

## The Birds, the Beasts, and the Bat

The birds and the beasts declared war against each other. No compromise was possible, and so they went at it tooth and claw. It is said the quarrel grew out of the persecution that the race of geese suffered at the teeth of the fox family. The beasts, too, had cause for fight. The eagle was constantly pouncing on the hare, and the owl dined daily on mice. It was a terrible battle. Many a hare and many a mouse died. Chickens and geese fell by the score—and the victor always stopped for a feast. Now, the bat family had not openly joined either side. They were a politic and fickle lot. So when they saw the birds getting the better of it, they were birds for all there was in it. But when the tide of battle turned, they immediately sided with the beasts. When the battle was over, the conduct of the bats was discussed at the peace conference. Such unfaithfulness was unpardonable, and birds and beasts had common cause to drive out the bats. And since then, the bat family hides in dark towers and deserted ruins, flying out only in the night.

**Moral:** The fickle have no friends.

## The Donkey and the Wolf

A donkey was feeding in a pasture near a wood when he saw a wolf lurking in the shadows along the hedge. He easily guessed what the wolf had in mind and thought of a plan to save himself. He pretended he was lame and began to hobble painfully. When the wolf came up, he asked the donkey what had made him lame, and the donkey replied that he had stepped on a sharp thorn. "Please pull it out," he pleaded, groaning as if in pain. "If you do not, it might stick in your throat when you eat me." The wolf saw the wisdom of the advice, for he wanted to enjoy his meal without any danger of choking. So the donkey lifted up his foot and the wolf began to search very closely and carefully for the thorn. Just then, the donkey kicked out with all his might, tumbling the wolf a dozen paces away. And while the wolf was getting very slowly and painfully to his feet, the donkey galloped away in safety. "Serves me right," growled the wolf as he crept into the bushes. "I'm a butcher by trade, not a doctor."

**Moral:** It is wise to stick to your trade.

## The Dog and the Reflection

A dog was carrying a piece of meat in his mouth to eat it in peace at home. On his way, he had to cross a bridge across a brook. As he crossed, he looked down and saw his own reflection in the water. Thinking it was another dog with another piece of meat, he made up his mind to have that also. He made a snap at the shadow in the water, but as he opened his mouth, the piece of meat fell out, dropped into the water, and was lost.

**Moral:** It is foolish to be greedy.

## The Miller, His Son, and Their Donkey

One day, a long time ago, an old miller and his son were on their way to market with a donkey, which they hoped to sell. They drove him very slowly, for they thought they would have a better chance to sell him if they kept him in good condition. As they walked along the highway, some travelers laughed loudly at them. “What foolishness,” cried one, “to walk when they might as well ride. The most stupid of the three is not the one you would expect it to be.” The miller did not like to be laughed at, so he told his son to climb up and ride.

They had gone a little farther along the road, when three merchants passed by. “Oh, what have we here?” they cried. “Respect old age, young man! Get down and let the old man ride.” Though the miller was not tired, he made the boy get down and climbed up himself to ride, just to please the merchants.

At the next turnstile, they overtook some women carrying market baskets loaded with vegetables and other things to sell. “Look at the old fool,” exclaimed one of them. “Perched on the donkey, while that poor boy has to walk.” The miller felt a bit vexed, but to be agreeable, he told the boy to climb up behind him.

They had no sooner started out again than a loud shout went up from another company of people on the road. “What a crime,” cried one, “to load up a poor dumb beast like that! They look more able to carry the poor creature than he to carry them.”

“They must be on their way to sell the poor thing’s hide,” said another. The miller and his son quickly scrambled down, and a short time later, the marketplace was thrown into an uproar as the two came along carrying the donkey slung from a pole. A great crowd of people ran out to get a closer look at the strange sight. The donkey did not dislike being carried, but so many people came up to point at him and laugh and shout that he began to kick and bray and then, just as they were crossing a bridge, the ropes that held him gave way and down he tumbled into the river. The poor miller now set out sadly for home. By trying to please everybody, he had pleased nobody and lost his donkey besides.

**Moral:** If you try to please all, you please none.

## The Seagull and the Owl

A hungry seagull, having bolted down too large a fish, burst its deep gullet-bag and lay down on the shore to die. An owl saw him and exclaimed, “You richly deserve your fate; for a bird of the air has no business to seek its food from the sea!”

**Moral:** No rule of nature applies to everyone the same way.