



The War of the Wolf and the Fox

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

German

*Intermediate
8 min read*

There was once upon a time a man and his wife who had an old cat and an old dog. One day the man, whose name was Simon, said to his wife, whose name was Susan, 'Why should we keep our old cat any longer? She never catches any mice now-a-days, and is so useless that I have made up my mind to drown her.'

But his wife replied, 'Don't do that, for I'm sure she could still catch mice.'

'Rubbish,' said Simon. 'The mice might dance on her and she would never catch one. I've quite made up my mind that the next time I see her, I shall put her in the water.'

Susan was very unhappy when she heard this, and so was the cat, who had been listening to the conversation behind the stove. When Simon went off to his work, the poor cat miawed so pitifully, and looked up so pathetically into Susan's face, that the woman quickly opened the door and said, 'Fly for your life, my poor little beast, and get well away from here before your master returns.'

The cat took her advice, and ran as quickly as her poor old legs would carry her into the wood, and when Simon came home, his wife told him that the cat had vanished.

‘So much the better for her,’ said Simon. ‘And now we have got rid of her, we must consider what we are to do with the old dog. He is quite deaf and blind, and invariably barks when there is no need, and makes no sound when there is. I think the best thing I can do with him is to hang him.’

But soft-hearted Susan replied, ‘Please don’t do so; he’s surely not so useless as all that.’

‘Don’t be foolish,’ said her husband. ‘The courtyard might be full of thieves and he’d never discover it. No, the first time I see him, it’s all up with him, I can tell you.’

Susan was very unhappy at his words, and so was the dog, who was lying in the corner of the room and had heard everything. As soon as Simon had gone to his work, he stood up and howled so touchingly that Susan quickly opened the door, and said ‘Fly for your life, poor beast, before your master gets home.’ And the dog ran into the wood with his tail between his legs.

When her husband returned, his wife told him that the dog had disappeared.

‘That’s lucky for him,’ said Simon, but Susan sighed, for she had been very fond of the poor creature.

Now it happened that the cat and dog met each other on their travels, and though they had not been the best of friends at home, they were quite glad to meet among strangers. They sat down under a holly tree and both poured forth their woes.

Presently a fox passed by, and seeing the pair sitting together in a disconsolate fashion, he asked them why they sat there, and what they were grumbling about.

The cat replied, ‘I have caught many a mouse in my day, but now that I am old and past work, my master wants to drown me.’

And the dog said, ‘Many a night have I watched and guarded my master’s house, and now that I am old and deaf, he wants to hang me.’

The fox answered, 'That's the way of the world. But I'll help you to get back into your master's favour, only you must first help me in my own troubles.'

They promised to do their best, and the fox continued, 'The wolf has declared war against me, and is at this moment marching to meet me in company with the bear and the wild boar, and to-morrow there will be a fierce battle between us.'

'All right,' said the dog and the cat, 'we will stand by you, and if we are killed, it is at any rate better to die on the field of battle than to perish ignobly at home,' and they shook paws and concluded the bargain. The fox sent word to the wolf to meet him at a certain place, and the three set forth to encounter him and his friends.

The wolf, the bear, and the wild boar arrived on the spot first, and when they had waited some time for the fox, the dog, and the cat, the bear said, 'I'll climb up into the oak tree, and look if I can see them coming.'

The first time he looked round he said, 'I can see nothing,' and the second time he looked round he said, 'I can still see nothing.' But the third time he said, 'I see a mighty army in the distance, and one of the warriors has the biggest lance you ever saw!'

This was the cat, who was marching along with her tail erect.

And so they laughed and jeered, and it was so hot that the bear said, 'The enemy won't be here at this rate for many hours to come, so I'll just curl myself up in the fork of the tree and have a little sleep.'

And the wolf lay down under the oak, and the wild boar buried himself in some straw, so that nothing was seen of him but one ear.

And while they were lying there, the fox, the cat and the dog arrived. When the cat saw the wild boar's ear, she pounced upon it, thinking it was a mouse in the straw.

The wild boar got up in a dreadful fright, gave one loud grunt and disappeared into the wood. But the cat was even more startled than the boar, and, spitting with terror, she scrambled up into the fork of the tree, and as it happened right into the bear's face. Now it was the bear's turn to be alarmed, and with a mighty growl he jumped down from the oak and fell right on the top of the wolf and killed him as dead as a stone.

On their way home from the war the fox caught score of mice, and when they reached Simon's cottage he put them all on the stove and said to the cat, 'Now go and fetch one mouse after the other, and lay them down before your master.'

'All right,' said the cat, and did exactly as the fox told her.

When Susan saw this she said to her husband, 'Just look, here is our old cat back again, and see what a lot of mice she has caught.'

'Wonders will never cease,' cried Simon. 'I certainly never thought the old cat would ever catch another mouse.'

But Susan answered, 'There, you see, I always said our cat was a most excellent creature—but you men always think you know best.'

In the meantime the fox said to the dog, 'Our friend Simon has just killed a pig; when it gets a little darker, you must go into the courtyard and bark with all your might.'

'All right,' said the dog, and as soon as it grew dusk he began to bark loudly.

Susan, who heard him first, said to her husband, 'Our dog must have come back, for I hear him barking lustily. Do go out and see what's the matter; perhaps thieves may be stealing our sausages.'

But Simon answered, 'The foolish brute is as deaf as a post and is always barking at nothing,' and he refused to get up.

The next morning Susan got up early to go to church at the neighbouring town, and she thought she would take some sausages to her aunt who lived there. But when she went to her larder, she found all the sausages gone, and a great hole in the floor. She called out to her husband, 'I was perfectly right. Thieves have been here last night, and they have not left a single sausage. Oh! if you had only got up when I asked you to!'

Then Simon scratched his head and said, 'I can't understand it at all. I certainly never believed the old dog was so quick at hearing.'

But Susan replied, 'I always told you our old dog was the best dog in the world—but as usual you thought you knew so much better. Men are the same all the world over.'

And the fox scored a point too, for he had carried away the sausages himself!

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