

The Lion and the Mouse

A lion lay asleep in the forest, his great head resting on his paws. A timid little mouse came upon him unexpectedly, and in her fright and haste to get away, she ran across the lion's nose. Roused from his nap, the lion laid his huge paw angrily on the tiny creature to kill her. "Spare me!" begged the poor mouse. "Please let me go and someday I will surely repay you." The lion was much amused to think that a mouse could ever help him. But he was generous and let the mouse go. Some days later, while stalking his prey in the forest, the lion was caught in the coils of a hunter's net. Unable to free himself, he filled the forest with his angry roaring. The mouse knew the voice and quickly found the lion struggling in the net. Running to one of the great ropes that bound him, she gnawed it until it parted, and soon the lion was free. "You laughed when I said I would repay you," said the mouse. "Now you see that even a mouse can help a lion."

Moral: A kindness is never wasted.

The Dogs and the Fox

Some dogs found the skin of a lion and furiously began to tear it with their teeth. A fox chanced to see them and laughed scornfully. "If that lion had been alive," he said, "it would have been a very different story. He would have made you feel how much sharper his claws are than your teeth."

Moral: It is easy but contemptible to kick a man that is down.

The Sick Stag

A stag had fallen sick. He had just enough strength to gather some food and find a quiet clearing in the woods, where he lay down to wait until his strength should return. The animals heard about the stag's illness and came to ask after his health. Of course, they were all hungry, and helped themselves freely to the stag's food; and as you would expect, the stag soon starved to death.

Moral: Goodwill is worth nothing unless it is accompanied by good acts.

The Eagle and the Fox

An eagle and a fox formed an intimate friendship and decided to live near each other. The eagle built her nest in the branches of a tall tree, while the fox crept into the underwood and there produced her young. Not long after they had agreed upon this plan, the eagle, being in want of provision for her young ones, swooped down while the fox was out, seized upon one of the little cubs, and feasted herself and her brood. The fox discovered on her return what had happened but was less grieved for the death of her young than for her inability to avenge them. A just retribution, however, quickly fell upon the eagle. While hovering near an altar on which some villagers were sacrificing a goat, she seized a piece of the meat and carried it, along with a burning cinder, to her nest. A strong breeze soon fanned the spark into a flame and the eaglets, as yet unfledged and helpless, were roasted in their nest and dropped down dead at the bottom of the tree. There, in the sight of the eagle, the fox gobbled them up.

Moral: Hunger can turn friends into enemies.

The Laborer and the Nightingale

A laborer lay listening to a nightingale's song throughout the summer night. So pleased was he with it that the next night he set a trap for it and captured it. "Now that I have caught you," he cried, "you shall always sing to me."

"We nightingales never sing in a cage," said the bird.

"Then I'll eat you," said the laborer. "I have always heard it said that nightingale on toast is a dainty morsel."

"No, kill me not," said the nightingale, "but let be me free, and I'll tell you three things worth far more than my poor body."

The laborer let him loose, and the nightingale flew up to a branch of a tree and said, "Never believe a captive's promise; that's one thing. Then again, keep what you have. And the third piece of advice is this: Sorrow not over what is lost forever." Then the songbird flew away.

Moral: People should never trust a promise made under pressure.