

Farmer Yikes and his Chickens and Lettuce

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Jack was a rabbit. He had two long and listening ears, two powerful hind legs, two small front legs, two large front teeth and a tail that wasn't very fluffy at all. Jack liked to jump. Higher than a bush he jumped. And Jack liked to run—faster than a whizzing motorbike he ran, leaving a trail of dust hanging in the air behind him.

One day Jack was out cruising the countryside. He was looking for wild lettuce and not finding any.

"Drats," said Jack. "I haven't found a single leaf of wild lettuce. What am I going to do?"

Jack searched, and searched some more. Finally he came to Farmer Yikes' garden. It had lots of lettuce. It wasn't wild lettuce, but every head was larger and juicier and leafier than any wild lettuce he'd ever seen.

"That lettuce looks delicious," said Jack Rabbit to himself as he slipped under the fence. "I think I'll take a nibble."

But Farmer Yikes was watching. He'd been picking radishes for a salad when he saw Jack slip under the fence and hop down the rows looking for the largest and juiciest lettuce to nibble upon. And Jack was about to do just that when Farmer Yikes shouted, "You rascal!"

Jack Rabbit leaped straight into the air. He rose like a rocket and flew high into the sky, his long ears flapping in the wind. As soon as he hit the ground Jack took off as if all the coyotes of the world were after him—and hot on his heels came Farmer Yikes, galloping down the lettuce row and screaming, "Stop! Thief!"

Jack zipped under the fence. "That'll stop him," he thought—but Farmer Yikes hurtled over the fence as light as a gazelle. Jack glanced behind and poured on the gas—but Farmer Yikes poured on the gas too, his great thumping galoshes pounding the earth. That's when Jack Rabbit knew a race was on—a race for his life! He laid back his long and listening ears

and strained every muscle. He sped faster than he'd ever sped before but the pounding-pounding-pounding of Farmer Yikes' wellies only got louder. Now Jack knew that he was losing ground. Never had he been out run by a human before and the look of terror in Jack Rabbit's eye was very, very real.

Jack twisted and turned. He dodged and ducked but Farmer Yikes only got closer. And the reason he was getting closer was that he owned a pair of magic boots stolen from the Wind King when he lay down to rest beside Farmer Yikes' chicken house.

At the last moment Jack spotted a hole at the bottom of an old oak tree. "Please, O please let me get inside!" Jack prayed, taking a desperate leap and vanishing out of Farmer Yikes' grasp.

"You come out, you lettuce stealer!" shouted Farmer Yikes, getting down on his hands and knees and peering into the hole.

But Jack Rabbit was too winded to answer. It turned out that the hole led into a hollow space inside the tree and all Jack could do was to lie panting on the sandy floor. Farmer Yikes stuck his arm into the hole and felt around but couldn't reach Jack. Off he strode in a huff, muttering to himself and promising that he'd get Jack Rabbit sooner or later and teach him a lesson.

Jack stayed inside the oak tree for ages. In fact, he stayed until it was dark and the stars were twinkling in the heavens. Only then did he go home.

Jack Rabbit kept away from Farmer Yikes' garden for a long time. He had no intention of going back there ever again. But Jack had eaten all the wild lettuce in the countryside. There was not a single leaf to be had, and somehow, day by day, Jack drew closer and closer to Farmer Yikes' garden. He couldn't help himself. He'd had a nibble of garden lettuce, and the taste, the smell, the crunchiness and sweetness would not leave him alone.

"I'll just go back for one little nibble," thought Jack. "I'll be in and out in a second and Farmer Yikes will never notice."

So that night Jack Rabbit crept across the chaparral. From sage bush to sage bush he crept, past the hollow oak tree and underneath the garden fence. The moon was full and glowed silver in the clear sky. Jack hopped down the rows looking for the lettuce. He passed the carrots, beets and radishes before he found the large and leafy heads of lettuce glistening in the moonlight. He was about to take a nibble when Farmer Yikes leaped out from between the runner beans.

"You robber!" he screamed.

Jack Rabbit couldn't believe his eyes. What was Farmer Yikes doing in his garden this late at night? But he didn't have much time to think about it for Farmer Yikes was already pounding towards him, his legs whirring furiously, a hoe raised dangerously above his head. Jack fled like the wind. He didn't dodge left or right but made a beeline for the oak tree.

'Pound! Pound! Pound!' went Farmer Yikes' magic boots.

'Pant! Pant! Pant!' went Jack Rabbit, running so swiftly his feet hardly touched the ground.

At the last second Jack dove into the hole at the bottom of the oak tree and breathed a sigh of relief. But Farmer Yikes stuck in his hoe and tried to scoop Jack out. Jack had to leap and dodge about to avoid being caught.

Finally Farmer Yikes gave up. "I'll get you, Jack Rabbit," he shouted as he marched home. "Just you wait and see. Just you wait and see."

Jack Rabbit didn't know what to do. Every day his desire for Farmer Yikes' lettuce grew. Soon the lettuce was all the Jack could think about and his mouth watered day and night. Finally Jack had no choice but to go to Foxy Loxy, PhD. Now Jack couldn't just visit Foxy Loxy any old how. If he did, he'd be eaten in a twinkling. To talk to a fox Jack needed someone safe he could talk to, who could themselves safely talk to Foxy Loxy. That was Spikes Porcupine.

"Spikes," said Jack Rabbit, "please ask Foxy Loxy why it is that Farmer Yikes can run so very fast."

So off Spikes lumbered to Foxy Loxy.

"Foxy Loxy," said Spikes when he'd found him, "why does Farmer Yikes run so very fast?"

"That's easy," said Foxy Loxy. "Because of the magic boots he stole from the Wind King when he lay down to rest beside the chicken house."

"So that's why he can run so fast," said Jack Rabbit when Spikes returned. "No wonder I was almost caught!"

Jack Rabbit sat and thought. He sat and thought for a long time. At last he came up with a plan.

For the next few days Jack watched the farm from a distance. Soon he noticed that Farmer Yikes let the chickens out of their coop first thing in the morning to scratch for worms in the orchard. After a while he threw grain into the coop, the chickens returned inside and he closed the door.

Jack set out early, very early, the next morning. Before the sun had risen Jack came to Foxy Loxy's den. Quick as a wink and faster than a streaking comet Jack sped past the den's entrance. A moment later he was sitting not too far away on a slight rise waiting for Foxy to come out. Soon the sun rose over the horizon and sure enough Foxy Loxy's long and pointed nose appeared out of the doorway. He sniffed the air to make sure no one dangerous was waiting outside. A moment later he was standing in the morning sunshine smelling a rabbit smell right outside his door. Foxy Loxy couldn't believe his nose!

"Good morning, Foxy Loxy," said Jack Rabbit, as cool as a cucumber. "And how are we today?"

For an instant Foxy's eyes grew round with surprise—the next instant they'd retreated into his head, deep behind his eyelids. Foxy Loxy casually stretched and shook his fur.

"Oh, is that you, Jack Rabbit?" he said sleepily, yawning broadly. "What a lovely morning it is! I hope you slept well."

Jack sat with his ears held high. They twitched this way and that, picking up the slightest noise. He wasn't fooled by Foxy Loxy one smidgin.

"Oh, I slept very well, thank you," said Jack, scratching one ear lazily.

Foxy hardly paid attention. He sat and licked his fur. He took his time, as if he'd nothing better to do in the world than to make his red coat smooth and pretty. Then he casually trotted away from Jack Rabbit.

"Bye, Jack," he called over his shoulder. "Nice to see you again," and with that he vanished into the brush behind his den.

Jack Rabbit didn't waste a second. He ran to a small hummock a fair distance away and lay in the grass. A moment later Foxy Loxy appeared exactly where Jack had been sitting. Foxy stopped and looked around, a puzzled look on his crafty face.

"I could have sworn you went off the other way," said Jack Rabbit, nibbling a dandelion. "Luckily for me the grass is greener over here."

"Not for long," snarled Foxy Loxy and he took off after Jack like a rocket. Jack, of course, was ready for this and away he zoomed like a rocket too. Over hillocks, past pines, around the rye field and beyond the hollow oak they raced, Jack always keeping one leap ahead of Foxy Loxy. Jack led Foxy so skillfully that Foxy didn't realize that they were heading towards Farmer Yikes's garden. Under the fence zoomed Jack; over the fence leaped Foxy. They were going so fast that neither of them saw Farmer Yikes hoeing the beans. They zipped past him and into the orchard where the chickens were wandering about and scratching for worms.

In an instant the chickens went berserk. They squawked and fluttered and shed feathers as they flew hither and thither, crying, "Foxy! Foxy! Squawk! Squawk! Squawk!"

Farmer Yikes paid no attention to Jack Rabbit. He was no threat to his precious chickens—but Foxy Loxy was, and after him he raced, his hoe held high in the air, shouting, "You miserable excuse for a dog! You chicken stealer! You crafty canine!" and other things like that.

Meanwhile, Foxy Loxy was completely confused. One instant he'd been chasing Jack Rabbit for breakfast, the next he had dozens of chickens flying helter-skelter around him as Farmer Yikes loomed over him with a hoe.

"Time to get out of here," thought Foxy, and with a sharp yelp he tucked his bushy tail between his hind legs and headed for home.

Meanwhile, Jack Rabbit did a quick U-turn and made straight for the lettuce. Oh, did it taste good as he sat on his hind legs and watched Foxy Loxy and Farmer Yikes disappear over the horizon. But hardly had Jack finished a single leaf when he saw Farmer Yikes racing back towards the garden, his magic boots kicking up the dust behind him.

"Those magic boots have to go," said Jack Rabbit in disgust, springing away as fast as his lissome legs could carry him.

Jack sat in a patch of grass. He was in a slump, a hole, a depression and mood so bad that all he could think about was Farmer Yike's horrid boots. They were the cause of everything bad in Jack's life and he hated them. He brooded for three days, hardly even eating.

"I have to find the Wind King and tell him who stole his magic boots," said Jack to himself. "He'll want them back for sure."

Off Jack set towards the west—for that was where he thought the Wind King lived. Luckily he was right, and after three days travel he came at last to a fierce thunderstorm. It sat in a huge valley surrounded by jagged mountains. Dark clouds towered into the sky, lightning flashed zigzags onto the earth and thunder-drums boomed. Jack looked on in awe. He'd never seen such a terrible sight and he quivered in fear.

Suddenly a voice roared from within the clouds: "Who stole my magic boots? Who robbed me of my boots?"

The voice was so loud and fearsome, that Jack blurted out in terror: "Not I! Not I!"

"Who spoke?" boomed the Wind King.

"Me," said Jack Rabbit, more afraid than ever.

"Me who?" cried the Wind King. "I am in no mood for name games!"

"I'm Jack Rabbit," said Jack. "I came to tell you who stole your magic boots."

"And who was that?" growled the Wind King, his storm clouds churning ever faster.

"It was Farmer Yikes," said Jack tremulously. "He stole them when you fell asleep beside his chicken house."

"Aha! So that's who it was!" cried the Wind King as seven bolts of lightning shot out of his eyes. A second later a mighty roar of thunder knocked Jack backwards and bowled him along the ground. By the time he'd found his feet the storm was already marching southward, howling and rumbling and making a racket.

Jack tried to keep up with the storm but it kept moving during the night and he was left behind. On he hopped the next day, and the next. Finally he arrived home and went to see how Farmer Yikes was faring. He stopped in amazement. The farmhouse was burnt down. A swath of orchard trees were gone; so was the chicken house. It looked as if a tornado had gone through the farm. Jack stared and stared.

"What happened here?" he muttered out loud.

"The Wind King came for Farmer Yikes," said Foxy Loxy.

Foxy was standing in the broken orchard licking his chops. Chicken feathers were scattered all around him. Jack Rabbit saw instantly that Foxy had a full tummy and wouldn't be chasing him anytime soon.

"And then what?" asked Jack.

"The Wind King came in a fierce storm," said Foxy Loxy. "I've never seen the likes of it. He thundered up to the farm and demanded his magic boots back. Farmer Yikes came out of his house, put his hands on his hips and laughed. 'Blow away! Blow away, mighty Wind King! You don't scare me!' he shouted, cock sure of himself."

Jack Rabbit was all ears. "What did the Wind King do?" he asked.

"I never saw anyone so angry," said Foxy Loxy. "I was sitting beside that hollow oak tree over yonder, and when I saw how angry he was I slunk into the hollow space inside and only dared to peek out with one of my two eyes."

Jack Rabbit didn't budge or blink. Anyone looking at him would think he was just listening to Foxy tell the story, but inside he was making a note to himself never to use that hollow tree if Foxy Loxy was chasing him. He hadn't realized that Foxy could slip into such narrow spaces.

"Go on," said Jack Rabbit evenly. "Then what happened?"

“What happened? What happened?” exclaimed Foxy Loxy. “Can’t you see? The Wind King shot lightning out of his eyes and the farmhouse went up in flames. He grabbed Farmer Yikes by the boots and swung him round and round. Faster and faster he went until the Wind King turned into a tornado. He churned up the orchard and chopped the chicken house into splinters. Finally Farmer Yikes popped out of the magic boots and went sailing through the air. Lucky for him he landed in the oak tree above my head and only has a fistful of scratches to show for it.”

“Where is he now?” asked Jack.

“He’s still in the oak tree,” said Foxy Loxy. “He’s too afraid to jump down and is waiting for someone to turn up and rescue him. Meanwhile, I’ve been feeding on his chickens and having a grand time.”

Jack Rabbit hopped over to the oak tree. There was Farmer Yikes sitting bootless on a branch. He didn’t look happy.

“Don’t you dare touch my lettuce,” said Farmer Yikes, wagging a finger.

Jack Rabbit paid no attention. He returned to the garden and ate his fill of lettuce while Foxy Loxy lay snoozing under an apple tree and dreaming of his next meal. And so it is to this day. Farmer Yikes is pestered by Jack the Rabbit and Foxy Loxy, PhD – but without his magic boots he has a hard time holding onto his chickens and lettuce.