

The Dog in the Manger

A dog looking for a quiet and comfortable place to take a nap jumped into the manger of the ox and lay there on the hay.

Some time later the ox, returning hungry from his day's work, entered his stall and found the dog in his manger. The dog, in a rage because he had been awakened from his nap, stood up and barked and snapped whenever the ox came near his hay.

The ox is a patient beast, but finally he protested: "Dog, if you wanted to eat my dinner I would have no objection. But you will neither eat it yourself nor let me enjoy it, which strikes me as a very churlish way to act."

The Wolf in Sheep's Clothing

A wolf had been lurking near a flock of sheep for several days. But so vigilant had been the shepherd in guarding his animals that the wolf was becoming desperate.

Then one day the wolf found a sheepskin that had been thrown away. Quickly he slipped it on over his own hide and made his way among the flock of grazing sheep. Even the shepherd was deceived by the ruse, and when night came the wolf in his disguise was shut up with the sheep in the fold.

But that evening the shepherd, wanting something for his supper, went down to the fold, and reaching in, seized the first animal he came to. Mistaking the wolf for a sheep the shepherd killed him on the spot.

Mercury and the Woodman

An honest, hard-working woodman was felling a tree on the bank of a deep river. In some way his hand slipped and his ax fell into the water and immediately sank to the bottom. Being a poor man who could ill afford to lose the tool by which he earned his livelihood he sat down and lamented his loss most bitterly.

But Mercury, whose river it was, suddenly appeared on the scene. When he had learned of the woodman's misfortune, he offered to do what he could to help.

Diving into the deep, swift-flowing stream, he brought up an ax made of solid gold.

"Could this be yours?" he asked.

"Alas, I wish it were," replied the woodman sadly.

Again Mercury dived into the icy-cold water and this time brought up an ax made of solid silver. But again the woodman shook his head and denied that the tool belonged to him. Mercury dived a third time and produced the identical ax which the man had lost.

Naturally the owner was delighted to see his trusty ax once more, and so was Mercury.

"You are an honest and a good man," said the messenger of the gods. "I want you to take the golden and the silver ax as a reward for telling the truth."

Thanking his benefactor, the woodman ran home to tell his wife of his good fortune. As the story spread, one of the neighbors rushed down to the same spot on the riverbank, threw his ax into the water, and began to moan and groan over his loss. Just as before, Mercury appeared, and learning what had occurred, dived into the water and fetched up a golden ax.

"Is this the ax you lost, my friend?" he asked.

"Yes, yes, that's it," lied the man, greedily reaching for the golden ax in Mercury's hand. But just as he was about to grasp the ax of gold, Mercury said: "Not so fast, sir. You are lying, and to punish you for not being truthful, I am not only denying you this, but I am leaving your own ax at the bottom of the river."

The Gardener and His Dog

The gardener was drawing water at the well to water his garden plants. His little dog was jumping and barking on the well curb until he lost his balance and fell in.

Hearing the splash, the gardener quickly drew off his clothes and descended into the well to rescue his dog. Just as he was bringing the struggling and slippery animal to the top, the ungrateful wretch bit his master's hand.

"Why, you little monster," exclaimed the gardener. "If that is your idea of gratitude to a master who feeds you and pets you and treats you kindly, then pull yourself out of the well." With that he dropped the dog right back into the well again.

The Milkmaid and Her Pail

A milkmaid was on her way to market, carrying a pail of milk on the top of her head. As she walked along the road in the early morning she began to turn over in her mind what she would do with the money she would receive for the milk.

"I shall buy some hens from a neighbor," said she to herself, "and they will lay eggs every day which I shall sell to the pastor's wife. And with the egg money I'll buy myself a new frock and ribbon. Green they should be, for green becomes my complexion best. And in this lovely green gown I will go to the fair. All the young men will strive to have me for a partner. I shall pretend that I do not see them. When they become too insistent I shall disdainfully toss my head—like this."

As the milkmaid spoke she tossed her head back, and down came the pail of milk, spilling all over the ground. And so all her imaginary happiness vanished, and nothing was left but an empty pail and the promise of a scolding when she returned home.

The Ant and the Grasshopper

One frosty autumn day an ant was busily storing away some of the kernels of wheat which he had gathered during the summer to tide him over the coming winter.

A grasshopper, half perishing from hunger, came limping by. Perceiving what the industrious ant was doing, he asked for a morsel from the ant's store to save his life.

"What were you doing all during the summer while I was busy harvesting?" inquired the ant.

"Oh," replied the grasshopper, "I was not idle. I was singing and chirping all day long."

"Well," said the ant, smiling grimly as he locked his granary door, "since you sang all summer, it looks as though you would have to dance all winter."

The Mice in Council

For many years the mice had been living in constant dread of their enemy, the cat. It was decided to call a meeting to determine the best means of handling the situation. Many plans were discussed and rejected.

At last a young mouse got up. "I propose," said he, looking very important, "that a bell be hung around the cat's neck. Then whenever the cat approaches, we always shall have notice of her presence, and so be able to escape."

The young mouse sat down amidst tremendous applause. The suggestion was put to a motion and passed almost unanimously.

But just then an old mouse, who had sat silent all the while, rose to his feet and said: "My friends, it takes a young mouse to think of a plan so ingenious and yet so simple. With a bell about the cat's neck to warn us we shall all be safe. I have but one brief question to put to the supporters of the plan—which one of you is going to bell the cat?"

The Hare With Many Friends

There was once a hare who had so many friends in the forest and the field that she truly felt herself to be the most popular member of the animal kingdom. One day she heard the hounds approaching.

"Why should a popular creature like me have to run for her life every time she hears a dog?" said she to herself. So she went to the horse, and asked him to carry her away from the hounds on his back.

"There is nothing I would rather do, friend hare," said the horse, "but, unfortunately, right now I have some important work to do for my master. However, a popular creature like you should have no difficulty in getting someone to help you."

Then the hare went to the bull and asked him whether he would be kind enough to ward off the hounds with his horns.

"My dear friend," replied the bull, "you know how I feel about you, and how glad I always am to be of service. But at this very moment I have an appointment with a lady.

Why don't you ask our mutual friend the goat?"

But the goat was busy too, and so was the ram, and so were the calf and the pig and the ass. Each assured the hare of his undying friendship and anxiety to aid her in her trouble, but each had some excuse which prevented him from performing the service. By this time the hounds were quite near, so the hare took to her heels and luckily escaped.

The Lion and the Bulls

A lion often prowled about a pasture where three bulls grazed together. He had tried without success to lure one or the other of them to the edge of the pasture. He had even attempted a direct attack, only to see them form a ring so that from whatever direction he approached he was met by the horns of one of them.

Then a plan began to form in the lion's mind. Secretly he started spreading evil and slanderous reports of one bull against the other. The three bulls, distrustingly, began to avoid one another, and each withdrew to a different part of the pasture to graze. Of course, this was exactly what the lion wanted. One by one he fell upon the bulls, and so made easy prey of them all.

The Hare and the Tortoise

A hare was continually poking fun at a tortoise because of the slowness of his pace. The tortoise tried not to be annoyed by the jeers of the hare, but one day in the presence of the other animals he was goaded into challenging the hare to a foot race.

"Why, this is a joke," said the hare. "You know that I can run circles around you."

"Enough of your boasting," said the tortoise. "Let's get on with the race."

So the course was set by the animals, and the fox was chosen as judge. He gave a sharp bark and the race was on. Almost before you could say "scat" the hare was out of sight. The tortoise plodded along at his usual unhurried pace.

After a time the hare stopped to wait for the tortoise to come along. He waited for a long, long time until he began to get sleepy. "I'll just take a quick nap here in this soft grass, and then in the cool of the day I'll finish the race." So he lay down and closed his eyes.

Meanwhile, the tortoise plodded on. He passed the sleeping hare, and was approaching the finish line when the hare awoke with a start. It was too late to save the race. Much ashamed, he crept away while all the animals at the finish line acclaimed the winner.

The Crow and the Pitcher

A crow, so thirsty that he could not even caw, came upon a pitcher which once had been full of water. But when he put his beak into the pitcher's mouth he found that only a little water was left in it. Strain and strive as he might he was not able to reach far enough down to get at it. He tried to break the pitcher, then to overturn it, but his strength was not equal to the task.

Just as he was about to give up in despair a thought came to him. He picked up a pebble and dropped it into the pitcher. Then he took another pebble and dropped that into the pitcher. One by one he kept dropping pebbles into the pitcher until the water mounted to the brim. Then perching himself upon the handle he drank and drank until his thirst was quenched.

The Horse and the Groom

Once there was a groom who was just about the meanest man in the world. He used to steal the grain intended for the horse and, without his master's knowledge, sell it in the village. But all day long he kept very busy grooming and currying the horse within an inch of its life.

"If you really are so anxious that I look well," said the horse one day to his groom, "then give me less of your brushing and more of your corn."

The Hares and the Frogs

For a long time the hares had believed themselves the most persecuted of all the animals. Everyone was their enemy, they said. One day, when the prospect looked especially dark, they came to the sad resolution that there was nothing left for them but to make away with themselves, one and all. So off they ran to a nearby lake, determined to throw themselves into the water to be drowned.

But at their approach a school of frogs seated on the shore took fright and dived into the water.

"Hold up!" cried the hare who was in the lead. "Let us not be too hasty. Surely our case is not so desperate yet, for here are other poor creatures even more fainthearted than ourselves."

The Eagle and the Fox

An eagle and a fox long had lived together as good neighbors, the eagle at the top of a high tree and the fox in a hole at the foot of it. One day, however, while the fox was away, the eagle, seeking a tender morsel for her nestful of young ones, swooped down upon the fox's cub and carried it away to her nest.

The fox, on her return home, upbraided the eagle for this breach of friendship, and pleaded with the eagle to return the cub to her den. But the eagle, feeling sure that her own brood high up in their treetop nest were safe from any possible revenge, ignored the entreaties of the cub's mother.

Quickly running to the place where she knew an altar fire to be burning, the fox snatched a brand and hurried back to the tree. The mother eagle, who was just on the point of tearing the cub to pieces to feed to her babies, looked down and saw that the fox was going to set fire to the tree and burn it and her nest and eaglets to ashes.

"Hold on, dear neighbor!" she screamed.
"Don't set fire to our tree. I'll bring back your cub to you safe and sound!"

The Creaking Wheels

Slowly and ponderously over the dusty road a yoke of oxen were hauling a heavily laden wagon. Each time the wheels turned on their axles they set up a tremendous creaking. Driven almost frantic by the ear-piercing noise, the driver cried: "Wagon, why do you make all this clamor and complaint, when they who are drawing all the weight are silent?"

The Boy and the Filberts

A boy put his hand into a pitcher which contained a goodly quantity of figs and filberts. Greedily he clutched as many as his fist could possibly hold. But when he tried to pull it out, the narrowness of the neck of the vessel prevented him.

Unwilling to lose any of the nuts, yet unable to draw out his hand, the lad burst into tears, bitterly bewailing his hard fortune. An honest fellow standing nearby gave him this wise and reasonable advice: "Grasp only half the quantity, my boy, and you will easily succeed."

The Lion, the Ass, and the Fox

A lion, an ass, and a fox formed a hunting party, and after an exciting chase caught and killed a great stag. All three were hungry, but the lion especially so. "Here, friend ass," he roared, "divide up the spoils, and let's have our dinner. I'm just about starved."

The ass was trying his best to divide the carcass into three equal portions when the lion fell upon him with a roar and tore him to pieces.

"Now," said the lion to the fox, "let's see how good you are at dividing the stag into two parts."

Taking one look at the remains of the poor ass, the fox said never a word, but made sure that in the division of the meat he left the "lion's share" for the king of beasts and only a mouthful for himself.

The lion nodded approvingly. "A very fair division, indeed," said he. "Who could have taught you to divide so fairly?"

"If I needed any lesson," replied the fox, "I had only to look at the body of our late friend, the ass, over yonder."

The Shepherd Boy and the Wolf

The Lioness

A great rivalry existed among the beasts of the forest over which could produce the largest litter. Some shamefacedly admitted having only two, while others boasted proudly of having a dozen.

At last the committee called upon the lioness.

"And to how many cubs do you give birth?" they asked the proud lioness.

"One," she replied sternly, "but that one is a lion!"

Every day the shepherd boy was sent with his father's sheep into the mountain pasture to guard the flock. It was, indeed, a lonely spot at the edge of a dark forest, and there were no companions with whom he could pass the long, weary hours of the day.

One day, just to stir up some excitement, he rushed down from the pasture, crying "Wolf! Wolf!" The villagers heard the alarm and came running with clubs and guns to help chase the marauder away, only to find the sheep grazing peacefully and no wolf in sight.

So well had the trick worked that the foolish boy tried it again and again, and each time the villagers came running, only to be laughed at for their pains.

But there came a day when a wolf really came. The boy screamed and called for help.

But all in vain! The neighbors, supposing him to be up to his old tricks, paid no heed to his cries, and the wolf devoured the sheep.

The Wind and the Sun

A dispute once arose between the wind and the sun over which was the stronger of the two. There seemed to be no way of settling the issue. But suddenly they saw a traveler coming down the road.

"This is our chance," said the sun, "to prove who is right. Whichever of us can make that man take off his coat shall be the stronger. And just to show you how sure I am, I'll let you have the first chance."

So the sun hid behind a cloud, and the wind blew an icy blast. But the harder he blew the more closely did the traveler wrap his coat around him. At last the wind had to give up in disgust. Then the sun came out from behind the cloud and began to shine down upon the traveler with all his power. The traveler felt the sun's genial warmth, and as he grew warmer and warmer he began to loosen his coat. Finally he was forced to take it off altogether and to sit down in the shade of a tree and fan himself. So the sun was right, after all!

A lion was asleep in his den one day, when a mischievous mouse for no reason at all ran across the outstretched paw and up the royal nose of the king of beasts, awakening him from his nap. The mighty beast clapped his paw upon the now frightened little creature and would have made an end of him.

"Please," squealed the mouse, "don't kill me. Forgive me this time, O King, and I shall never forget it. A day may come, who knows, when I may do you a good turn to repay your kindness." The lion, smiling at his little prisoner's fright and amused by the thought that so small a creature ever could be of assistance to the king of beasts, let him go.

Not long afterward the lion, while ranging the forest for his prey, was caught in the net which the hunters had set to catch him. He let out a roar that echoed through the forest. Even the mouse heard it, and recognizing the voice of his former preserver and friend, ran to the spot where he lay tangled in the net of ropes.

"Well, your majesty," said the mouse, "I know you did not believe me once when I said I would return a kindness, but here is my chance." And without further ado he set to work to nibble with his sharp little teeth at the ropes that bound the lion. Soon the lion was able to crawl out of the hunter's snare and be free.

The Sick Lion

The lion allowed word to get around that he was on his deathbed and wished all the animals of his kingdom to come to his cave to hear his last will and testament.

The fox, who lived by his wits, did not wish to be the first to enter the cave. So he lingered near the entrance while the goat and the sheep and the calf went in to receive the last wishes of the king of beasts.

After a time, the lion seemed to make a remarkable recovery, and came to the mouth of the cave. Seeing the fox a safe distance away, he bellowed: "Why do you not come in to pay your respects to me, friend fox?"

"Please pardon me, your majesty," replied the fox, "but I did not wish to crowd you. I noticed the tracks of many of your subjects going into your cave, but so far I have seen none coming out. Until some of them come out, and there is more room in the cave, I think I'll stay out here in the open air."

The Mule

A mule had been having an easy time of it with nothing to do but eat. One day as he was frisking about the pasture he began to fancy himself a runner.

"My mother was a famous race horse. I'll bet I can run as fast as she ever could," he said to himself. And to prove it he set off at what he thought was a fast pace toward the barn.

Not so long afterward the mule's master found it necessary to get to the village in a great hurry. Jumping upon the animal's back the farmer began to flog him and urge him to greater speed, until the mule, gasping for breath said: "My mother may have been a race horse, but my father was only a jackass."

The Father and His Two Daughters

A man who had two daughters gave one in marriage to a gardener and the other to a potter. After the weddings the daughters departed with their husbands to their new homes, and the father was left alone.

The following spring the father went to visit the daughter who married the gardener. "How fares it with you, daughter?" he asked.

"Very well, indeed," she replied. "We have everything we want. I have but one wish. And that is that we have a heavy shower to water all our growing plants."

Later the father visited the daughter who had married the potter. "And how is everything with you, daughter?" he inquired.

"There is not a thing we lack," said she. "My only hope is that this fine weather and hot sun may continue so that all our tiles may be baked."

"Alas," said the father, "if you must have fine weather and your sister must have rain, what am I to pray for myself?"

The Old Man and Death

An old man, stooped by age and hard work, was gathering sticks in the forest. As he hobbled painfully along he thought of his troubles and began to feel very sorry for himself.

With a hopeless gesture he threw his bundle of sticks upon the ground and groaned: "Life is too hard. I cannot bear it any longer. If only Death would come and take me!"

Even as the words were out of his mouth Death, in the form of a skeleton in a black robe, stood before him. "I heard you call me, sir," he said. "What can I do for you?"

"Please, sir," replied the old man, "could you please help me put this bundle of sticks back on my shoulder again?"