



CHAPTER ELEVEN – SOLVING A MYSTERY

The serial story "Fly-In Fox Tales" continues each Monday in the Accent section. It's written by local author Marian Strong Tomblin and illustrated by local artist Tom Bull.

The story so far: Wildfires force a family of humans and a family of foxes from their homes in Central Florida. As Kit watches, a situation at the cabin is sorted out.

The policeman squeezed their host's shoulder and looked proudly at Rico and Marisol. "Do you know who this is?"

The children shook their heads. Rico stared at the dark-haired man. How important was he?

"This is Frank Carpenter," the policeman said. "But his Seminole brothers and sisters call him Tom Cat."

Tom Cat scowled at the floor and released himself from his friend's grasp. He walked into the kitchen. "Who wants something cold to drink?" he asked from behind the door of an old refrigerator.

The policeman winked at the children. "He doesn't like people bragging about him. But it's because of his excellent tracking skills that Tom Cat lives here in the Preserve."

Tom Cat rattled some soda cans in protest.

The policeman continued, "We've had problems out here with squatters." At the children's blank expression, he explained further. "They're people who live on someone else's property illegally."

"This is a beautiful piece of the world," the policeman said. "Real quiet because folks aren't supposed to live here year-round. Visitors are welcome to pitch a tent for the weekend at the campground, rent a canoe and hike the designated trails, but we've got some people who like to carve out their own trails. They set fires where they're not supposed to. Some even poach deer. Tom Cat was hired to live in this cabin and be the eyes and ears of the forest. So here he is."

"And here you go." Their host handed each of his guests a cold can of soda before pushing open the screen door.

"Can we come back and visit you some time, Mr. Tom Cat?" Marisol asked.

Rico held his breath. How he hoped the man would say yes.

Suddenly there was a loud clattering by the shed. "Stay here," the policeman ordered. He followed Tom Cat into the clearing.

Kit watched the men leave the cabin and walk quickly over to the far side of the clearing. The fox had heard the disturbance by the shed and apparently the men had, too. The policeman clicked on his flashlight and aimed its beam into the shadows. Kit decided he had had enough. With a twitch of his tail, he dashed back to the Fly-In to share the details of the night's adventures with his family.

A deep snuffling and snorting came from behind a rusty oil drum. It was hard for the men to tell what animal was making the noise, because its coat was as black as the surrounding woods.

They stepped closer. A small bear looked up from the aluminum pie plate that it had been pushing around with its nose. Its eyes glowed in the artificial light.

The policeman shook his head. "Are you still feeding them?"

Tom Cat shrugged. "Not bears. At least not on purpose. But raccoons, sure, and foxes, too."

The policeman gestured with his flashlight. "Do we need to run him off?"

"Nah," Tom Cat replied. "He belongs here as much as I do."

The policeman clicked off his light, and the two returned to the Rodriguez children anxiously awaiting them.

"Old Tom Cat caught a bear," the policeman said as the screen door slapped shut behind them.

"Really?" Rico asked. "Whatcha gonna do with it?"

Tom Cat shook his head. "Nothing."

Rico frowned. "Well is it gonna be okay?"

The policeman smiled. "Better than ever." He nodded toward his friend. "Our host is saving the wild animals one at a time."



Next Week: Saving the Animals

Author Marian Strong Tomblin has also written *The Mystery at Hotel Ormond*, *Where's Capone's Cash?* and *Manatee Moon*, all selected for community-wide literacy campaigns. Award-winning illustrator Tom Bull currently teaches art at Mainland High School; his artwork is exhibited by Very Special Arts Volusia. "Fly-In Fox Tales" is presented by The News-Journal's Newspapers in Education program.

Newspaper activities – things to think about and do

- In this chapter, Rico and Mari discover that Tom Cat works to help save animals. Look through the classified section of The Daytona Beach News-Journal for jobs that require people to work with animals. Make a list of the ones of most interest to you. Then, go online to nieworld.com and in the upper right corner click on Occupational Handbook. Explore some of the occupations you had selected. Share your findings with friends or family. (Sunshine State Standard LA.A.2.2.5)
- In this chapter, the police mention that Tom Cat helps to keep the preserve safe from people who might misuse it, such as animal poachers or those who might set unwanted fires. Clip articles from the News-Journal that show people doing activities that either preserve or destroy wild places. With friends and/or classmates, assemble the clippings into a bulletin board or poster display to teach others. (Sunshine State Standard SC.G.2.2.3)

Teachers:
Win a visit to your class by author Marian Tomblin. See details in the NIE Update box on today's Mini Page.



For more information and fun activities, go to www.nieworld.com

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