

As darkness fell, Bunce and Bean switched on the powerful headlamps of the two tractors and shone them on to the hole. 'Now,' said Bean, 'we'll take it in turn to keep watch. One watches while two sleep, and so on all through the night.'

Boggis said, 'What if the fox digs a hole right through the hill and comes out on the other side? You didn't think of that one, did you?'

'Of course I did,' said Bean, pretending he had.

'Go on, then, tell us the answer,' said Boggis.

Bean picked something small and black out of his ear and flicked it away. 'How many men have you got working on your farm?' he asked.

'Thirty-five,' Boggis said.

'I've got thirty-six,' Bunce said.

'And I've got thirty-seven,' Bean said. 'That makes one hundred and eight men altogether. We must order them to surround the hill. Each man will have a gun and a flashlight. There will be no escape then for Mr Fox.'

So the order went down to the farms, and that night one hundred and eight men formed a tight ring around the bottom of the hill. They were armed with sticks and guns and hatchets and pistols and

all sorts of other horrible weapons. This made it quite impossible for a fox or indeed for any other animal to escape from the hill.

The next day, the watching and waiting went on. Boggis and Bunce and Bean sat upon small stools, staring at the fox's hole. They didn't talk much. They just sat there with their guns on their laps.

Every so often, Mr Fox would creep a little closer towards the mouth of the tunnel and take a sniff. Then he would creep back again and say, 'They're still there.'

'Are you quite sure?' Mrs Fox would ask.

'Positive,' said Mr Fox. 'I can smell that man Bean a mile away. He stinks.'



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Mr Fox Has a Plan

For three days and three nights this waiting-game went on.

‘How long can a fox go without food or water?’ Boggis asked on the third day.

‘Not much longer now,’ Bean told him. ‘He’ll make a run for it soon. He’ll have to.’

Bean was right. Down in the tunnel the foxes were slowly but surely starving to death.

‘If only we could have just a tiny sip of water,’ said one of the Small Foxes. ‘Oh, Dad, can’t you do *something*?’

‘Couldn’t we make a dash for it, Dad? We’d have a little bit of a chance, wouldn’t we?’

‘No chance at all,’ snapped Mrs Fox. ‘I refuse to let you go up there and face those guns. I’d sooner you stay down here and die in peace.’



Mr Fox had not spoken for a long time. He had been sitting quite still, his eyes closed, not even hearing what the others were saying. Mrs Fox knew that he was trying desperately to think of a way out. And now, as she looked at him, she saw him stir himself and get slowly to his feet. He looked back at

his wife. There was a little spark of excitement dancing in his eyes.

‘What is it, darling?’ said Mrs Fox quickly.

‘I’ve just had a bit of an idea,’ Mr Fox said carefully.

‘What?’ they cried. ‘Oh, Dad, what is it?’

‘Come on!’ said Mrs Fox. ‘Tell us quickly!’



‘Well ...’ said Mr Fox, then he stopped and sighed and sadly shook his head. He sat down again. ‘It’s no good,’ he said. ‘It won’t work after all.’

‘Why not, Dad?’

‘Because it means more digging and we aren’t any

of us strong enough for that after three days and nights without food.’

‘Yes we are, Dad!’ cried the Small Foxes, jumping up and running to their father. ‘We can do it! You see if we can’t! So can you!’



Mr Fox looked at the four Small Foxes and he smiled. What fine children I have, he thought. They are starving to death and they haven’t had a drink for three days, but they are still undefeated. I must not let them down.

‘I ... I suppose we could give it a try,’ he said.

‘Let’s go, Dad! Tell us what you want us to do!’

Slowly, Mrs Fox got to her feet. She was suffering more than any of them from the lack of food and

water. She was very weak. ‘I am so sorry,’ she said, ‘but I don’t think I am going to be much help.’

‘You stay right where you are, my darling,’ said Mr Fox. ‘We can handle this by ourselves.’

Task 1 – Answer the retrieval questions:

- 1.) How many men did they have altogether to surround the hill? (page 1)
- 2.) Give two examples of weapons the men had with them. (page 1)
- 3.) What was Fox trying to do when he wasn’t speaking very much? (page 2)
- 4.) Find and copy the phrase which shows that Fox was pleased with his children when they said they will keep digging. (page 3)
- 5.) Why did Mrs Fox say that she didn’t think she would be much help? (page 4).

Task 2 – Predict what will happen next.

Remember to use your **knowledge of the text** to explain why you think this will happen.

Use the sentence stem: “I think this will happen because...”