

THE FOX AND THE WOLF

A Tale from the West Highlands Of Scotland

Adapted for The Ten Minute Tutor by: Debra Treloar



Once upon a time, at the foot of some very high mountains there was a small village, and a little way off two roads met, one of them going to the East and the other to the West.

One warm summer night, when a round full moon shone down upon the road, a great Wolf came trotting round the corner.

"I positively must get a good meal before I go back to my den," he said to himself.

"It's been nearly a week since I have tasted anything but scraps, though perhaps no one would think so to look at my figure! Of course there are plenty of rabbits and hares in the mountains, but indeed, one needs to be as fast as a greyhound to catch them, and I'm not as young as I was. If I could only eat that fox I saw a fortnight ago, curled up into a delicious hairy ball. I could have eaten her then, but

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unluckily her husband was lying beside her. Besides, everyone knows that foxes, great and small, run like the wind. It seems as if there is not a living creature left for me to prey upon. However, let's see what this village can produce. I am as hungry as a bear."

Now, while these thoughts were running through the mind of the Wolf, the very Fox he had been thinking of was galloping along the other road.

"All day I have listened to those village hens clucking until I can't bear it any longer," she murmured as she bounded along, hardly seeming to touch the ground.

"When you like chickens and eggs as much as I do, it is the sweetest of all music. As sure as there is a moon in the sky, I will have some of them tonight, for I have grown so thin my very bones rattle, and my poor babies are crying for food."

As she spoke she reached a little patch of grass, where the two roads joined, and flung herself under a tree to take a little rest, and make her plans.

At the same time the Wolf arrived. The sight of the fox lying within his grasp made his mouth water, but his joy was somewhat reduced when he noticed how thin she was.

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The Fox's quick ears heard the sound of his paws, though they were as soft as velvet, and turning her head she said politely, "Is that you, neighbour? What a strange place to meet in! I hope you are quite well?"

"Quite well in regards to my health," answered the Wolf, whose eyes glistened greedily, "at least, as well as one CAN be when one is very hungry. But what is the matter with you? A fortnight ago you were as plump as one could wish!"

"I have been ill... very ill," replied the Fox, "and what you say is quite true. A WORM is fatter compared to me."

"You're right! Still, you are good enough for me," said the Wolf.

"Oh, you are always joking! I'm sure you are not half as hungry as I am!"

"That we shall soon see," cried the Wolf, opening his huge mouth and he crouched ready to spring.

"What are you doing?" exclaimed the Fox, stepping backwards.

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"What am I doing? What I am going to do, is to make you my supper, in less time than it takes a rooster to crow."

"Well, I suppose you must have your joke," answered the Fox lightly, but she never removed her eyes from the wolf.

"I don't want to joke, but to eat!" replied the Wolf, with a snarl, which showed all his teeth.

"But surely a person of your talents must see that you might eat me to the very last morsel and never know that you had swallowed anything at all?"

"In this world the cleverest people are always the hungriest," replied the Wolf.

"Ah! How true that is, but...."

"I can't stop to listen to your 'buts' and 'yets'," broke in the wolf rudely. "Let us get to the point, and the point is that I want to eat you - not talk to you."

"Have you no pity for a poor mother?" asked the Fox, putting her tail to her eyes, but peeping slightly out of them all the same.

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"I am dying of hunger," answered the Wolf, doggedly; "and you know," he added with a grin, "that charity begins at home."

"Quite so," replied the Fox. "It would be most unreasonable of me to object to you having your fill at my expense. But if I am about to be eaten, this Mother asks you for one last request."

"Then be quick and don't waste my time, for I can't wait much longer. What is it you want?"

"You must know," said the Fox, "that in this village there is a rich man who, in the summer makes enough cheeses to last him for the whole year, and he keeps them in an old dry well, in his courtyard. By the well hang two buckets on a pole that are used to draw up the water. Many nights I have crept down to the place, and lowered myself in the bucket, to get enough cheese to feed my children. All I beg of you is to come with me, and, instead of hunting chickens and such things, I will make you a good meal of cheese before I die."



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"But what if the cheeses are all gone by now?" said the wolf.

"If only you could see how many there are!" laughed the fox.
"And even if they were all gone, there would always be ME
to eat."

"Alright, I will come. Lead the way, but I warn you, not to try
to escape or play any tricks!" threatened the Wolf.

All was silent in the village, and not a light was to be seen except for the moon, which shone bright and clear in the sky. The Wolf and the Fox crept softly along, when suddenly they stopped and looked at each other.

A savoury smell of frying bacon reached their noses, and at the same time it reached the noses of some sleeping dogs, which began to bark loudly.

"Is it safe to go on, do you think?" asked the Wolf in a whisper. The Fox shook her head.

"Not while the dogs are barking," she said. "Someone might
come out to see if something is the matter."

The Fox signalled to the Wolf to curl himself up in the shadow beside her. About half an hour later the dogs grew tired of

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barking, or perhaps the bacon was eaten up and there was no smell to excite them. The Wolf and the Fox jumped up, and hurried to the foot of the thick wall that surrounded the rich man's house.

"I am lighter than he is," the Fox thought to herself, "and perhaps if I hurry, I can get a head start, and jump over the wall on the other side, before he manages to spring over this one." So she quickened her pace. But if the Wolf couldn't run, he could jump, and with one bound he was beside his companion.

"What were you going to do, my friend?"

"Oh, nothing," replied the Fox, annoyed at the failure of her plan.

"I think if I were to take a bite out of your rump you would jump better," said the Wolf, giving a snap at her as he spoke.

The Fox drew back uneasily. "Be careful, or I shall scream," she snarled. And the Wolf, understanding all that might happen if the fox carried out her threat, gave a signal to his companion to leap on to the wall, where he immediately followed.

Once on the top, they crouched down and looked about them. Not a creature was to be seen in the courtyard, and in the furthest corner from the house stood the well, with its two buckets suspended from a pole, just as the Fox had described it.

The two thieves dragged themselves noiselessly along the wall until they were opposite the well. By stretching out her neck as far as it would go the Fox was able to make out that there was a little water in the bottom, just enough to reflect the moon, big, and round and yellow.



"How lucky!" she said to the Wolf. "There is a huge cheese about the size of a mill wheel. Look! Look! Have you ever seen anything so beautiful?"

"Never!" answered the Wolf, peering over the edge too, his eyes glistening greedily, for he imagined that the moon's reflection in the water really was a wheel of cheese.

"And now, disbeliever, what have you to say?" laughed the Fox gently.

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"That you are a woman - I mean a fox - of your word,"
replied the Wolf.

"Well, then, go down in that bucket and eat your fill," said the
Fox.

"Oh no! Is that your game?" asked the wolf, with a grin. "No!
No! No! YOU will be the one who goes down in the bucket!
And if you don't go down your head will go without you!"

"Of course I will go down, with the greatest pleasure," said
the Fox, who had expected the wolf's reply.

"And be sure you don't eat all the cheese, or it will be worse
for you," continued the Wolf.

But the Fox looked up at him with tears in her eyes. "Farewell,
suspicious one!" she said sadly and climbed into the bucket.
In an instant she had reached the bottom of the well, and
found that the water was not even deep enough to cover
her legs. "Why, it is larger and richer than I thought," she
cried, looking up at the Wolf, who was leaning over the side
of the well.

"Then be quick and bring it up," commanded the Wolf.

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"How can I, when it weighs more than I do?" replied the Fox.

"If it is so heavy bring it in two bits, of course," he said.

"But I have no knife," answered the Fox. "You will have to come down yourself, and we will carry it up together."

"And how am I to get down?" asked the Wolf.

"Oh, you really are very stupid! Get into the other bucket that is above your head."

The Wolf looked up, and saw the second bucket hanging there, and with some difficulty climbed into it. As he weighed four times as much as the Fox, the bucket went down with a jolt, and the other bucket, in which the Fox was seated, came rushing to the surface.

As soon as the Wolf understood what was happening, he began to get angry, but felt a little better when he remembered that the cheese would all be for him.

"Where is the cheese?" he asked when he reached the bottom of the well. The Fox, who was leaning over the edge of the well, smiled.

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"The cheese?" replied the Fox, "why, I am taking it home to my babies, who are too young to get food for themselves."

"Traitor!" cried the Wolf, howling with rage, but the Fox was not there to hear the insult, for she had already gone to a nearby chicken-house, where she had seen some fat young chickens the day before.

"Perhaps I did treat him rather badly," she said to herself.

"But, it looks like it's getting cloudy, and if there is some really heavy rain, the other bucket might fill up and then sink down to the bottom of the well, pulling him up again. But I doubt it! I'm glad I was born a clever fox instead of snarling wolf", and off she ran to feed her cubs.

The End



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