

The Swan and the Goose

A certain rich man bought a goose and a swan in the market. He fed the one for his table and kept the other for the sake of its song. When the time came for killing the goose, the cook went to get him at night, when it was dark; he was not able to distinguish one bird from the other. By mistake, he caught the swan instead of the goose. The swan, threatened with death, burst forth into song and thus made himself known by his voice and preserved his life by his melody.

Moral: A person does better when they use their own talents.

The Town Mouse and the Country Mouse

A town mouse once visited a relative who lived in the country. For lunch, the country mouse served wheat stalks, roots, and acorns, with a dash of cold water for drink. The town mouse ate very sparingly, nibbling a little of this and a little of that, making it very plain by her manner that she ate the simple food only to be polite. After the meal, the friends had a long talk—or rather, the town mouse talked about her life in the city while the country mouse listened. They then went to bed in a cozy nest in the hedgerow and slept in quiet and comfort until morning. In her sleep, the country mouse dreamed she was a town mouse with all the luxuries and delights of city life that her friend had described for her. So the next day, when the town mouse asked the country mouse to go home with her to the city, she gladly said yes. When they reached the mansion in which the town mouse lived, they found on the table in the dining room the leavings of a very fine banquet. There were sweetmeats and jellies, pastries, delicious cheeses—indeed, the most tempting foods that a mouse can imagine. But just as the country mouse was about to nibble a dainty bit of pastry, she heard a cat mew loudly and scratch at the door. In great fear, the mice scurried to a hiding place, where they lay quite still for a long time, hardly daring to breathe. When at last they ventured back to the feast, the door opened suddenly and in came the servants to clear the table, followed by the house dog. The country mouse stopped in the town mouse's den only long enough to pick up her carpet bag and umbrella. "You may have luxuries and dainties that I have not," she said as she hurried away, "but I prefer my plain food and simple life in the country with the peace and security that go with it."

Moral: A simple life can be as rewarding as a sophisticated life.

The Gnat and the Bull

A gnat flew over the meadow with much buzzing for so small a creature and settled on the tip of one of the horns of a bull. After he had rested a short time, he made ready to fly away. But before he left, he begged the bull's pardon for having used his horn for a resting place. "You must be very glad to have me go now," he said.

"It's all the same to me," replied the bull. "I did not even know you were there."

Moral: We are often of greater importance in our own eyes than in the eyes of our neighbor.

The Huntsman and the Fisherman

A huntsman, returning with his dogs from the field, fell in by chance with a fisherman who was bringing home a basket well laden with fish. The huntsman wished to have the fish, and their owner experienced an equal longing for the contents of the game bag. They quickly agreed to exchange the produce of their day's sport. Each was so well pleased with his bargain that they made for some time the same exchange day after day. Finally, a neighbor said to them, "If you go on in this way, you will soon destroy by frequent use the pleasure of your exchange, and each will again wish to retain the fruits of his own sport."

Moral: Variety makes life better.

The North Wind and the Sun

The north wind and the sun had a quarrel about which of them was the stronger. While they were disputing with much heat and bluster, a traveler passed along the road wrapped in a cloak. "Let us agree," said the sun, "that he who is stronger can strip that traveler of his cloak."

"Very well," growled the north wind, and at once sent a cold, howling blast against the traveler. With the first gust of wind, the ends of the cloak whipped about the traveler's body. But he immediately wrapped it closely around him, and the harder the wind blew, the tighter he held it to him. The north wind tore angrily at the cloak, but all his efforts were in vain.

Then the sun began to shine. At first his beams were gentle, and in the pleasant warmth after the bitter cold of the north wind, the traveler unfastened his cloak and let it hang loosely from his shoulders. The sun's rays grew warmer and warmer. The man took off his cap and mopped his brow. At last, he became so heated that he pulled off his cloak and, to escape the blazing sunshine, threw himself down in the welcome shade of a tree by the roadside.

Moral: Gentleness and kind persuasion win where force and bluster fail.