

# *The Most Cunning Animal*

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*Easy*  
*4 min read*

NE day the Fox and the Bear began to argue as to which was the most cunning animal. The Bear said that he thought foxes and bears took first place.

“You are wrong, my friend,” said Reynard. “We are clever, you and I, but there is one animal that is as far above us as we are above the rest of creation.”

“Oh, indeed,” sneered the Bear, “and what is the name of this marvellous creature?”

“He is called the man-animal,” answered Reynard, “and he goes on two legs instead of four, which is a wonderful thing in itself. Here are some of the cunning things he can do; first, he can swim in the water without getting wet; when he is cold he makes yellow flowers grow out of sticks to warm himself; and he can strike at an enemy a hundred yards away!”

“I do not believe you,” answered the Bear. “This is a fairy-tale you are telling me. If such a creature as the man-animal really exists, it is very strange that I have never seen him!”

“Strange, indeed!” grinned the Fox, “but soon remedied. Would you like to see the man-animal?”

“It would be a sight for sore eyes,” said the Bear.

“Very well,” said the Fox, “come along with me.” And he led the Bear through the forest until they came to a

road leading to a village. "Now, then," said he, "let us lie down in the ditch and watch the road, and we shall see what we shall see."

Presently a child from the village came along.

"Look! Look!" whispered the Bear. "An animal walking on two legs! Is this the creature we seek?"

"No," answered the Fox, "but one of these days it will become a man-animal."

Shortly afterwards there came along an old woman, all bent and wrinkled.

"Is that one?" asked the Bear.

"No," said the Fox again, "but once upon a time that was the mother of one!"

At last there came the sound of brisk footsteps on the road, and peeping out between the bushes the Bear saw a tall soldier in a red coat marching towards them. He had a sword by his side and a musket over his shoulder.

"This must surely be the man-animal," said the Bear. "Ugh! what an ugly creature! I don't believe he is cunning in the least!" But the Fox made no answer, for at the first sight of the soldier he had fled into the forest.

"Well, well," muttered the Bear, "I don't see anything to be afraid of here. Let us have a talk with this wonder!" And hoisting himself clumsily out of the ditch he lumbered along the road to meet the soldier.

"Now then, my fine fellow," he growled, "I have heard some wonderful stories about you. Tell me...."

But before he could get another word out of his mouth the soldier drew his sword and struck him such a shrewd blow that he cut off his ear.

"Wow!" cried the Bear, "what's that for? Tell me...." But then, seeing the gleaming steel flash once again, he turned tail and ran off as fast as he could go. Just as he reached the edge of the wood, he looked backward and saw the soldier raise his gun to his shoulder. There was a flash, a loud report, and the Bear felt a terrific blow against his side. Down he went like a ninepin, but fortunately for him the bullet had merely glanced off his hide, and he was not seriously hurt. Picking himself up, he lost no time in gaining the shelter of the trees, and presently came limping painfully to the place where the Fox was waiting for him.

“Well, my friend,” said Reynard, “did you see the man-animal? And what did you think of him?”

“You were right,” answered poor Bruin sadly. “He is certainly the most cunning creature in the world. I went up to speak to him and he tore a rib from his side and cut off my ear. Then I ran away, but before I could reach the trees he picked up a stick and pointed it at me. Then there came thunder and lightning, and a piece of the earth heaved itself up and knocked me spinning! Beyond all doubt the man-animal takes the palm for cunning, but I never want to see him again, for I shall carry the marks of our first meeting to my dying day.”

And Reynard grinned, and said: “I told you so!”

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