

5 negatives

## FOXY, THE PET DEER

By

Irene Finley

Anne liked to go out to Grandfather's farm on the Willamette River for short visits. Those were red-letter days when Grandmother drove up to her house and called out merrily:

"Ready to be a country girl, Anne? Or do you still want to be a city girl? Hurry up let me know. I can't wait long for we have to be there to eat supper with Grandfather, and Oh, my! I forgot to tell you that we have a new child at our house!"

Anne danced about excitedly for she knew that when Grandmother mentioned a new child it meant some little friend of the woods or wild places. So she raced into her bedroom, grabbed her blue traveling bag and stuffed pajamas and toothbrush into it. Then as a last thought, she ran to the back porch and got a big carrot, a "s'prise" for the week-end playmate whomever it might be. She had learned that a carrot is a lolly-pop to a lot of little wild folks. There was Peter Rabbit who was always stealing them from Mr. McGregor's garden. And at the city zoo it looked as if every monkey in the cage was holding a carrot in his fingers and nibbling it. So a carrot was a good guess for most any one.

"Well, here we are," said Grandmother as they turned off the highway and drove down a country lane that ended above the river bank. There was an English cottage with wide lawns and spreading maple trees that gave one a peaceful feeling the minute he saw it. It looked down a gentle wooded slope to the big river.

"My, I'm glad to be here," said Anne. "Can I go anywhere I want to?"

"No, indeed," answered Grandmother. "You have to stay right here in the yard, and it is plenty big enough."

Two black Scotty pups came running out to greet them, wiggling and squirming their joy at Grandmother's safe arrival home. It happened just so every time she went away and came back.

"Now Heather and Docken, don't eat me alive," she said as she fondled both of them. "Have you taken good care of Foxy?"

*"And who might I say to?" Anne asked herself.*  
Just then a very dignified, slim-legged, spotted deer fawn came around the corner of the house and walked demurely up to them. Her big round eyes were gentle and unafraid. Grandmother bent her head and the little deer rubbed a soft nose on her cheek. It was a greeting of understanding between them.

"Come on in, children," she said as she gathered up a few bundles and went into the kitchen through an arched gate. The pups rushed ahead of her like young hurricanes, but the little deer minced her steps and stopped at the drain-board to nibble some green vegetables.

"Foxy, those are not for you," scolded Maddy, the cook. "You have had your supper of bread and milk, and I want you to go out and stay out. If you are still hungry, you can go down to the garden and eat all the lettuce and cabbage you want."



Frank will put you to bed." But Foxy had no intention of hunting up the gardener as she didn't want to go to bed.

"What a funny household," thought Anne. "This little deer is the s'prise child! I wonder where she came from. She didn't grow around here. She isn't a bit afraid of the dogs and they all seem to get along fine together. I never knew a deer was so tame."

Foxy was shoood out of the kitchen and Anne followed her fascinated. She held her carrot in her hand and walked along beside the slim animal. Pretty soon Foxy nuzzled at her dress and finally found the carrot. She took a taste and then began to eat eagerly. Anne held on tight till she was afraid her fingers would be eaten, and almost shivered she was so thrilled. Grandmother stood in the door and watched.

"Grandmother, look! Look!" she cried. "She isn't afraid of me and she likes carrots!"

Grandmother laughed and replied, "You needn't be afraid. Foxy will tag you all over the place if you feed her something she likes, and she has learned to eat a lot of things she would never get in the wilds. But don't offer her candy as she doesn't like sugar."

Anne wandered off and sat down on the grass under a big tree, looking dreamily up the river with fields along its shores and trees climbing the hillsides. The pups were frisking about and never got tired of playing at "tug-of-war."



Not to be left out, Foxy ambled up in her deliberate way and lay down beside Anne, folding up her spindle legs like big tooth-picks. All at once she gave a little hiccough and then began chewing something.

"What have you in your mouth, Foxy? I didn't see you pick up anything. You look like you were chewing gum," said Anne.

Foxy continued munching methodically with a contented, far-away look. After awhile she kinked her neck with a little jerk and swallowed something.

"You mustn't swallow gum, Foxy," scolded Anne. "Why didn't you spit it out as my Mother tells me?"

Later Grandfather laughed heartily at Anne's efforts to bring Foxy up properly. Then he told her that it was perfectly proper for all deer to chew their kind of gum which is called a cud. A deer goes foraging for herbs and brush and doesn't stop to chew his food on the spot, but just drops it hurriedly into one of his stomachs. Later when he is resting in one of his hidden beds in the woods, he "ups" this undigested food and finishes chewing it. Then at a little signal he drops it back into another stomach. In reality, he has one stomach with four compartments.

"My," said Anne, "suppose I had four stomachs and forgot which one was up and which one was down!"

After supper Grandfather asked, "Who wants to take a walk with me down to the river bank?"



"I do! I do!" piped Anne, and she took his hand and trotted off down the path under the maples. They soon came into the woods where there were big fir trees and an undergrowth of vine maples bending gracefully, with here and there syringa bushes fluffy with white blossoms.

"Don't the woods smell sweet," sniffed Anne. "I don't want to be a city girl any more. May I pick some of the flowers?"

"Yes, you may pick some," answered Grandfather, "but you must never pick any except on our place. Flowers belong to people who own the land, and not just to everybody to pick as they please. And when you are taking a ride into the country, you must not pick flowers that grow by the roadside, because it would spoil the beauty of our wild places and we want them left there for everybody to enjoy. Will you remember?"

"Oh, yes, Grandfather, 'specially as we have a plenty of flowers on our own place and you will let me pick some."

Anne heard a slight rustle in the leaves behind her and looked back.

"Grandfather, look who's here!"

Foxy had followed them softly all the way as if it was the natural thing to do, for she belonged to the woods. She had stopped frequently to nibble a tender branch or pull off a leaf from a bush. But she paid little attention to the lush green grass under her feet.



"Why doesn't she eat the nice grass?" asked Anne.

"I'll tell you about her," said Grandfather. "Deer that live in the big forests eat what we call browse or limbs of young trees and bushes. But Foxy would starve before she would eat green grass. Do you want to know where she came from?"

"Oh, yes. Where did she?"

"Once when Grandmother and I were traveling in the eastern part of the state away over beyond the big mountains from here, in the evening we came to a farm and stayed there all night. After supper I went down to the corrals and there running about was this little fawn. She was only a baby then and seemed to be all legs and big ears.

"The farmer told me to watch her. Soon a cow came around the corner of the barn, and the fawn made straight for here, knelt down on her knobby knees with her hind parts sticking up in the air, and began to get her dinner of warm milk. It was such an odd performance that I laughed out loud. The farmer had called her Foxy because she could look out so well for herself. She had come in from the pasture with the cows one night, a poor little bedraggled thing, and being an orphan had adopted this gentle cow for a mother.

"The next day Grandmother and I had become so fond of Foxy and her loving ways that we begged the farmer to let us take her home for a pet. He agreed readily, because he

wanted the cow's milk for his family. So, although we have no cow for a mother for her, Maddy feeds her warm bread and milk and she has now become one of the family. She is called a mule deer on account of her large ears and particular markings. She has a bed down in the tool house beside the garden-er's cottage, but mostly she sleeps with the dogs and likes to run races with them down the road. But they never catch her."

"Now it's time to go to bed. Up the hill we go," he said.

Through the twilight they climbed the path, Foxy at their heels. It was dim and mysterious under the trees. A russet-backed thrush was singing her evening song from the deep woods. At the door Anne put her arms around the little deer's neck and felt the fuzzy nose on her cheek.

"Foxy will be here when you come back for more week-ends," said Grandmother as she tucked Anne in bed. "And you can't tell, we may have another little wild child to play with you."