

1. ***A Flea in the Ear***

by Stephen Wylie and Ken Brown

One moonlit night, as the spotted dog was lifting the flaps on the side of the chicken coop to make sure the hens were all tucked up in bed, he heard a twig snap in the woods nearby.

“I know you’re out there, fox,” he barked. “Stay away from my hens.”



“Good evening,” said the wily fox politely, sauntering into the farmyard.

“Back off,” said the dog, “or I’ll bite.”

“You can’t imagine for one moment that I would dream of taking one of your scrawny hens,” lied the fox. “I much prefer a nice, fat, juicy duck.”

“Well, that’s all right then,” said the dog, scratching his fleas. “Just remember what I said.”

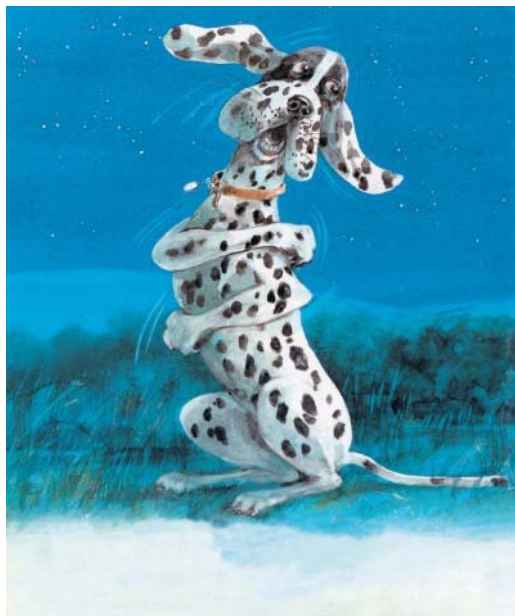
“I will,” said the fox, edging closer. “I see you have a spot of flea trouble.”

“Don’t talk about it,” said the dog. “At this time of year it’s agony.”

“I never have any trouble myself,” said the fox. “But then I know the secret that keeps them away.”

“What? You do?” asked the dog eagerly. “Please tell me.”

“I couldn’t possibly,” the fox replied. “It’s a family secret.”



“Oh, please tell,” pleaded the dog. “I’ll give anything to get rid of my fleas.”

“Anything?” asked the fox slyly.

“Well, almost anything.”

“I suppose I might be persuaded, in exchange for five or six of your stringy birds.”

“Definitely not,” said the dog indignantly. “I’d lose my job.”

“Oh well,” said the fox, “suit yourself. Bye bye.”

The following afternoon the fox came back.

“Good afternoon,” he said.

“Hello,” growled the dog suspiciously.

“I’ve been thinking things over,” said the fox, “and have decided to tell you the secret for nothing. I couldn’t allow a fellow creature to suffer so much pain.”



“That’s wonderful,” said the dog. “What do I have to do?”

“It’s quite simple really. You just trot over the hill, down the other side, through the gate and along the lane until you come to a pond. Walk into the water and, as it gets deeper, the fleas will climb up your legs.

Eventually, only your head will be dry and all the fleas will be on it. Take a deep breath and dunk your head under the water and all your fleas will drown.”

“Brilliant,” said the dog. “I’m surprised I never thought of it myself.”

“Off you go then,” said the fox. “I’ll watch the chickens while you’re away. Just think of it, flea free for the first time in your life.”

“I can hardly wait,” said the dog, and galloped off up the hill, through the gate, and down to the pond to drown his fleas.

As he lowered himself into the water, he was astonished to hear a voice in his ear.

“I know you are about to drown us,” said a flea, “but if you go back to the bank, we will all jump off and promise never to bite you again.”



The dog paused for a moment.

“Oh, very well. So long as you keep your word.”

He walked back to the bank and all the fleas leapt off. The happy dog went back home. When he got back, he found that the fox had vanished and when he lifted the flaps he discovered that his hens had too.

“Oh no,” howled the dog. “I’ll lose my job, I’ll be homeless.”

He lay down in despair. When he felt a little better, he noticed a trail of feathers leading into the wood. He got up and followed it until he came at last to the fox’s den.

He knocked on the door. The fox opened it.
“Hello,” he said, pretending to be surprised. “What brings you here?”
“I just dropped by,” said the dog, pretending to scratch, “to tell you that I went for your flea cure, but I couldn’t get into the pond. It was full to the brim with fat, juicy ducks.”
“It was?” asked the fox, licking his lips.



“Overflowing,” lied the dog. “I’ll try again later when they have gone. Bye bye.”
“Goodbye,” said the fox, and closed the door.

The dog hid behind a tree. He hadn't waited long before the fox came out of his den with an empty sack slung over his shoulder. After a quick look round, he slunk off towards the pond...

...only to find when he got there, that there wasn't a trace of the fat, juicy ducks the dog had said he'd seen. While he sat there in disbelief, all the fleas who had so nearly drowned leapt joyfully, but unnoticed, on to his neck.



Meanwhile, the dog had broken down the fox's door and there, sure enough, he found a squawking bagful of his chickens. He gathered them up and took them back to their coop, determined never to let them out of his sight again.

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Practice questions

A Where did the hens live?

in the pond

in the field

in the woods

in the coop

B How did the dog know that the fox was nearby?

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1 What is the main idea at the beginning of the story?

The fox wanted to teach the dog a lesson.

The fox wanted the dog to ask about his family.

The fox wanted to trick the dog.

The fox wanted the dog to look after the hens.

2 Why did the dog want to know the fox's secret?

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3 What reason did the dog give for not letting the fox have his hens?

.....

4 What did the dog give the fox in exchange for his secret?

the chicken coop

ducks

nothing

money

5 What did the fox tell the dog was the **last thing** he needed to do to get rid of the fleas?

walk into the water

dunk his head under the water

trot over the hill

take a deep breath

6 What did the dog discover when he got home?
Write **2** things.

1.

2.

7 Which of these words show you how upset the dog was?
Tick **2** words.

vanished

howled

noticed

despair

paused

8 What made the dog take a walk into the woods?

He heard the fox.

He saw a trail of feathers.

He heard the hens.

He saw a trail of ducks.

9 How did the fox behave when the dog came knocking at his door?

He pretended to be surprised.

He didn't open the door.

He told the dog to go away.

He gave the hens back.

10 Why did the fox take an empty sack with him when he went to the pond?

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11 Which words best describe what a squawking bagful of chickens might be like?

noisy and happy

noisy and restless

restless and quiet

calm and quiet

12 What did the dog decide he would never do again?

.....

13 a) How did the fox make the dog go to the pond?

.....

b) How did the dog make the fox go to the pond?

.....

14 What kind of character is the fox in this story?
Explain your answer.

.....

.....

15 In this story who do you think is the cleverer, the dog or the fox?

the dog

the fox

Explain your answer.

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