

FOX HATCHES AN EGG

狐狸孵蛋

A hungry fox finds a beautiful duck's egg, but would rather eat a tasty little duck, so he becomes a super-nanny, and waits patiently for the egg to hatch.

Fox is so hungry he can hardly move. He chances upon a beautiful smooth duck's egg. He is just about to crack it open and eat it, when a thought occurs to him: "If I hatch the egg, I'll be able to eat a tasty little duck!" So he takes the egg with him when he goes walking, and even takes it to bed with him. Over time, the egg becomes his friend. Then, one day, Fox is woken by a strange noise. He notices a little hole in the top of the egg, and sees a little duck's beak pecking away at the hole...

Fox Hatches an Egg has been a classic in the Taiwanese children's book world for twenty years. Reminiscent of Aesop's fables, Sun Chyng-feng's story depicts with humour the relationship between Fox and the little duck, but turns the old-style fox-as-villain story into one with warmth and kindness. The new illustrations by Nan Jun are full of autumnal colour and atmosphere and are cleverly constructed, making this a wonderful reinterpretation of a classic.

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Chyng-Feng Sun is Professor of Media Studies at the School of Professional Studies, New York University. She was previously a journalist at the children's edition of *Min Sheng Daily* in Taiwan, and an editor of children's books. She has published almost forty books for children: poetry, fairy tales, picture books, in English or Chinese, and has won the *China Times* Literary Prize for children's story books, the Hsin-Yi Children's Literature Award, the Golden Tripod Award, and other important children's literature awards in Taiwan.

Illustrated by Nan Jun 南君

Born in Pingtung, Nan Jun was inspired at primary school by page after page of exquisitely illustrated picture books to pursue a career in this



Category: Picturebook

Publisher: Pace

Date: 12/2019

Rights contact:

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Pages: 44

Size: 29.7 x 21 cm

Age: 3+

Rights sold: Simplified Chinese (Tomorrow)

field. He continues to work by hand, because he wants to have only one “draft”. His work is retro in style and very finely executed. His picture books include *Wishing at 18 Degrees Below Zero*, and *The Girl from the Tower*.

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Translated by Helen Wang

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Fox was so hungry he could hardly move.
His whole body felt weak.
He leaned his head against a tree while he caught his breath.
“I’m so hungry,” he muttered to himself, “I think I might die.”
Then everything went black.
Fox keeled over, and slept for thirteen hours.
When he woke, he felt brighter,
but he could still feel those two claws of hunger
grabbing and wringing his stomach,
making it difficult for him to breathe.

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Clutching his belly, Fox searched in the long grass by the tree,
and found a prickly blackberry bush.
Without a moment’s hesitation,
but dodging the prickles,
Fox picked the berries one by one.
He didn’t care if they were sour, or if there were tiny spiders.
He ate them by the pawful.
The berries were small, but they did the job.
Feeling stronger now, and bored of blackberries.
Fox set off down the hill,
hoping to find some food by the pond.

p.7

Fox couldn’t believe his eyes.
His mouth hung open for three whole seconds.
It was a miracle! A miracle!
In the grass by the pond lay an enormous white duck’s egg!
His mind went blank for one second
And the next thing he knew
The egg was in his mouth.

p.9

Fox was just about to bite into the egg
and let the delicious liquid run down his throat.
As his teeth scratched the shell, a voice boomed in his head:
“Which would you rather eat – a duck’s egg or a duck?”
Fox opened his mouth so as not to break the shell.
“Wouldn’t you rather eat a tasty little duck?” the voice boomed.
“Yes!”
Fox was excited:
“If I hatch the duck’s egg, I’ll have meat to eat! Roast duck, mmmmm!”
His mouth was watering, he had to keep swallowing.

p.11

Fox didn’t waste any time.
He pictured a mother duck hatching her eggs.
Then he dug a hole at the foot of a tree,
dropped a handful of dry grass in it,
and placed the egg on top.
He was just about to sit down, when he suddenly leapt up:
“I don’t want to crush it? What else can I do?”

p.12

Fox thought for a while.
He fetched two planks of wood and placed them on the ground,
He put his front paws on one, his back paws on the other,
then lowered his body so that his furry, warm belly was covering the egg,
but his body was not putting any weight on it.
Perfect!
But his excitement did not last five minutes.
Holding that position was torture:
his legs wouldn’t stop trembling,
his back and belly started sagging.
Fox knew that if he went any lower, the egg would be crushed.
He leapt to his feet, and clutched the egg to his belly to keep it warm.

p.14

Fox had a flash of inspiration.
He found a long strip of bark,
tied it around his waist,
and tucked the egg safely inside.

It was a good idea,
but the bark kept coming loose.
At one point, the egg rolled so close to a rock...
another ten centimetres
and it would have been smashed.

p.17

Fox took a deep breath.
He decided to eat the egg,
and forget about the duck!
But as soon as the egg was in his mouth
he had a genius idea:
Why not keep the egg warm in his mouth!
It was a warm, safe place, wasn't it?

p.19

For the next three weeks,
Fox was more patient than he had ever been in his life.
He held the egg in his mouth all day,
except for when he was eating,
when he took it out and held it close to his chest,
and except for when he was sleeping,
when he tucked it between the crook of his elbow and the end of his chin
before closing his eyes for the night.

p.20

With each day that passed,
Fox experienced something totally new.
He was used to being on his own,
he had never had a companion,
and he had never smiled,
except when eating animals larger and tastier than a mouse.
This egg was the only company he'd ever had.
And because he'd resisted eating it
He'd almost forgotten that it was food.

p.22

At first, Fox had been tempted to eat the egg,
and had licked it, which was better than nothing.
Then, gradually, he thought up some amusing games

like turning the egg upside-down with the tip of his tongue,
and squeezing the egg from one cheek to the other,
and rolling his tongue so the egg slid up and down.
For the first time, Fox knew the meaning of “play”.
And for the first time, Fox had someone to play with.

p.24

Early one morning, Fox was woken by a strange noise.
He opened his eyes, and saw a hole in the top of the egg.
Inside he could just see the pointed beak of a little duck
pecking at the hole, which grew bigger and bigger
until, finally, the shell broke in half,
and a fluffy little duck poked its way out,
closed its eyes, and rested against the fox’s paw while it caught its breath.

Fox licked his lips. At last!
He had waited so long, and taken so much care,
and was so excited that his mind went blank.

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All of a sudden, the little duck squealed “Mama Mama!”
Before Fox could gather his wits, the little duck had run to him.
“Mama Mama!” it said again and again.
Things were not going to plan!
Fox pulled himself together, sat up straight, and cleared his throat:
“Cough, cough, You’ve got it wrong. I’m not your Mama.”
He panicked and tried to explain:
“I’m male, I can’t be a Mama, I can only be a Baba.”

“Baba Baba!”
The little duck jumped on to Fox’s shoulder and into Fox’s mouth,
where it squealed with excitement:
“Baba, I know this smell from when I was inside the egg!”
It climbed out of Fox’s mouth and on to his nose,
and its little eyes looked into Fox’s big eyes.

p.29

Fox couldn’t bear to look the little duck in the eye.
“He has no idea why I put him in my mouth...”
Fox stuck out his tongue to brush the little duck off his nose,

but when his tongue touched the duck, it started to laugh.
“That tickles! Baba, I remember, when I was still in the egg,
you used to roll me from side to side like this. It was so nice!”
Fox sighed. The plan was falling apart.
The little duck broke his train of thought: “Baba, I’m hungry!”
Fox sighed again, and fed it the berries he’d been saving for breakfast.

p.30

The little duck’s tummy was round and full.
It gave a big yawn, found a warm soft place on Fox’s chest, and snuggled up, mumbling “Thank
you, Baba! I love you, Baba!”
Fox smoothed down the fluff on the little duck’s head,
“It’s all gone wrong!” he sighed, with a smile,
“I lost a meal and gained a son!”

p.33

Fox ate the rest of the berries in one go.
“They taste quite nice, when you get used to them,” he muttered to himself.
Then he curled up, his chin just touching the duck, and fell fast asleep.
It was the first time in his life that Fox had a friend to talk to.