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A Case for Patience

A half-starved fox, who saw in the hollow of an oak-tree some bread and meat left there by shepherds, crept in and ate it. With his stomach distended he could not get out again. Another fox, passing by and hearing his cries and lamentations, came up and asked what was the matter. On being told, he said: 'Well, stay there till you are as thin as you were when you went in; then you'll get out quite easily.'

This tale shows how time solves difficult problems.



Friend or Foe?

A fox slipped in climbing a fence. To save himself from falling he clutched at a brier-bush. The thorns made his paws bleed, and in his pain he cried out: 'Oh dear! I turned to you for help and you have made me worse off than I was before.' 'Yes, my friend!' said the brier. 'You made a bad mistake when you tried to lay hold of me. I lay hold of everyone myself.'

The incident illustrates the folly of those who run for aid to people whose nature it is to hurt rather than to help.

Sour Grapes

A hungry fox tried to reach some clusters of grapes which he saw hanging from a vine trained on a tree, but they were too high. So he went off and comforted himself by saying: 'They weren't ripe anyhow.'

In the same way some men, when they fail through their own incapacity, blame circumstances.



Actions Speak Louder than Words

A fox was being chased by huntsmen and begged a wood-cutter whom he saw to hide him. The man told him to go into his hut. Soon afterwards the huntsmen arrived and asked if he had seen a fox pass that way. He answered 'No' – but as he spoke he jerked a thumb towards the place where the fox was hidden. However, they believed his statement and did not take the hint. When the fox saw they had gone he came out and made off without speaking. The woodman reproached him for not even saying a word of acknowledgement for his deliverance. 'I would have thanked you,' the fox called back, 'if your actions and your character agreed with your words.'

This fable is aimed at men who make public profession of virtue but behave like rogues.

Fools Die for Want of Wisdom

A monkey made a great impression by dancing before an assembly of animals, who elected him their king. The fox was jealous. Noticing a snare with a piece of meat in it, he took the monkey to it and said: 'Here is a choice titbit that I have found. Instead of eating it myself I have kept it for you as a perquisite of your royal office. So take it.' The monkey went at it carelessly and was caught in the snare. When he accused the fox of laying a trap for him, the fox replied: 'Fancy a fool like you, friend monkey, being king of the animals!'

People who attempt things without due consideration suffer for it and get laughed at into the bargain.

Dead Men Tell No Tales

A fox and a monkey, as they journeyed together, disputed at great length about the nobility of their lineage. When they reached a certain place on the road, the monkey fixed his gaze upon it and uttered a groan. The fox asked what was wrong with him. The monkey pointed to some tombs that stood there. 'Don't you expect me to mourn,' he said, 'when I behold the sepulchres of the slaves and freedmen of my ancestors?' 'Lie away to your heart's content,' answered the fox. 'They won't any of them rise up to contradict you.'

It is the same with men who are impostors. They never boast more loudly than when there is no one to expose them.

Look Before You Leap

A fox tumbled into a water tank and could not get out. Along came a thirsty goat, and seeing the fox asked him if the water was good. The fox jumped at the chance. He sang the praises of the water with all the eloquence at his command and urged the goat to come down. The goat was so thirsty that he went down without stopping to think and drank his fill. Then they began to consider how they were to get up again. 'I have a good idea,' said the fox, 'that is, if you are willing to do something to help us both. Be so kind as to place your forefeet against the wall and hold your horns straight up. Then I can nip up, and pull you up too.' The goat was glad enough to comply. The fox clambered nimbly over his haunches, shoulders, and horns, reached the edge of the tank, and began to make off. The goat complained that he had broken their compact. But he only came back to say: 'You have more hairs in your beard than brains in your head, my friend. Otherwise, you wouldn't have gone down without thinking how you were going to get up.'

A sensible man never embarks on an enterprise until he can see his way clear to the end of it.

Cut Off Your Tails to Save My Face!

A fox who had lost his tail in a trap was so ashamed of the disfigurement that he felt life was not worth living. So he decided to persuade all the other foxes to maim themselves in the same way; then, he thought, his own loss would not be so conspicuous. He collected them all and advised them to cut off their tails. A tail, he said, was merely a superfluous appendage, ugly to look at and heavy to carry. But one of the others answered: 'Look here! You only give us this advice because it suits your own book.'

This tale satirizes those who offer advice to their neighbours not out of benevolence but from self-interest.