

AESOP'S FABLES



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COVER NOT
FINAL



THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE

Dum-dum, dum-de-dum,

Slow and steady, here I come!

Tortoise sang as he plodded down the road. A small, restless breeze danced beside him swirling up eddies of dust and nearby a frog sat, his long tongue curled in his mouth, ready to catch passing flies.

Frog liked Tortoise's song, so he joined in with a "rib-rib-ribbet".

Other than Frog and Tortoise, there was no movement or sound on the dry, dusty road.

Then, in the distance, Tortoise saw a cloud of dust – it looked as if the ground was being stirred by the hooves of a galloping horse. "Maybe I should get out of the way," he thought. The cloud came closer and closer and, when it was nearly upon them, Tortoise closed his eyes and climbed into his shell where he planned to wait until the speedy traveller has passed.

"Rib-rib-ribbet," sang Frog, and then, Rib-rib-cough!"

Tortoise stuck out his head and opened one wrinkly eyelid. It seemed that the cloud of dust had not moved on. It had come to a halt right beside him.

"What's all this? What's all this?" said a quick, loud voice. "Slow on the road, aren't we? Not a lot of get-up-and-go, have we? How do you expect to get anywhere crawling around like that? You need to hoppity-loppity-hurry-up-choppity!"

Tortoise sighed and slowly opened his other eye.

"Oh, hello, Hare, I didn't see you there. It's very dusty."

Hare took this as a great compliment and spun around quickly, stirring up even more dust. Some of it got into Tortoise's nose and he sneezed loudly.

"Rib-rib-COUGH!" said Frog.

"Look, Tortoise," said Hare. "Don't take this the wrong way, but don't you ever get sick of being so slow? Of walking with your legs scrabbling on the ground and never getting to three places in one day like I do? I've seen trees and rocks move faster than you."

"I don't mind going slowly," said Tortoise. "I look at the view and I sing my songs. I get there in the end. Don't you get tired of rushing everywhere and never catching your breath?"

"Oh, no," said Hare, jumping about. "Never. Not for a splitly-split-second. I need to go-go-go. Some of us are busy-busy-busy, Tortoise!"

"Rib-COUGH-COUGH," said Frog. And then, "Excuse me!"

Hare spun around to stare at whoever it was that had interrupted her. Despite all the booming and coughing, she hadn't noticed Frog until now.

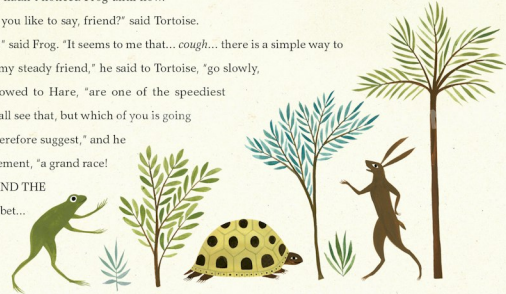
"What would you like to say, friend?" said Tortoise.

"Rib-rib-cough," said Frog. "It seems to me that... cough... there is a simple way to resolve this. You, my steady friend," he said to Tortoise, "go slowly, while you," he bowed to Hare, "are one of the speediest creatures. We can all see that, but which of you is going to get further? I therefore suggest," and he hopped with excitement, "a grand race!"

THE TORTOISE AND THE

HARE! Cough... ribbet...

what do you say?"





Hare threw back her elegant long ears and laughed and laughed. "And who do you think is going to win a rapity-race?" she laughed. "No, I won't race this dawdling dullard. It wouldn't be fair. He'd still be in a cloud of starting-line dust when I got to the finish line."

But Tortoise shook his scaly head. "I think Frog is wise. I'll meet you in the woods at the edge of town at dawn tomorrow," Tortoise said to Hare. "Tell your friends! It'll be the race of the year! Everyone will come to see you!"

Hare loved the idea of everyone coming out to watch her victory, so she agreed to the plan. But she did shake her head as she sped off to spread the news. "Tortoise must have a slow mind too. Racing a hoppity-hare? I almost feel sorry for him!"

The day of the race dawned clear and crisp. And, as Tortoise had predicted, quite a crowd had gathered. It seemed that everyone was cheering for Hare. A family of mice were waving a banner with Hare's name on it and the birds were dropping flowers on her head from above. Even Fox thumped her bushy tail on the ground in encouragement.

Hare put on an impressive display for her supporters: she jumped up and down very fast, she turned cartwheels and she made a great show of stretching out her long limbs so everyone could see how strong and athletic she was.

"We love you, Hare!" squeaked the mice.

Tortoise waited patiently beside the starting area and gathered his strength by slowly munching a juicy cabbage leaf. Nobody paid him much attention at all.

Finally, Frog drew a long line in the dust with his elegant toe and told the two animals to

line up behind it.

"Rib-rib-ribbet!" he said. "The race is over the plain, over the hill and then an easy run down to the town square. Ready, set, GO!"

And they were off!

Hare sprinted away, her legs a blur, her ears streaming behind her, her powerful feet pumping as they carried her away.

Tortoise was barely over the starting line when Hare disappeared over the hill. But he didn't worry. He just sang his marching song to himself and kept putting one foot in front of the other:

Dum-dum, dum-de-dum

Slow and steady, here I come!

Hare was running through a copse of trees in the hills above town. She didn't have far to go until the finish. Hare thought this had been too easy! She had her own song for travelling and she sang it now:

Hoppity-hippity-Hare-I-come.

Quick-quick-quick as a beating drum.

Hoppity-hippity, watch me pass –

If you can see me – I'm that fast!



THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE

"Suddenly, Hare let out a very loud yawn. "Ahhhhh! It's terribly tiring running as fast as I do. Where is that Tortoise? I bet he'll be hours yet. Good! No one will know if I take a little nap."

Hare lay down on a clump of springy moss and closed her eyes. "I'll just rest a few moments," she murmured to the humming bees.

When Hare woke, it was dark. The stars were out and the ground was cold. "Where am I?" she thought. Then she remembered the race.

"Oh, hoppity-hippity! What time is it?" She jumped to her feet and stretched. "Never mind," she told herself. "I'm still going to beat Tortoise! Why I bet he's not even half-way there yet!"

She started to jog down the hill towards town, where the finish line was, but as she approached, she heard what sounded like cheering and celebration coming from behind the town walls. She ran a little faster.

At the town gates, she looked around for her loyal supporters, but no one was there to greet her. "Everyone must be inside," she thought. "What is happening?"

It didn't take her long to find out.

In the town square all the animals had gathered. In the very centre of the party Hare saw Tortoise, being carried in triumph by the family of mice.



They were singing Tortoise's song:

Dum-dum, dum-de-dum

Slow and steady, here I come!

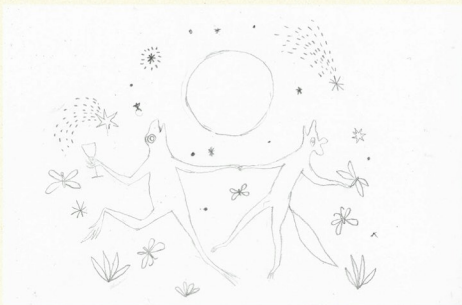
Dum-de-dum a gentle pace

Slow and steady wins the race!

"But how...?" she cried, in disbelief.

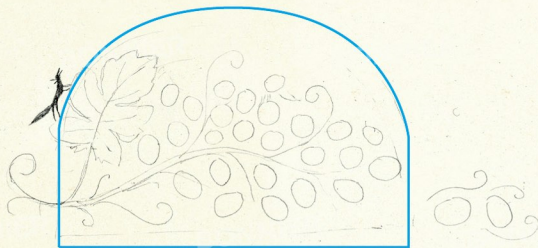
"Oh, hello Hare," said Frog, who was dancing with Fox. "I'm glad you could finally join us. Boom-boom. Tortoise said he passed you napping on the road. I hope you had a good sleep!"

Tortoise was placed back on the ground and he strolled over to greet Hare. "My friend," he said. "Maybe next time you won't be so hasty!"



MORAL

Don't give up. Hard work and a steady pace will win the race.



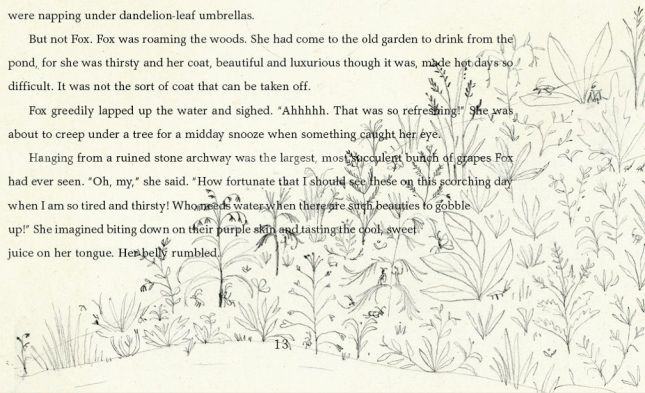
THE FOX AND THE GRAPES

It was the hottest day of the year. The sun beat down from the cloudless sky and even the rocks in the old garden were too hot to step upon. Every animal who could was hiding from the heat – the birds slept in the shade of the trees' top branches and the rabbits were deep in their cool burrows. Even the grasshoppers were too hot. They had woven sunhats from the long grass and were napping under dandelion-leaf umbrellas.

But not Fox. Fox was roaming the woods. She had come to the old garden to drink from the pond, for she was thirsty and her coat, beautiful and luxurious though it was, made hot days so difficult. It was not the sort of coat that can be taken off.

Fox greedily lapped up the water and sighed. "Ahhhhh. That was so refreshing!" She was about to creep under a tree for a midday snooze when something caught her eye.

Hanging from a ruined stone archway was the largest, most succulent bunch of grapes Fox had ever seen. "Oh, my," she said. "How fortunate that I should see these on this scorching day when I am so tired and thirsty! Who needs water when there are such beauties to gobble up!" She imagined biting down on their purple skin and tasting the cool, sweet juice on her tongue. Her belly rumbled.



"I'll have all those grapes," she told herself, and she galloped towards the archway and leaped into the air.

"I am the best leaper in the forest!" she cried. "Aiiieeee!"

But though she jumped high, higher than a silly cricket, she could not reach the grapes.

The second time, she leapt even higher.

"I am more light-footed than any cotton-brained rabbit!" she called out.

But still, she could not reach the grapes.

The third time she took a long running jump and soared into the air.

"I fly higher than the sparrow! Higher than the raven! Higher than a mighty eagle!" she shouted.

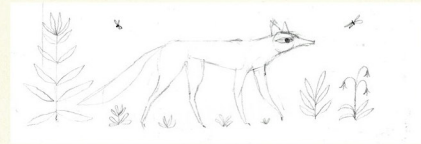
The grapes drew closer and closer to her open mouth. She snapped her jaws and tasted . . .

. . . nothing. Not a thing. Not a single grape had she managed to reach.

"Hurruph," she said.

As the birds dreamed of flying over the treetops, as the rabbits dreamed of tasty carrots and as the crickets snored and dreamed the secret dreams of crickets, Fox marched away from the garden with her tail held high.

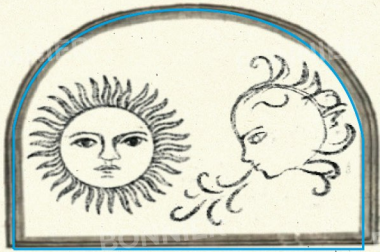
"I never wanted those grapes anyway," she muttered. "I could tell they were sour as soon as I saw them."



MORAL



Many decide that what they cannot reach is not worth having.



THE SUN AND THE WIND

"Raaaaahhhhhh!" roared the North Wind. "Hoooooo!"

Down in the ocean, he had soon whipped up a wonderful storm. The waves were as tall as pine trees and had foaming caps on top. North Wind watched delightedly as a strong-masted merchant ship began to dip and drive and the crew were thrown from one side to the other.

"Hoooo! Look at my might and my power!" North Wind shouted victoriously.

He was tossing some seagulls around in his icy fingers, as they flapped and squawked, when he felt a warm hand touch him on the shoulder. The seagulls flew away.

"Hello, North Wind," whispered Sun. "What's all this?"

"Just a bit of fun," said North Wind, annoyed that his game was ruined. "Can't you see how strong I am, Sun? Look at how those little humans on the ship are cowering!"

Sun smiled, and the sea grew calmer. The ship was soon steadied and quickly sailed away on the last of the North Wind's breath.

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"Very mighty, North Wind," the Sun said encouragingly. "But I'm stronger."

North Wind laughed. "You! Why, you are all warmth and smiles and weakness. Nothing beats an icy blast from the North."

"We'll see about that," said Sun. "Why don't we try a little test?"

Below them, a man was walking along a coastal road. Sun pointed to him. "I bet I can take that cloak off him faster than you can."

North Wind laughed. Then he huffed and puffed and blew.

"HOOOOO!" he cried.

The man pulled his cloak closer.

"RAHHHHHHHHH!" shouted North Wind, blowing with all his strength.

"Brrr," said the man, and he wrapped his cloak around him so tightly that there was nothing North Wind could do. Finally, exhausted, he turned to Sun. "Well, I'd like to see you do better," he grumbled.

Sun spread out her rays and gave her widest smile. "Hello, friend," she whispered to the man.

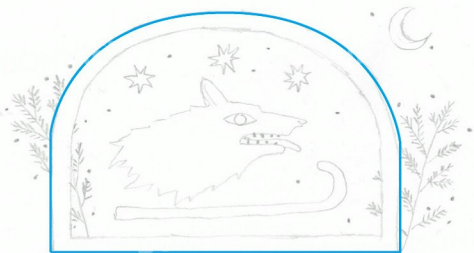
"Ahh," said the man, "what a lovely day it's become." And he took the cloak off and walked along basking in the heat that shone down on him.

 MORAL 

Gentle persuasion can be more effective than force.



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THE BOY WHO CRIED WOLF

The shepherd boy threw a stone over the edge of the cliff and watched it bounce down the mountain and land in the stream far below.

"I'm so bored," he sighed.

He looked out over the mountain, at the meadows of spring flowers, the fresh streams and the white-capped peaks far beyond. All around him, his sheep grazed peacefully.

"You lot aren't much company," he said to them.

"Baaaaa," they replied.

The shepherd boy threw another stone down the mountain.

Thunk, thunk, thunk, splash! It landed in the stream below.

Looking down at the village below, he sighed again. "I wish something, anything, would happen." Then, a thought came to him.

That night, there was a terrible commotion in the village below. The villagers awoke to a loud cry coming from high up the mountain. "A wolf! A wolf is eating the sheep! Help me!"



All of a sudden, what rushing about there was! The villagers gathered bows and arrows and lit flaming torches, and then they charged up the mountain to scare away the wolf.

As they climbed, the shouting grew louder.

"Help! Help! He's taken another sheep!" cried the shepherd boy. "Hurry! He's sizing me up now. I don't think I can hold him off much longer!"

Finally, cold and out of breath, the villagers reached the meadow where the shepherd grazed his sheep. When they got there, they found no wolf, just the shepherd boy, doubled over with laughter.

"HA!" he shouted. "You should see your faces!"

The villagers were relieved to find the boy unharmed, but when they asked where the wolf had gone, he said, "Wasn't it a great joke? There was no wolf! I just wanted to see you all run up the mountain!"

Several weeks later, on a damp and drizzly night, the villagers had just snuffed their candles and climbed into their beds when they heard shouts coming from the mountain once again.



A wolf! A wolf is eating the sheep! Help me!"

Once again, there was rushing about and shouting in the village. Torches were lit and men and women called to each other, "We must help the shepherd! We must drive the wolf away!" Though there were also one or two who grumbled under their breath that if this was another joke, they were never climbing that mountain in the dark again. Soon everyone had gathered and the made the arduous climb to the meadow, stumbling and slipping up the rocky path as the rain fell around them.

"Hurry!" the shepherd boy cried. "The wolf has taken another sheep! He's ripping it apart with his huge jaws. I'm afraid I will be next. Please, make haste!"

The villagers rushed up the rest of the path only to find the shepherd boy once again holding his sides and howling with laughter.

"HA!" he shouted. "I got you! I got you again! There is no wolf! But you should see how stupid you all look fumbling around in the dark like that."

The villagers were furious that they had been tricked a second time, and they complained loudly about the shepherd boy as they made the dangerous journey home.





On a particularly frosty night, the villagers woke once more to cries coming down from the mountain.

"A wolf! A wolf is eating the sheep! Help me!"

This time nobody stirred.

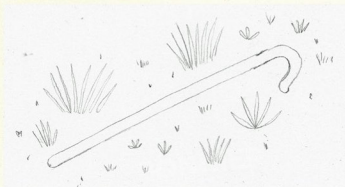
"That boy is up to his old tricks," they muttered. "Running up the mountain in this weather? To be laughed at *again*? No thank you!" and they rolled over in their warm beds and went back to sleep.

"How interesting," thought a passing wolf. "I didn't know there were sheep in that meadow."

Up in the meadow, the boy watched as a pair of golden eyes came towards him in the dark. "HELP!" he shouted. "PLEASE, PLEASE HELP ME! I'M SERIOUS THIS TI—"

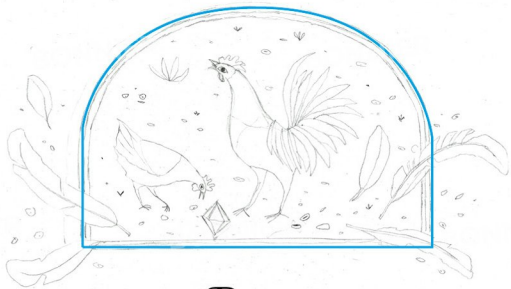
But he never finished because the huge wolf leaped at him with its terrifying teeth bared. "Baaa," said the sheep, and they turned and bolted for safety. In the morning the villagers found the sheep wandering, lost on the mountain.

"I wonder what happened to that shepherd boy," the villagers said. "I suppose he's run away. Though the way he's vanished you'd think he really had been eaten by a wolf. Ha ha!"



🌿 MORAL 🌿

A liar will not be believed,
even when they are telling the truth.



THE ROOSTER AND THE JEWEL

Rooster was very hungry. Even though he pecked and clawed in the farmyard all day he was never quite full. It wasn't that the farmer and his family didn't feed him; he just didn't think they understood just how much work was involved in being a rooster.

"Hungry work, too," he muttered to himself. "Every morning I'm up at the crack of dawn, waking everyone else up! Not to mention the task of managing the hens! Why, if I'm not around they all fight terribly. And *then* I have to march up and down the yard to guard it *and* I have to keep my spurs sharp to scare away the fox." He ruffled up his feathers discontentedly. "I've heard it said I have an easy life! Well, they just don't appreciate me!"

Rooster found a worm and gobbled it up, then he ate the last few grains of barley from the morning's feed. "But I'm **STILL** hungry!" he moaned.

"Greedy more like," muttered one of the hens who was pecking nearby, and all the others clucked with laughter.

"Humph," said Rooster. "They *really* don't appreciate me!" And he marched off to the far corner of the farmyard and started pecking there instead.

• THE ROOSTER AND THE JEWEL •

Suddenly Rooster's beak hit something hard and round. "Ooh!" he said. "Maybe it's a juicy snail!"

But the object he found was not a snail. It was a gleaming emerald. The sunlight caught it and it glittered like green fire.

"Hmm," said Rooster. "Now I know that the farmer might think this was a great find. Perhaps he would take it to a jeweller in town and get it set in a big ring which he would wear to impress his friends. But to me? Phhhist! It is of no use at all!"

And he picked up the jewel and threw it into a dung heap.

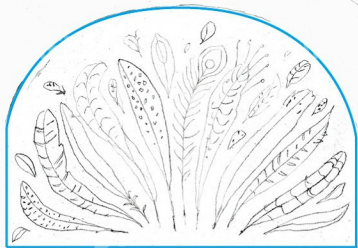
"I'd rather have some tasty grain than all the jewels in the world!"



MORAL



Precious things are worthless to those who do not prize them.



THE KING OF THE BIRDS

All the birds were aflutter with excitement.

A proclamation had just been delivered from Zeus, the mighty king of the gods! That morning, Hermes, the messenger god, had appeared above the forest flapping the wings on his sandals, and bellowing loudly enough to be heard from the mountains to the town.

"Attention birds!" he had cried. "Mighty Zeus has declared that whichever of you birds is most beautiful, shall be king or queen of your kind!"

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And he leaped onto a passing cloud and rode off back to the top of Mount Olympus.

"Well," said Peacock, flaunting his tail as he strutted back and forth, "you twittering fools had best start calling me "Your Majesty" now. Or perhaps "Your Eminence"? or "Your Beauteous and Most Esteemed Highness"? Hmm, which do I prefer? I'll have to have a nap under this tree and think about it." And off he went.

Flamingo giggled. "That peacock knows it will be me. I hear Zeus likes pink best of all," and he danced about for everyone so his pretty tail and wings puffed up like a dancer's dress.

"Don't be a bird-brain," said Eagle. "It's sure to be me. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and you are both silly and vain. What you birds need in a king is a bit of beautiful terror!" and she amused herself by pretending to dive on helpless little sparrows who fluttered out of her way.

Jackdaw said nothing. He peered into the still water of the pool. His sharp beak and pebble-eyed face peered back at him.

"Gah!" said Jackdaw. "I'm not much to look at, it's true!"

He puffed out his chest and drew himself up to his full height. "Cack-cack-cack-cack-cack," he said. "I'm not exactly much of a songbird either." He studied his reflection again, "But really, I should be king. I might not be handsome, but I'm prouder and more noble than any other bird!" And he marched up and down by the side of the pool using his big feet to take what he imagined to be large, royal steps.

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A pair of goldfinches in a nearby shrub began to titter at his silly walk and, on hearing them, Jackdaw stopped his parading and came to a sad halt. "Oh, what's the use," he said. "I'm a plain jackdaw and I'm not fit to be anything much!"

Then, out of the corner of his eye, he saw something glinting on the riverbank. "A shiny thing," he thought. "That will cheer me up. I love shiny things!"

He snatched at it and found that he was holding a gleaming blue and green peacock's feather in his beak.



"Oh-ho," thought Jackdaw. "Now there's an idea. They say that fine feathers make fine birds ... but I never heard anyone say you couldn't borrow someone else's!" He wove the feather into his own black coat and kept walking.

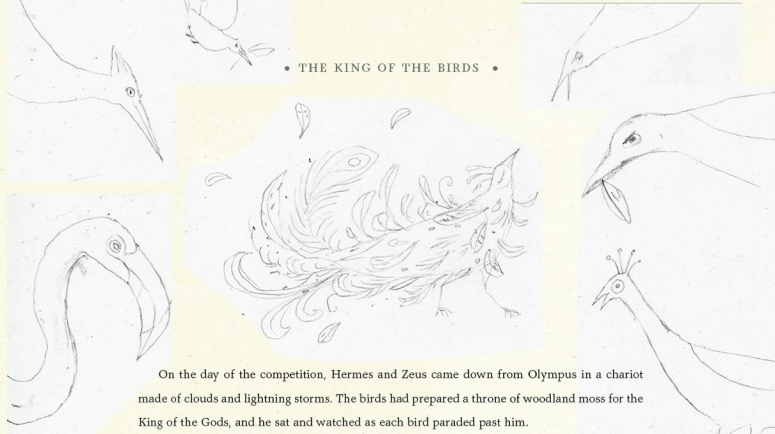
Down by the lagoon Flamingo was talking excitedly to the gold-and-blue kingfishers in the reeds. They didn't even notice as Jackdaw gathered fallen feathers from beneath them and wove them into his chest.

On he went, into the forest. There, beneath a heavily laden fig tree where little songbirds were chattering and feasting, he found many different coloured feathers. There was yellow and ultramarine from the bee eater; green from the finches; and red, white and black from a woodpecker. On his head he placed the sun-kissed plumes of the golden oriole.

Finally, from the foot of the mountain he picked up Eagle's strong, stylish black-and-white tail feathers.

Back at the pool, he looked into the water again and saw an entirely different creature. This one was blue and pink and shimmering green. It had a golden crown, a green cloak, stripy wings and a collar of deep red.

He bowed to himself, "Your Majestic Majesty, hmmm, yes I think I like that one best of all!"



On the day of the competition, Hermes and Zeus came down from Olympus in a chariot made of clouds and lightning storms. The birds had prepared a throne of woodland moss for the King of the Gods, and he sat and watched as each bird paraded past him.

Zeus admired Peacock, he praised Eagle and he applauded Flamingo's dance, but when Jackdaw jumped onto the stage, Zeus was so impressed that he shouted out, "Birds, here you see before you your king! Give him all deference!"

Jackdaw puffed up his chest and waited for the birds to shout, "Long live the king!"

But did they? Not a single one.

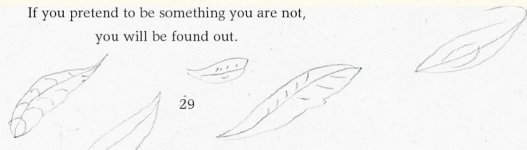
No, they recognised their own feathers and saw through Jackdaw's trick. Squawking and shrieking they attacked him with their beaks and claws. Each bird plucked out a feather, and soon Jackdaw was just as plain and ungainly as he had been before.

Mighty Zeus shook with laughter. "You can't be the king, little Jackdaw, but I think you make an excellent fool!"



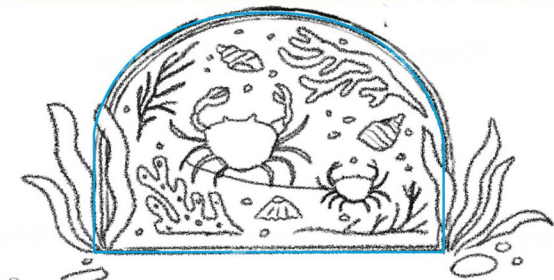
MORAL

If you pretend to be something you are not,
you will be found out.



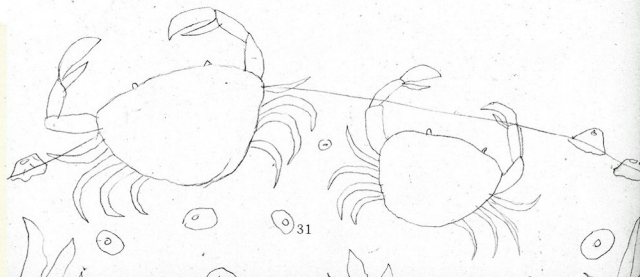


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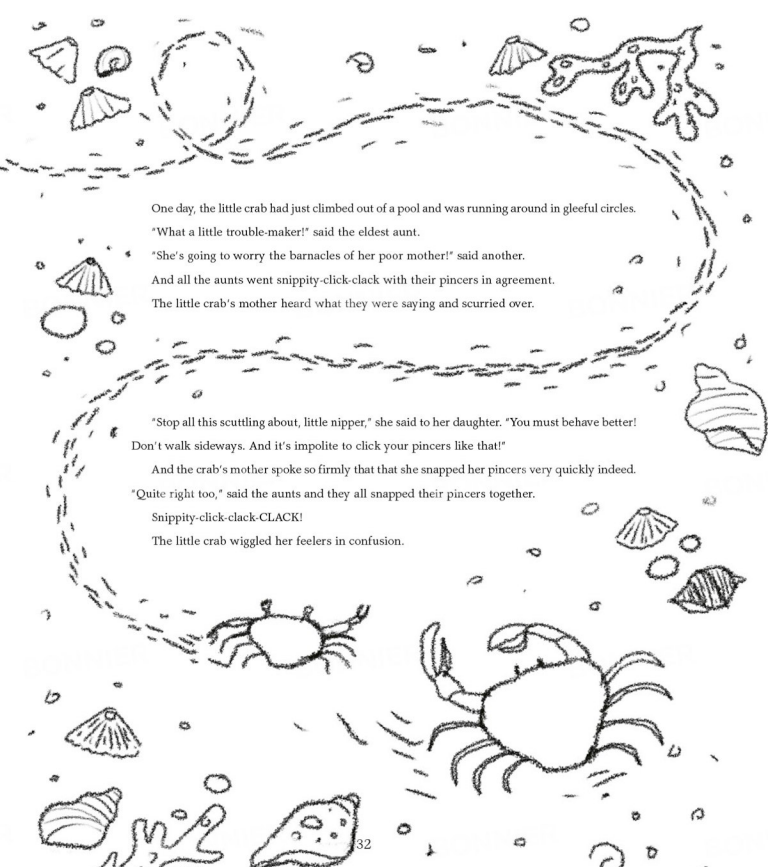


THE CRAB AND HER MOTHER

Little Crab was playing one day in the rock pools by the sea. She loved to scuttle between them and plunge into their cool water. Her friends, the small fish and sea urchins who lived in their depths would greet her and the fish would swim around in graceful spirals before she pulled herself out of the water and ran to another pool. It was such a fun game, though she did used to make such a noise giggling and splashing and scuttling that sometimes the crab's aunts would look at her disapprovingly and mutter, "That one isn't very well behaved!"



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One day, the little crab had just climbed out of a pool and was running around in gleeful circles.

"What a little trouble-maker!" said the eldest aunt.

"She's going to worry the barnacles of her poor mother!" said another.

And all the aunts went snippy-click-clack with their pincers in agreement.

The little crab's mother heard what they were saying and scurried over.


"Stop all this scuttling about, little nipper," she said to her daughter. "You must behave better! Don't walk sideways. And it's impolite to click your pincers like that!"

And the crab's mother spoke so firmly that that she snapped her pincers very quickly indeed.

"Quite right too," said the aunts and they all snapped their pincers together.

Snippy-click-clack-CLACK!

The little crab wiggled her feelers in confusion.



"Ma," she said. "I don't know what to do. You will have to show me the way that you walk straight ahead and keep your pincers closed so that I have good manners when I grow up too!"

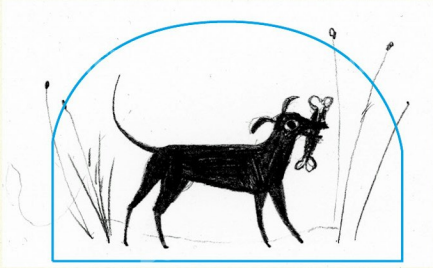
Mother Crab began her demonstration. She held her pincers at her sides and took a few careful steps. But her pincers snapped as soon as she moved and she could only walk sideways.

"No, no, like this!" called the crab's aunts. Then they all started snappy-click-clacking their claw and scuttling sideways over the rocks.

"Eeee! Eeee! Eeee!" laughed the seagulls on the cliffs above.

Little Crab scratched her head. Ma, Aunties, you *are* walking sideways. And as for not clicking pincers ... why you don't seem to be able to stop! If you want to teach me, then you have to walk straight too. I'm only doing what I've seen you do!

Teach others by setting a good example yourself.



THE DOG AND HIS REFLECTION

There was once a dog who didn't live in a house with people like many dogs do, and he was often hungry. One day he came to a town, and in its dusty main street he found a butcher's shop.

The dog peered through the window. Oh, what treasures there were inside!

Hanging from hooks there were enormous hams, and on the tables there were strings of beautiful sausages and very fine red meat. The dog's stomach growled so loudly he was certain that it could be heard all the way to the city and back.

"Oh, what a wretched dog I am!" he sighed. "I wish I had someone to buy me a string of sausages, or a side of beef, or a delicious juicy bone. No one cares for a mutt like me."

But the dog looked so hungry and mournful, that the butcher's young son took pity on him and came out of the shop with the biggest bone the dog had ever seen.

"Here you are, Dog," said the boy. "It makes me sad to see you looking at me with those huge eyes."

"Oh, thank you!" cried Dog, waving his tail like a flag and barking a few times. He even permitted the butcher's boy to scratch him behind the ears, which he thought was very generous of him. Then he picked up his prize and trotted down the street.

A baker's dog saw him and wagged her tail. "Isn't it your lucky day, friend," she said. "I've never had a bone like that! Care to share?"

"No, I don't think I shall!" said the hungry dog and he trotted on by.

Next, he met a dog who spent his days guarding the temple.

"Zeus's ears, look at that magnificent bone!" said the temple dog. "I don't even get a bone like that on festival days. Would you allow a hungry friend to have a little gnaw?"

"No, I certainly would not!" growled Dog. "What a cheek to ask!" And he trotted on by.

On the edge of the town, he met a wealthy merchant's dog wearing a jewelled collar and looking very grand beside her master and mistress's beautiful gates.

"Oooh!", she yelped. "I thought I got the finest things to eat every day, but clearly my people have been holding out on me. They don't give me the best bones at all. I shall have to make a complaint!"

She shook her ears indignantly, then fluttered her long eyelashes and said, "You can come to dinner in my courtyard if you bring your bone."

Dog laughed. "I have to turn down your invitation. This bone is a banquet for one and I'm going to take it somewhere away from all you yip-yapping town dogs to eat it."

And so he trotted away from the town, through the wheat fields and down towards the forest. "I'll have some peace and quiet there," he thought.

On the way to the forest there was a little wooden footbridge, and as Dog was crossing it, he looked down into the water and saw another dog looking back at him. He thought the dog was a rather scruffy looking thing and, even worse than that, he was holding a larger, juicier, more succulent bone than the one the dog held in his own jaws.

"Ooh!" he thought. "That butcher's boy was a scoundrel and he tricked me. For here is a mangy mutt with a better bone than mine. Well, I won't stand for that. I'm going to fight him and teach him a lesson!"

He bared his teeth. The other dog did the same. He flattened his ears and snarled. So did the other dog. Then he leaped at his opponent, snapping and barking. "That's my bone!" he said. "Mine, mine, mine!"

But instead of feeling his teeth sink into the other dog's ears he heard a great splash and felt the water closing over his head. And where was his bone? It had been snatched away.

Dripping wet and still very hungry, Dog dragged himself onto the riverbank.

"That dreadful dog has stolen my bone and run away. The greedy coward!" he cried. "Why did he have to take my bone when he had an even bigger one of his own?"

He stood once more over the water and peered in. There was that other dog, looking boldly up at him! He didn't even look embarrassed! But where were the bones? The strange dog wasn't holding either of them now.

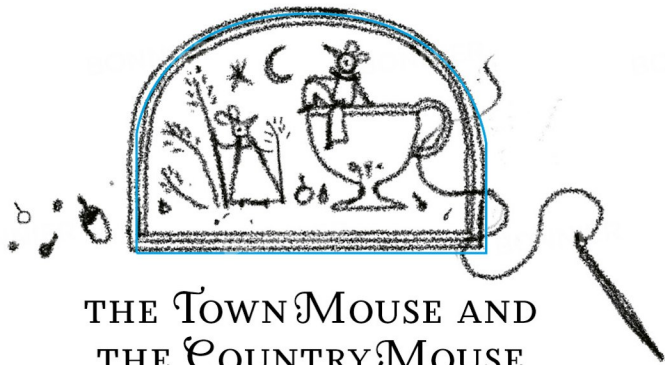
Dog blinked in surprise, and the other dog did too. Then, finally, he realised.

"How silly I've been! Trying to fight with my own reflection. And now my bone is at the bottom of the river and I'm still hungry!"



under water spot illustration natural edge

MORAL
Be content with what you have.



THE TOWN MOUSE AND THE COUNTRY MOUSE

Country Mouse was excitedly scurrying about in the wheat field gathering food. Tonight, she was expecting a special guest and she wanted to make a wholesome meal. She didn't need much: just an ear of barley, a few sweet herbs, a fig for dessert and a daisy to put in her chipped vase.

Country Mouse's daughter made barley soup and sprinkled in the herbs, while her son set the table with their walnut-shell bowls and twig spoons. "Ahh. It's a simple life, but a good one," Country Mouse said to herself.

Just then, there was a knock at the door. When Country Mouse opened it, a very smart mouse was standing on the doorstep.

"Country Mouse!" cried the visitor. "It's been too long. What a peaceful place this is! I've grown tired of the hustle and bustle of town life. I wanted some fresh country air and simple food."

"Town Mouse!" replied Country Mouse. "Welcome to my home. We have simple food and fresh air in abundance!"

She helped her friend take off her thick travelling cloak and offered her the best seat at the table. It creaked dangerously when Town Mouse sat down, but she didn't request another – after

all, she was determined to show her little country friend her most sophisticated town manners.

When the meal was served, Town Mouse ate her barley soup politely, but she looked thoughtful. She still looked thoughtful after they had divided the fig for dessert, and when Country Mouse served sweet peppermint tea. Finally, Town Mouse said to her friend, "You have so little here! Barley and water! A morsel of fig! Why, you live like an ant. In the city we have so many fine things. We eat from painted pots and have food you can't even imagine. Come and visit me and I will share it all with you!"



Country Mouse listened in amazement with her eyes very wide and her whiskers twitching in admiration.

"I would like that very much!" she said.

Town Mouse hugged her friend. "I am so happy you will come. What a grand time we will have!"

Later, when Country Mouse showed Town Mouse to a bed of field grass, Town Mouse thought, "Thank Zeus we return to town tomorrow – for my sake! I couldn't sleep another night here. Why, this is a bed for a ragged little hedge sparrow, not a mouse such as I!"



In the morning, Country Mouse put on her best dress and set off with Town Mouse. From the garden gate she waved goodbye to her children.

"I'll have the most amazing stories to tell when I come back," she called. "Of parties and feasts and... other town things!"

The two mice walked for many miles, and after a long, hot journey they reached the busy street that led into the town centre.

Country Mouse looked around her with wide, fearful eyes. "But what is this? There are so many people and so many horses! What a noise they make and how big they are! We shall be crushed under their feet!"

Town Mouse took her friend's hand and together they dodged and darted between the legs of the people, the wheels of the carts and the clapping hooves of the horses.

Country Mouse was very frightened, but she tried to be brave so her friend didn't think she was a coward. But when they reached Town Mouse's home, she forgot to be afraid. It was the grandest, most comfortable mouse hole she had ever seen. Candles blazed everywhere, luxurious fabric hung from the walls and the floors were covered in thick rugs – she felt as if she was walking on feathers. Even Town Mouse's daughters were richly dressed. They wore elegant clothes and jewels and both curtseyed to Country Mouse like she was an honoured guest.

The little country animal was amazed. "My dear friend, it is just as you said! Everything is so grand and you have so much!"

Her amazement was increased tenfold when she saw the meal that had been laid out on the table. There were bowls of nuts, creamy cheeses, fresh baked bread and, in the centre of the feast, a baked sardine served on a slice of lemon took pride of place.

Country Mouse ate well, but after dinner she sighed. "Town Mouse, I now see what a good life you live. You have everything a mouse could wish for! Perhaps my children would be happier if we moved here and become town mice too? I don't want to go back to the country where we have so little."

But just then, there was a low hissing sound and Town Mouse and her children leaped to their feet. "Quick! Hide!" they shouted. All the mice scurried off the table and hid in damp cracks in the floor.

Country Mouse peered out of her hiding place and what a sight met her eyes! A huge, black cat with eyes like watchful moons and teeth like knives stood guard, hissing and spitting.



"I dare you to come out little mice," whispered the cat. "We can play my favourite game – catch!"

For more than an hour Country Mouse shivered with fright in the crack in the floorboards. Finally, the cat grew bored and stalked off, hissing, "I'll eat you later, mice!" over her shoulder. Town Mouse and her daughters helped the Country Mouse out of her hiding place. "Don't worry," they said. "It only happens sometimes."

That night, Town Mouse showed Country Mouse to a beautiful bed hung with silk curtains in a cosy alcove near the stove. It was the softest, most luxurious bed Country Mouse had ever seen, but she didn't sleep a wink. Town was too noisy. Cats howled from rooftops, people yelled at each other, carts rolled up and down the streets all night and dogs barked. The little mouse spent every moment quivering beneath her blankets in terrible fear.

The next morning, Country Mouse packed her dock-leaf bag and went to say farewell to her friend. "I have decided that town is not for me," she said, simply.

"You're going home?" asked Town Mouse. "To your damp earth burrow and your barley soup? Why in Zeus's name?"

"You have all the luxuries you could want, but you live in constant fear," Country Mouse said. "Better barley soup in safety than a banquet in terror, my friend!" and with that she darted down the street, avoiding the cart wheels and the clip-clopping hooves.

When she got home, her son and daughter greeted her with a cup of peppermint tea. She sipped it and sighed contentedly. "Town is a very grand sort of place I daresay," she said. "But we have everything we need right here."



MORAL

It is better to live a simple life in peace
than a luxurious life in fear.





THE BATS, THE BIRDS AND THE BEASTS

Nobody remembered how the war had started, but no reasoning could calm either side and the birds and the beasts fought tooth, beak and claw.

One story went that it was Jackdaw's fault, that one day he'd decided that it would be great fun to dive squawking, with his claws outstretched, onto Lion's head, just to give him a fright. Those who told this story said that Lion had screeched and batted at his mane in fear and all the little songbirds had twittered with laughter as they watched him. And so the beasts had declared war on the birds because Lion could not tolerate such a loss of his regal dignity.

Another story told that it was Fox's fault. Fox often raided the hen houses in the valley and one day the rooster and the hens had had enough. Those who told this story said that the hens had gone to Eagle and said, "Though we do not soar through the sky, are we not also birds? And can our kind really stand by while Fox picks us off one by one?" And so Eagle had spread out her magnificent wings and declared, "When one bird is harmed all birds are harmed! This means war!"

There were other stories too, but the point is that no one really remembered how it had started.



In the great battles that took place many lives were lost. Monkey and her family would climb trees to throw nests to the ground, and Eagle and her soldiers would dive on lambs and carry them away while Jackadaw 'caw-cawed' approvingly from a nearby tree. The wolves hunted in packs and would leap on any pigeon silly enough to come to the ground to look for food, and the owls terrorised the small animals, the mice and rabbits and frogs, making midnight raids on their homes. After many long months it looked as if the fighting would never end.

Now, there was one animal that watched the war happening, though she joined neither side. Bat was known to be a ferocious and cunning fighter and both the beasts and birds hoped that she would join them. Both sides sent secret messengers to her.

The beasts arrived first. Fox had been selected as an ambassador, and she bowed low to Bat (who was hanging upside down and sleeping, so did not see this display of courtesy). "Bat," called Fox. "You are the only beast that has not joined to fight against the wicked birds. Will you not join us? Our honour is at stake!"

Bat awoke from her dreams. "What's all this?" she flapped. "Me? Fight against the birds? I don't think so! I have beautiful wings and I can glide on the wind. I *am* a bird." And she sent Fox on her way.

Then the birds came. They had sent peaceful Dove to be their ambassador. She cooed and fluttered around the cave where Bat slept, showing off her snowy white feathers.

"Coo, Bat!" she called softly. "The birds want peace. Not even our nests are safe. But you, Bat, are the only bird who has not joined us in the fight. Will you help us defeat the beastly beasts?"

Bat yawned and wrapped her leathery wings more tightly around her. "It would be wrong of me to fight with you, Dove. Can't you see my fur? Do you see feathers or a beak? No! I *am* a beast." And she sent Dove on her way.

A little while later, the birds and the beasts really did make peace. Lion and Eagle became friends again and in both camps there was great celebration.

Bat, never one to miss a party, first flew to the beasts' camp. "I've come to join the festivities," she called.

"Oh no you don't," said Lion. "You're a bird, remember? Flap off to their party!"

So, Bat made her way to the trees where the birds were singing jubilant songs. "I've come to join the festivities," she chirruped.

"Oh no you don't," said Eagle. "You're a beast remember? I'm sure they'd love to see you. But you aren't welcome here!"

So bat flew home all alone. She lives there still and no other beast or bird will keep her company.

MORAL

Those that bark and cry for a cause will have no friends.





THE FROG AND THE SUN

The frogs were sitting on the edge of their lovely wet pond, booming and croaking to each other. Most had at their feet in the cool water, while the tadpole played games of tag beneath its surface. The strongest, most athletic of the older frogs were practising their diving from a thick green lily pad.

"Boom-boom, croak-boom," said the King of the Frogs to his wife, the Queen. "What a wonderful home we have! Fresh water and lots of it, plus all the flies and mites my subjects could need. We even have tall, beautiful reeds in which to build our houses."

"And water lilies," sighed the Queen. "Water lilies make the most beautiful dresses!"

"Why yes, dear," said the King. "The water lilies are very fine too."

Just then there was a loud twang and a golden arrow quivered in the riverbank. Tied around

it was a note. The King of the Frogs asked one of his footmen to fetch it.

"It's an invitation," declared the King. "From Aphrodite, the goddess of love herself! Delivered by her son, Eros. The Sun is to be married and we are all invited to the wedding feast!"

"BOOM-BOOM-CROAK-BOOM!" said all the frogs delightedly.

"BOOM... how wonderful!" said the Queen. "I shall wear the most exquisite water-lily dress I can find!"

The frogs stayed up late that night. They chatted excitedly and made dresses from flowers and suits from willow bark. Just one frog did not join in the preparations – but he was known to be grumpy and old and he often scolded the tadpoles when they swam too close to his hiding place, so no one paid him much attention.

The wedding was just as splendid as the frogs had hoped. The King and Queen looked beautiful and Aphrodite herself conducted the ceremony. Afterwards, everyone danced to music sung by

a frog choir. The Sun and his new wife blazed with love.

"Oh, I do love a wedding," sighed the Queen.

Just then, there was a very loud "BOOM" and "CROAK" from the edge of the celebration. Everyone spun around to see who was being so rude.

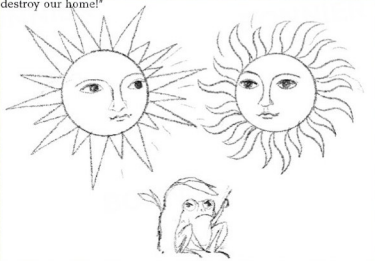
"BOOM-CROAK!" said the voice again. It was the old, grumpy frog.

"Really, I don't see the need to make such a fuss," said the King of Frogs. "Come and join our dance, old timer."

"You are all fools!" spat the old frog. "Fools, I tell you! Celebrating the wedding of the Sun? Pah!"

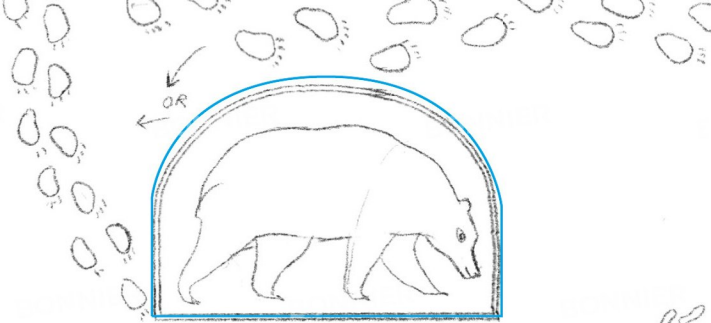
"That's not terribly polite," said the Queen.

"Well, think about it," said the old frog. "The Sun's new wife is just as heated as he is! So that's two of them to dry out our pond. And then what if they have a baby? Three suns? Can you imagine what will happen to our beautiful marshes? There will be no more swimming holes, no more reeds, no more flies to eat and no more water-lily dresses, your highness! The Sun and his family will destroy our home!"



 MORAL 

Do not celebrate things that will bring you destruction.



THE TRAVELLERS AND THE BEAR

Two friends stood on the top of a steep hill and looked down below them into the lush, green valley. They were very happy to be here.

"It's been such a long journey," said the first man. "I can't believe it's nearly over!"

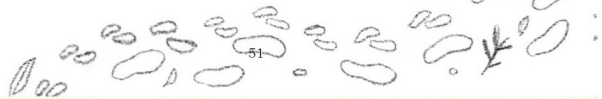
"Yes," said the second. "By nightfall we will be in the town with full stomachs and a safe warm bed to sleep in."

They had set out from the city some months ago and had travelled hundreds of miles. They had crossed oceans and climbed mountains and braved the waterless wastes of the desert. Now they were nearly at their journey's end.

"Just a little further," they said, and they set off down the track and towards the easy sweep of the valley below and the safety of the farms and villages that surrounded the town.

To pass the time, the first man began to tell a story about his travels in the lands beyond the endless ocean. He was the elder of the two and he had so many stories to tell that the younger man thought he'd never tire of hearing them.

"Once," he began, "I was climbing over the mountains at the end of the eternal river, when





a pack of wolves began to chase me. For miles they followed me and my companion. At last, my friend was so exhausted that he begged me to let the wolves end his suffering, but I refused. Instead, I challenged the wolves to a boxing match, and – BIFF! POW! WHAM! – I beat every single one of them! They promised never to follow us again.”

“You were so brave!” said the younger man admiringly.

“Well, I call it a likely story indeed!” said a deep, growling voice from somewhere nearby.

The travellers looked around to see who had spoken and, just when they thought they must have imagined it, a huge brown bear lumbered out of a thicket. He was as big as a horse and his claws were as long as daggers.

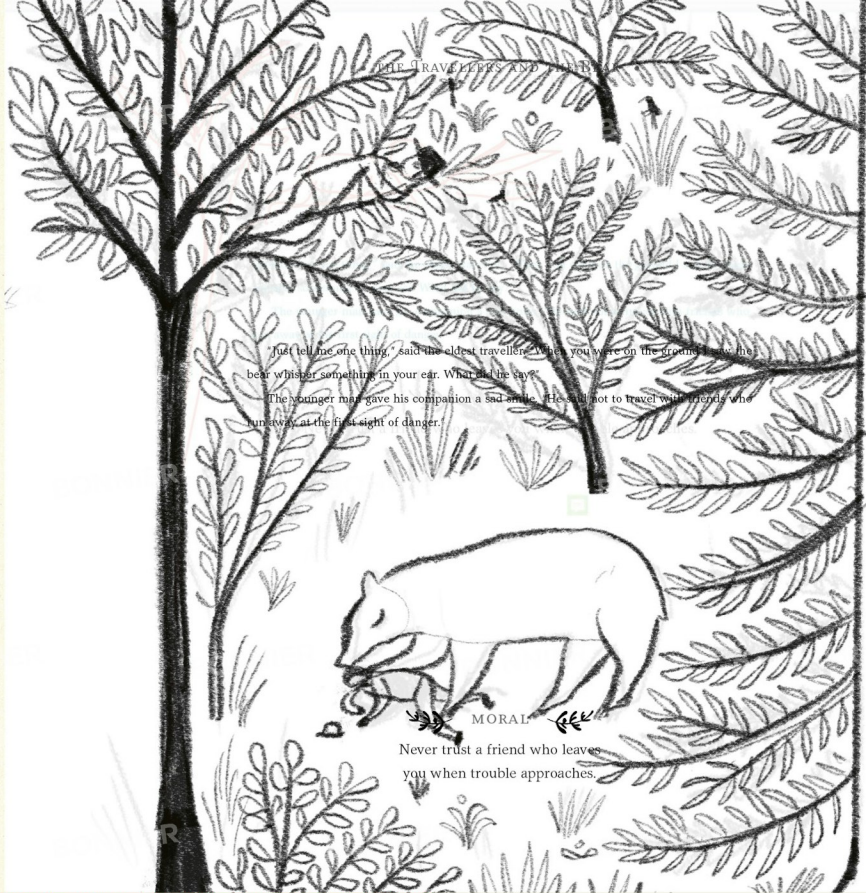
The eldest of the two travellers shouted in terror and then, quick as a flash, he sprinted away and clambered into a tree. He climbed as high as he could, then sat on a branch.

“Don’t let it c-c-climb up here!” he begged.

The younger traveller was not so quick and so, instead of running, he threw himself on to the ground and lay as still as he could – he had heard that bears will not touch a dead body.

The bear approached him and sniffed. The traveller felt the bear’s furry snout and hot breath on his ear. Then, after what seemed like a terrible long moment, the bear left him and vanished back into the trees.

When his friend climbed down from the tree both men were still amazed at their lucky escape.

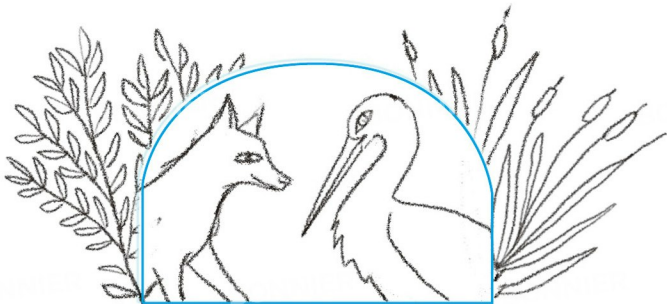


“Just tell me one thing,” said the eldest traveller. “When you were on the ground, did the bear whisper something in your ear. What did he say?”

The younger man gave his companion a sad smile. “He said not to travel with friends who run away at the first sight of danger.”

MORAL

Never trust a friend who leaves you when trouble approaches.



THE FOX AND THE STORK

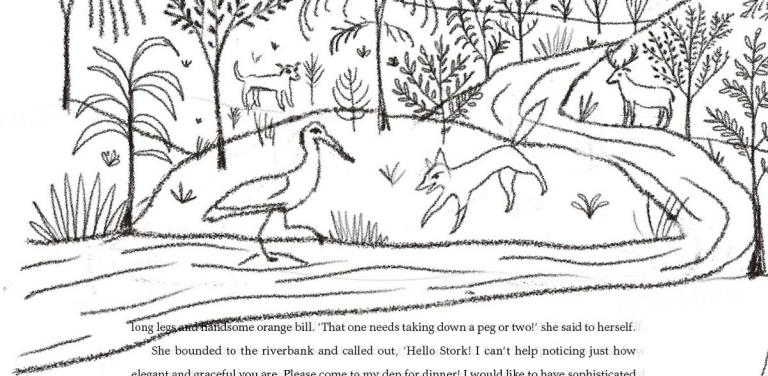
Fox loved nothing better than to play tricks on her neighbours.

When she saw Stag coming through the forest, she would run between the smaller trees calling, 'Hey, Stag! This way!' Poor Stag would run towards her voice and his antlers would soon be caught in the low branches. Fox thought this was very funny and she laughed as poor Stag struggled to break free.

When Dog complained that he was hungry, Fox would run in circles with a chicken she had stolen from the farm and then eat it all up. When Dog passed by he would smell the good smells and run around in circles crying, 'Where where are you my lovely chicken dinner? You smell delicious!' Fox would hide in the bushes and hold her sides with laughter as Dog ran in circles before he collapsed, exhausted and starving.

Fox even played a trick on Eagle. She wrapped a heavy rock in a sheepskin so it looked like a lamb. When Eagle dived from the sky in a blur of feathers and talons, she snatched what she thought would be her prey, but she could not fly away because the rock was so heavy. As Eagle sweated, trying to lift a wool-wrapped rock, Fox peeped at the scene with a delighted grin on her face. 'Look at that silly bird straining and panting. Not so mighty now, are you Eagle?'

One day, Fox saw Stork daintily paddling in the shallows of the river. She was envious of his



long legs and handsome orange bill. 'That one needs taking down a peg or two!' she said to herself.

She bounded to the riverbank and called out, 'Hello Stork! I can't help noticing just how elegant and graceful you are. Please come to my den for dinner! I would like to have sophisticated table manners just like you!'

'Well . . .' said Stork, uncertainly.

'Wonderful!' said Fox. 'I'll see you this evening!' And she bounded off with a little giggle as she thought what a wonderful trick she was going to play.

At home, Fox chopped up vegetables and boiled water. Soon she had a steaming pot of soup. When Stork arrived, he was very polite and chatted to Fox about the best places to go fishing on the river and the songs that were popular with birds. He even offered to sing her one or two.

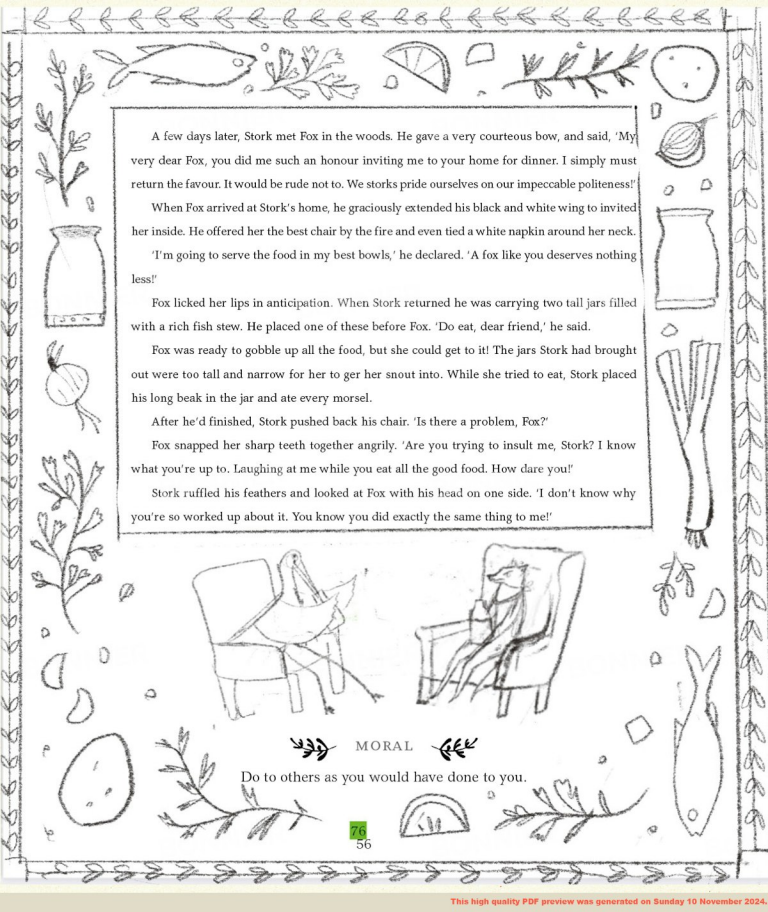
'Superb!' said Fox. 'I can't wait. Maybe after dinner? I made something extra special!' And she bounded to her kitchen and came back with two shallow dishes filled with soup.

'Bon appetite, Stork,' she said.

Stork stared at the shallow dish before him. It did smell wonderful, but all he could do with such a shallow dish was wet the end of his beak.

Fox lapped up her meal with huge enjoyment. 'Mmm! Isn't this tasty. Old family recipe! Hey, Stork, you're not eating much. My, my, I'll never learn to have good manners like you. I'm far too hungry!'

While Fox was licking the bottom of her bowl, Stork was still trying to swallow a single mouthful.



A few days later, Stork met Fox in the woods. He gave a very courteous bow, and said, 'My very dear Fox, you did me such an honour inviting me to your home for dinner. I simply must return the favour. It would be rude not to. We storks pride ourselves on our impeccable politeness!'

When Fox arrived at Stork's home, he graciously extended his black and white wing to invited her inside. He offered her the best chair by the fire and even tied a white napkin around her neck.

'I'm going to serve the food in my best bowls,' he declared. 'A fox like you deserves nothing less!'

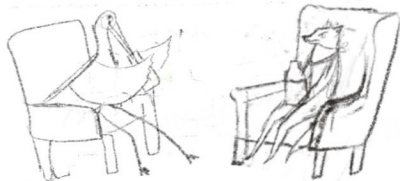
Fox licked her lips in anticipation. When Stork returned he was carrying two tall jars filled with a rich fish stew. He placed one of these before Fox. 'Do eat, dear friend,' he said.

Fox was ready to gobble up all the food, but she could get to it! The jars Stork had brought out were too tall and narrow for her to get her snout into. While she tried to eat, Stork placed his long beak in the jar and ate every morsel.

After he'd finished, Stork pushed back his chair. 'Is there a problem, Fox?'

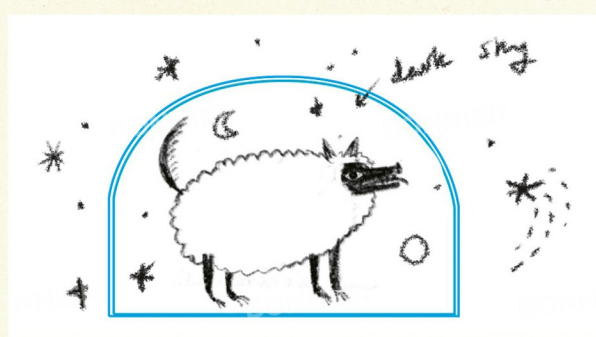
Fox snapped her sharp teeth together angrily. 'Are you trying to insult me, Stork? I know what you're up to. Laughing at me while you eat all the good food. How dare you!'

Stork ruffled his feathers and looked at Fox with his head on one side. 'I don't know why you're so worked up about it. You know you did exactly the same thing to me!'



 MORAL 

Do to others as you would have done to you.



THE WOLF IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

Wolf was tired of the lean pickings he found in the mountains. He hunted rabbits and hares – and birds if he could catch them – but it was a hard life and he was often tired and hungry.

From his den on a high cliff face, he could look down into the valley to the towns and fields where the people lived. He watched the shepherds minding their sheep and noticed how often they lit a fire to roast meat. Even their dogs ate better than Wolf!

He imagined having a whole sheep to himself and his mouth watered. 'What a feast it would be!' he sighed. 'I would be full and content for once in my life.' His stomach growled. 'I want to live where the humans live,' he said. 'When I am there, I will eat mutton every day of the year and life will be rosy!'

So, he made his way down the mountain and approached the flock of sheep. He bared his teeth and ran at them, but the sheep knew far too much about wolves for him to get away with that.

'Maaaaa!' bleated an old ewe. 'We sheep bring our lambs up on tales of wolves and how dreadful they are. You're not coming anywhere near us!'



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And then all the sheep shouted, "MAAAAA" and the shepherds ran out of their huts with their dogs and their slingshots and chased the wolf away.

Wolf skulked into a bush and hid. "I'll try later," he said. "Everyone knows sheep are stupid. I'm sure they will all be fast asleep as soon as it's dark."

When dusk had dyed the clouds dark grey and deep purple, the Wolf crept out and tiptoed towards the sleeping sheep on his silent wolf paws. "This time, Wolf is going to stuff himself," he hissed.

He shouldn't have spoken. Sheep are light sleepers – with so many wolves around they are often quite nervous – and the old ewe heard his wolfish voice in her dreams of lush meadows and sunny buttercups. "Maaaaa!" she cried, and awoke. The first thing she saw was Wolf's teeth gleaming in the moonlight. "Maaaaaaaaa!" she cried again, and all the sheep joined in.

"MAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!"

The shepherds and the dogs heard the noise, and they chased the wolf away.

In the morning, Wolf was ready to give up.

"Better being hungry in the mountains than humiliated by a flock of woolly fools," he growled to himself.

But just before he left, he spied a strange shape hanging from a string near the shepherds' huts. It was a sheepskin that one of the shepherds used as a rug and it had been hung outside to have the dust beaten from it.

"Hmm," thought Wolf. "Maybe I can't take a sheep by stealth, but I'm sure I can through cunning."

That night, a new sheep joined the flock. It had a thick, woolly coat like the others, but if anyone had looked closely, they might have seen a pair of soft paws with claws like thorns beneath its snowy fleece.

For many nights the shepherds wondered what was happening. Each morning when they counted the sheep one was missing, but the dogs had noticed nothing and the sheep were certain they had seen no strangers.

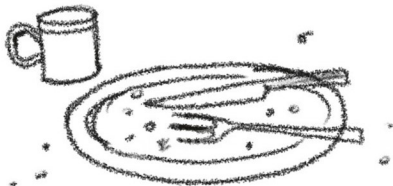
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Wolf finally had his wish. He was never hungry and his belly soon grew fat and his coat beneath the sheepskin became sleek and glossy. He learned to cry "Maaaaaa!" with the other sheep and he even pretended to nibble grass to make his disguise all the more convincing.

Then, one day it was the festival of Pan, the god of shepherds and hunters. Every year on this day the shepherds would celebrate together and would kill a sheep for their feast. They looked over the flock. "Which shall we have?" they asked themselves. One caught their eye. It was true that it had slightly strange feet – really more like paws than hooves – but its stomach was so round that they knew it would make a fine meal and that there would be leftovers for the dogs too.

The shepherds enjoyed their feast. They played pipes and sang and danced. A shepherd boy did say that the meat tasted a little strange, but nobody minded too much.

But there was one peculiar thing. From that day forth, sheep stopped disappearing in the night. The shepherds accepted their good fortune with a shrug. "Pan must have blessed us," they said. The wolf was never heard of again.



✻ MORAL ✻

If you harm others, harm will find you.



THE SILVER FIR TREE AND THE BRAMBLE

Silver Fir was known far and wide to be a great beauty. She was tall and slender with shimmering grey bark and dainty needles. She was also very used to receiving compliments. Often, travellers would stop when they saw her and say, "What a beautiful tree! Let's rest beneath her branches a while."

Whenever this happened, Silver Fir would ruffle her needles and proudly stand a little taller. "They love me because I am beautiful," she whispered to herself.

Silver Fir's nearest neighbour was Bramble. Bramble was not beautiful. He was twisted and low to the ground with prickly thorns.

When travellers resting beneath Silver Fir saw Bramble, they would say, "Watch out for that ugly little bramble. You'll be cut on its thorns."

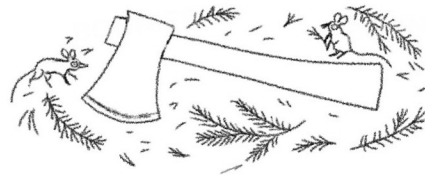
"You just get close enough to give me the chance," Bramble would mutter.

One day, Silver Fir had enough. "Bramble," she snapped after a party of travellers had decided to push on rather than rest near the bramble bush, "you're rather taking down the tone of the neighbourhood, don't you think? Isn't it time you moved on? No one likes you!"

Bramble shrugged his thorny shoulders. "It's you who will be moving on soon, Silver Fir. You might be beautiful, but your kind is turned into the masts of merchant ships and the decks of war galleons."

Silver Fir sniffed. "What's wrong with that? You're just jealous because you're stubby and prickly and I have such a bright future ahead of me."

Bramble clicked his thorns in disagreement. "But if you thought about the axes and saws that will cut you, you wouldn't be so proud. On the day they come up here to chop you down, you will wish that you were a bramble too."



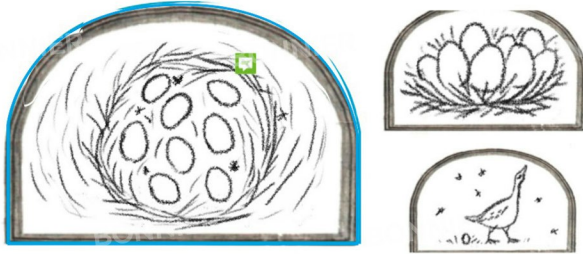
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MORAL



Don't despise those who are more humble than you –
they have less far to fall.



THE GOOSE WHO LAID THE GOLDEN EGG

When a farmer found a silver coin on the road outside his house, he couldn't believe his luck. He picked it up and hopped up and down with glee. "I'm not rich," he said, "so to a poor man like me, this is a treasure indeed!"

Then he ran inside to show his wife.

"Look! A silver coin!"

His wife took it from his hand and held it in her own. She loved the feel of the heavy metal and the possibilities it might bring.

"You must go to town today," she sold her husband. "We have often said that if we just had a goose to lay eggs for us we'd be so happy – and have much fuller stomachs!"

So, the man took the silver coin and walked to the market in town. There he bought a snowy white goose, which he brought home that evening.

Just as he had settled the goose on a box filled with straw, she started honking and flapping. "What a fuss you make, Goose!" said the farmer's wife. But she was secretly pleased because she could imagine the taste of the delicious egg the goose was laying. She reached under the bird

and, just as she had expected, she pulled out an egg.

But what a strange egg! It was yellow and extremely heavy to hold. When she tried to break it open to cook it, she found she couldn't – all she could do was make a few dents on its yellow shell.

"Husband!" she shouted for the farmer. "Did you buy this goose cheaply and spend the change drinking? It doesn't lay proper eggs! It lays some sort of... yellow stones."


The farmer came running, but when he looked at the egg he was overjoyed.

"Ho, ho," he chuckled. "Wife, you are going to have all the goose eggs you could want. And all the bacon, olives, bread, butter and cheese that you could ever eat."

He polished the egg on his sleeve. "Look! It's made of solid gold!"



Then the farmer and his wife leaped up and down and shouted and danced a whirling jig in their raggedy clothes. "We're going to be rich!" they cried.



Everyone noticed that the farmer and his wife had changed. Their house was repaired and new rooms were built and every week they came to the market and bought armfuls of fine things. They had soft rugs for their floors and beautiful pots and jugs. The farmer's wife wore golden necklaces and silk dresses, and the farmer started wearing gold rings. The couple even bought a cart and two beautiful horses. They would drive past their neighbours with their noses to the air and didn't even stop to say hello.

And where did this good fortune come from? From their goose, for every morning she produced a single, beautiful golden egg.

"Soon," the farmer started to say to his wife, "I shall be as rich as a king. Richer! We'll sell this house and the farm and build a palace. Wouldn't you like to live in a palace?"

His wife looked at the goose and said, "I would but we'll never be that rich – she only lays one egg a day!"

"We'll see about that," said the farmer. "I have a plan."

He started buying expensive grain for their goose. He stroked her head and talked to her encouragingly. He even replaced the box in which she laid her eggs with a velvet cushion. The goose didn't seem to mind any of this – she even honked in a pleased way sometimes – but she still just laid a single golden egg a day.

After a month of kindness, the farmer's wife lost patience. "Your clever little plan isn't working," she said. "Look at you. Talking away all day to that goose. I have a better idea. If she isn't going to lay her eggs any faster, we should get them ourselves!"

The farmer rubbed his hands together. "What a good idea!" he said. So they took the goose into the yard and cut her open.

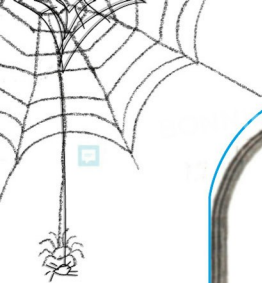
Inside they found... well, just what you'd expect to find in any goose. There were bones and blood and a heart and a stomach. But there was not a single speck of gold.

Soon, everyone noticed that the farmer and his wife seemed to have lost their good fortune. The farmhouse slumped back into disrepair and all the gold jewellery and expensive clothes were sold. Before long, the couple were walking into town along the road with mud on their shoes, just like everyone else. The neighbours would point at them and laugh. "See them? They are ones who killed the goose that laid golden eggs!"



MORAL

If you are too greedy you may lose everything.



THE CAT AND MICE

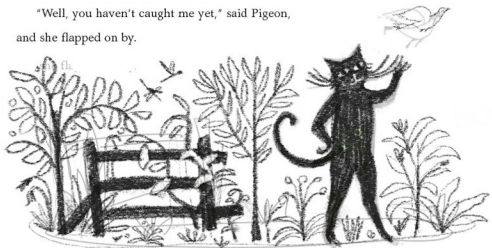
"The thing about me," said Cat to himself in the mirror one morning, "is that I am just so terribly clever and handsome."

He stroked his long, majestic whiskers and shook himself so his thick, glossy coat shone in the morning light. "Ah yes, not only am I a good-looking cat, but I am the best hunter in town."

"Who says?" called out a passing pigeon.

"Oh, everyone," said Cat. "Everyone knows."

"Well, you haven't caught me yet," said Pigeon, and she flapped on by.



When Cat went walking that day he came to a tumbledown house on the edge of town. The garden was overgrown, the tiles on the path were cracked and the door hung crookedly from its rusty hinges.

Cat was about to walk on by, but then he heard a scuttling, pattering sound coming from inside.

"Oh-ho!" said Cat. "This house is full of mice. I really must go hunting for, as everyone knows, I am the best hunter!"

He padded inside and looked around.

"Zeus's whiskers!" he said, "this is going to be a picnic!"

Running all over the house were hundreds of mice. They were so busy going about their business that they didn't even seem to notice that Cat was there.

"Why they have never seen anything like me before," thought Cat. "Let's play a game of catch!"

He ran here and there, on the table, over the floor, through the cupboards, under the beds. Soon he had caught and eaten his fill and he wandered home, proudly whistling to himself.

"Hey you!" he called out to the pigeon. "I just caught more mice than you can count. Who is the best hunter? And the handsomest?"



But Pigeon paid him no heed. She just cooed and ruffled her feathers.

The next day, Cat returned to the house.

"Let's show that pigeon what's what," he said.

Once inside, he looked around expectantly, but he didn't see a single mouse.

"Hello," he called out. "Hello Mousies!"

There wasn't a sound in the old house, but Cat knew the mice were there, cowering in their burrows, for he had the keen senses of a cat and he could smell them.

"Well, well," he said, "you want to play it like this? Very well – it shouldn't be difficult for someone as clever as me to deceive such timid, pea-brained creatures."

He walked into the middle of the room and held up his front paws like a tragic actor. "Oh," he cried, "Oh my heart! Oh, such pain I feel!" And then he fell over with a dramatic flourish and lay on the floor as if dead – though he kept his mouth wide open just in case a mouse scuttled in. He lay there still as a statue for what seemed the longest time, but he could not hear a single mouse.

Finally, he got so tired of waiting that he opened one of his glass-green eyes. The mice were peering out from the doors of their burrows. When they saw him looking, they broke into squeaky laughter.



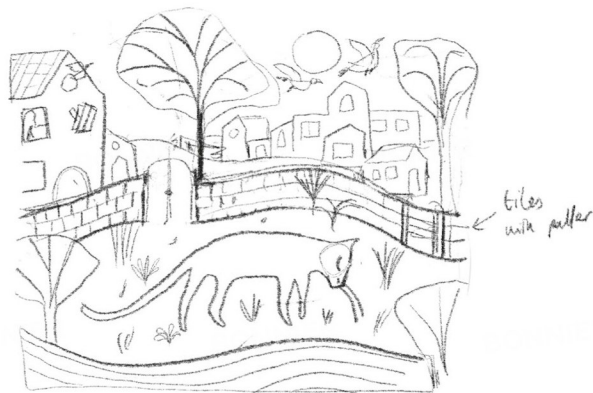
"Look at this stupid cat!" one called out. "He thinks we're going to walk into his mouth!"

"It's no good pretending to be dead," called another. "After yesterday we're certainly not coming anywhere near you!"

And as the mice laughed even louder, Cat left the house with his head hung in shame.

From the rafters of the house Pigeon had been watching, and she laughed the loudest of all.

"How is the best hunter in town today?" she called out and Cat's very fine whiskers drooped all the way to the ground.



MORAL

Pride comes before a fall.



THE LION AND THE MOUSE

Lion was the King of the Forest. And everyone knew it too. Whenever he came near, animals would hide in the treetops or in their burrows, and if they couldn't get out of the way fast enough they would bow deeply and beg him to spare their lives.

Lion cut a very impressive figure. Each of his paws was larger than a warrior's helmet, and his great body was wider and stronger than that of any war horse. His teeth were like sharp javelins, and when he roared the sound was so loud that the babies in the village beyond the forest would cry out in fear.

Lion was most proud of his mane, however, and he would often shake it so it puffed out like the sail of a trireme and made him look much bigger than he really was. He loved that all the little forest creatures would scuttle away in terror when he did this.

One day, Lion was in a very bad mood.

"You would think," he grumbled, "that as King of the Forest, I would not have to go a single day hungry! But it is nearly evening and I have walked up and down all day and not even found a single rabbit!" And he was so cross that he roared especially loudly, and the babies in the village began to scream.

Lion found a cool place in the shade of an olive tree and he lay down and closed his eyes. "At least," he muttered, "these beasts have the good sense to leave me alone while I sleep!"

But what Lion did not know, is that he had lain down on top of the burrow of a tiny mouse.

Mouse had been out in the wheat fields gathering food for her family, and when she came home and found a great lion blocking her front door, so was very annoyed.

"King or no king," she said, "he doesn't have any manners. Well, he might be bigger than any creature this side of the ocean, but he's not blocking the door to my house!"

And she scuttled up over Lion's back, and into his long mane. There, she used her little paws to tickle him behind the ears.

"ARRRRGGGGHHHHH!" Lion let out a great roar and leaped up. He shook his mane and the little mouse went flying into the trunk of a tree. While she was lying there, completely winded, Lion leaped upon her with terrifying speed and growled, "Who dares disturb the sleep of the King of the Forest!"

The little mouse trembled. She could feel the weight of his enormous paw on her, and she knew that he could crush her at any moment if he chose.

"Please, Your Resplendent Majesty," she squeaked. "I am just a mouse and I mean no harm. I was just trying to cross your great and glorious mane – to me as wide and treacherous as the seven seas – to reach my family. Please spare me!"

Lion bared his teeth. "You are smaller than my ears, little beast. I could gobble you up and you wouldn't even touch the sides of my hunger. Why should I spare anything so insignificant?"

"Well," said the mouse, thinking quickly, "A favour given today might come back as a favour tomorrow."

Lion laughed when he heard this. "But look at you! You're smaller than my nose. Pipsqueak! What could you possibly do for me?"

"You never know," said the mouse, optimistically. Might Lion was so amused that he forgot his terrible anger and the little mouse scuttled away.

"Favour from a mouse?" he laughed. "Favour from a MOUSE! ah ha ha ha!"

Even kings can fall.

On a cold winter, during the loneliest month, Lion ventured far away from his forest. He went down into the valleys where the humans grazed their goats in the hope of getting something to eat. But instead of a easy dinner, he stepped in a hunter's trap and found himself bound in thick, unbreakable ropes.

"What a downfall this is!" said Lion. "Some king I am to be trussed up like this." And he waited for the hunters to kill him.

But as Lion lay awake that night, he felt a tickle in his mane, as if dozens of tiny feet were running through his hair. "What is this?" he growled.

"Shhh my friend," said a little voice. "In no time at all you will be free."

Lion watched in amazement as a family of mice nibbled through the ropes that tied him. Soon the ropes that bound him were chewed through and they fell away.

"Who are you?" he whispered. "Who are you that has rescued me?"

A tiny voice squeaked, "Your Resplendent Majesty, it is I! The Pipsqueak who is smaller than your nose! I said that one day I would return the favour. Well, here I am with my family, and we thank you for sparing my life. Now I am sparing yours."

The kingly lion bowed low. "Little mice, you have taught me a lesson that I will remember for the rest of my life. Never again shall I underestimate someone just because they are small."



🌿 MORAL 🌿

The mighty must sometimes depend on the weak. No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.



THE GRASSHOPPER AND THE ANTS

Grasshopper lay in her flax-leaf hammock and plucked her lyre.

*Oh, every lazy summer day,
I sleep and strum the day away.
I spend all summer in the heat,
Making music, true and sweet.
Lazy, lazy summer days
I sleep and strum the day away.*

"Ahhh," she sighed. "I love summer. I love the meadows filled with flowers and the cornfields and the sound of the bees! Bzzzzzz. It makes me want to write another song. Maybe one with buzzing. Hmmm. Let me think..."

But she didn't think and nor did she write a song. Instead, she pulled her hat over her eyes, lay back in her hammock and fell fast asleep. And maybe she did sing a little more... if snoring can be considered a song.

As the sun beat down, Grasshopper slept. When the bees returned to their hives as evening made the sky cooler, Grasshopper slept. Even when the stars came out, twinkling and the moon smiled down on the dark but still sun-warmed earth, Grasshopper slept. She dreamed of dancing on a stage surrounded by cowbell flowers with an audience of insects. In her dream she pirouetted and leaped so high that everyone broke into applause. Grasshopper smiled in her sleep.

Then she heard a different sort of song.

Ants, ants, run-tun-tun

Off to work, everyone.

Ants, ants, run-tun-tun

Winter's cold will always come!

Grasshopper moaned and opened one eye.

"By Hypnos, the god of sleep," she cried. "What sort of inconsiderate creature would make a noise like that at dawn in midsummer! Some of us have dreams to enjoy!"

"Ants HALT!" shouted the commanding ant who led the workers into the fields every morning. The ants, as one, stopped moving and stood in a straight line without a feeler out of place.

"Ants ABOUT TURN!" shouted the commander. Every ant stepped to face Grasshopper in a single, precise movement. Not one of them was out of time.

Grasshopper clapped languidly. "Bravo," she said. "Very impressive. The life of an ant is not for me though. I'm a free spirit. I do as I like. You all march in lines and work all day. What sort of an existence is that? I'll tell you what sort. A boring sort."

"Ants STAND AT EASE," yelled the commander.

"Grasshopper," she said, in the patient voice she often used when training young ants to march, "when is winter coming?"

Grasshopper, in the patient voice she often used

Grasshopper waved her six legs about. "Oh, sometime. In a month. In two months? Three? I don't know. What's winter got to do with anything anyway?"

Although they were excellently trained and had even had marching songs played to them when they were larvae in the ant nest, several younger ants could not help giggling a little at this speech.

"Grasshopper," said the commander. "It is my official opinion that you are a very silly creature. Winter will be here soon! And the ground will freeze and nothing will grow. What are you going to eat then?"

Grasshopper closed her eyes. "Please go away, ants, you're giving me a headache. I want to sleep. If you come by later, I'll play you some real music. It would do you lot good to dance to something that isn't all dum-tum-dum-tum march march march!"

And she sank into her hammock and returned to her delightful dream.

"Ants ABOUT TURN!" hollered the commander. "Ants FORWARD MARCH!" And off they went, a line of black bodies, singing and marching in strict formation. All day they gathered food, and in the evening they returned home past the gently swinging flax hammock where Grasshopper had still not finished writing her new song.

As the commanding ant had predicted, winter did come. Wind came to visit and blew icy gusts across the land, and Snow powdered the ground and spread her white cloak over all the plants. This was the time of year that animals climbed deep into their burrows and slept until it was warm again and many birds flew to faraway lands where Summer was visiting. Some creatures, like Robin, didn't mind the cold so much, but he was a clever gatherer and knew where to find winter food.

Grasshopper was miserable. The wind and ice made her hands too cold to play her lyre and, more importantly, she was starving. The sweet grass stems and tasty flowers that she usually dined on were all under the snow and she could not find a single thing to eat.

Freezing, she wrapped her flax-leaf hammock around her and set off to the one place she knew where food was plentiful.

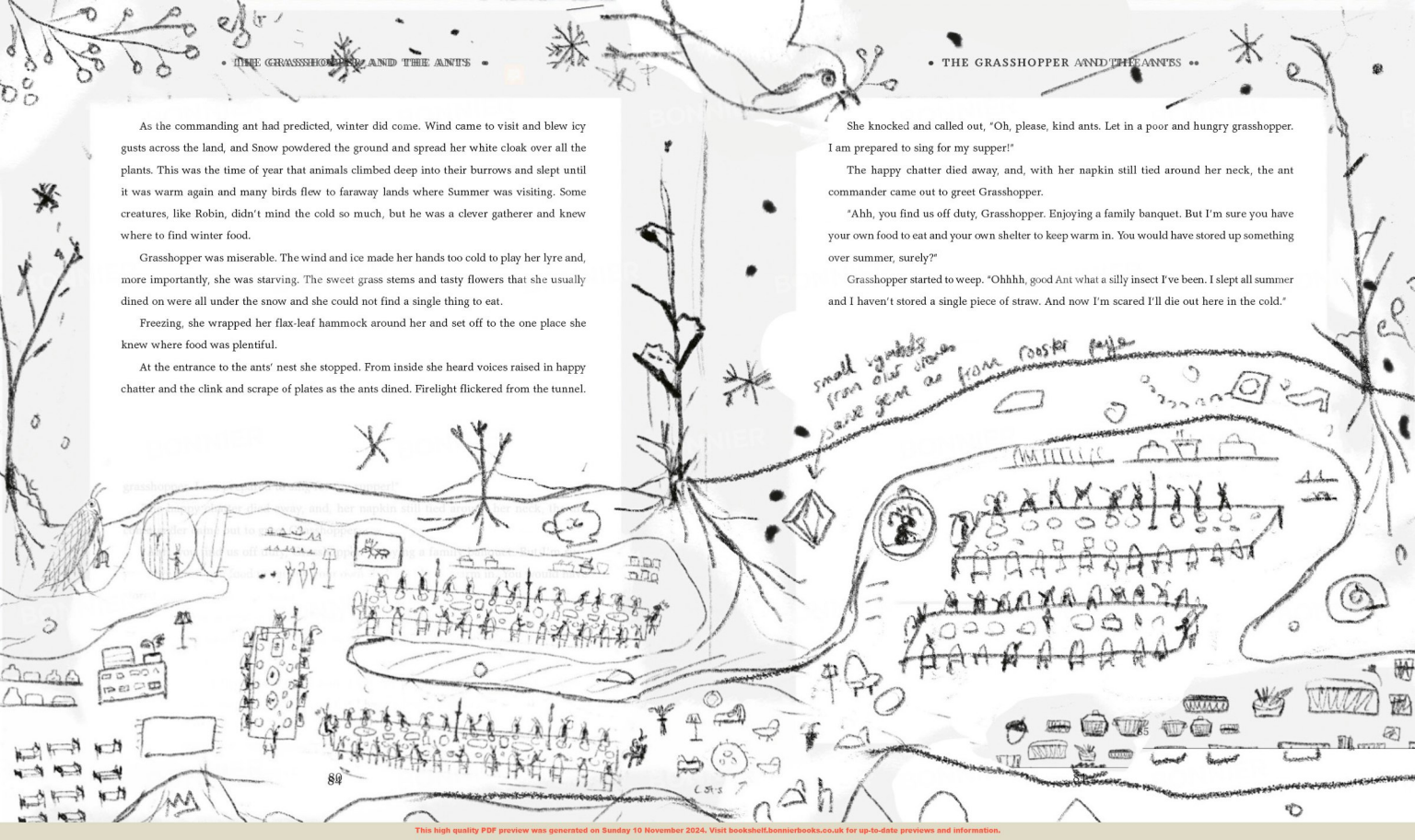
At the entrance to the ants' nest she stopped. From inside she heard voices raised in happy chatter and the clink and scrape of plates as the ants dined. Firelight flickered from the tunnel.

She knocked and called out, 'Oh, please, kind ants. Let in a poor and hungry grasshopper. I am prepared to sing for my supper!'

The happy chatter died away, and, with her napkin still tied around her neck, the ant commander came out to greet Grasshopper.

'Ahh, you find us off duty, Grasshopper. Enjoying a family banquet. But I'm sure you have your own food to eat and your own shelter to keep warm in. You would have stored up something over summer, surely?'

Grasshopper started to weep. 'Ohhhh, good Ant what a silly insect I've been. I slept all summer and I haven't stored a single piece of straw. And now I'm scared I'll die out here in the cold.'



Ant looked at Grasshopper and folded her strong arms. "Well," she said. "Maybe you can stay this winter, Grasshopper, but I have a few conditions."

"Anything!" cried poor, weak Grasshopper.

"You're going to have to learn to march. We have morning drill at dawn. And you need to learn some ant songs. Someone has to keep the beat, and that can be your job."

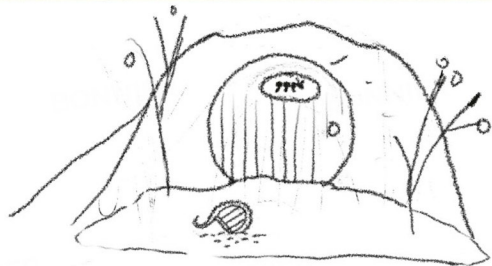
"Yes," said Grasshopper. "Oh, yes, anything!"

"And one more thing," said Ant. "Next winter if you haven't stored up what you need, you're not coming in here again."

Grasshopper nodded.

"Good," said Ant. The she stood to attention and shouted, "Grasshopper FORWARD MARCH!"

And Grasshopper came in from the cold.



MORAL



Prepare for the future.



THE FOX WHO HAD NEVER SEEN A LION

Fox was wandering through the mountains one day, singing a little song to herself:

*I'm a fox with nimble feet
Who dances through the bubbling stream!
Watch me hop and spin and leap!
Come out friends, and dance with me!*

As she sang, she leaped from rock to rock in the fast flowing mountain stream. She dipped her toes in the cool water and splashed it around her – just for the fun of it. She had raided a hen house in the valley that morning and she was in a very good mood.

But suddenly, something cast a long shadow on the rocks ahead. Fox looked around to find what was blocking the sun and saw a terrible monster.



“Argh!” she shrieked.

It truly was a fearsome beast. It was twenty times as big as Fox, it had a great mane of hair and its teeth looked as though they could crunch through bones just as easily as the beast’s enormous golden eyes could blink.

Without thinking, Fox turned tail and ran as fast as she could, down the mountain, through the forest, into the valley and safe into her warm den.

“What a vicious creature!” she said and congratulated herself on her escape.

A few days later, she was in the mountains once again. This time she was skipping amongst tall Silver Fir trees and she sang her song to keep herself company:

*I’m a fox with nimble feet
Who dances through the forest trees!
Watch me hop and spin and leap!
Come out friends, and dance with me!*

The loud padding and tip-tapping of large clawed paws grew closer – it was the giant beast, once again. But this time, Fox stopped behind a tree and watched the beast for a few moments, before slinking away

“A beast indeed, but not as monstrous as I remember,” she said on her way home.

Some weeks passed and then, once again, the Fox returned to the forest. She bounded up the craggy slope where the forest met the mountains and sang her favourite song:

*I’m a fox with nimble feet
Who climbs up mountains, come and see!
Watch me hop and spin and leap!
Come out friends, and dance with me!*



But this time, she heard a low hum and another voice, deep and strong, took up her song and sang:

*I'm a lion who loves a song —
I'd love a friend to join my tune.
I've been alone for far too long!
Let's sing and dance beneath the moon!*

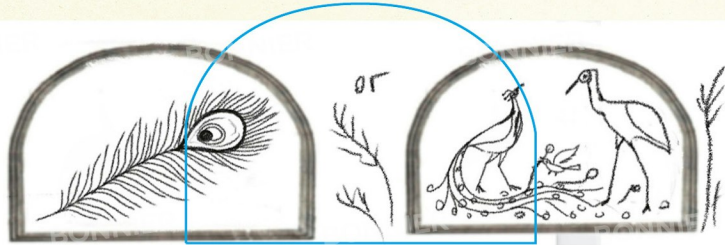
Fox turned to see where the voice was coming from. There, standing in a thicket of trees, was the beast she had seen before. It still had a huge head and enormous teeth; it still had a shaggy mane and golden eyes. But this time, Fox felt less fearful, and she did not run away. Instead, she tentatively stepped forward and said, "H-h-hello! I am Fox."

"And I am Lion," said the creature. "May I sing and dance with you?"

And from that day on, Fox and Lion were the best of friends.

 MORAL 

Do not judge someone before you know them

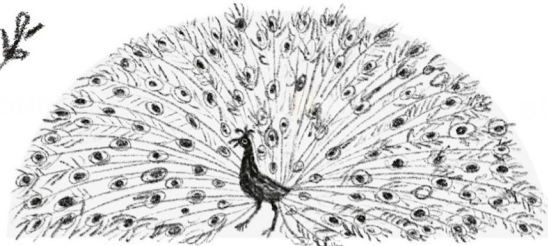


THE PEACOCK AND THE CRANE



Peacock was the most beautiful of the birds. Everyone admired him. Really, thought Sparrow, you couldn't help it. Look at him!

At that moment, Peacock was parading up and down on a low branch, showing the peahens his tail. It caught the light with green and blue fire. "It's like the Sun himself has chosen Peacock





to be his ambassador for the birds," said Sparrow. "He shines and blazes! How I wish I was even a little as beautiful as that."

Sparrow's friend, Stork, gave Sparrow a surprised look. "Peacock? Sparrow, really. Of all the birds, you want to be like that creature?"

Sparrow gave a little sigh. "I know you mean to be kind, Stork, but when one is presented with so much magnificence it's hard to think of anything else."

Just then, Peacock did something rather foolish.

He spread his tail as wide as it would go, he puffed out his chest and he shouted, "Birds! I challenge any one of you to better me. I the peacock! I the beauty! I the most godlike of birds! Who would dare to stand beside me?"

The peahens tittered at this display of bravado, and Sparrow sighed admiringly. Stork, however, was not impressed.

"And what will the challenge be, Peacock? Are you going to ask other birds to try to be as boring as you are? Because that's the only competition I can think of that you'd win."

"Oh, ha ha, Stork," said Peacock. "I challenge you to better me. To show that you are superior. You won't do it, mind, but it'll be fun to see you try!"

"Stork, what are you doing?" hissed Sparrow.

Stork whispered something in Sparrow's ear and then he marched over to Peacock as she quietly flew away. "Very well my fine fellow, let's see what you've got."

Peacock started to strut. He let his elegant tail drape behind him like a cape and then he threw it into the air in a most splendid fan. The peahens clucked, "Peacock is the best!"

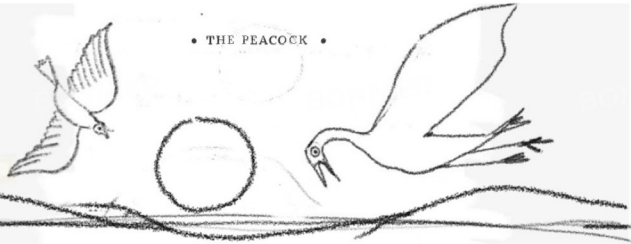
Finally, after performing a swaying dance and with his tail spread as wide as he could, Peacock stopped and bowed to all the watching birds. They clapped their wings together and whistled loudly.

Peacock swirled around. "Go on Stork, I'd like to see you beat that."

Stork opened his wings and started to march up and down on his scrawny legs. His drab grey colours didn't make it much of an impressive show, and the peahens were soon laughing at his awkward dancing.



• THE PEACOCK •



But just then, there was a loud, "Peep! Peep! Peep!" and Sparrow fluttered into the clearing, panting as if out of breath.

"A fox!" she cried. "A fox is coming and she says she's looking forward to eating that massive show-off, Peacock!"

Stork took to the sky, calling behind him, "Quick, my friend, Peacock! Fly away with me!"

Peacock tried, he really did, but his heavy tail feathers tangled in a vine and soon he was completely stuck.

"Help!" he cried. "Help, Fox is going to eat me!"

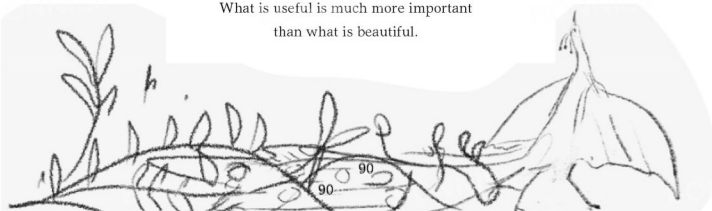
Stork flew back to the ground and stood beside him.

"I'm sorry to say this, Peacock, but there is no fox. I got our friend Sparrow to play a little trick on you. I wanted to teach you a lesson. You are indeed the most beautiful of birds, but all your beauty is nothing but a death trap when there is a fox in the woods!"

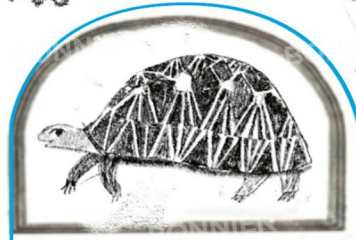


MORAL

What is useful is much more important
than what is beautiful.



• ZEUS AND THE TORTOISE •



ZEUS AND THE TORTOISE

When mighty Zeus, King of the Gods married Queen Hera, he invited every living creature in the world to the wedding. By the time Hermes, the messenger god, had delivered the last invitation, he was so exhausted that he fell asleep in mid-flight and spent an entire week circling the summit of Mount Olympus, his winged sandals fluttering while he snored loudly.

But it was worth it! Because every beast, every bird, every insect was so honoured and excited to be asked to come that no matter how far away they lived, they decided to travel to the wedding.

In the days before the celebration, the air around the mountain was filled with birds and the trees groaned with monkeys. From far away the steep slopes of Olympus looked like an ant hill as thousands of creatures swarmed towards the summit. Even the fleas came, riding on the backs of dogs and cats.

When the animals reached the summit they found a magnificent banquet, which had been laid out by Demeter, goddess of the harvest.

As his guests celebrated, Zeus looked at the banquet from his golden throne and smiled at Hera. "Look at how the animals of the world respect you, my love! Every single one – from the elephant to

the humble flea – has come to your wedding.’

Hera, who loved Zeus but couldn't help pointing out when he was wrong, shook her head.

‘Not every animal. Look over there!’



Zeus looked and saw that she was right. At one of the tables, there was an empty place. The mighty god's brow grew stormy and lightning flashed from his eyes. ‘WHO,’ he thundered, ‘has not come? Can anyone tell me which animal would DARE to turn down an invitation from the King of the Gods?’

The happy chatter that had filled the air stopped at once and every creature looked guiltily at their feet. Finally, after a long and terrible pause, Hare piped up. ‘Please Your Eminence, please Your Magnificence, it was Tortoise!’

‘TORTOISE?’ thundered Zeus. ‘TORTOISE?’

The next day Zeus drove his stormy chariot to Tortoise's home and called out, ‘Tortoise, you dust eating, low-bellied, plodding, miserable animal, WHY did you not attend my wedding feast?’

Tortoise peered outside. ‘Oh, hello Zeus, would you like to come in for dinner? Nothing fancy, but it's filling.’

‘No, I would not!’ thundered the god. ‘I want an excuse for your insolence!’

Tortoise gave a wrinkly smile. ‘Well, I was very honoured by your invitation, but I just think there's no place like home!’

Zeus pointed at Tortoise, and ZAP, a bold of lightning shot from his finger. ‘There, you disobedient laggard,’ said the god. ‘If you like home so much take it about with you wherever you go.’

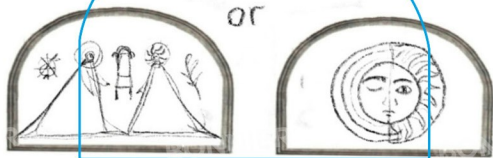
Tortoise peered behind him and saw that his back had been encased in a magnificent hard shell.

‘Why Zeus!’ he smiled. ‘Is this supposed to be a punishment? It's sturdy, cosy and waterproof. The perfect little home. They say home is where the heart is and now that's certainly true of me! I shall carry it wherever I go.’

And from that day forth Tortoise did just that.

🌿 MORAL 🌿

There's no place like home.



WINTER AND SPRING

It was getting warmer in the forest. It was the time of year when Winter was getting ready for her long sleep and handing the Throne of Seasons to Spring, who would reign until Summer awakened in a blaze of heat.

Winter looked around her at the forest. It was so noisy! The birds had started chattering to each other and sleepy foxes and bears were coming out of their burrows and talking about their winter dreams. Even in the cities and meadows it was all too busy. Winter watched a group of girls weaving wreathes from new flowers and dancing together. The very oceans were bustling as merchants took their ships to sea and carried wine and fine cloth to faraway places.

"I call this a disgrace!" said Winter to Spring. "Everyone must be sorry to see you come. Look at this. No one has a moment's peace any longer. Why—" and she drew herself up to her full, frozen height and blew a cloud of snowflakes in Spring's face. "I rule with an icy fist! I tell them to stay home and keep their doors locked and they do what I say. Everyone loves a firm ruler and a bit of fear is good for them. All this running about nonsense is chaos."

Spring smiled sweetly at Winter, and swept her cloak about her. It left a trail of snowdrops and daffodils in its wake. "Oh, grumpy old Winter!" she laughed. "The world is busy because everyone is happy that I have arrived! After the long, cold months they see the beauty of the flowers and leaves and the warmth of the sun gives them the freedom to meet friends and travel to faraway places. They are running around because they are happy you are leaving!"

Winter was about to argue with Spring, but just then a mother and a little girl walked by. The mother said, "Thank Zeus that the terrible Winter has passed now and you can run outside and play. Why don't you pick a bunch of Spring's beautiful flowers so we can welcome her into our home?"

🌿 MORAL 🌿

No one loves a tyrant.