

Aesop's Fables

32. THE DOG AND HIS REFLECTION

By Tony Payne

When Patch was young he was a good dog. He was warm and soft and had the sweetest breath and he licked the tip of your nose if you let him. And because he was so good he was allowed to stay in the farm kitchen. The other farm dogs lived outside in a kennel.

But just because a dog is warm and soft and good when he's a puppy and licks the tip of your nose if you let him, it doesn't mean he will grow up like that.

Once, when Patch was a fully grown-up dog, he pulled the cloth off the table and all the family's dinner crashed to the floor. He had eaten it all up before the farmer's wife came running in.

'Bad dog!' scolded the farmer's wife.

He barked at the children and bit their legs when they rode their bikes.

'Bad dog!' cried the children.

He pulled up all the flowers outside the kitchen door, dug five holes in the lawn and did his business in the farmer's hat.

'Bad dog!' yelled the farmer.

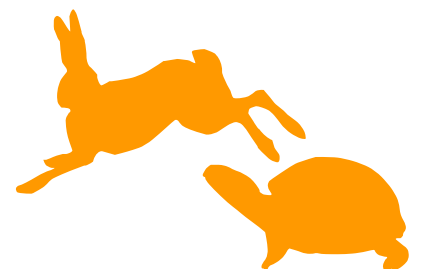
So Patch was sent outside with the other dogs. And because people only said 'bad dog!' to him, everyone forgot he'd once been called Patch. Now he was called simply, 'Bad Dog'.

At feeding time every dog had their own bowl of biscuits and scraps from the table, but Bad Dog would get to them first. He would growl and snarl and turn up his lips to show how sharp his teeth were. The other dogs had to wait, licking their mouths until Bad Dog had finished eating.

When he had eaten all the meat and the gravy, and all the dog biscuits from the bowls, all that was left was dry bread and carrots and broccoli, and lots of other things that farmers eat but dogs don't.

But then one day he went too far. The smell of roast meat was wafting out from the kitchen. Bad Dog ran in, snatched the huge bone with the meat still on and ran off with it.

'Bad Dog,' screamed the farmer, running after him. 'Come back with that meat now, or you'll never come back again!' Bad Dog took no notice. This was a whole big bone with the meat still on, not scraps, and he wanted it more than anything.





So Bad Dog ran away with it.

He ran for a long time until at last he came to a little bridge. This would be a good place to stop and eat his stolen dinner.

He looked over the side of the bridge. And had such a shock! Below him in the still water was another dog. A big, fierce, ugly dog - and this dog had a bone with all the meat on too!

Bad Dog had to have it. Two joints of meat! His lips turned back in a snarl, and so did the lips of the other dog. He opened his mouth to growl...and so did the other dog! And the bone fell from Bad Dog's jaws into the water and was taken away by the stream.

It had been his own reflection in the still water he had seen, and now instead of two bones he had nothing.

Bad Dog felt sad. He had lost everything that was important. 'From now on,' he said to himself, 'I shall try and be better. I shall be good instead of bad and nice instead of nasty. Then one day...everyone will love me again.'

And that is what happened. If you are too greedy, he realised, it's easy to end up with nothing.