

The Astrologer

A man who lived a long time ago believed that he could read the future in the stars. He called himself an astrologer and spent his time at night gazing at the sky. One evening, he was walking along the open road outside the village. His eyes were fixed on the stars. He thought he saw there that the end of the world was at hand, when all at once, down he went into a hole full of mud and water. There he stood up to his ears in the muddy water and madly clawed at the slippery sides of the hole in his effort to climb out. His cries for help soon brought the villagers running. As they pulled him out of the mud, one of them said: "You pretend to read the future in the stars, and yet you fail to see what is at your feet! This may teach you to pay more attention to what is right in front of you and let the future take care of itself."

"What use is it," said another, "to read the stars, when you can't see what's right here on the earth?"

Moral: If you take care of the little things, the big things will take care of themselves.

The Bees, the Wasps, and the Hornet

A store of honey had been found in a hollow tree, and the wasps declared positively that it belonged to them. The bees were just as sure that the treasure was theirs. The argument grew very pointed, and it looked as if the affair could not be settled without a battle when at last, with much good sense, they agreed to let a judge decide the matter. So they brought the case before the hornet, who was the justice of the peace in that part of the woods. When the judge called the case, witnesses declared that they had seen certain winged creatures in the neighborhood of the hollow tree, who hummed loudly and whose bodies were striped yellow and black like bees. Counsel for the wasps immediately insisted that this description fitted his clients exactly. Such evidence did not help Judge Hornet to any decision, so he adjourned court for six weeks to give him time to think it over. When the case came up again, both sides had a large number of witnesses. An ant was first to take the stand, and was about to be cross-examined, when a wise old bee addressed the court. "Your honor," he said, "the case has now been pending for six weeks. If it is not decided soon, the honey will not be fit for anything. I move that the bees and the wasps be both instructed to build a honeycomb. Then we shall soon see to whom the honey really belongs." The wasps protested loudly. Wise Judge Hornet quickly understood why they did so: They knew they could not build a honeycomb and fill it with honey.

"It is clear," said the judge, "who made the comb and who could not have made it. The honey belongs to the bees."

Moral: A wise man can find out the truth.

The Cat and the Fox

Once a cat and a fox were traveling together. As they went along, picking up provisions on the way—a stray mouse here, a fat chicken there—they began an argument to while away the time between bites. And, as usually happens when comrades argue, the talk began to get personal. “You think you are extremely clever, don’t you?” said the fox. “Do you pretend to know more than I? Why, I know a whole sack full of tricks!”

“Well,” retorted the cat, “I admit I know one trick only, but that one, let me tell you, is worth a thousand of yours!” Just then, close by, they heard a hunter’s horn and the yelping of a pack of hounds. In an instant, the cat was up a tree, hiding among the leaves. “This is my trick,” he called to the fox. “Now let me see what yours are worth.” But the fox had so many plans for escape that he could not decide which one to try first. He dodged here and there with the hounds at his heels. He doubled on his tracks, he ran at top speed, he entered a dozen burrows—but all in vain. The hounds caught him and soon put an end to the boaster and all his tricks.

Moral: Sometimes fewer choices are better.

The Wild Boar and the Fox

A wild boar was sharpening his tusks busily against the stump of a tree when a fox happened by. Now, the fox was always looking for a chance to make fun of his neighbors. So he made a great show of looking anxiously about, as if in fear of some hidden enemy. But the boar kept right on with his work. “Why are you doing that?” asked the fox at last with a grin. “There isn’t any danger that I can see.”

“True enough,” replied the boar, “but when danger does come, there will not be time for such work as this. My weapons will have to be ready for use then or I shall suffer for it.”

Moral: Preparedness for war can guarantee peace.

The Young Man and the Swallow

A young fellow who was very popular among his companions as a good spender quickly wasted his fortune trying to live up to his reputation. One fine day in early spring, he found himself with not a penny left and no property, save the clothes he wore. He was to meet some jolly young men that morning, and he was at his wits’ end figuring out how to get enough money to keep up appearances. Just then, a swallow flew by, twittering merrily, and the young man, thinking summer had come, hastened off to a clothes dealer to whom he sold all the clothes he wore, down to his very tunic. A few days later, a change in weather brought a severe frost. The poor swallow and that foolish young man in his light tunic, with his arms and knees bare, could scarcely keep life in their shivering bodies.

Moral: One swallow does not make a summer.