What a race it was! Tod ran faster than he had ever done in his life, but still the dogs got closer and closer to him. Soon he began to pant as he ran, and his breath grew short. ‘Oh, if I can only reach my den!’ he said to



himself.

On and on he went; on and on came the dogs behind him. Now the first dog was only a little way from him, But ah! there was the brook at last, and the steep bank where his hole was.

How glad Tod felt! He had only just the force left to swim the brook and crawl up the bank to his hole.

But the foremost dog had swum the

brook too. And just as Tod was about to go under the bush that hid his hole, the dog came right up to him.

Then Tod sprang at him, with a snap and a snarl. This gave the dog such a shock that he fell back, and began to roll down the bank to the brook.

As the dog fen back, Tod crept into his den, far under the earth. There he lay down to get some rest after his hard run.



SLY TOD EARNS HIS NAME

Tod did not rest for very long. ‘Those men will do their best to get me out of my den,’ said he. ‘They may try to dig me out. Or, as their big dogs cannot reach me, they may send in a little dog to worry me. I hope they have not been able to find my side door, and stop me from going out that way.’

Off he set in the dark. He went by a path he had made long ago under the earth. For a long time he went down and up, up and down, with many a twist and turn. At last he crept out of a wee hole under a rock. This hole was so small, and so well out of sight, that it would have been hard for even a dog to find.

As he came out, Tod had a good look this way and that. Not a man or a dog was to be seen. They were all at his other door, which was a long way off.

He then gave a little jump. Splash! He was in the water. His side door led right into the



brook!

‘Oh, I was a Sly Tod,’ he said to himself as he swam away, ‘to make a door that no one could find, and so near to the water, too. I have not been seen this time. And the dogs cannot trace me by smell when I am in the water. I will swim as far away as I can, and then I shall be safe.’

Tod was right. After he had swum a long, long way, he got out of the brook. He was

now far from home, but he began to make his way back. And when he got to his den again it was dark, and the men and dogs had all gone.

‘Ah!’ said the huntsmen, as they sat round the fire that night, ‘Tod has been able to play us one more sly trick today, He has earned his name well. Sly Tod he is, and Sly Tod he will be to the end of his days. If we ever catch him, we shall be lucky.’

