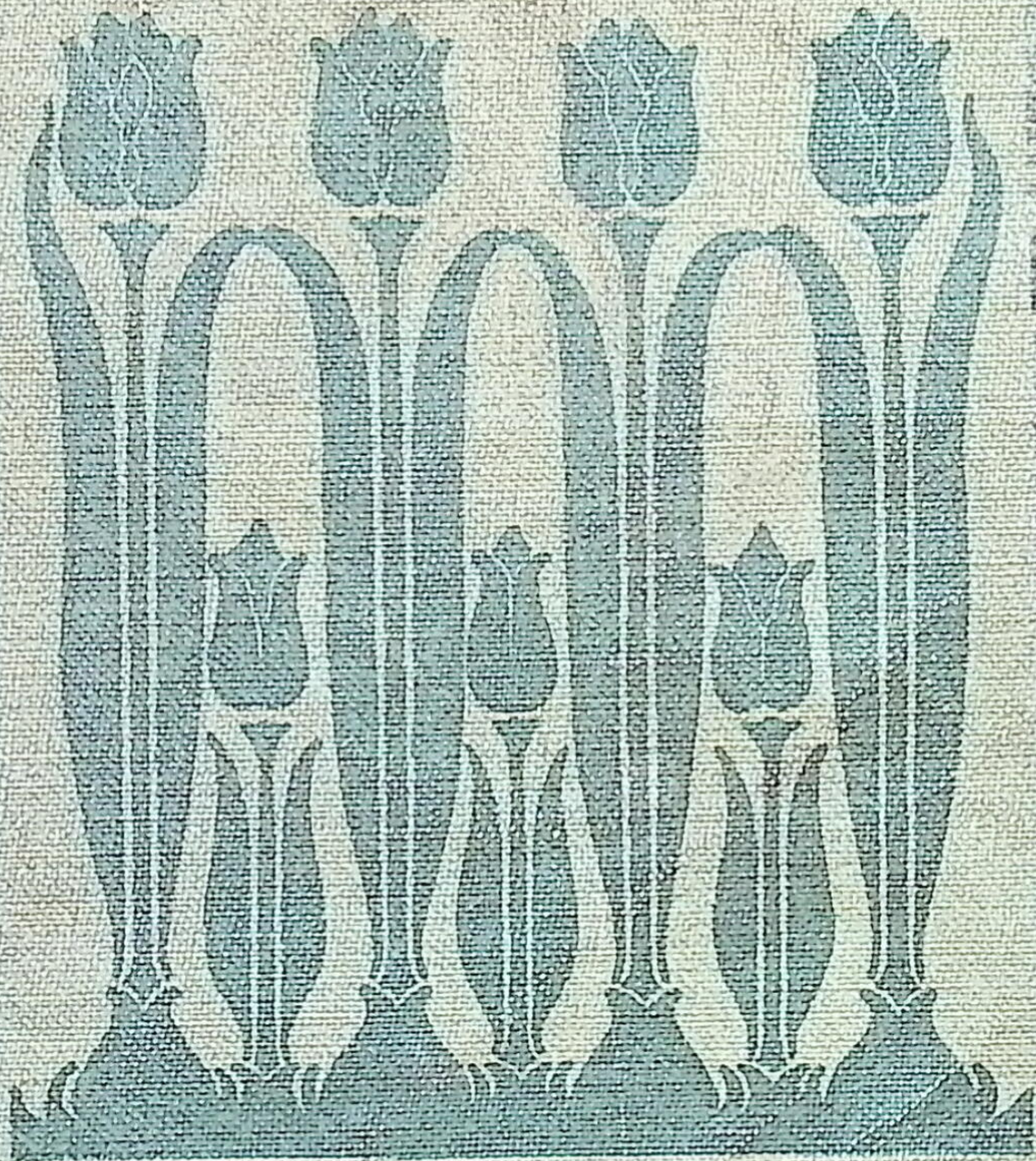


Instructor Literature Series—No. 50

REYNARD THE FOX

Retold By SUSIE M. BEST



F. A. OWEN PUBLISHING COMPANY,
DANSVILLE, N. Y.

INSTRUCTOR LITERATURE SERIES

Reynard the Fox

Retold By Susie M. Best

The Little Red Hen and
the Sly Old Fox



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REYNARD THE FOX

Introductory Note: This animal story is an epic poem, which probably originated among the ancient Franks in Germany. From there it spread to France and thence all over Europe.

The earliest manuscript form of the poem dates back to about the eleventh century.

The eminent German poet, Goethe, made an admirable rendering of the old epic and his version of it has been well translated by Alexander Rogers.

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REYNARD THE FOX

The lion was chosen king of the forest. He wanted all the animals to live at peace with each other, so he declared a truce. No one was to kill or steal.

At the end of a year the king called all the animals to a meeting. He wanted to hear how they had conducted themselves during the year.

All came except Reynard, the fox. Reynard was a sly one. He had played

many tricks on the other animals, so he thought he had better not appear at the meeting.

The animals were eager to tell their grievances against him.

The wolf spoke first. "I have three little wolf-cubs," he said. "Reynard tried to blind them. He threw dirt in their eyes. I think he wanted to eat them."

The dog came up with a big bow-wow. "Reynard stole my sausage," he cried. "It was a sweet piece. I was nearly famished when I found it in a thicket. But before I could get a morsel of it, Reynard snatched it from me and gobbled it up."

"The sausage was mine," spat the cat, humping his back. "I hid it in the thicket for myself."

"Where did you get it?" asked the king.

"I stole it from the miller's wife," answered the cat, "and it was mine by all legal rights."

Here a general hubbub followed in which nearly every animal present had some complaint to make against sly Reynard.

Things began to look dark for the absent

culprit. But he had one friend at the meeting. It was his nephew, the badger. The badger tried to defend the fox.

"Reynard has faults," he said, "but so have others. The wolf has often cheated Reynard. They made an agreement to be partners, share and share alike was the bargain. See how the wolf acted.

"One day they met a man who was going to market with a load of fish. Reynard and the wolf both wanted some. Reynard made a plan to get the fish. He lay down in the road and pretended to be dead. The carter stopped and picked him up. Fox fur was valuable; he couldn't afford to pass it by. He threw Reynard into the cart. Then he drove on. As soon as his back was turned, Reynard began throwing the fish out of the wagon. As fast as he threw them out, the wolf gobbled them up. He left nothing for Reynard but the bones."

As the badger related this incident, the wolf looked sheepish and the king looked shocked.

"As for the cat and the dog," continued the badger, "I should think they'd be

ashamed to accuse Reynard. They are shocked because he stole! Well, by their own confession they are both thieves. Nice fellows they are, to be finding fault with others. Set a thief to accuse a thief, I say."

He paused and looked around him.

The king coughed. "I am inclined to think Reynard is not so bad after all," he said. "Perhaps—"

But before he could finish what he intended saying, there was a great commotion among the animals and they parted their ranks for the rooster who seemed to be in deep distress.

"Reynard broke the truce," he gasped, as soon as he reached the king's presence. "I had ten sons and fourteen daughters. They were beautiful children. I was afraid to let them out of my sight but Reynard coaxed me to let them go into the forest with him. He said no one would harm them because of the truce. But no sooner did he get them in the forest than he fell upon them. All but five he killed. And of the dead he left nothing but the mangled body of my darling baby, my Scratchfoot."

Here he showed the headless body of little Scratchfoot.

The animals were all horror-stricken at the rooster's story and the king was in a great rage. Then the badger saw it was no use to try to plead Reynard's cause any further so he stepped aside.

The animals were all sorry for the rooster and the king ordered a fine funeral for Scratchfoot. She was buried with great honors and a stone was put over her grave. On the stone were lines that told what a good hen she was.

Then the king said, "We must catch Reynard and punish him. He must be brought to the court. Brown, you shall go for him."

Brown was the bear. He didn't want to go but he had to do what the king ordered. So he set off. The road to Reynard's house was long and hard, and Brown was tired and hungry when he got there.

He knocked at the door of the house. After a long time Reynard came out.

"Excuse me for keeping you waiting," he said. "I was busy studying my prayer-book. What do you want?"

"The king says you must come to court," said Brown. "All the animals are complaining of you."

"What do they say?" asked Reynard.

Then the bear told him.

"All lies," said Reynard, "and I can prove it. Of course I'll go with you. But shall we eat something first? Would you like some honey? Have you time to take some?"

Honey! Brown pricked up his ears. It was his favorite dish. Yes, indeed, he would have some honey, and he had plenty of time to get some.

Then Reynard led Brown to the foot of a mountain where there was a hollow tree. The tree was split half-open and it was held apart by big wedges.

"Stick your nose in, Brown; the sweet stuff is in the hollow," said Reynard.

So Brown stuck his nose and his fore-paws in the crack. No sooner were they in than sly Reynard quickly drew the wedges, and at once the tree closed with a snap. Brown was a prisoner. He blubbered and howled and kicked and scratched with his hind feet but he couldn't get out.

Reynard laughed and ran away.

Some farmers heard Brown crying. They came with all sorts of things to throw at him. They threw their hay-rakes and pitch-forks at him and they beat him with straps.

Brown finally wriggled himself free and ran away. His nose was all bloody, for the skin was torn off. His paws were bleeding too. The claws were torn out.

After a while he met Reynard but the fox only jeered at him for being greedy.

Brown now realized that Reynard had played him a trick, and when he made his way back to the court of the king, he gave a vivid account of his wrongs.

The king said Reynard should not escape. He would send another messenger. This time he chose the cat.

Poor puss! He fared little better than the bear.

As soon as Reynard saw him, he knew what he came for but he said nothing. He pretended to be very much astonished that he was blamed for what had befallen the bear in the trap.

"I shall be only too glad to go back with

you and prove my innocence," he said. "Shall we go at once or shall we have something to eat first? A nice fat mouse, for instance?"

The cat was hungry and at the mere mention of a nice fat mouse his mouth watered. Have something to eat first by all means!

"I haven't any mice in the house," explained Reynard, "but I know where we can find a number of fine ones. Come with me."

So the cat followed him down to the parson's barn. There Reynard showed him an opening through which he must crawl to get into the barn.

On the other side of that opening there was a spring-trap and Reynard knew it, but the cat didn't. The parson had been losing his chickens and he set the trap to catch the thief. It is safe to conclude that Reynard was the thief.

The cat was afraid of the hole. It looked so small and dark, but Reynard urged him to go. He finally did so, but lo, and behold! as soon as he got into the hole he found himself fast in the trap.

"Mew! Mew! Help! Help!" called puss. The parson heard him and came out with a club to hit him. There was quite a battle but the cat finally escaped. He was a sorry looking sight. He had lost one of his eyes in the fracas and was all battered up.

He too understood that he was a victim of Reynard's tricks and he too related a tale of woe upon his return to the court.

The king was so angry this time that he said he would take an army against the fox. Then the badger offered to go and get him, "He is my uncle," he said, "and he will come for me." So the king let him go.

Reynard was pleased to see the badger and readily agreed to go with him to the court. As they traveled the road, the two talked together.

"Don't you want to tell me the truth about all the things you have done, Reynard?" asked the badger. "It makes you feel better to confess your sins."

"All right," said Reynard, "I'll confess."

So he owned up how he tricked the bear and the cat. "I've played other tricks besides," he said. "I'll tell you about them."

"Once I tied the wolf to the bell-rope of a church, and when he tried to free himself, he made the bell ring. The priests heard the bell and came running. When they saw the wolf, they gave him a good beating. I ran away and laughed."

"That was very bad," said the badger. "Anything else to tell?"

The fox looked sober. "Yes, one day the wolf and I went to the priest's house to steal ham. There was a hole in the wall that led into the store-room. I told the wolf to creep through the hole and eat all the ham he wanted. The hole was small. He got through and found the ham. He ate a great deal. Then he crept into the hole again but he only got part of himself in it. He had eaten so much his body was all swollen. He stuck in the hole. I ran in the priest's house myself. He was sitting at dinner. There was a fine chicken on the table. I snatched it up and ran off with it. The priest ran after me but he stumbled against the table and upset everything. This put him in a great rage. All the people chased me so I dropped the chicken. I

hated to let it go but I had to. The priest happened to run into the store-room chasing me. There he found the wolf sticking in the hole. All the people helped the priest to give the wolf a beating. It was great fun."

"Did you escape?" inquired the badger.

"Oh, yes, I always do. I played him another trick. I knew a house where seven hens perched on a beam near a window, every night. I led him there. He crept upon the window-sill. It was very narrow. As he was tip-toeing along, I pushed the shutter to and tumbled him down into the room below. There were people sleeping there. They were frightened when the wolf dropped down on them. He ran into a corner but they got a light and found him. He got another beating. Oh, it was great fun!"

Reynard kept on talking a long time. He had many things to confess, but at last he finished.

"What do you think of my case?" he asked the badger.

The badger shook his head. "I think you need praying for," he said.

When the two reached the court, the king at once set Reynard up for trial.

The fox talked very artfully but it was no use. There were too many new witnesses against him. The cat, the bear, the hare, the goat, the weasel, the squirrel, the stag, the roe, the beaver, the marten, all crowded around to tell of his wicked doings and when they were done, the birds came in great companies with their complaints.

So no one believed his denials and he was ordered to be hanged.

Now, Reynard didn't want to hang, but he pretended to be perfectly willing to die. All he asked was permission to tell the king about a great treasure which he had found.

So the king let him tell about it.

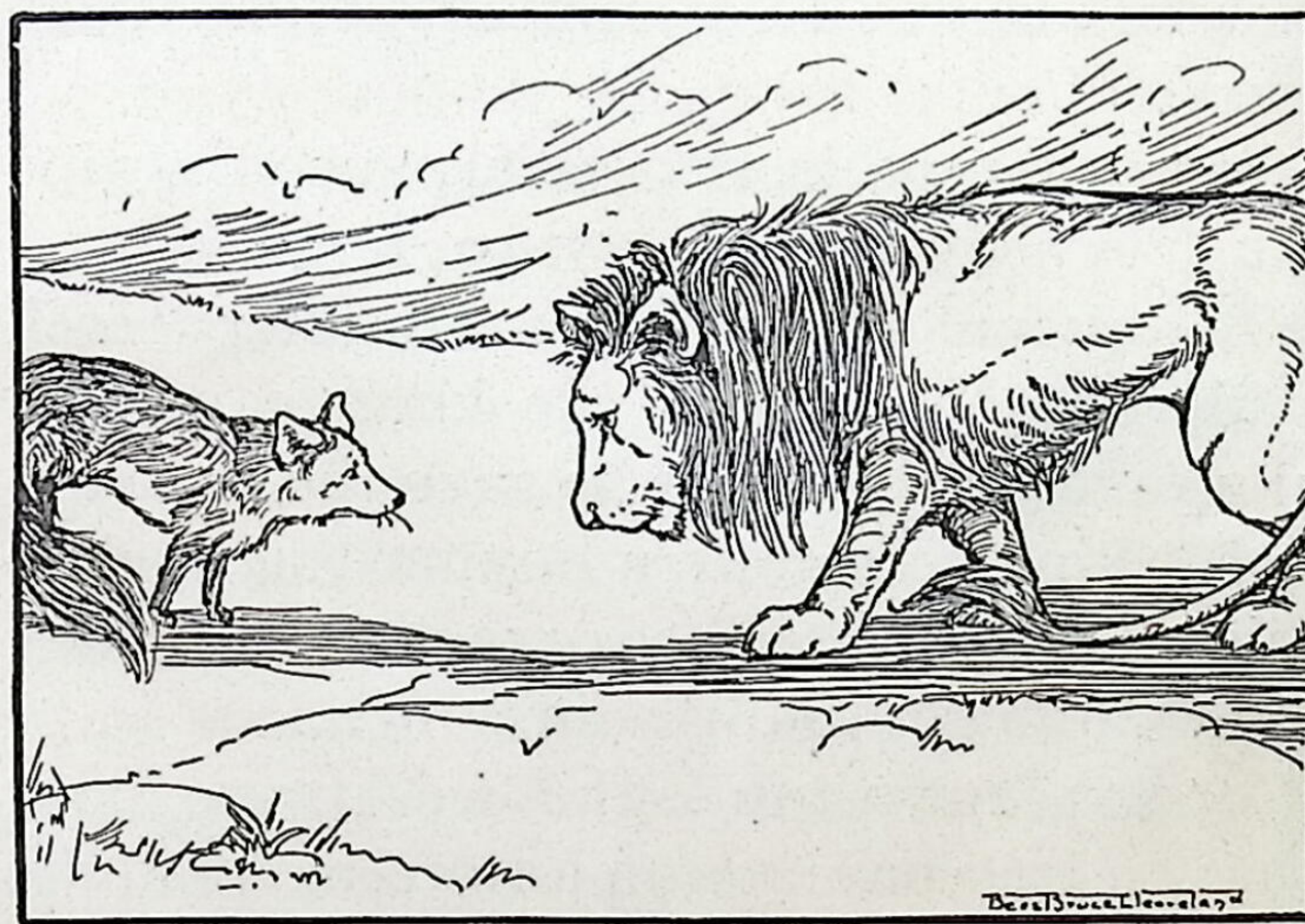
"It is a treasure which my father found," said Reynard. "I stole it from him. It was lucky for you, oh, King, that I did. If I hadn't, you would be dead now."

The king shivered a little. "Explain yourself," he said.

The crafty fox continued, lying as fast as he talked. "There was a plot formed against you. All the animals were in it.

They were to get up an army against you and make Brown king. The money was to be used to pay them.

"My own father was one of the plotters. I hate to tell of him as he is dead, but I must speak the truth."



"Yes, tell the truth, the whole truth," said the king.

The fox went on. "I found out the plot and I spied on my father till I found where the gold was. Then my wife and I stole it. I knew the animals wouldn't fight if they got no pay. It's a good thing I got the gold away in time, for all the wolves were busy

sharpening their teeth for the fray, all the cats and bears were getting ready, and all the gluttons and badgers in the country were pledged to bear arms against you. When they found the gold was gone, they refused to fight, just as I knew they would. My father was so disappointed he hanged himself."

Having said this, the rascal paused to wipe his eyes as if he were crying.

The queen believed all the cunning wretch said and she induced the king to pardon him on condition that he gave the treasure to the king. Of course Reynard agreed to this and he described exactly how they must go to get the treasure.

Poor Brown and the wolf were both thrown into prison as plotters against the king.

Then Reynard said he must go home to his wife. So they gave him a bag to carry things in. And the king said the rabbit and the goat must go with him, to see him safely home.

When they got there, he made the goat wait outside but he invited the rabbit inside.

Alas, for the rabbit! No sooner had Reynard greeted his family than he turned on the innocent rabbit and killed him.

When Reynard jumped on him, the rabbit cried out, "Help! Help!" But there was no one to help him. So he was killed and the family ate him up, all except the head.

Reynard took the head and tied it securely in the bag. Then he took the bag outside and gave it to the goat.

"Give this to the king," he said. "It contains very important letters. Don't try to open it. You couldn't tie it the same way again, and the king understands the knot. He will be angry if he finds it has been fooled with. You had better tell him you helped compose the letters in the bag. It will win you the king's favor."

The goat took the bag. "Where is the rabbit?" he asked. "Won't he come back with me?"

"No," replied Reynard; "he is having a nice time so he says he will stay with us awhile."

"I thought I heard him call for help a little while ago," said the goat.

"So you did," readily responded the fox; "my wife fainted, and the dear rabbit was frightened and called for help. That was what you heard."

So the goat said goodby to the rascal and taking the bag, started off on his long journey. When he came to the court of the king, he delivered the bag and openly boasted how he had helped prepare the contents.

When the king opened the bag and out came the rabbit's head, all the goat's denials profited him nothing, for no one believed him. He was convicted out of his own mouth, and the horrified king and court decided he must die for his share of the crime. So he was given over to the wolf to be eaten.

This last affair of Reynard's proved what a deceiver he was, and so the bear and the wolf were set free, amidst great rejoicings over their innocence.

One day soon after this a crow came to court weeping.

"Oh, King," he said, "hear my sad story. My wife is dead. Reynard ate her."

"How was that?" asked the king, while

all the court listened in shocked silence.

"We were out walking," wept the crow, "and we saw Reynard lying motionless in the road."

"Alas! he is dead!" I said to my wife.

"Poor Reynard!" said she, and put her



head down to his mouth to feel if perchance there was a breath left in his body. Instantly the cruel rascal opened his mouth and bit her head right off her body. I screamed in fright and then he turned on me too. If I hadn't flown into a tree he would have gobbled me too."

At this story the king was in a great rage. "Come," he said, "we must punish this rogue. Get an army ready and we will go and besiege him."

When the badger heard this, he hurried off to see Reynard and warn him.

When Reynard heard the news, he decided to go to court at once and try to clear himself of the charges.

✕ He told his wife not to worry, he had gotten out of worse scrapes than this and he'd come out all right. Then he went on with the badger.

As they went along he confessed many more misdemeanors.

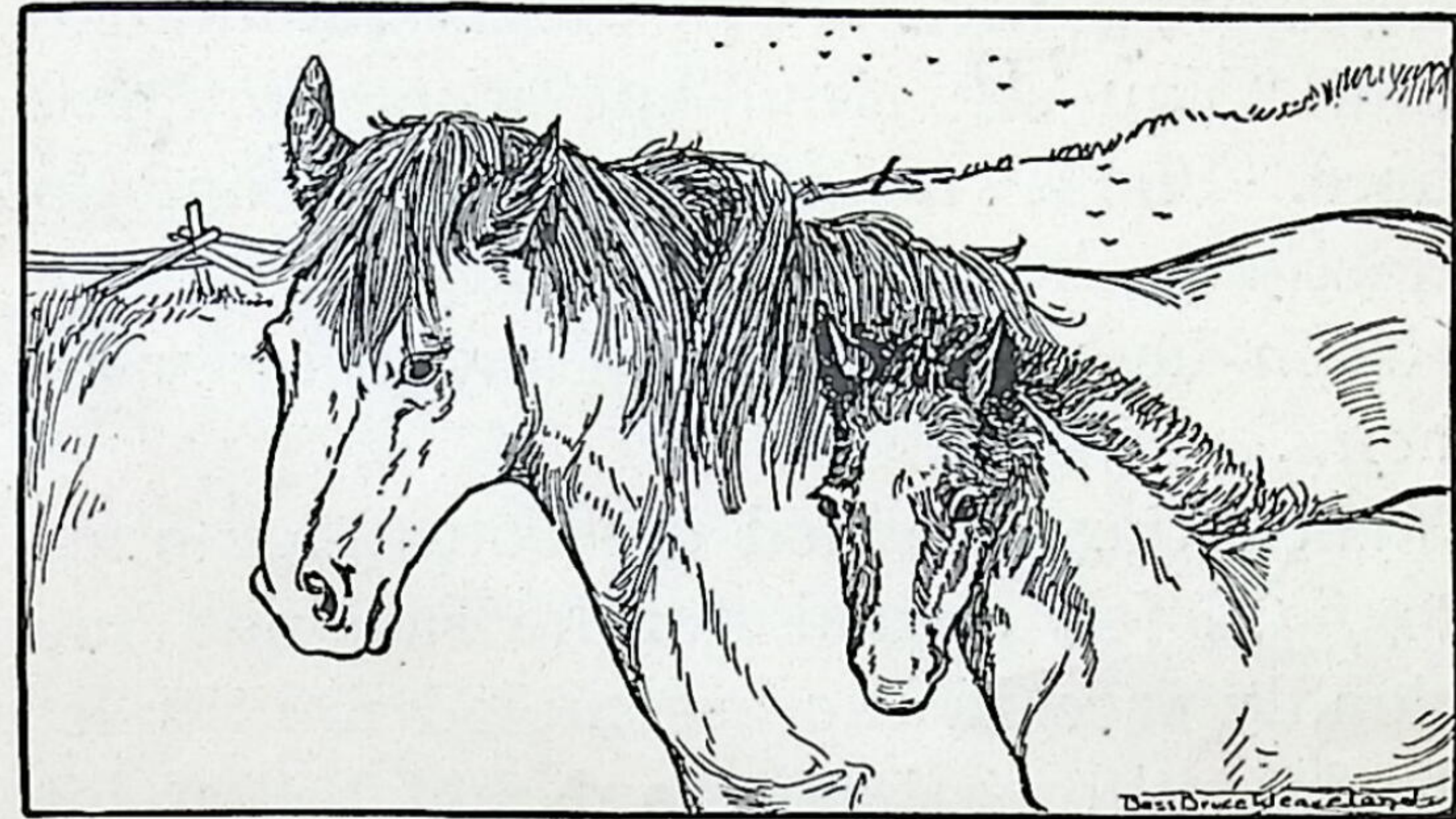
"It is true," he said, "that I ate up the crow's wife. And now I'll tell you a trick I played on the wolf that I forgot to tell you on our other trip. Perhaps I'll feel better if I confess it."

"Do," said the badger, "I'm sure your heart will be lighter."

"Well," said the fox, "the wolf and I were one day walking together. We were both hungry. We met a mare with a fine young foal. The wolf said the foal would taste

good and suggested that we offer to buy it.

"I went to the mare and asked her the price. She said I would find it written on her hoof. I knew what she meant, so I told



the wolf I couldn't read and he'd have to look to find the price."

He stopped a minute in his story and laughed. Then he went on, "The wolf is proud of being learned. He is skilled in German, French, Italian and Latin. So he went up to the mare and asked to see the price. He bent his head down to her hind foot and she just up with it and kicked him in the skull so that he liked to have died. She had six iron nails in her hoof. I told him he did not understand mare language."

The badger shook his head. "I'm afraid you're in for it, Reynard," he said.

Just then they met the ape. The ape was a friend of Reynard's. He asked where they were going. When they told him he said, "You see Mrs. Ape when you get there. She is very wise. Trust her and do exactly as she tells you."

Then he went his way and they went theirs.

When they reached the court, for once Reynard felt dismal, for he saw not one friendly face in the assembled multitude. But he put on a bold front and began his defense. As usual he denied every charge.

"What about the crow's wife?" asked the king.

"She died of eating fish too greedily. A bone stuck in her throat and killed her. I assure you I had nothing to do with it. I have often been kind to the crow, and this is the way he repays me. But I forgive him. I have no ill-will in my heart for him." And the old hypocrite wiped away a tear he squeezed out

"Reynard," said the king, "you are a de-

ceiver. I believe nothing you say. You killed the poor little rabbit. You and the goat did it together. The goat dared to bring the head here and he openly boasted of having helped you."

Reynard opened his eyes wide. "What!" he cried, "is the dear little rabbit dead? Why, I sent him home with the goat, and in the bag I sent three great gifts for the king and the queen. Oh, I see it all! The goat killed the rabbit and then stole the presents and put the rabbit's head in the bag, knowing he could accuse me of the crime. Oh, the wickedness of this world!" He looked really shocked.

But the king refused to believe him. Then Reynard remembered about Mrs. Ape and he sent for her to plead for him.

"You ought to show him some mercy, oh King," said she; "don't you remember how he helped you decide the case of the snake and the man?"

"I don't quite remember the case," said the king, "tell me about it."

"Why," said Mrs. Ape, "a peasant found a snake in a noose. He said he would free

the snake if it would promise not to harm him. The snake promised, of course. But no sooner was it free than it sprang on the man and tried to kill him. The man told it to remember its promise. But it said hunger gave it a right to kill. A bear and a wolf were passing by and the snake asked their opinion. They both hoped to get a bit of the man and they decided in favor of the snake. Then the man said he would appeal the case to you and he would abide by your decision.

"You didn't know how to decide it and you asked Reynard's advice. He said the snake must go back into the noose so he could see just how much the man had helped him. The snake did so, and then Reynard said the man might free him again if he wanted to take the chance of the snake's keeping his word, but he wouldn't advise him to do it.

"This way out of the trouble won you great praise, oh, King, and it was all owing to Reynard's wit. You ought to forgive him."

The king showed signs of relenting and the fox was quick to see it. "I'd bear any-

thing," he sighed, "if I could only have given my king and queen the treasures I sent them."

The queen was curious. "What were the treasures?" she asked.

"One was a ring," said the sly cheat. "It was for the king. It was pure gold and had fine jewels in it. It was a magic ring. No one who wore it could ever be hurt. He would live to a great old age and would always be lucky."

"What else did you send?" asked the king.

"A comb and a mirror for the queen," said Reynard. "My own wife wanted them and she often coaxed for them. But I always said no, they were for the queen."

"What kind of a comb was it?" inquired the queen.

"It was made of panther's bones. It was bright as silver and it had a scent sweeter than roses. There were lovely pictures on the back of it. It was a magic comb for it kept all manner of sickness away."

"I wish I had it," sighed the queen. "What was the mirror like?"

"Oh, wonderful mirror!" exclaimed the fox. "In place of a glass it had a fine jewel. You could see in it anything that was going on in any place in the world. It too had lovely pictures on the frame. Oh, if I could only find my treasures and give them to the king and queen I could die happy!"

So the artful fellow talked, and at last the king said he guessed he had better pardon him and let him go.

Then the wolf jumped up and declared it was a sin to be fooled again and no one would be safe if the king did not punish the offender.

At this Reynard looked very much hurt and offered to settle the whole affair by fighting the wolf.

This pleased everybody and the two went away to get ready for the fight.

The first thing Reynard did was to shave him self smooth all except his tail which he filled full of dirt.

Then he oiled himself well and said he was ready for the fight.

When they came together in the ring, he slipped out of the wolf's clutches every

time and then he threw the dust out of his tail into the wolf's eyes and blinded him. The wolf couldn't see and the fox finally won the fight.

The king then declared the fox was innocent of all the charges and set him up high in honor at the court. And the animals all cheered the fox because he won and hooted at the wolf because he lost.

But that is the way of the world.

THE LITTLE RED HEN AND THE SLY
OLD FOX

(An Old Irish Ballad)

There was once upon a time
A little small Red Hen,
Off in the good old country
Where you have never been.

Nice and quiet sure she was,
And never did any harm,
She lived alone all by herself
And worked upon her farm.

There lived out o'er the hill,
In a great den of rocks,
A crafty, sly and wicked
Old fellow of a Fox.

This rascal of a Fox,
He took it in his head
He'd have the little Red Hen,—
So, when he went to bed,

He lay awake and thought
What a fine thing 'twould be
To fetch her home and boil her up
For his old marm—oh, me!

THE LITTLE RED HEN

29

And so he thought and thought,
Until he grew so thin
That there was nothing left of him
But just his bones and skin.

But the small Red Hen was wise,
She always locked her door,
And in her pocket put the key
To keep the Fox out sure.

But at last there came a scheme
Into his wicked head,
And he took a great big bag
And to his mother said,

“Now, have the pot all boiling
Against the time I come;
We'll eat the small Red Hen tonight
For sure I'll bring her home.”

And so away he went
With the bag upon his back,
And up the hill and through the wood
Softly he made his track.

And then he came along,
Creeping as still as a mouse,
To where the small Red Hen
Lived in her snug old house.

And out she came herself,
Just as he got in sight,
To pick up sticks to make her fire,—
“Ah, ha,” says Fox, “all right!”

“Begorro, now I’ll have you
Without much trouble more;”
And in he slipped quite unbeknownst
And hid behind the door.

And then, a minute after,
In came the small Red Hen,
And shut the door and locked it too,
And thought, “I’m safely in!”

And then she turned around
And looked behind the door;
There stood the Fox with his big tail
Spread out upon the floor!

Dear me! she was so scared
With such a wondrous sight
She dropped her apronful of sticks
And flew up in a fright,

And lighted on the beam
Across on top the room;
“Aha!” says she, “you don’t have me,
You may as well go home.”

“Aha!” says Fox, “we’ll see;
I’ll bring you down from that.”
So out he marched upon the floor,
Right under where she sat.

And then he whirled around,
And round and round and round,
Faster and faster and faster,
After his tail on the ground.

Until the small Red Hen,
She got so dizzy, sure,
With looking at the Fox’s tail
She just dropped on the floor.

And Fox, he whipped her up,
And put her in his bag,
And off he started all alone,—
He and his little dog.

All day he tracked the wood,
Up hill and down again,
And with him, smothering in the bag,
The little small Red Hen.

Little indeed she knew
Of where she was that day,
Says she, “I’m boiled up, sure,
And what’ll be to pay?”

Then she bethought herself,
And took her scissors out,
And snipped a big hole in the bag,
So she could look about.

And before old Fox could think,
She leaped right out, she did,
And then picked up a great big stone
And popped it in, instead.

And then she runs off home,
Her outside door she locks,
Thinks she, “You see, you don’t have me,
You crafty, sly, old Fox!”

And Fox, he tugged away
With the great big heavy stone
Thumping his shoulders very bad,
And he went on alone.

And when he came in sight
Of his great den of rocks,
Just watching for him at the door,
He spied old Mother Fox.

“Have you the pot a-boiling?”
Says he to old Fox then.
“Sure, and it is, my child,” says she,
“Have you the small Red Hen?”

“Yes, just here in my bag,
As sure as I stand here,
Open the lid till I put her in,
Open it—never fear.”

So the rascal cut the string,
And held the big bag over.
“Now, when I shake it in,” says he,
“Do you put on the cover.”

“Yes, that I will;” and then
The stone went in with a dash,
And the pot of boiling water
Came over them, ker-splash!
And scalded them both to death,
So they could breathe no more;
And the little small Red Hen lived safe
Just where she lived before!

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