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## **Fido's Little Friend.**



## FIDO'S LITTLE FRIEND.

One morning in May Fido sat on the front porch, and he was deep in thought. He was wondering whether the people who were moving into the next house were as cross and unfeeling as the people who had just moved out. He hoped they were not, for the people who had just moved out had never treated Fido with that respect and kindness which Fido believed he was on all occasions entitled to.

"The new-comers must be nice folks," said Fido to himself, "for their feather-beds look big and comfortable, and their baskets are all ample and generous,—and see, there goes a bright gilt cage, and there is a plump yellow canary bird in it! Oh, how glad Mrs. Tabby will be to see it,—she so dotes on dear little canary birds!"

Mrs. Tabby was the old brindled cat, who was the mother of the four cunning little kittens in the hay-mow. Fido had heard her remark very purringly only a few days ago that she longed for a canary bird, just to amuse her little ones and give them correct musical ears. Honest old Fido! There was no guile in his heart, and he never dreamed there was in all the wide world such a sin as hypocrisy. So when Fido saw the little canary bird in the cage he was glad for Mrs. Tabby's sake.

While Fido sat on the front porch and watched the people moving into the next house another pair of eyes peeped out of the old hollow maple over the way. This was the red-headed woodpecker, who had a warm, cosy nest far down in the old hollow maple, and in the nest there were four beautiful eggs, of which the red-headed woodpecker was very proud.

"Good-morning, Mr. Fido," called the red-headed woodpecker from her high perch. "You are out bright and early to-day. And what do you think of our new neighbors?"

"Upon my word, I cannot tell," replied Fido, wagging his tail cheerily, "for I am not acquainted with them. But I have been watching them closely, and by to-day noon I think I shall be on speaking terms with them,—provided, of course, they are not the cross, unkind people our old neighbors were."

"Oh, I do so hope there are no little boys in the family," sighed the red-headed woodpecker; and then she added, with much determination and a defiant toss of her beautiful head: "I hate little boys!"

"Why so?" inquired Fido. "As for myself, I love little boys. I have always found them the pleasantest of companions. Why do *you* dislike them?"

"Because they are wicked," said the red-headed woodpecker. "They climb trees and break up the nests we have worked so hard to build, and they steal away our lovely eggs—oh, I hate little boys!"

"Good little boys don't steal birds' eggs," said Fido, "and I'm sure I never would play with a bad boy."

But the red-headed woodpecker insisted that all little boys were wicked; and, firm in this faith, she flew away to the linden over yonder, where, she had heard the thrush say, there lived a family of fat white grubs. The red-headed woodpecker wanted her breakfast, and it would have been hard to find a more palatable morsel for her than a white fat grub.

As for Fido, he sat on the front porch and watched the people moving in. And as he watched them he thought of what the red-headed woodpecker had said, and he wondered whether it could be possible for little boys to be so cruel as to rob birds' nests. As he brooded over this sad possibility, his train of thought was interrupted by the sound of a voice that fell pleasantly on his ears.

"Goggie, goggie, goggie!" said the voice. "Tum here, 'ittle goggie—tum here, goggie, goggie, goggie!"

Fido looked whence the voice seemed to come, and he saw a tiny figure on the other side of the fence,—a cunning baby-figure in the yard that belonged to the house where the new neighbors were moving in. A second glance assured Fido that the calling stranger was a little boy not more than three years old, wearing a pretty dress, and a broad hat that crowned his yellow hair and shaded his big blue eyes and dimpled face. The sight was a pleasing one, and Fido vibrated his tail, —very cautiously, however, for Fido was not quite certain that the little boy meant his greeting for him, and Fido's sad experiences with the old neighbors had made him wary about scraping acquaintances too hastily.

"Tum, 'ittle goggie!" persisted the prattling stranger, and, as if to encourage Fido, the little boy stretched his chubby arms

through the fence and waved them entreatingly.

Fido was convinced now; so he got up, and with many cordial gestures of his hospitable tail, trotted down the steps and over the lawn to the corner of the fence where the little stranger was.

"Me love oo," said the little stranger, patting Fido's honest brown back; "me love oo, 'ittle goggie."

Fido knew that, for there were caresses in every stroke of the dimpled hands. Fido loved the little boy, too,—yes, all at once he loved the little boy; and he licked the dimpled hands, and gave three short, quick barks, and wagged his tail hysterically. So then and there began the friendship of Fido and the little boy.

Presently Fido crawled under the fence into the next yard, and then the little boy sat down on the grass, and Fido put his forepaws in the little boy's lap and cocked up his ears and looked up into the little boy's face, as much as to say, "We shall be great friends, shall we not, little boy?"

"Me love oo," said the little boy; "me wan' to tiss oo, 'ittle goggie!"

And the little boy did kiss Fido,—yes, right on Fido's cold nose; and Fido liked to have the little boy kiss him, for it reminded him of another little boy who used to kiss him, but who was now so big that he was almost ashamed to play with Fido any more.

"Is oo sit, 'ittle goggie?" asked the little boy, opening his blue eyes to their utmost capacity and looking very piteous. "Oo nose be so told, oo mus' be sit, 'ittle goggie!"

But no, Fido was not sick, even though his nose *was* cold. Oh, no; he romped and played all that morning in the cool, green grass with the little boy; and the red-headed woodpecker, clinging to the bark on the hickory-tree, laughed at their merry antics till her sides ached and her beautiful head turned fairly livid. Then, at last, the little boy's mamma came out of the house and told him he had played long enough; and neither the red-headed woodpecker nor Fido saw him again that day.

But the next morning the little boy toddled down to the fence-corner, bright and early, and called, "Goggie! goggie! goggie!" so loudly, that Fido heard him in the wood-shed, where he was holding a morning chat with Mrs. Tabby. Fido hastened to answer the call; the way he spun out of the wood-shed and down the gravel walk and around the corner of the house was a marvel.

"Mamma says oo dot fleas, 'ittle goggie," said the little boy. "*Has* oo dot fleas?"

Fido looked crestfallen, for could Fido have spoken he would have confessed that he indeed *was* afflicted with fleas,—not with very many fleas, but just enough to interrupt his slumbers and his meditations at the most inopportune moments. And the little boy's guileless impeachment set Fido to feeling creepy-crawly all of a sudden, and without any further ado Fido turned deftly in his tracks, twisted his head back toward his tail, and by means of several well-directed bites and plunges gave the malicious Bedouins thereabouts located timely warning to behave themselves. The little boy thought this performance very funny, and he laughed heartily. But Fido looked crestfallen.

Oh, what play and happiness they had that day; how the green grass kissed their feet, and how the smell of clover came with the springtime breezes from the meadow yonder! The red-headed woodpecker heard them at play, and she clambered out of the hollow maple and dodged hither and thither as if she, too, shared their merriment. Yes, and the yellow thistle-bird, whose nest was in the blooming lilac-bush, came and perched in the pear-tree and sang a little song about the dear little eggs in her cunning home. And there was a flower in the fence-corner,—a sweet, modest flower that no human eyes but the little boy's had ever seen,—and she sang a little song, too, a song about the kind old mother earth and the pretty sunbeams, the gentle rain and the droning bees. Why, the little boy had never known anything half so beautiful, and Fido,—he, too, was delighted beyond all telling. If the whole truth must be told, Fido had such an exciting and bewildering romp that day that when night came, and he lay asleep on the kitchen floor, he dreamed he was tumbling in the green grass with the little boy, and he tossed and barked and whined so in his sleep that the hired man had to get up in the night and put him out of doors.

Down in the pasture at the end of the lane lived an old woodchuck. Last year the freshet had driven him from his childhood's home in the cornfield by the brook, and now he resided in a snug hole in the pasture. During their rambles one day, Fido and his little boy friend had come to the pasture, and found the old woodchuck sitting upright at the

entrance to his hole.

"Oh, I'm not going to hurt you, old Mr. Woodchuck," said Fido. "I have too much respect for your gray hairs."

"Thank you," replied the woodchuck, sarcastically, "but I'm not afraid of any bench-legged fyste that ever walked. It was only last week that I whipped Deacon Skinner's yellow mastiff, and I calc'late I can trounce you, you ridiculous little brown cur!"

The little boy did not hear this badinage. When he saw the woodchuck solemnly perched at the entrance to his hole he was simply delighted.

"Oh, see!" cried the little boy, stretching out his fat arms and running toward the woodchuck,— "oh, see,—nuzzer 'ittle goggie! Tum here, 'ittle goggie,—me love oo!"

But the old woodchuck was a shy creature, and not knowing what guile the little boy's cordial greeting might mask, the old woodchuck discreetly disappeared in his hole, much to the little boy's amazement.

Nevertheless, the old woodchuck, the little boy, and Fido became fast friends in time, and almost every day they visited together in the pasture. The old woodchuck—hoary and scarred veteran that he was—had wonderful stories to tell,—stories of marvellous adventures, of narrow escapes, of battles with cruel dogs, and of thrilling experiences that were altogether new to his wondering listeners. Meanwhile the red-headed woodpecker's eggs in the hollow maple had hatched, and the proud mother had great tales to tell of her baby birds,—of how beautiful and knowing they were, and of what good, noble birds they were going to be when they grew up. The yellow-bird, too, had four fuzzy little babies in her nest in the lilac-bush, and every now and then she came to sing to the little boy and Fido of her darlings. Then, when the little boy and Fido were tired with play, they would sit in the rowen near the fence-corner and hear the flower tell a story the dew had brought fresh from the stars the night before. They all loved each other,—the little boy, Fido, the old woodchuck, the red-headed woodpecker, the yellow-bird, and the flower,—yes, all through the days of spring and all through the summer time they loved each other in their own honest, sweet, simple way.

But one morning Fido sat on the front porch and wondered why the little boy had not come to the fence-corner and called to him. The sun was high, the men had been long gone to the harvest fields, and the heat of the early autumn day had driven the birds to the thickest foliage of the trees. Fido could not understand why the little boy did not come; he felt, oh! so lonesome, and he yearned for the sound of a little voice calling "Goggie, goggie, goggie."

The red-headed woodpecker could not explain it, nor could the yellow-bird. Fido trotted leisurely down to the fence-corner and asked the flower if she had seen the little boy that morning. But no, the flower had not laid eyes on the little boy, and she could only shake her head doubtfully when Fido asked her what it all meant. At last in desperation Fido braced himself for an heroic solution of the mystery, and as loudly as ever he could, he barked three times,—in the hope, you know, that the little boy would hear his call and come. But the little boy did not come.

Then Fido trotted sadly down the lane to the pasture to talk with the old woodchuck about this strange thing. The old woodchuck saw him coming and ambled out to meet him.

"But where is our little boy?" asked the old woodchuck.

"I do not know," said Fido. "I waited for him and called to him again and again, but he never came."

Ah, those were sorry days for the little boy's friends, and sorriest for Fido. Poor, honest Fido, how lonesome he was and how he moped about! How each sudden sound, how each footfall, startled him! How he sat all those days upon the front door-stoop, with his eyes fixed on the fence-corner and his rough brown ears cocked up as if he expected each moment to see two chubby arms stretched out toward him and to hear a baby voice calling "Goggie, goggie, goggie."

Once only they saw him,—Fido, the flower, and the others. It was one day when Fido had called louder than usual. They saw a little figure in a night-dress come to an upper window and lean his arms out. They saw it was the little boy, and, oh! how pale and ill he looked. But his yellow hair was as glorious as ever, and the dimples came back with the smile that lighted his thin little face when he saw Fido; and he leaned on the window casement and waved his baby hands feebly, and cried: "Goggie! goggie!" till Fido saw the little boy's mother come and take him from the window.

One morning Fido came to the fence-corner—how very lonely that spot seemed now—and he talked with the flower and

the woodpecker; and the yellow-bird came, too, and they all talked of the little boy. And at that very moment the old woodchuck reared his hoary head by the hole in the pasture, and he looked this way and that and wondered why the little boy never came any more.

"Suppose," said Fido to the yellow-bird,— "suppose you fly to the window way up there and see what the little boy is doing. Sing him one of your pretty songs, and tell him we are lonesome without him; that we are waiting for him in the old fence-corner."

Then the yellow-bird did as Fido asked,—she flew to the window where they had once seen the little boy, and alighting upon the sill, she peered into the room. In another moment she was back on the bush at Fido's side.

"He is asleep," said the yellow-bird.

"Asleep!" cried Fido.

"Yes," said the yellow-bird, "he is fast asleep. I think he must be dreaming a beautiful dream, for I could see a smile on his face, and his little hands were folded on his bosom. There were flowers all about him, and but for their sweet voices the chamber would have been very still."

"Come, let us wake him," said Fido; "let us all call to him at once. Then perhaps he will hear us and awaken and answer; perhaps he will come."

So they all called in chorus,—Fido and the other honest friends. They called so loudly that the still air of that autumn morning was strangely startled, and the old woodchuck in the pasture way off yonder heard the echoes and wondered.

"Little boy! little boy!" they called, "why are you sleeping? Why are you sleeping, little boy?"

Call on, dear voices! but the little boy will never hear. The dimpled hands that caressed you are indeed folded upon his breast; the lips that kissed your honest faces are sealed; the baby voice that sang your playtime songs with you is hushed, and all about him is the fragrance and the beauty of flowers. Call on, O honest friends! but he shall never hear your calling; for, as if he were weary of the love and play and sunshine that were all he knew of earth, our darling is asleep forever.

1885.

[End of *Fido's Little Friend* by Eugene Field]