



# *The Cock and the Fox*

## *(Belgian tale)*

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Belgian

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*Intermediate*

*6 min read*

This is the story that the old woman who was called Tante Sannie told to the little boy who would always be talking:

A long time ago (she said) there lived in a farmyard a Cock who was very proud of himself, and with reason, too, for he was, indeed, a plump and handsome bird. Nothing could have been finer than his appearance when he strutted through the yard, lifting his feet high as he walked, and nodding his head at each step. He had a magnificent comb of coral-red, and blue-black plumage streaked with gold, which shone so brilliantly when the sun flashed on it that it was a joy to see him. No wonder that his twenty wives gazed at him admiringly and followed him wherever he went, and were quite content to let him hustle them about and gobble up all the fattest worms and the finest grains of corn.

If this Cock was proud of his appearance, there was one thing of which he was even prouder, and that was his voice. He was a famous songster; he could crow you high and he could crow you low; he could utter tones as deep as the pealing of the organ in church or as shrill as the blast of a trumpet. Every morning, when the first streak of dawn appeared in the sky, he would get down off his perch, raise himself on his toes, stretch out his

neck, close his eyes and crow so loudly that he roused people who were sleeping in the next parish. And this he loved to do, because it was his nature.

Now in the forest close to the farmyard there lived a Fox who had often gazed with longing eyes upon the plump and handsome bird. His mouth watered every time he thought of him, and many were the artful tricks he played to try and catch him for his dinner. One day he hid himself among the bushes in the garden by the farmyard and waited patiently until the Cock happened to stray his way. After a time the bird came along, pecking here and pecking there, wandered through the gate into the garden, and made straight for the bush under which Master Fox was hidden. He was just going to run into the bush after a butterfly which was fluttering about, when he caught sight of Reynard's black snout and cunning, watchful eyes, and with a squeak of alarm he jumped aside, just in time, and hopped on to the wall.

At this the Fox rose to his feet. "Don't go away, my dear friend," said he in honeyed tones. "I would not for the world do you any harm. I know that it is my bad fortune to be disliked by your family—I can't for the life of me think why, and it is a pity, because I have to hide myself for the pleasure of hearing you sing. There is no cock in all these parts has such a magnificent voice as yours, and I simply do not believe the stories they tell about you."

"Eh, what is that?" said the Cock, stopping at a safe distance and looking at the Fox with his head on one side. "What do they say?"

"Why," Reynard went on, edging a little nearer, "they tell me that you can only crow with your eyes open. They say that if you were to shut your eyes, that clarion call of yours would become only a feeble piping, like the clucking of a new-born chick. But of course I don't believe them. Any one can see they are merely jealous."

"I should think so," cried the Cock, bristling with anger. "Crow with my eyes shut, indeed! Why, I never crow in any other way. Just look here—I'll prove it to you!" And he raised himself on his toes, stretched out his neck, closed his eyes, and was just going to crow, when, *Snap!* the Fox sprang upon him and caught him in his teeth!

Then began a great to-do! The poor cock flapped his wings and struggled as the Fox ran off with him. The hens ran about the yard clucking and squawking, and the noise they made alarmed the farmer's wife, who was cooking in the kitchen. Out she came running, with the rolling-pin in her hand, and, seeing the fox with the

cock in his mouth, gave chase, shrieking as she ran. The farm-hands tumbled out of barn and byre armed with pitch-forks, spades, and sticks. All the beasts began to raise a clatter, and what with the shouting of the men, the squealing of the pigs, the neighing of the horses, and the lowing of the cows, to say nothing of the clucking of the hens and the old woman's screaming, one would have thought the end of the world was at hand.

The Fox was not a little frightened by all this clatter, but he was not so frightened as the Cock, who saw that only cunning would save his life.

"They will catch us in a minute," he said to the Fox, "and, as likely as not, we shall both be killed by a single blow. Why don't you call out and tell them I came with you of my own accord?"

"A good idea," thought the Fox, and he opened his mouth to call out to his pursuers, thereby loosening his grip on the Cock's neck. Then, with a squirm and a twist and a flutter of his wings, the wily bird wrenched himself free and flew up to the branches of a tree near by.

The Fox cast a look at him and saw that he was out of reach; then he glanced over his shoulder at his pursuers, who were getting perilously near. "It seems to me," he said, grinning with rage, "I should have done better to hold my tongue."

"That is true," said the Cock to himself as he smoothed his ruffled feathers. "And I would have been better advised to keep my weather-eye open."

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