

Aesop Has the Fox to Tea

by Bethany Poore

(Lights up. Aesop is arranging tea and refreshments on a tray. There is a knock on the door.)

Aesop (opening the door): Ah! My dear Mr. Fox! So happy to see you. Come in and sit down. My, it is a windy day.

Fox: Good evening, old friend Aesop. I thank you for inviting me to tea.

Aesop: Truly a pleasure, good Mr. Fox. Come and sit by the fire.

(They sit down in chairs facing each other.)

Fox (seeing paper and pen lying beside Aesop's chair): I see you are still at work on your writing, friend Aesop?

Aesop: Indeed I am. I wish to instruct the youth on morals, good character, and wisdom, yet I can't seem to find a way. They do not wish to listen to the lectures of an old man! They would much rather listen to the jests and flatteries of their companions.

Fox: Flatteries. Ah yes. *(chuckling)* Did I ever tell you how I taught a young crow about listening to flatteries?

Aesop: No, pray tell me, friend Fox.

Fox: One day I caught sight of a crow with a piece of delicious cheese in its beak. Being late in the afternoon, of course I was hungry. I simply looked up at the crow and said, "Good day, Mistress Crow. How well you are looking today! *(chuckling)*

again) I feel sure your voice must surpass that of other birds, just as your figure does! Let me hear one song from you that I may greet you as the Queen of Birds!"

(Aesop and Fox both laugh.)

Aesop: Oh, Mr. Fox, indeed you are droll!

Fox: It worked like a charm! She opened her beak to sing her hideous song, and I got my snack of cheese!

Aesop: Ah, never trust a flatterer!

(Aesop's face brightens with inspiration. He picks up pen and paper and begins writing. Hereafter he takes notes while Fox tells stories.)

Fox: No, indeed! But there was another bird that was smarter than Miss Crow and got the best of me!

Aesop: Surely not!

Fox: Oh, indeed! I once invited Mr. Stork to dinner and served soup in a shallow bowl. All he could do was stick the end of his beak in it! Ah, it was all for a joke, but Mr. Stork took offense. And then he invited me to dinner the next week.

Aesop: Oh dear, I can only guess what he did to return your joke!

Fox: Yes! He served me dinner in a tall jar with a long neck! All I could manage to do was to lick the sides of the jar to see if he had spilled any pouring it in!

(Aesop and Fox laugh.)

Aesop: The unforgiving sort would say that one bad turn deserves another. *(He writes a note on his paper.)*

Fox: I hate to say it, but my brother would have declared that the food in that jar was not worth eating!

Aesop: Oh?

Fox (shaking his head with amusement):

Yes, one day my brother fox was strolling through an orchard on a hot summer day. He saw a juicy bunch of grapes just ripe and decided to get them. He jumped and jumped and jumped again, but they were just out of reach. When he told me about them later, he said, "I am sure they were sour anyway."

Aesop: Ah, it is easy to despise what you cannot get! *(after taking notes, he adds with embarrassment)* Was that the same brother that . . . ?

Fox (sadly, looking down): No, that was my other brother. A sad business. Did you hear it from the cat?

Aesop: Yes, she told me the sad story, and without a touch of malice I must add. How was it told to you?

Fox: My brother and the cat were strolling along and talking about escaping enemies. I'm afraid my poor brother always was one to boast. He told her about his bag full of tricks of escape, while the cat told him, "I have only one way of escape, but I generally manage with that."

Aesop: If only your brother had had time to think over that bit of advice!

Fox: Yes. That very moment a pack of hounds came upon them. The cat ran up a tree and told poor Brother Fox, "This is my plan. What is yours?" Well, he was thinking of one idea, then the next, but had no chance to make up his mind. The hounds prevailed as he considered the question, poor thing.

Aesop (sadly): Ah, truly, better one safe way than a hundred on which you cannot reckon.

Fox: I cannot deny it's true, friend. *(Fox becomes lost in thought.)*

Aesop: Oh dear, Friend Fox, I have not offered you any refreshment! I beg your pardon! *(Aesop serves the Fox from the tray.)*

Fox: Thank you, thank you.

Aesop (trying to think of a way to change the subject): I happened to meet our friend Mr. Goat yesterday afternoon. He was covered in mud, poor chap. You came up in the conversation, and he said that you are a sly one, very sly. Now why would he say such a thing as that?

Fox (smiling): Oh dear, I'm afraid I did put one over on him!

Aesop: He neglected to tell me the details.

Fox (embarrassed): Well, it all starts with me falling in the farmer's well yesterday morning.

Aesop: Dear me!

Fox: Yes, and Mr. Goat passed by in a few moments and heard me calling for help. “What are you doing down there?” he said. So I answered, “Why, I heard there was to be a great drought and I thought a well would be the best place to wait it out! Why don’t you join me? It would be quite companionable.” And no sooner did I say that but good Mr. Goat jumped right down.

Aesop: Why, Mr. Fox! How very sly!

Fox (laughing): I am ashamed. But it was easy as could be to jump on his back and ride out of the well!

(Aesop laughs.)

Fox: And I did call on the farmer as I passed to let him know that his goat was in the well.

Aesop: You should have told the goat never to trust a man in difficulties! *(Both laugh.)*

Fox: It was so kind of you to invite me, friend Aesop, but Mrs. Fox will be expecting me home soon. *(He gets up and heads for the door.)*

Aesop: Oh, well, next time you must stay for a longer visit.

Fox: I would be delighted. *(He stands at the door.)* And I do wish I could be of some help to you with your writing. It does sound like a noble work. Stay with it. I’ve always said that slow and steady wins the race.

Aesop: Ah, you are a kind friend, and a wise one, Mr. Fox.

(Fox walks out the door. Aesop closes it then returns to his chair and writes quickly on his paper. Lights down.)