

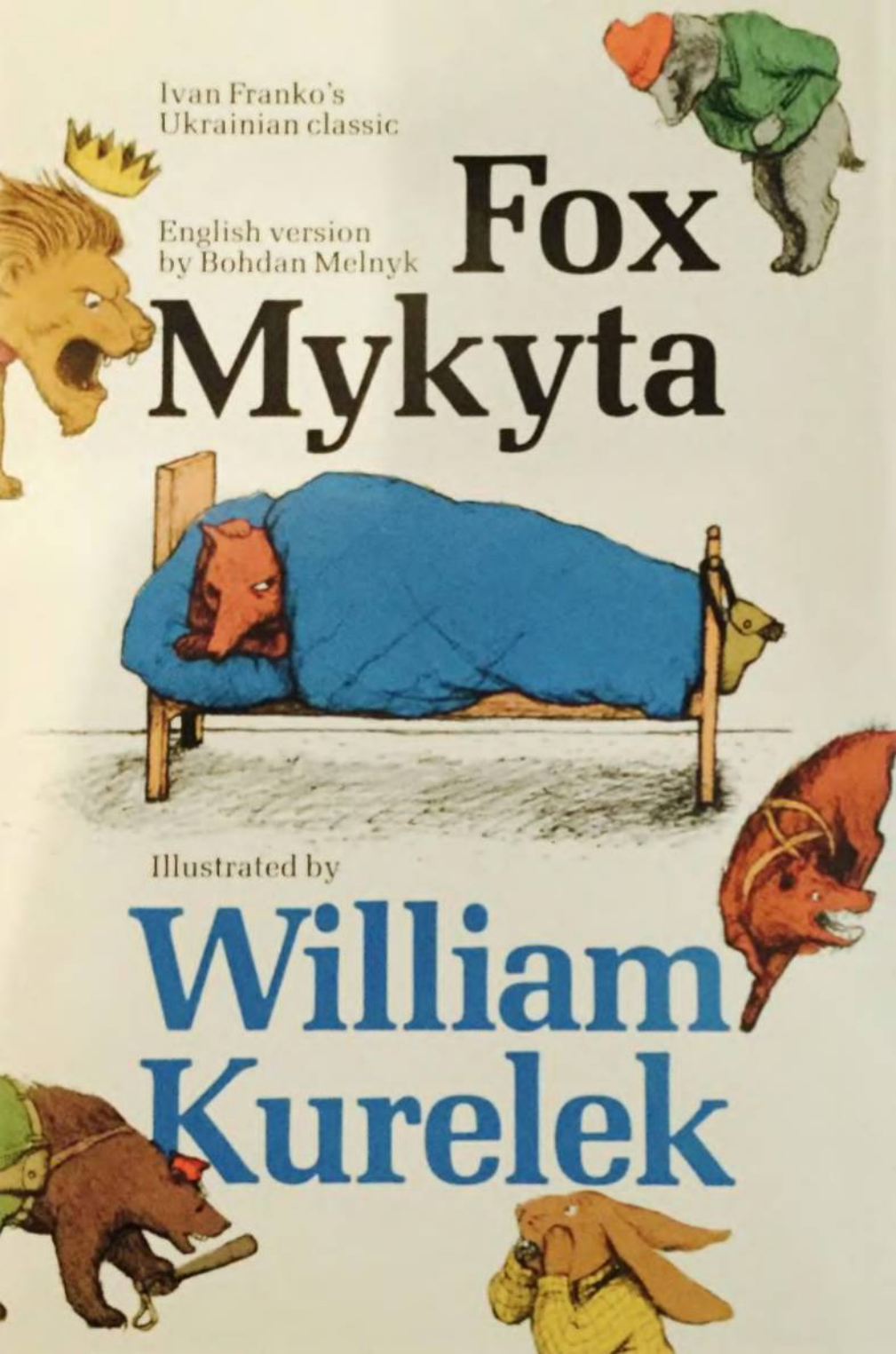
Ivan Franko's
Ukrainian classic

English version
by Bohdan Melnyk

Fox Mykyta

Illustrated by

William Kurelek



This is the first English version of Ivan Franko's 1890 classic *Lys Mykyta*, the most beloved work in all Ukrainian literature. After such a long wait, how exciting for us that it should also be the most beautifully illustrated edition ever, done with affection and amusement by an artist of the stature of the late William Kurelek. Four years ago, when Bohdan Melnyk asked him to illustrate his translation, Kurelek responded with his usual enthusiasm and generosity, producing a lavish 72 drawings!

In retelling the ancient Reynard the Fox stories, Franko enriched them with Ukrainian folklore, sharpened their humor and molded the more than 25 tales into one brilliantly constructed whole. As its theme, Franko took the Ukrainian proverb: 'Where there is wisdom, there you will find good luck.' Fox Mykyta is the eternal rebel — independent, indomitable and irresistible. Using only his wits and his wit, he astutely uses the moral flaws of his enemies to triumph over them: Wolf's greed, Bear's hypocrisy, Cat's thieving, Rabbit's opportunism, Goat's obsequiousness and even the lust for treasure of King Lion himself. Only the guileless Badger Baby escapes Fox's cunning.

Fox is the prototype of the lovable rogue from Gil Blais and Tom Jones down to Brer Rabbit and the Music Man, and we find ourselves rooting for him at his final victory.

Lys Mykyta is one of *The Best of the Best* children's books of the world, listed by the International Youth Library. Munich and heads every list of the best of Ukrainian literature for both adults and children. Older readers will appreciate the strong social and political satiric elements reminiscent of Swift and Voltaire.



Fox Mykyta



Under the spell of Fox's words, the cubs were transported to the royal palace.

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Tundra Books



The original Ukrainian version of *Lys Mykyta* by Ivan Franko was published in 1890 in Western Ukraine.

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Lys Mykyta is recommended for ages 10-12 in *The Best of the Best* of children's literature from 110 countries by the International Youth Library, Munich, Germany.

Fox Mykyta

From the translator

I am inviting you hereby
To meet a fox nicknamed The Sly
(He's called *Mykyta* in Ukraine
And this name, too, he will retain)
And other animals who live
In this fantastic narrative.
Now, take a very careful look
While reading this amusing book:
You'll recognize that some of them
Have qualities we all condemn,
Like spite, hypocrisy and greed.
But who are they, these beasts, indeed?
The answer is not hard to find,
Just keep the following in mind:
Behind each beast, whate'er its race,
There always hides a human face.
It is, therefore, a human tale
Wrapped in an allegoric veil.
Its every part imbued with wit
Makes this great classic exquisite.
You will enjoy its every page,
No matter what your sex, or age,
For these narrations brightly glow
With wisdom gems of long ago.
But I must keep this preface short,
Or you might miss King Lion's court.
Now, turn the page to Chapter One.
The hearing will start soon. Have fun.

Bohdan Melnyk

Against Fox, many testified
To crimes of theft and chickencide.

Chapter 1

It was spring. King Lion Tsar Lev, ruler of all the beasts, stood on the terrace of his palace and admired the beauty of the rolling countryside that stretched away into the far distance. He loved this time of the year best. The earth had waited for warmth and light during the long drab winter months. Now, the sleeping life began to stir and dress itself in colorful garments, particularly in greens of all shades. Everywhere fields, meadows and forests were filled with the cheerful singing, chirping and warbling of birds. King Lion thought the nightingale the most brilliant.

As King Lion looked and listened, a disturbing thought crossed his mind. The older he got, the more he appreciated all the magnificence around him and the less time he had for such private moments. After all, his subjects were not angels but creatures of different races. Their conflicting interests often made his task very hard. Spring meant the time had come for him to hold court to give his subjects a chance to bring their complaints to his attention.

Accordingly, King Lion sent an order to all corners of his kingdom commanding everybody to drop what he was doing and hurry to Lionburg, the splendid capital city of the land.

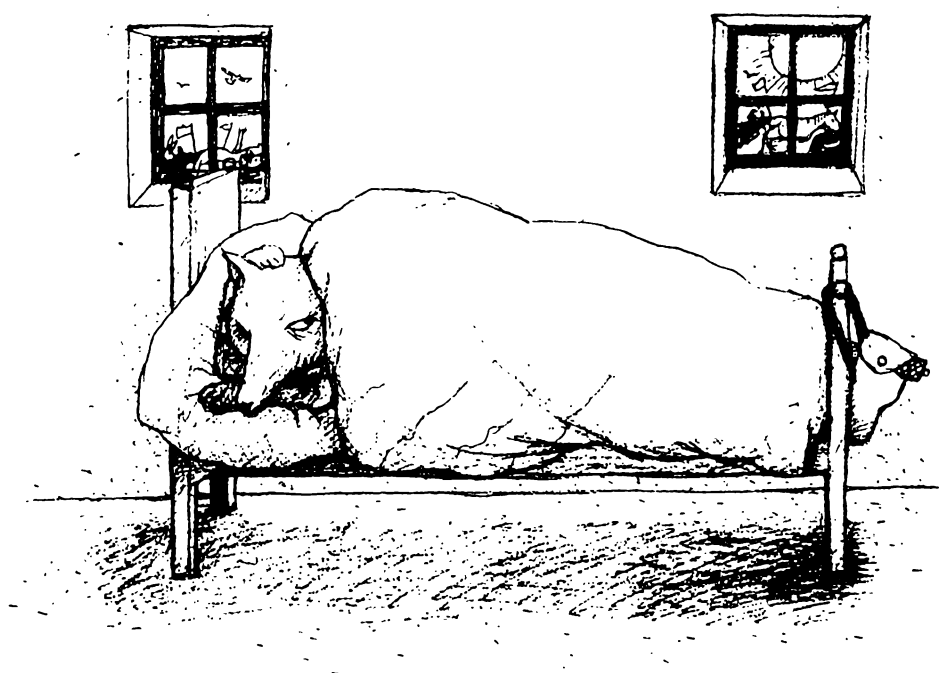
And they came like a parade of pilgrims. Throngs of beasts of every kind and shape — squeaking, barking, howling and quacking, singing songs and flying banners — all headed toward Lionburg. What a procession! Everyone obeyed the King's command. All except one, that is. Lys Mykyta Highdamaka, Fox Mykyta the rebel, was hiding out in his fortress Foxburg. Even though he didn't like to admit it, he was worried. He had wronged many of his fellow creatures and he knew the royal law was short and severe. It called for retribution — tit for tat.

While Fox Mykyta tried to sleep, King Lion Tsar Lev and his Queen Lioness Tsarina Lvytsia sat upon their thrones in the shade of a towering oak tree. They listened to the first complainant, Vovk Nesyty, Wolf the Hungry. His voice quivered with emotion as he spoke to the royal pair.

'Your Highnesses, Fox Mykyta is destroying my life. He beats and bites my little cubs. He abuses my wife with words I am ashamed to repeat. And he almost caused my death in the most cunning and deceitful way. It happened when, at your command, I was serving as justice of the peace. One day Mykyta came running to me and said: "Hey, Wolf, I have some great news for you! Four rams are waiting outside. Their father died and left them a large plot of land and now they're quarreling about how to divide it. They have no land surveyor so they want you to be the judge. I'm sure they will pay you handsomely for your trouble."

'And to tell the truth,' said Wolf Nesyty, 'I was glad to hear it. There is nothing I want more in this world than to make peace among rams. When I settle their differences, they need never file an appeal.'

King Lion knew Wolf was not a very good judge, so he was quite curious as to how he had made out in this particular case.



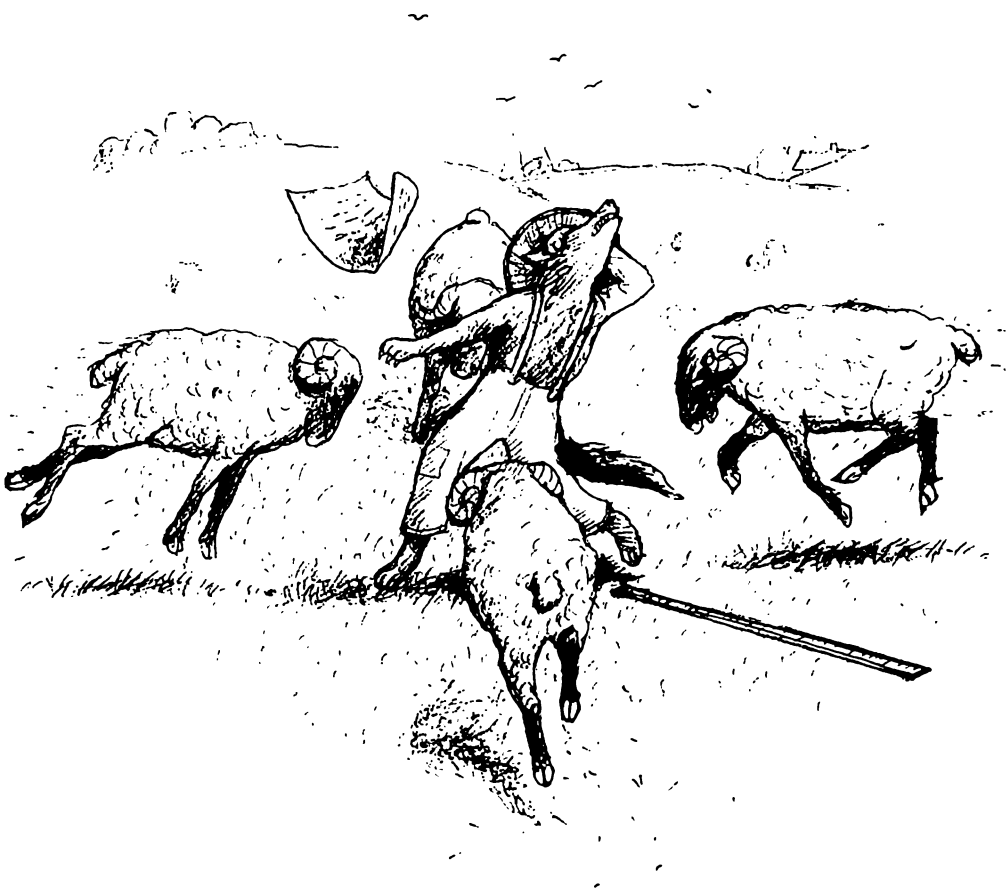
Fox Mykyta the rebel was hiding out in his fortress Foxburg.

Wolf cleared his throat that had become parched from tension, and continued: 'I dressed in a jiffy, went out and greeted the rams. As we shook hands, I noticed that the rams were full and round as pea pods. "Well, boys," I urged, "let's not waste time. Let's go to the field you're quarreling over. Do you have any sticks and rods for measuring?" "Yes," they replied. "Everything is ready!"

'In minutes we were on the spot. As soon as the rams began to measure the field, it became clear that no sensible solution would come of it. To divide the field crosswise was impossible because one end was more fertile than the other. Naturally, no brother would take the bad end. To divide it lengthwise was impractical because the strips would be too narrow. The situation seemed hopeless.

'Then Fox Mykyta, who had come to the field with us, stepped forward. "I know only one way out of this deadlock. Wolf Nesyty, you stand right here in the middle. Each of you boys go to one of the four corners of the field. Stand there quietly and pay attention to me. When you hear me yell: «One, two, three, run!» race as fast as you can to Wolf. Whoever arrives first and shoves him off his place will get the largest part. Do you know what I mean?" The rams bleated, "Yes, we do!" "All right, then," said Fox. "Take your places, and may God help you reach your objective!"

'I did what Fox said and stood in the middle. I suspected no treachery, and looked forward to the amusing show. Fox, who could barely suppress his joy, suddenly let out a loud shout and the rams tore off in my direction. All four of them crashed into me at the same moment! I felt as if I were being hit by four trees. Every bone in my body seemed to be broken. I swayed, reeled over and sank to the ground.



The rams took a running leap to strike all the harder with their horns.



'Those awful rams didn't give a hoot that I lay unconscious and near death. While one of them gored me from his side, the others butted my poor body this way and that. Each was hellbent on moving the boundary to his own advantage. And it went on and on. Time after time they took a running leap in order to strike all the harder with their horns. And Mykyta, that scoundrel, stood by and roared with laughter as they tried to kill me. I have no doubt the rams would have murdered me right then and there — to the eternal disgrace of the wolfish race — if my wife hadn't come along to see how the land surveying was going. It was only when they spotted her that the rascals ran away.'

While Wolf the Hungry told his sad story, Queen Tsarina Lvytsia giggled uncontrollably. King Lion Tsar Lev tried hard to hide his laughter to preserve the dignity of the court. Finally, Wolf, emotionally drained and sweating profusely from testifying so long, stepped aside.

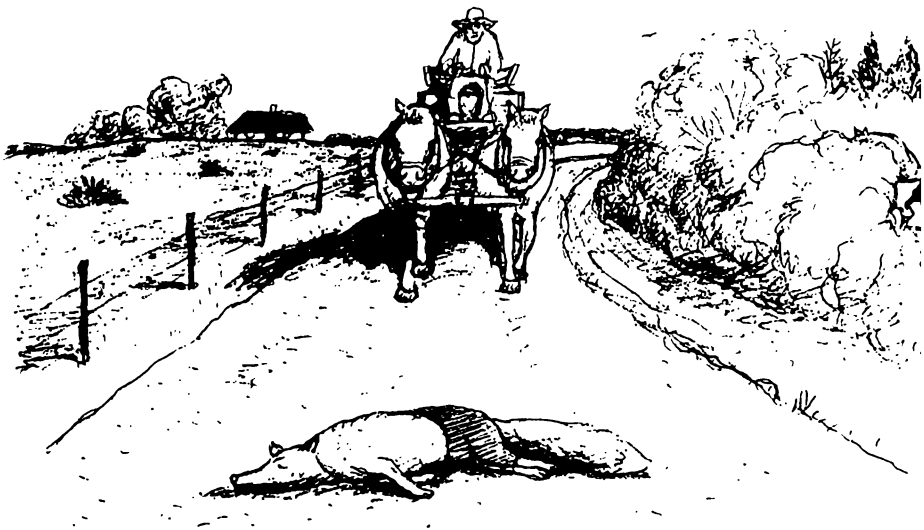
Tsutsyk Neboraka, Hector the Dog, poor old dear, now moved forward, rose on his hind legs and said: 'Oh King, protector of our rights. I had a little piece of sausage well hidden in a nook. Fox Mykyta stole it from me.'

When Keet Moorlyka, Cat the Purry, heard this, he jumped to his feet. 'You lying dog! That sausage was mine! I don't argue that Fox is a thief, but I'm the one who stole that sausage from the blacksmith's wife.'

This stunning revelation caused Tsarina Lvytsia to lean over and whisper something into Lion Tsar Lev's ear.

Next Lynx Rys felt it was his turn to talk: 'It's all true,' he said. 'Fox Mykyta is indeed a thief! He would trade his conscience, his honor and his religion for a hunk of headcheese and a jigger of brandy. Patriotism means nothing to him. I know him all too well. He would hand over the skin of our King for a pound of pork. Look what happened to Jack Yats the Rabbit. He's a decent soul who wouldn't hurt a fly. Why, never in his whole life has he done anything wrong to anyone — he's never even *wished* anyone evil. Once he asked Fox to teach him some psalms and hymns. What a painful education that was! Fox used the strap on him right away! And when they came to the fifth tune, Fox grabbed Jack and shook him like a pear tree. If I hadn't saved the poor devil, Fox would have shaken his soul out!'

At this point Badger Babye, Fox's uncle, stepped up to the throne to defend his nephew. He bowed reverently and said: 'How right those wise old men were who said it was useless to expect praise from one's enemies. But this is balderdash! Aren't you ashamed of yourself, Wolf Nesyty, spreading around your own disgrace and reviving all that old mold? Mykyta was once your best and most faithful friend. Why don't you describe how you used to travel with



'Fox lay down, pretended he was dead and waited for the farmer . . .'

him — that would be something new, fresh and worth telling. You remember well that time the two of you were wandering across the steppes, ravenously hungry, with nothing to eat but your own knees. Suddenly a peasant appeared, driving a horsecart loaded with a barrel of fish to the market. "Hey, I've got an idea, brother," Fox said. "We'll have food, but we must be careful. You go hide behind those bushes." Then Fox lay down right in the middle of the road, stretched out his legs, pretended he was dead and waited for the farmer...

Here Babye paused to prepare the audience for a dramatic moment. '...who could easily have split his skull! When the farmer saw Fox, he couldn't believe his eyes. A fox! He leaped off the cart as fast as he could and grabbed a stone to kill him. But as he came nearer he noticed that Fox wasn't breathing. Obviously he was dead! "What luck," the farmer muttered. "I'll make myself a beautiful winter cap with ear flaps." He seized Fox by the tail, threw him on the cart beside the fish and continued down the road. Mykyta, the rascal, went right to work. He threw all the fish out of the barrel, leaving nothing but water. Then he jumped down from the cart and took to his heels. When he got to Wolf, he found him devouring the very last pike! "Hey, Nesyty, have you saved a fish for me?" Fox asked. Wolf gave his friend a fiendish glare. "Sure, here's your share. Enjoy it, but don't choke on it!" Imagine Wolf's bottomless greed! He had left Fox nothing but bones!

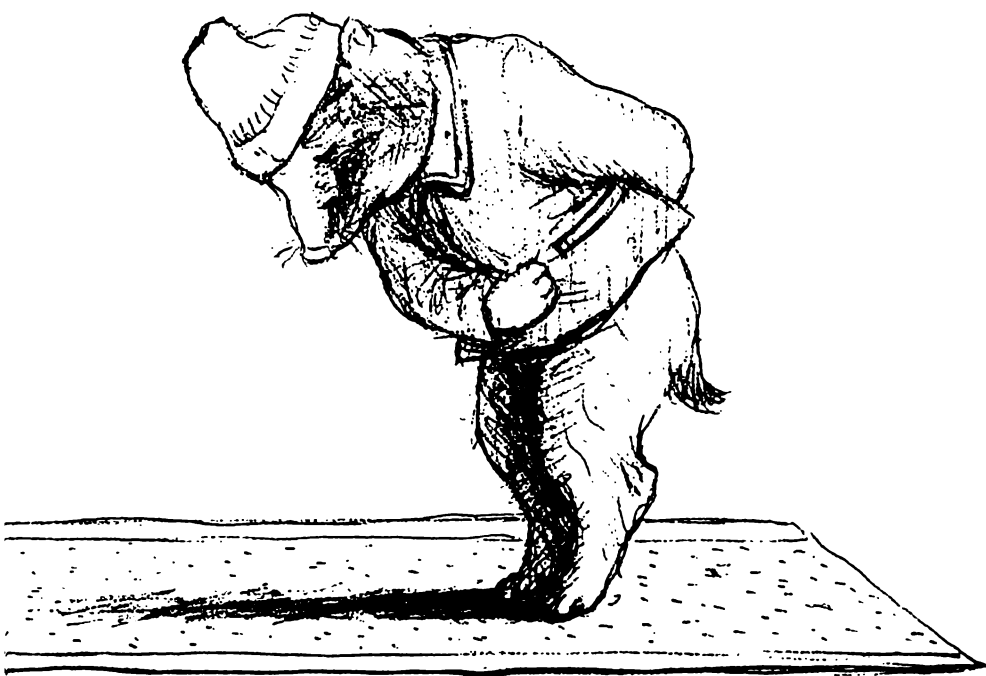
'As for Jack Yats the Rabbit, has learning ever been possible without a strap? It's ridiculous to make such a big case out of it. And Hector the Dog, the miserable crybaby, caught himself in his own trap. He stole that exquisite sausage from Purry and now blames Mykyta for it. My nephew Fox Mykyta is a pious man. Any godless deed is worse than horseradish to him. For the past year he's been keeping a severe fast and no longer

touches meat. I worry to watch him losing weight so rapidly...'

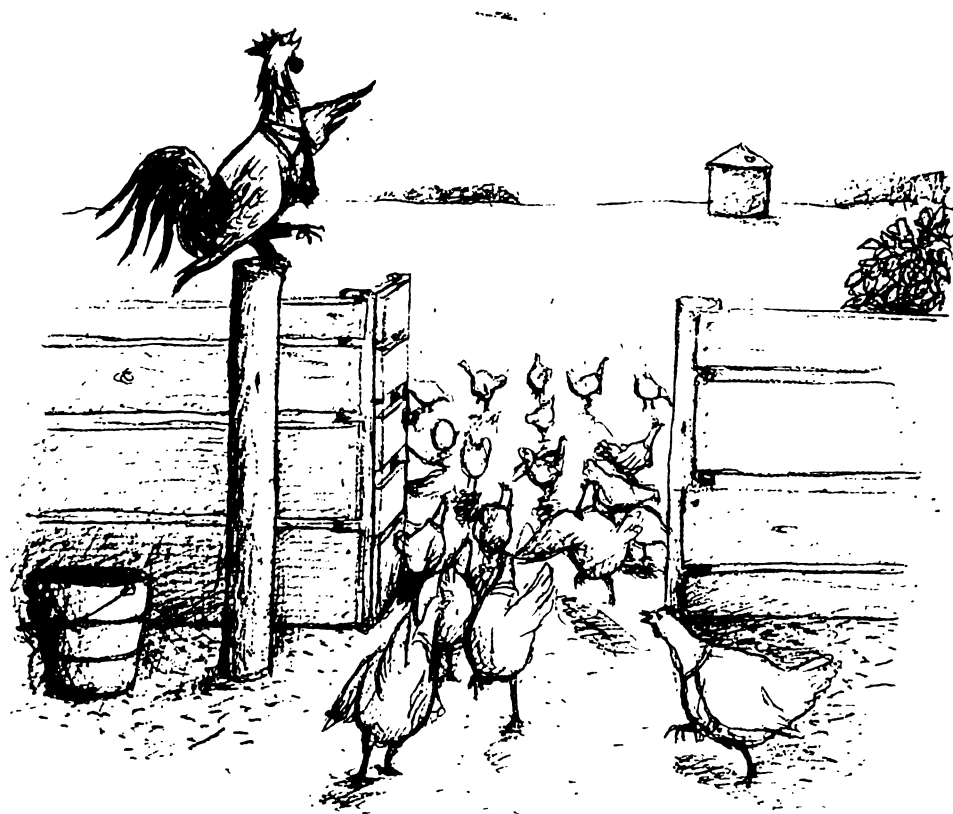
Here Badger Babye was interrupted. A very noisy crowd had just arrived in the royal grove from God knows where. Old Cock Piven was up front. He was followed by a double file of chickens who carried on their shoulders a stretcher with a dead chicken on it. The horror-stricken flock was crying and moaning: 'Oh, woe, oh, woe!' As soon as they reached the throne, Old Cock's tenor voice rang out: 'Oh, mercy, my King! My little daughter is dead, and the killer is Fox Mykyta! Let your justice be done!' He stopped a moment to collect himself, then continued: 'We lived in a cloister and minded our own business. But often I saw Fox sniffing around the main gate with his cruel eye on us. Since I know his tricks very well, I always told my children: "Be careful. Never ever go into the woods! Our toothy foe is waiting in there and will kill you instantly."'

'Everything was fine and peaceful until two days ago. Then there was a knock on the gate. We went to answer it and found ourselves face to face with Fox Mykyta himself. He was dressed in a hair robe just like a monk. He greeted us very politely and held out his hand. In it he had an open letter with a royal seal: "Here," he said, "is the King's promise of security. His Majesty proclaims that from now on there must be peace among the beasts. Wolf must be on friendly terms with the sheep, and I must be a friend and brother to all of you. Since I've become a hermit, I don't eat meat but only herbs and wild honey. Peace be with you, children! May God protect you!"'

'As he left, I told my family: "Freedom! Now we can roam the stubble fields outside the cloister walls." The news brought us all great joy. We burst into song and set out for the open spaces.



Badger Babyc stepped up to the throne to defend his nephew.
He bowed reverently.



'All of us went out, but not all of us came back. No sooner were we outside the gate than Fox Mykyta jumped from his hiding place and pounced upon my daughter. I let out a fierce *cock-a-doodle-do-o-o!* and he disappeared into the woods. I kept yelling until the faithful dogs came running. They gave chase but, alas, all they brought back was my daughter's corpse. That's how that rebellious evildoer warps your decree, Your Majesty.'

When Old Cock had finished his tragic story, the King said: 'How about that, Babye? Your nephew keeps a strict fast, indeed! No, I must put an end to all snatchers of this kind!'

Right away he summoned Medveed Boormylo, Bear the Growler: 'My friend, if you value our grace, strap on your holster and gun, go to Fox Mykyta and tell him to come at once to our court. But beware of that rascal, for he might lead you into a trap. He is a very cunning beast!'

'He wouldn't dare fool me!' growled Bear Boormylo. He armed himself and took off for Foxburg.

Will Fox Mykyta really dare
To fool the royal envoy, Bear?

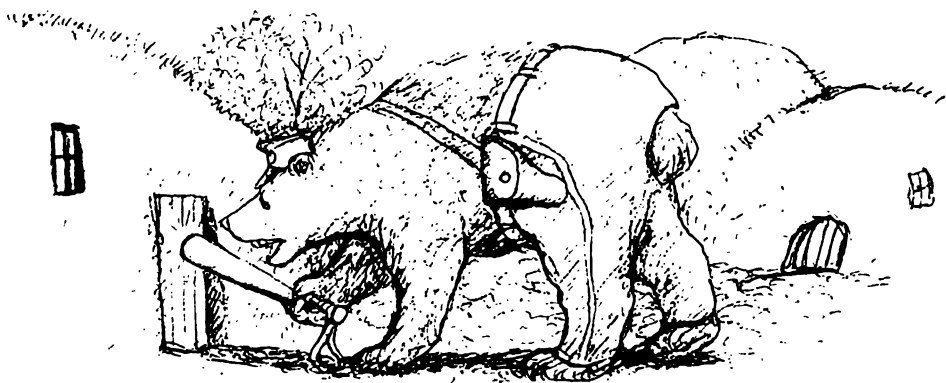
Chapter 2

If you have never been to the woods you have no way of knowing how Fox Mykyta lives there. His Foxburg is a famous fortress, crisscrossed with underground tunnels and provided with secret nooks and holes for hiding in.

Fox Mykyta was resting comfortably in his dugout when he heard a knock on the gate outside. He took a look and — oh, good heavens! — there was Bear the Growler himself, carrying a huge club.

‘Hey, Mykyta!’ Bear shouted menacingly. ‘Where are you, you good-for-nothing bum? Come out and be quick! I am the King’s envoy! You have committed many crimes, and Lion, our Father, is very angry with you! It is time you paid for your misdeeds!’ Then Bear repeated the royal summons as loudly as he could: *I, Ruler of all the beasts, order Fox Mykyta, the rebel, to appear before me immediately! If he refuses to obey, he will be tortured, beheaded and destroyed like a rabid dog!*

Fox Mykyta pricked up his ears at these ominous words. ‘Hmm, hmm,’ he wondered, ‘how can I teach that fool once and for all not to roar so proudly?’ He peeked out slyly to see if there was anyone else outside. No, just the Growler.



'Hey, Mykyta,' Bear shouted, 'you good-for-nothing bum! Come out!'

Mykyta's face was radiant with sudden joy as he stepped boldly out and exclaimed: 'Uncle, welcome to my home! Is it really you? I can't believe you came such a long way in this terrible heat. You look tired. You're out of breath. And look, sweat is pouring down your fur. Why did our illustrious King burden you, the oldest and the best, with this task? Doesn't he have other envoys? Well, I'm certainly pleased to have such a distinguished visitor at least once. I don't mind a bit going to court. It's a delicious treat. I know that your wise advice will save me. One word from you will turn my tears into laughter and make the King's anger disappear. After all, uncle, we are relatives. I'm ready to go with you anywhere, but I do think you should rest first. So please spend the night here. The sky is overcast, your feet are sore and I, excuse my saying so, have... well... a disorder of the stomach. You know what I mean... when you have to rush out really fast...'

'Oh, I know!' replied Bear. 'But how did you get that, young fellow?'

'Oh, dear Bear, it was really very stupid. It all started after I became a hermit. As you probably know, hermits are forbidden to eat meat. So in order not to sin, I have to suck that repugnant honey.'

'Honey?' shouted the Growler excitedly. 'You call honey "repugnant"? Good lord, I'd sell my soul for honey. Where is it? Where do you buy it? Do you have any for me?'

'Growler, you must be joking!' said Fox.

'No, no, I'm not joking! If you give me a few quarts, I swear to help you. Honey is the food of paradise! I love it so much I'd give anything for it!' Bear was so excited he could hardly stand still.

'Well, if that's the case, my dear fellow, let's go! Even though I'm pretty weak tonight, I won't let you down. To me, your order is a voice from heaven. One should never spare one's strength and health for guests. Not far from here — oh, I'd say, about one quarter mile — is a wealthy farmer. His name is Bill. He has so much honey on his property you can not only eat it, you can practically swim in it!'

'Wow!' sighed Bear the Growler, his heart melting with joy. 'Let's run, Mykyta, let's run!'

Meanwhile, dusk had descended upon the earth, covering everything with its protective robe. But in spite of the failing light, Fox and Bear were able to find Bill's garden and in it a huge log from an oak tree. They approached it cautiously. George, a carpenter, had been working on it during the day, trying to split it lengthwise. The log was tough and stubborn and, even though it refused to split, George had succeeded in



making a crack in it about two feet long. Into this he had driven a good-sized wedge.

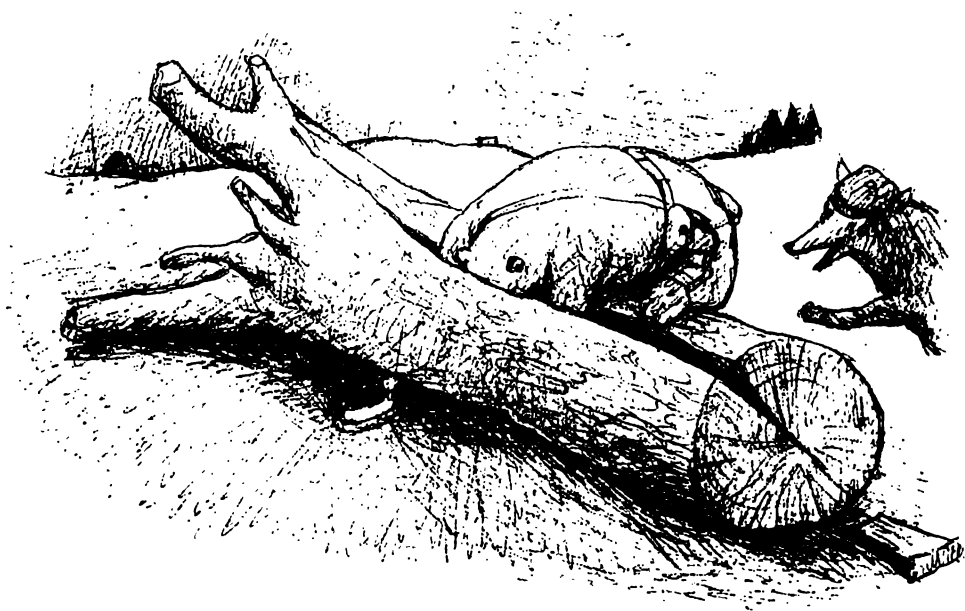
'Here it is, Bear,' whispered Fox Mykyta. 'It may look old and crooked but inside there's lots of honey. This is where I used to get mine. Look, it's dark all around. Farmer Bill sleeps under his warm feather quilt, so don't be afraid. Eat as much as you wish, and I'll guard you. Go ahead, reach into that crack!'

Bear was overcome with excitement. 'Thank you very much, my boy,' he stammered feverishly. 'I smell honey! You stay beside me and watch out for evil spirits. Here, take my club, hold it and stand guard.' Unable to contain himself any longer, the Growler pushed his paws, head and neck right into the wide crack.

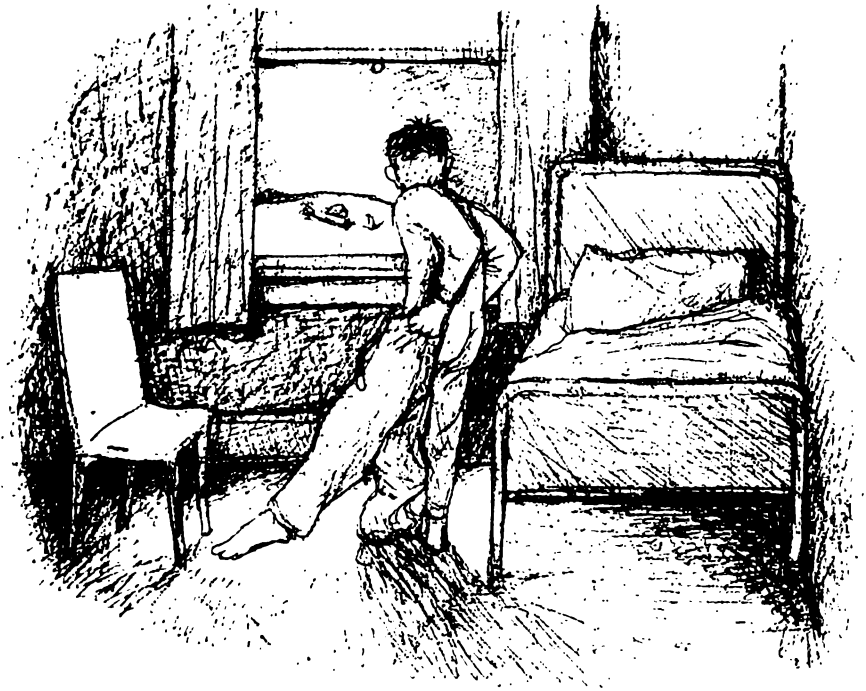
At that very moment, Fox Mykyta took a swing with the club and knocked the wedge out. Instantly, the oak log clamped shut on the Growler's head. It closed tight with such force you could hear his bones crack.

'Hey, Growler,' yelled Fox Mykyta, 'that's some log, isn't it? Farmer Bill knows where to keep his honey.' But Bear couldn't utter a word. He groaned, puffed and blew. No matter how he tugged and struggled to free himself, it was useless. The log held him like a vise. 'Uncle,' scoffed Mykyta, 'you must be really enjoying the honey. But why are you so restless? Are the flies bothering you? Well, keep on eating, but don't overdo it now, or the honey might come out through your bellybutton.'

But Growler's thoughts were far from honey. Oh, how he craved to break that murderous embrace! When he realized the futility of his exertions, he let out such a deafening roar it seemed to hit the sky.



The oak log clamped shut on the Growler's head.



Fox Mykyta continued to tease. 'What kind of melody are you singing? But be quiet now. I see a light in the farmer's house. Do you know what that means? Trouble for you, that's what it means. Hey, I think the farmer is coming right now.'

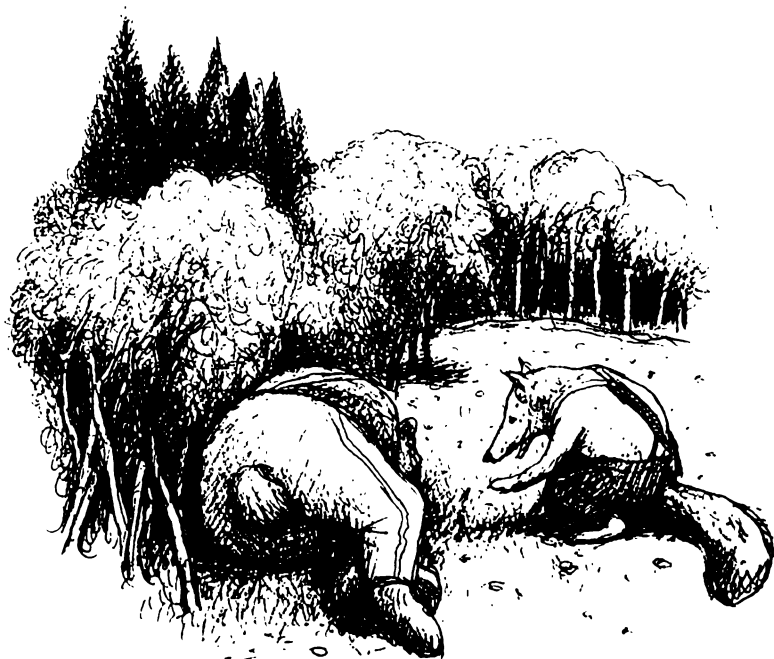
And it was true — Growler's roar had awakened Farmer Bill. He jumped out of bed and raced to the window. Straining his eyes, he saw something looming by the oak tree log. A thief, maybe? He grabbed an ax, ran out, looked closer and pinched himself to make sure he wasn't dreaming. What he saw was a bear — a *real* bear — wrestling with the log, its head and paws caught in the crack.

'Neighbors!' Bill yelled at the top of his lungs. 'Wake up! There's a bear caught in my log! Come quick! Let's give him a good beating!'

Aroused from sleep by Bill's alarm, the villagers — men, women and children, some only in underwear — came running to the trouble spot. Armed with flails, pitchforks and spades, they descended upon the Growler with the fury of a lynch mob. The unbearable pain of their beating gave Bear more power. He gave one tremendous tug and his head was out. Another mighty pull and his paws came out. He had scraped the skin off his forehead, and his claws remained in the log, but he was free!

The villagers jumped back in terror, afraid that he might turn on them, but Bear ran for the nearest bush leaving bloodstains behind him. There he dropped on the grass and moaned as if about to give up the ghost.

Mykyta came to him and said: 'Well, Growler dear, did you enjoy your honey dish? I guess you have eaten your fill! I can arrange such a meal for you every Sunday if you want.'



That's how Fox Mykyta made fun of Bear the Growler. Meanwhile, Bear tossed around on the ground and muttered under his breath. It took him three full days of painful trudging to get back to the royal palace.

When King Lion caught sight of the battered Bear, he wrung his hands in horror. 'Growler, my poor friend, who beat you up and tore off your skin?'

'Oh, King, my Lord,' wheezed Bear, 'I've had an awful disaster. And it was all Mykyta's doing! Because of him I suffered terribly and almost lost my life!'

The veins on Lion's neck stood out like ropes, showing how angry he was. He thrashed his tail and stamped his right foot in fury: 'I swear by my crown that this criminal will not escape torture! Bring him to me and he will not last till tomorrow!'

After that outburst, Lion Tsar Lev conferred with the Senate to discuss Mykyta's death sentence. Then he did some serious thinking.

Finally, he summoned Cat the Purry and addressed him with these words: 'Listen, Moorlyka, my little Purry, even though you are very small, you are smarter than any three big fellows put together. So I am sending you to Fox Mykyta. Go to his thievish hole and tell him to come to my palace immediately! Threaten him if necessary. Tell him he will not escape a hook if he refuses to appear here!'

Cat was so taken aback by this assignment he forgot how to meow. The prospect of going to Fox made his flesh creep. He did not like that honor at all, but what could he do?

When the King mixes you a drink, you have to finish it to the last drop.





'The King is very angry,' Cat the Purry warned, 'so I advise you to come with me.'

Was Lion right in choosing Cat
To be his envoy-diplomat?

Chapter 3

Cat the Purry put a roasted mysh-mouse into his bag and set off on his long journey. He passed through wooded valleys and shady dales, and shortly after sun-down arrived in Foxburg. His heart beat wildly as he knocked on Fox's door. Never in his life had he been on such a mission. He wanted to run away from that cunning and dangerous character, Fox the sly one. As he stood there feeling out of place, the upper-story window flew open and Fox's head appeared.

Cat took off his wide-peaked cap, bowed low, greeted Fox rapidly and said: 'Don't be offended, little father! I have brought the King's order. This is the second time now our Emperor has summoned you to his court. The King is very angry so I advise you to come with me. His Majesty has sworn by his crown that you and all your family are doomed if you refuse.'

'Why, Purry,' exclaimed Fox Mykyta, 'I wasn't expecting you! Let me embrace you! Don't say that we must go right away! Your Aunt Lysytsia sees you so seldom, I'm sure she won't let us leave during the night. And my little cubs will want to see you, too. First, we'll eat a sumptuous supper and then we'll get a good night's sleep. Early in the morning before it gets too hot, we'll take off. Okay? I don't mind going to the King's court

with you. What happened to Bear the Growler is an entirely different matter. He came here like some thug, shouting, calling names and terrorizing me with a big club – me, who's so small and weak.'

Cat the Purry was growing impatient. 'Oh, dear cousin, I appreciate your hospitality, but we'd better not wait any longer. The night is beautiful, the moon is shining... Let's go right now.'

'Purry, dear,' replied Fox, 'be reasonable. Night is not kind to us. We aren't going to ride in a cart or fly in the air. Don't forget there are evil gangs in the woods at night. It's easy to get ambushed.'

Those words made Cat the Purry shiver. 'You're right, I must stay overnight then,' he said in a small voice. 'But tell me, is it possible to get some proper food around here?'

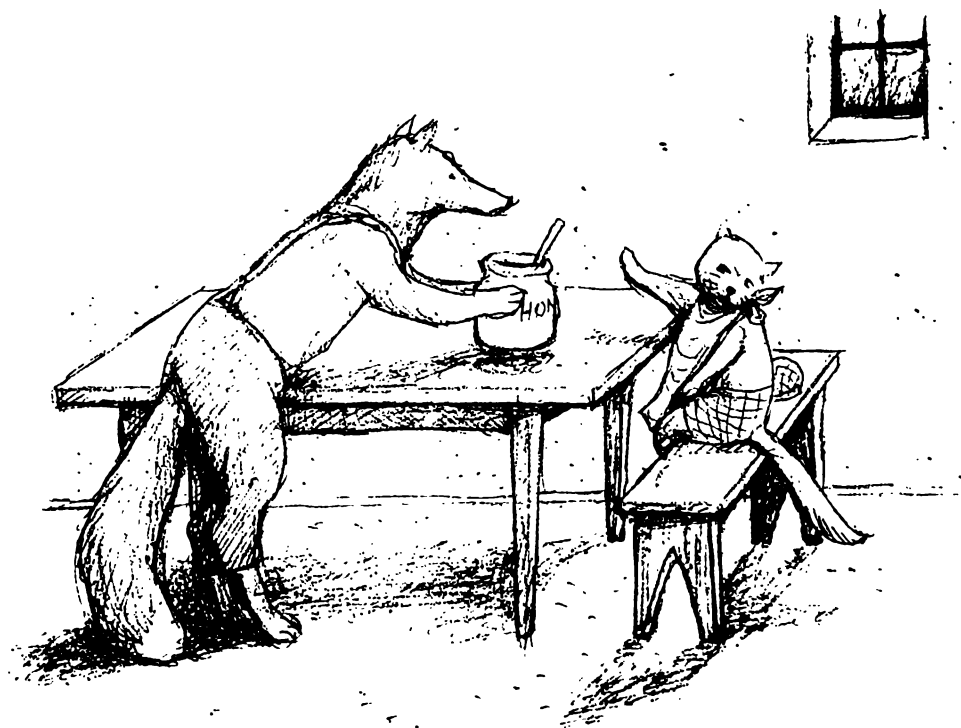
'Well, brave Purry, I am a pious man and keep a strict fast every day,' Fox replied. 'But I can give you a plateful of delicious honey.'

'Honey? Phooey!' Cat spat. 'Let Growler gorge himself on that gooey and disgusting stuff! It's not for me! Don't you have at least one decent mouse around the house?'

'Purry, there are so many mice around here you could dam a river with them,' Fox replied. 'The village chicken farmer has a barn chock-full of them, and it's close by.'

'Oh, dearest cousin, please lead me to that blessed place! Mice are my very favorite food!'

'All right, then. Let's go!' said Fox.



'Honey? Phooey!' Cat spat. 'Don't you have one decent mouse around the house?'

A short while later, Fox and Cat approached the poultry house. Mykyta knew the building well. He showed Cat a hole in the wall he had used to steal chickens. In fact, the night before Fox had snatched and killed a rooster there. When the chicken farmer discovered the scattered feathers, he was livid. 'Enough is enough!' he had shouted. 'I'm going to catch the thief.' He put a snare just inside the opening. Fox Mykyta got wind of it, so now he told the hungry Cat: 'Purry, listen to those mice twittering in there just like little sparrows! The hole is up there. Just jump in and have a feast.'

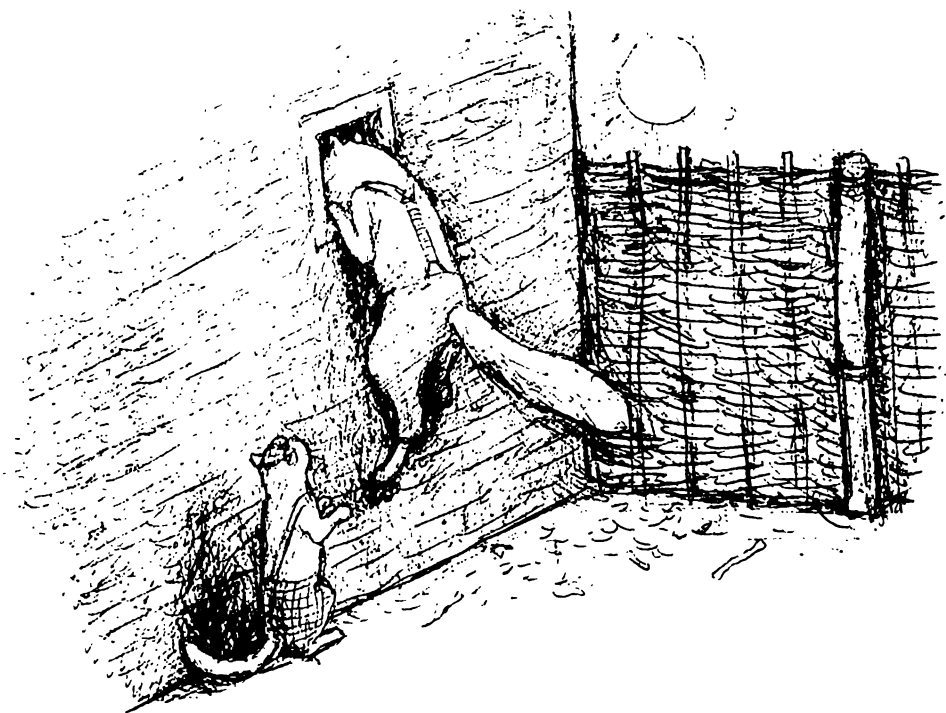
Cat held back. 'But, cousin, is it safe? Nowadays it's so easy to get into trouble, and those chicken farmers are no dummies.'

'Ha,' answered the treacherous Fox. 'This is no business for a coward. Of course, I've never been inside, so I don't know what you're talking about. But if you're afraid, then let's go back. At home we're having radishes with honey for supper.'

Cat the Purry felt ashamed. 'Me scared? Cats are never scared,' he said cockily. Then he jumped into the hole and... landed in the snare! As he dangled from the rope, his head knocked against the doorjamb. It got harder for him to breathe as the noose tightened around his throat.

Fox Mykyta enjoyed the sight through the hole. 'Purry, dear? How are the mice? Tasty? Maybe you need some salt? I could borrow it from the chicken farmer, or do you like them as they are? I like your singing! But the tune is so sad, it makes me c...c...ry.'

All at once the door flew open and the farmer, bathed in sweat, rushed in with a big stick. He was followed by his sons and servants wielding clubs and straps for poor Purry!



Fox showed Cat the hole in the wall he had used to steal chickens.

'Get the thief!' the farmer yelled. 'Yesterday he stole our rooster. Beat him until he's dead!' The blows came down, but Purry didn't utter a sound. 'More!' shouted the farmer and hit as hard as he could.

Suddenly, Cat jumped and sank his fangs into the farmer's bulbous nose. There was a loud crunch, as if he had bit into a mouse. At the same time, Cat dug his claws into the man's face and scratched deeply. 'Help!' screamed the farmer and collapsed like a sack of potatoes. Everybody ran to him, shouting and pushing in great confusion.

'Light! Where is the light?' someone yelled.

'Get some water! Quick!' another voice called. 'Bring some bandages, too!' But nobody knew who should get what. In the pandemonium, Cat the Purry was forgotten. All attention was on the man lying bleeding on the floor.

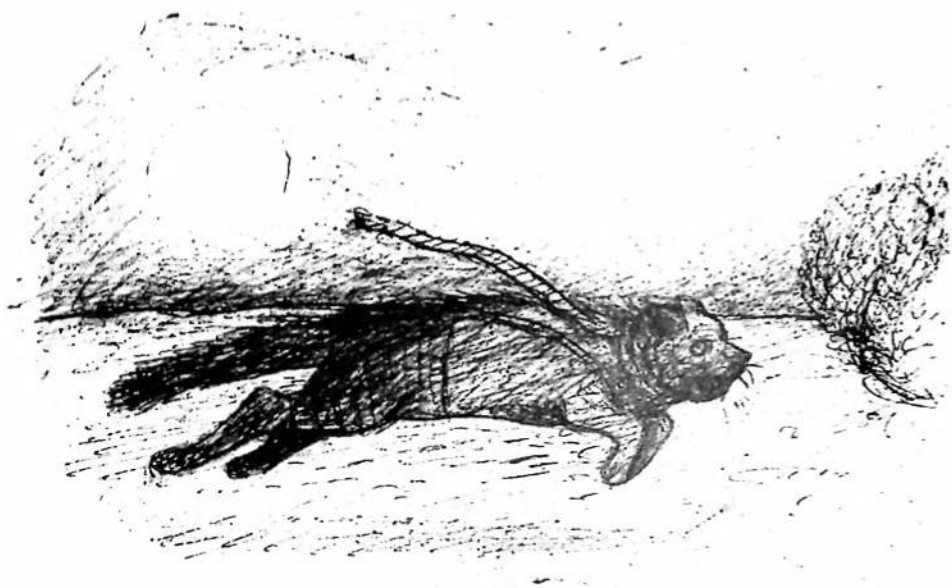
Cats are very tough by nature; they can take a lot of abuse. So Purry gathered all his strength and with great determination started to gnaw the rope. When it was almost through, he gave a jerk. It snapped, and he was free.

At tremendous speed Purry scaled the wall, shot through the hole and, with his tail high in the air, raced toward the woods as if the devil were after him. In no time, he reached the royal palace.

When the King saw Cat's swollen head, he turned green with anger. 'What, again?' roared the ruler of the beasts. 'That wicked Fox again ignores my order! This time he has gone too far! I'll never forgive him. I'm going to send a whole army to catch him! I'll hang him! I'll destroy his nest!'



There was a loud crunch, as if Cat had bit into a mouse.



The King roared and jumped around for some time. He acted as if he would have eaten Fox, bones and all, if he'd been there.

When Lion's anger quieted down, Badger Babye stepped forward meekly and said, 'My King, Mykyta is a free man. The law says that a guilty person must be summoned to your court three times, and only if he refuses to come all three times can he be sentenced *in absentia*. I don't know how much truth there is in all this talk against him. I won't even go into it. But I do know that everyone should be treated in the same way, equally according to the law. That's why I beg you to send me to Mykyta. I will try to bring him to your feet.'

Without uttering a word, the King consented by nodding his head and touching the royal mace.

Babye left immediately.



'You must have important news,' Fox said as he hugged Babye.

Wolf stuffed himself with ham and mutton
And almost died a stupid glutton.

Chapter 4

It was one of those pleasant evenings after a hot, muggy day. Fox liked this time with his family. While his wife, Lysytsia, was busy preparing supper, he talked and played with his cubs in the yard. The cubs! They were so full of energy, so bright and so curious. They never tired of asking questions about the woods, about who lived in them and what went on there. Proud and happy, Fox taught them the secrets of life; he told them what to do and what to avoid to survive in this beautiful cruel world. Just as he was showing them how to outsmart a pursuing hound by suddenly turning and racing in the opposite direction, a voice boomed from the woods:

'How is everybody? Here I am! I've come to visit you!'

Even before the visitor came out of the woods, Fox knew who it was. 'Uncle Babye!' he called. 'What a delightful surprise! You must have important news, or you wouldn't come at this late hour. You look tired. Or are you sad? Let's go into the house. You'll spend the night and we'll have time to talk about everything.'

They hugged and exchanged greetings. Babye planted a kiss on each cub's forehead. Then he sat down on the *pryzba*, a bench of earth that ran along the

front wall of the house. Fox offered him a drink of homemade cherry wine.

Babye remained silent for quite a while. From time to time he heaved a deep sigh. Finally, Fox put his arm around Babye's shoulders. 'Out with it, uncle. What is it, old friend? Stop sighing and speak up.'

With a hint of reproach in his voice, Babye said: 'You have not behaved well lately, have you. Why do you make fun of all the King's envoys? Are you really afraid of going to the royal court? I'm convinced, my dear nephew, that you could hold your own and silence your enemies instantly. Their brains, compared to yours, are sawdust. Those folks are stupid!'

'You're absolutely right, uncle dear!' Fox agreed. 'You've made me want to go. I'll make them see what it means to oppose me. Those who now laugh at me will soon cry. King Lion looks on me with anger but soon he will bestow favors. He knows that during times of danger, during a national crisis, he can't depend on any of the others. They're stupid, ignorant and quarrelsome. At such times Fox Mykyta alone can give wise advice.'

As they talked together, they went into the house. There Babye greeted Lysytsia very warmly. She was so touched to see their dear and good-hearted relative, she lifted the corner of her apron to brush away a tear of happiness. As Mykyta and Babye sat down at the table, little Mitsko and Mina climbed up on their uncle's knee to play horse. The house filled with happy voices and the cubs' laughter.

'Uncle, is the King really very angry with me?' Fox asked. 'I know, I know, he feels sorry for Bear. But I had to do it. An old score had to be settled, and I waited a long time for my chance.'

'What old score are you talking about?' Babye asked.

Fox filled his pipe with home-grown tobacco, lighted it with a wood splinter ignited in the stove and began: 'You probably remember a few years back when Lion, our Father, appointed Bear the Growler to govern the entire highland forests. Lion expected him to mete out justice in all cases, impartially and fairly. It was exactly at that time that Wolf the Hungry was determined to destroy me. Since he and Bear were in cahoots against me I was dragged before the governor's court all because of my ingenious plan.'

Badger took a sip of wine. 'What kind of plan was it?' he asked.

'You just listen, and we'll come to it,' Fox said. 'A few winters ago, Wolf and I were very hungry, so we decided to go looking for food together. One Sunday morning, famine and bitter cold drove us out of the



woods. But which way to go? Everywhere the snow was deep and walking was very difficult. As we stood at the edge of the woods, we heard a church bell ringing in a nearby village. "Let's go in that direction," I said to Wolf.

'We moved very cautiously and sniffed the air all the time, hoping to catch some scent. Suddenly we smelled it. Meat! I could feel the smell not only in my nose, but all the way down to my paws. That wonderful aroma led us straight to the parson's pantry. We looked this way and that. There was not a soul around because everyone had gone to church. At the back of the building we were lucky enough to find a little window one could crawl through. "What do you think?" I asked Wolf. "Should we go in?" Slobbering like a boor, Wolf answered, "By all means. You go first. See if there are any traps around. If everything is safe, I'll follow." I said: "That's all right with me," and crawled through without difficulty. Wolf, who was bigger, barely squeezed through, and then only because he was starving and thin.

'Inside the pantry — oh, lordy, lordy — we found so much food it made me dizzy to look at it. Babye, just picture, if you can, a roomful of all sorts of meat: bacon, smoked ham, legs of lamb, headcheese, rows of sausages and what not. I tried to figure out the best way to handle it all, but Wolf instantly sank his teeth into a hunk of bacon, tore it apart and gulped it down like crazy. "Well," I thought, "go ahead and gorge yourself. That's not my way."

'Sausages appeal to me more than anything else, so using a pole I took some off the hooks, brought them down and threw them out the window. I jumped outside, put them around my neck and made a beeline for the woods. There I enjoyed a leisurely lunch, and hid the rest in a hole.

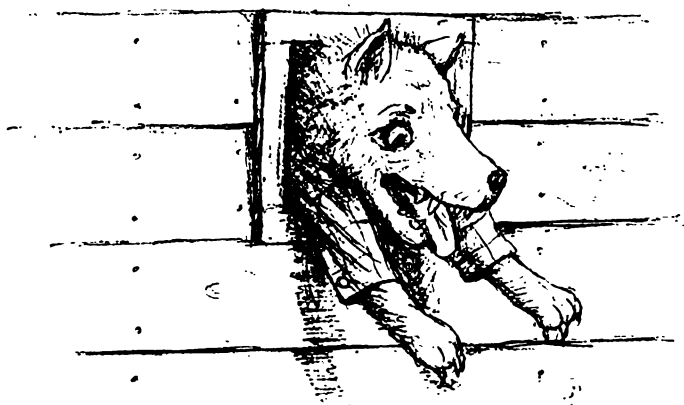


'Sausages appeal to me more than anything else, so I took some off the hooks.'

“Then I became mighty curious as to how Wolf was doing, so I ran to the pantry. And do you know what? He was still in there eating everything in sight. Even though he was stuffed to his neck and his belly stuck out like a barrel, he was attacking one piece of meat after another without finishing any before running to the next. When there was nothing left, he pushed his head into a tub of lard. “Hey, Wolf,” I breathed, “it’s time to take off. People are coming back from church! Let’s leave before somebody finds us here.”

“When he heard that, he became terrified and rushed to the window. But all he could push through was his head. He just stood there petrified, and looked at me with eyes that stuck out like meatballs. He was so frightened, he couldn’t speak. “What are you waiting for? Christmas?” I shouted. “Let’s get out of here right away!” But he stood there like a new-born calf in front of a painted garden gate, doing nothing.

“Can you imagine Wolf there — wet with perspiration, lard stuck to his whiskers? At length he tried again to



force himself through the window, but in vain. Finally, in utter desperation, he wrung his hands and wailed: "Fox, I'll die here!" I grabbed him by the lapels of his coat and glared into his stupid eyes: "Listen, Wolf, are you insane, or drunk on that lard? Don't wait any longer, get out!" "But Foxie, my belly cannot squeeze through!" he cried. "Please, help me!"

"Now, Babye, what was *I* supposed to do? How could I help that glutton? If I had left him, he would have perished there. So I decided to go to the parson and ask him politely to lend me a saw, and give me his permission to cut out a bigger opening. "Wolf, wait here, I'll be right back," I said, and went to find the parson.

"The parson was walking up and down his living room, smoking his pipe and feeling in a genial after-dinner mood. I looked in the window, scratched it with my paw and begged him to open it. One look and the parson rushed toward me yelling: "A fox is looking in my window! Catch him! Run! Quick!"



'Everybody started after me — the cowherd, a stable-boy, a housemaid and a cook with a ladle in her hand. They almost caught me at the fence, but I jumped over, raced to the pantry and hid under its raised wooden floor. A split second later, they all arrived running, shouting and screaming: "Where is he? Where is that fox? He showed us only his tail." Then they looked up and saw Wolf's head sticking out of the opening. "Wait! That's not a fox, it's a wolf! Get him! Let's kill the villain!"

'Wolf didn't wait for them with his head stuck out the window. He hid behind the door. As soon as they opened it, he jumped out, getting some blows across the rump as he fled.

'He went straight to the Growler, and charged me with breach of faith, malice and treachery. He never even mentioned his own gluttony. Now, do you think Bear examined the matter in detail according to the law? Not at all! When that greedy judge heard about my sausages, he roared: "You thief, surrender to me all the sausages you stole!"'

Badger, who until now had listened without stirring, asked apprehensively: 'Did you give them to him?'

'Well, what could I do?' Fox answered. 'He wanted to cut off my tail! But I didn't give him *all* of them. I gave him just four thin ones. The six big ones I kept for myself.'

Fox, who was very good at imitating people, rose to his full height and said: 'Here's how that idiot pronounced the verdict.' Fox made his voice sound deep, and boomed: "'Wolf, I'm giving you one sausage ring for the beatings and shame you suffered. The rest are mine. As for you Mykyta, you just be glad I am letting you go free. Now get out of my reach, or I'll break your



'Wolf, I'm giving you one sausage for the beatings and shame you suffered. The rest are mine.'

bones!" I was so humiliated I swore by the King's tail to make him pay for his meanness as soon as I got a chance.'

Meanwhile supper was ready — woodcock baked in feathers. They ate their fill. Badger licked his fingers and said: 'M-m-m, it's delicious.' They talked some more, and then went to bed.

When Fox and Badger got up the next morning, Lysytisia had breakfast ready on the table — bacon with garlic, a goose ragout and smoked perch. Fox looked out the window. 'It's nice outside. The weather is just right for us, Babyc.'

He put on his traveling outfit, gave the house keys to Lysytisia and embraced her. 'My darling wife, I must go to Lionburg. You stay here, and look after your health. And be cheerful. Believe that better times are coming. Keep an eye on our food supplies in the pantry. You know how quick those mice are to steal. Don't worry about me. The King is mad at me now, but I'm sure he will smile yet.'

Turning to the cubs, Fox warned them: 'Don't give your mother a hard time. Be good, and stay close to home. Promise?' Mitsko grinned, showing a gap in his front teeth. His sister just sucked her thumb and hid behind her mother's skirt. Fox said to Badger: 'Look here, uncle, what a wonderful boy our Mitsko is! Who'd believe that he's only a year old?'

Then Fox kissed Lysytisia and the cubs goodbye, and, along with Badger, stepped boldly into the bright outdoors. He was so cheerful, anyone would think he was going not to face the anger of the King, but to attend a birthday party.



When death is near, then you will find
It helps to have Mykyta's mind.

Chapter 5

A wild uproar from his many enemies greeted Fox as he entered Lionburg: 'Look, Mykyta's coming! Fox the Rebel is here!'

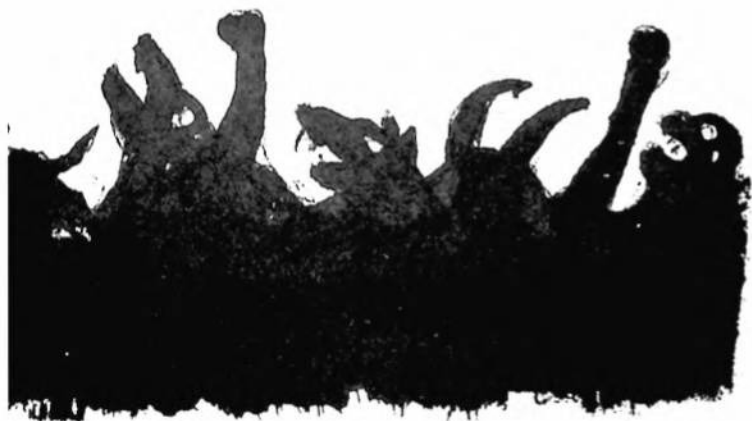
Fox paid no attention to the noise, but walked proudly and fearlessly through the crowd. He stopped in front of the throne, bowed to the King and addressed him:



'My magnanimous King! I have obeyed your order and come to your just court. I believe in the greatness of your spirit and trust that you will not listen to those hypocrites who try to plant bad feelings between you and me by spreading wild lies.'

The King jumped to his feet and roared with anger: 'You detestable creature! You wag your tail? You try to influence me with flattery? You dare to demand rights? No, you cannot find favor with us! Never! Look around. Old Cock is in mourning! Cat the Purry is broken hearted! And Growler, my baron, is wounded because of you. Have you forgotten the pain, the disgrace and the unspeakable anguish they have suffered? Ho, there, seize this low lawbreaker and take him to trial. Immediately!'

But Fox Mykyta did not give up. 'Are my sins so obvious?' he pleaded. 'Is it my fault that Growler insisted on stealing and making a glutton of himself on Farmer



Bill's honey? I'm a midget compared to him. How could I prevent it? As for Cat the Purry? Good lord! What reason has he got to complain? If slaughter wasn't what he was after, why did he jump into the barn?

'What about the poor mice he's caught? Do they have rights, or don't they? It's all very well for everyone to say Fox is a thief, a scoundrel. But what about Cat the Purry? Isn't he a criminal, too? Didn't he jump into that hole in the chicken shed to steal, to shed innocent blood and to kill?

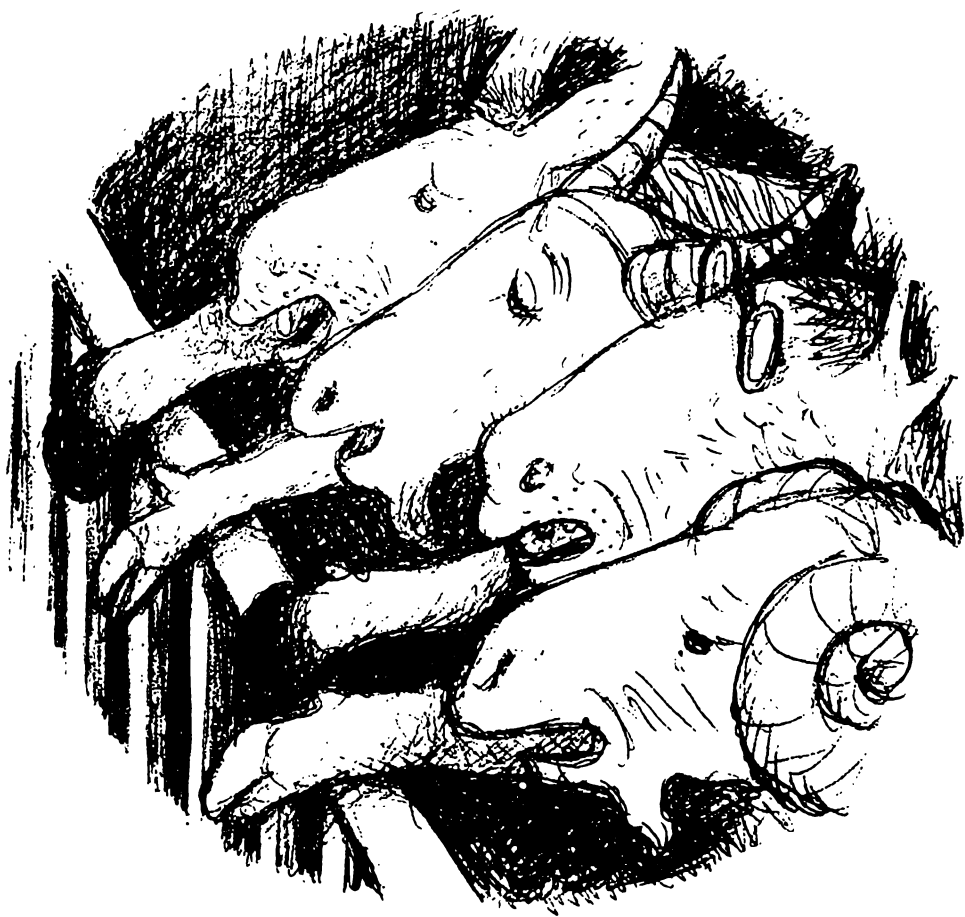
'Your majesty,' Fox continued. 'I am your faithful servant, but if your anger is so great, then let your will be done. Let small offenders like me be hanged so that big criminals may enjoy the show. If that's the way the world is, then it's no fun to be alive anymore.'

But the King remained unmoved. Guards grabbed Fox Mykyta, handcuffed him and escorted him to trial. There the judges were goats and asses. Mykyta rose to defend himself, but the oldest ass had been deaf for the past five years and couldn't hear him at all. Nobody was interested in hearing his side of the story anyway. The verdict was speedy: *Fox is to be hanged today by the neck from a tree branch until dead.*

When Wolf, Bear and Cat heard the news, they were overjoyed. They volunteered to be the hangmen and promised to make fun of him as well. As Fox was led out, the Growler hit him across the chops: 'That's for my sore feet! Remember?'

Wolf, in order to make Fox suffer more, forced his arms backward and glared: 'Now, you won't escape the noose.'

Cat the Purry climbed a tree and attached a strong rope. He told a raven to be ready to drink Fox's eyes the moment he kicked the air.



The judges were goats and asses. The oldest ass had been deaf for five years.



Cat told a raven to be ready to drink Fox's eyes the moment he kicked the air.

It seemed that every animal alive in the world came to watch Fox hang. The police locked arms and formed a chain on both sides of the road to hold the curious crowds back. But they kept pushing forward to catch a glimpse of the condemned prisoner.

Fox trudged along the road like a wet hen. Wolf prodded and nudged him from behind. Up front, Bear pulled on the rope.

‘Don’t be afraid,’ said the Hungry. ‘We don’t intend to let you die right off. You will dangle for a long time until Mole has dug a proper hole for you under the oak.’

Fox turned to him: ‘How come you couldn’t find a stronger rope for my hanging? Cat could certainly have got the one he dangled from in the chicken coop.’

‘Shut up!’ roared the Growler. ‘May your tongue be tied in knots! Won’t you ever stop joking? Look, the gallows is waiting for you. Repent before it’s too late. Cleanse your sinful soul!’

As soon as they reached the tree, they put a noose around Fox’s neck. Fox Mykyta climbed a ladder, turned to the crowd, bowed to the King and said: ‘No beast can avoid death. The hour is approaching when I shall fall into eternal sleep. I beg you, oh, my King, to grant me one last request according to the old custom. Now that I am facing death and the grave, I want to get rid of all hatred and confess all my sins so that no one — I repeat — no one will be held responsible for my actions or suffer because of them.’

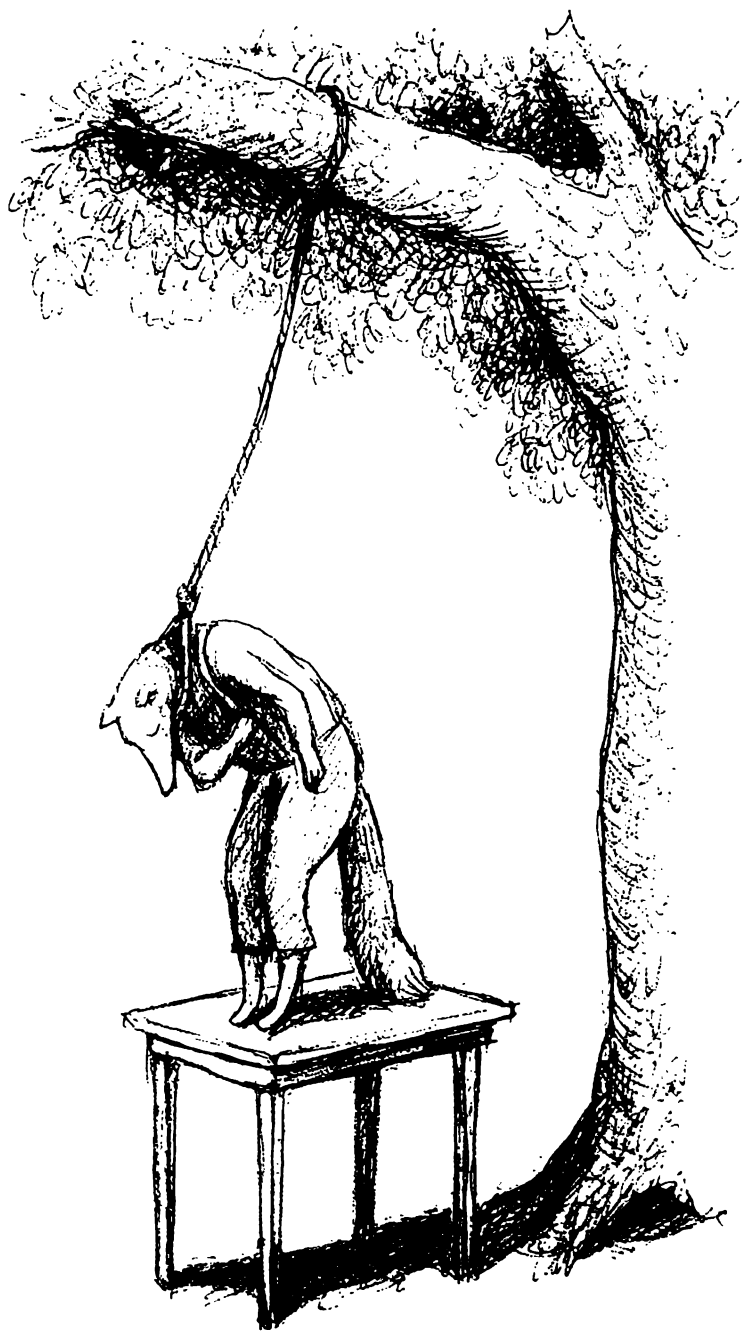
When Fox Mykyta finished speaking, he bowed to the crowd while tears rolled down his face. The beasts were very moved. Some wiped their eyes. The King considered the request for a moment, then he lowered his mace and said: ‘All right. I agree.’

Mykyta pounded his chest: 'I admit, honest people, that I have sinned quite a bit. Is there a single person among you who will remember me for one good deed or for some good words? I doubt it. Even when I was a cub, when I was still wet behind the ears and crawling around in diapers, I had a violent temper and a taste for blood. My father tried to straighten me out by applying his strap, but this made things even worse. Chickens! Geese! Ducks! My heart breaks when I think of how I used to tear you to pieces. As I grew bigger, I made rapid progress in my criminal activities. I attacked little lambs and kids who happened to stray too far from their parents. I killed them and dragged them to my hole.

'But my road really went straight to hell when I became a friend of Wolf the Hungry. He became my true and dedicated teacher in these matters. So if any of you are wondering why I now stand under the death tree, my answer is: "Because of him!"

'One summer we agreed to work together. It was Wolf's job to steal the big things and mine to steal the small. Everything was to be divided into two equal parts. But Wolf was never satisfied with his half. He gobbled everything down to the last crumb. When we got a big catch, Wolf would call his wife and sons and they would devour everything so fast all I could swallow was my own saliva!

'One night – I remember it vividly – we came to the house of an old widow. I sensed that there would be ham in the attic, and I told Wolf to make a hole in the thatched roof. It was difficult, but through it I managed to pull the ham out and throw it straight into Wolf's snout. He grabbed it and took to his heels. I felt like having a chicken for supper, and why not? A whole flock was there sleeping on a perch. But how to get them? I inched my way along a beam, my heart racing



Fox pounded his chest: 'I admit, honest people, that I have sinned quite a bit.'



like crazy. It was very quiet and pitch dark. I remember thinking that at such an hour the devil likes to pull practical jokes. And, indeed, that's what happened. What I thought was a chicken beside me turned out to be a turkey. I aimed at the chicken's neck, but sank my teeth into the turkey's wing! His scream must have been heard for miles around! He was a strong brute and unwilling to die. He shook his powerful wing. I lost my balance and down we went headfirst. We didn't stop on the attic floor, but fell through a hole in it right into the hall below.

'My bones felt as if they had been pulverized in a stamping mill. But this wasn't the end of my predicament! The hall was like a jail. It was impossible to get out of there. So I crawled into a corner, formed my



body into a tight ring and made myself as inconspicuous as possible. My situation was really desperate, but I told myself: "Mykyta, be quiet and hope for the best." Meanwhile, the turkey was running around gobbling and tooting as if somebody had sprinkled salt on his bum. I knew exactly how he felt — we were both very nervous.

'Then I heard a woman's voice: "Hey, Andy! What's going on in the hall? Go and look! Something was screaming in the attic, then it fell down into the hall. Hey, Andy, do you hear me? Get up!"

'Andy was a servant. I could hear him get up, scratch himself, then bump into something. Apparently, he was trying to light a lantern. At last he came in: "What

the hell's going on here?" he grumbled. And then he noticed the turkey and shouted: "Look who's causing all that racket! It's the turkey. He fell down from his nest!"

'And then, what couldn't be helped happened. He spotted me, and he got really excited: "Hey, Ma'am, get up, quickly! We have a guest!" And she called back: "What kind of guest, Andy?" "Fox Mykyta, that's who." At that moment the woman raised her voice: "Hit him, Andy, hit him!"

'Andy mimicked her high-pitched voice: "Hit him, Andy, hit him." Then he shouted back at her, "Hit him with what? I have nothing handy! You'd better get up fast. Together, we'll be able to get him into a bag."

'While the woman was getting up, Andy, his eyes wide with surprise, lowered his shaggy head to have a closer look at me. He stood there pop-eyed, fixing me with a steady, glassy stare. I trembled and racked my brain. How was I going to get out of there alive?

'At last, I heard the woman come. The moment she opened the door, I shot like a bullet between her legs, into the next room and dove straight through the window. The broken glass cut my skin, but it didn't matter. I was free again! Without looking back, I ran like crazy to the woods. I reached Wolf's lair out of breath. "Hey, Wolfie, brother," I gasped, "I'm starving. Give me a slice of meat! I hope you've saved some for me." "Oh sure, sure, I've saved some for you," he guffawed. "Here, this will satisfy your hunger!" Now, can you imagine a more selfish and contemptible creature? He gave me *the wooden pole* they hang meats on for smoking!

'I must say this — my criminal association with Wolf brought me nothing but sin. As for material gains, I had



'Can you imagine a more contemptible creature? He gave me the wooden pole they hang meats on!'

nothing and would have starved to death without my own resources. But I didn't really care because I had a secret. I possessed the famous treasure of King Pea, a treasure so vast it boggles the imagination. Seven wagons couldn't carry it.'

Lion perked up. 'Fox, what are you babbling now? What kind of treasure? Do you still have it?'

'Of course,' Fox answered quickly. 'My King, I have to get something very important off my chest before they put me in the grave. I want to tell you everything, things I would never tell my own children. This treasure would have caused a terrible disaster. It was meant to bring about your death, my Lord! If I, Fox Mykyta, hadn't stolen it, your blood would have been shed and a horrible revolution would have broken out!'

The King jumped up as if stung by a scorpion, and roared: 'What? What did you say? What kind of nonsense is this? Revolution? Disaster? Bloodshed? Come on, speak. I want to know everything!'

'I'll gladly tell you everything,' Fox replied, 'but I beg you, not in front of witnesses. I will divulge the exact hiding place only to you and the Queen, and hand over to you King Pea's treasure.'

'Ho, there,' Lion shouted to the executioners, 'take Fox down from that tree and bring him closer to me.' The executioners carried out the royal order very reluctantly, wondering what new lies Fox would think up.

As for Mykyta, he heaved a deep sigh of relief and muttered: 'Thank God!' Then he said to himself, 'If you don't want to die, Mykyta my boy, sharpen your tongue for a fantastic lie.'

'All right, Mykyta,' said King Tsar Lev, 'sit down and tell me all you know. But tell me only the truth, I warn you, or you'll be hanged by your hind leg instead of your neck.'

It often happens those on top,
Come tumbling down, become a flop.

Chapter 6

Now listen, everyone, to the monstrous lie that Fox Mykyta told. Like a spirited horse kicking up his hooves, Fox lashed out with his tongue and, to save his hide, he even besmeared the honor of his own father. This is his story:

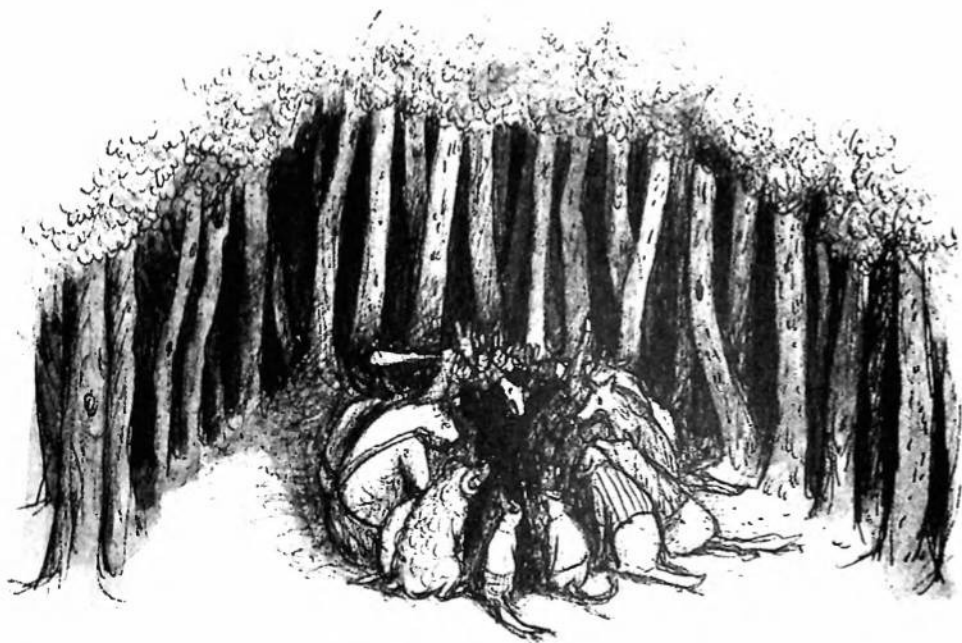
'My King and Honorable Assembly, today I suffer misfortune and rightly so. I'm going to pay for thievery with my life. That is why I must bring to light a theft of particularly great importance. A number of years ago, my father — nobody knows exactly where — carried out an attack and stole the famous treasure of King Pea. But the cursed loot did him no good.

'My father had been a proud and ambitious man and very interested in financial matters of the State. He had always craved to become Minister of Finance. He had tried everything to achieve that goal; he wheedled, begged and changed his color like a chameleon. But you, my King, saw through him. You recognized a schemer right away. You kicked him out of your court and appointed Lynx Rys to that high office.

'Defeated and disillusioned, my father went into the deep forest, carrying in his heart an evil determination to take revenge on you. As soon as he got that wealth,



'A number of years ago,' Fox said, 'my father stole the famous treasure of King Pea.'



he started planning to dethrone you and give the crown to Bear the Growler. Soon misfits and social outcasts joined his cause. When he felt ready, he sent Cat the Purry to Bear the Growler with a letter saying: "We are determined and ready to depose King Lion. Let us know if you wish to accept the crown. Please reply immediately!" When Bear read it, he jumped so high for joy he hit the ceiling of his den. Delirious with happiness, he came running to the plotters and raved: "Brethren, I'm always with you! Either we fall in battle, or we'll put Lion into a bag!"

"They wasted no time. My father, Cat, Wolf, Bear and their many relatives held a meeting and solemnly

vowed to revolt against our lawful King Lion. To ensure their success, they decided to hire mercenaries from foreign lands, and pay them with gold from King Pea's treasure. I overheard their plotting, and thought about it very deeply. I knew Bear very well. When I compared his ridiculous personality with yours, my Lord, I said to myself: "Why should that nut be our king? Oh, my father, you knew how to get those vast riches, but in choosing a king for us you have failed completely! Don't you know that where Bear rules, honor is trampled upon, freedom is lost and truth is struck dumb?"

'I felt I heard a voice from on high calling to me: "Do not allow this treason to succeed. Stamp it out at the root! Your own father is a traitor, but you must remain faithful to your King! Mykyta, be a patriot!"

'So I waited until the day my father left for a neighboring country to hire the mercenaries. Since I knew where the treasure was hidden, I went to the cave and transferred it to my own hiding place. Shortly after, my father came back with his troops. They insisted on being paid in advance so he rushed to the cave, took a look and fainted. It was empty. He couldn't believe his own eyes. He ran around, looked into every crevice, sniffed and scratched in vain. The hoard was gone like last year's snow. Faced with this reality, the old man lost his mind. Wailing as if from a toothache, he found a rope and hanged himself.

'When Bear and Wolf learned what had happened to my father, they did an about-face. They now pretend to be exceedingly loyal to you. And the only traitor is Fox. Today those hypocrites are considered the very props on which your throne rests, while I — who saved the King and his crown by causing the death of my own father — stand here and see death beckoning me with its bony finger. Well, go ahead and hang me now. I have nothing more to say.'

That's how boldly Fox could lie. The beasts were flabbergasted. As for Lion, his hands trembled as he spoke... 'Now I know everything. I thank you, Mykyta! And... the treasure? Where is it?' He motioned him to lean closer.

Fox whispered: 'In the high Chornohora Mountains where the Cheremosh's swift waters rush down over stone boulders. Right inside the Hoverla, close to her heart and near her third rib, there is a cliff platform.

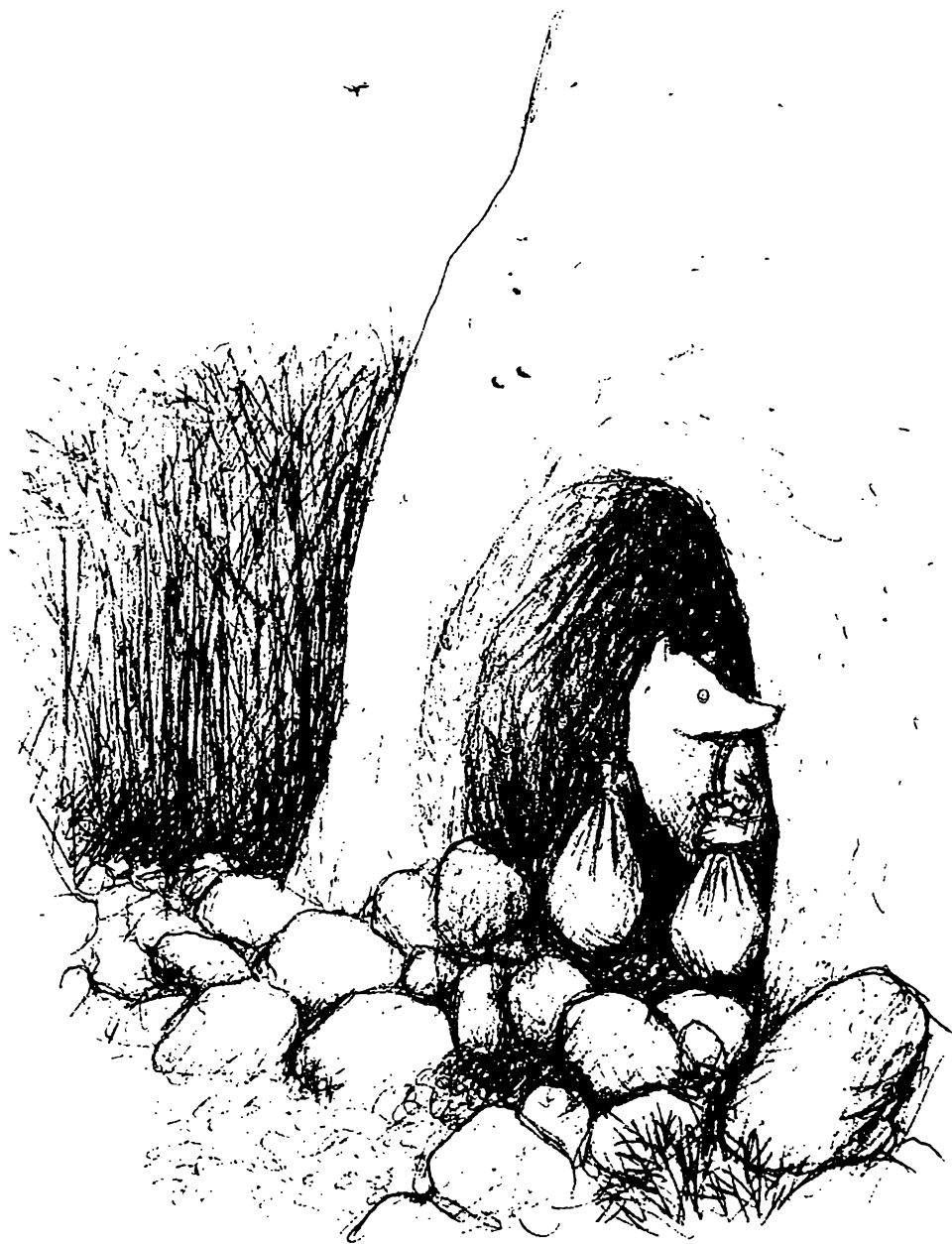
'That's where the treasure lies untouched... Oh, King, I want it to be yours, I saved it for you. I only regret that I did not show someone the path to it, so that after my death...'

'Death? Who dares to speak of death here today?' the King interrupted. 'The royal right is to forgive. Take that rope off him right away! We annul the execution. Mykyta, you deserve more than any other beast. All those sins amount to nothing compared to your merits. Now, listen to this: tomorrow morning you will accompany me to the Chornohora. I don't want anybody else to know the secret entrance to King Pea's treasure.'

Fox felt suddenly uneasy. Then he replied: 'Oh, King, of course I want to go with you on the trip. But when I was face to face with death I vowed that, if I were spared, I would atone for my sins by going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Rome. But as soon as I come back, my illustrious Lord, the treasure will be yours, and you will be the richest king in the world.'

'Well,' Lion said, 'pious vows should not be broken. So go, and I wish you well.'

Then the King ordered this pronouncement to be made public: *To all interested! His Majesty, the King, on the*



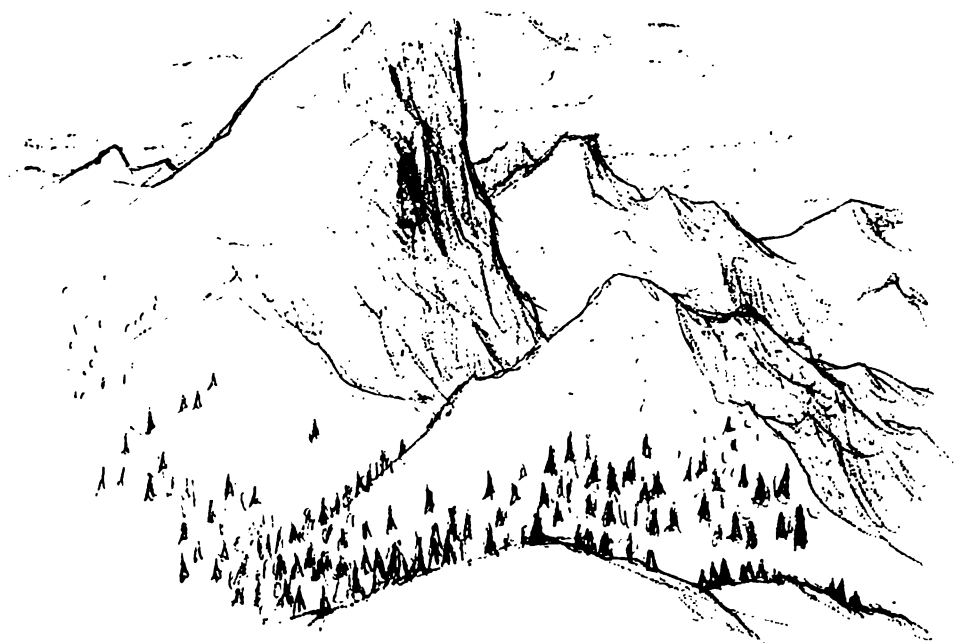
Fox said: 'I knew where the treasure was hidden, so I transferred it to my own hiding place.'

strength of the authority given him by his Heavenly Father has absolved Fox Mykyta, known as Fox the Sly, from all his guilt, and gives him back all the benefits of royal grace. Whoever so much as touches Mykyta, or criticizes this patriot behind his back, will have his or her tongue ripped out by order of the King.

Wolf, Bear and Cat were thunderstruck. They began to growl and howl, and their relatives joined in. But it was all too late.

Lion roared from the throne: 'Who's making that noise? Aha, it's you, damned scoundrels! You were going to murder me in my own palace? Look how you pretend to be saintly and God-fearing, while inside you have nothing but fiendish thoughts! Did Fox step on your paws? Was he in your way? Well, you will now see for yourselves the fairness of our laws. Guards, put Bear in heavy chains. Make Wolf's fetters tight. Give Cat the Purry the same treatment. Throw all of them into the dungeon.'

That's how Fate often plays with us. He who seems destined to bite the dust sometimes comes out on top. While those who flaunt their importance may find themselves in jail.





The blow had fallen like a thunderbolt on Bear, Wolf and Cat.

Wolf let his stomach be his boss.
That's why he bore loss after loss!

Chapter 7

Deep beneath the royal fortress, the dungeon was cold and damp. The stale and musty air was all the more unpleasant because of the stench that rose from the pail that served as a toilet for the prisoners. The unexpected blow that had fallen upon Bear, Wolf, and Cat like a thunderbolt from a clear sky left them in a state of shock for a long time.

Now a week later, Cat still couldn't understand what had befallen him and why. He just sat there speechless, his eyes closed. Similarly, Bear the Growler seemed to be snoozing, but frequent sighs from his mighty chest showed that he was awake. He was deeply hurt by the King's unjust treatment.

Unlike his cellmates, Wolf couldn't keep his mouth shut. He raged and swore: 'May Fox Mykyta drop dead!' He wanted to tell somebody his life's story, full of failures and disappointments. But Bear and Cat showed no interest in his adventures. They were too preoccupied with their own problems. But he must find *somebody somewhere* to listen. If he called loud enough, maybe the entire universe would hear.

'Oh, Heavens, Earth and deep Seas!' Wolf wailed. 'Picture my suffering. I hope my cry will move your souls,

and cause you to shed a few tears with me. They call me "Hungry"! Am I supposed to be ashamed of the good appetite God has blessed me with? Is it my fault that I have to keep my stomach filled all the time, that it keeps shouting "Give"! They say that Wolf is insatiable. That Wolf is demanding! That Wolf deserves nothing but death. That Wolf should be beaten wherever he is found. Nobody gives a straw that Wolf suffers from starvation, and must provide for his family. Nobody! They say that Wolf's a killer. That Wolf's a glutton! No one believes that my soul is in pain, that I have a conscience, that my heart is true, compassionate and merciful. The world won't believe that I'm decent and pious! If only my stomach were always full, my gentleness and meekness would amaze everyone!

While saying this, Wolf involuntarily glanced at the three pots full of the disgusting porridge they were served once a day. The prison food was so awful it made the prisoners' innards turn over. Its smell alone made them sneeze. They had spit at the pots, and kicked them across the floor to the far corner of the dungeon. Wolf listened for a moment. He could hear nothing except Bear's snoring. He continued his monologue.

'Even now — is it worth mentioning? — when my stomach starts to cry, it silences my conscience right away. I have had to obey those cries so often, I have lost count. One day I was out to do some hunting and met a flock of geese pecking for food in a meadow. "Hey, you geese," I called, "I'm going to eat you up!" They replied: "Go ahead, Wolf, but give us a moment to say our prayers."

'I found nothing wrong with that, so I agreed: "All right, pray if you want to, but hurry up!" The geese lifted their wings to heaven like true saints, cackled a few outlandish words, then rose in the air and flew off.



'Hey, you geese,' I called, 'I'm going to eat you up!'

I was left there like a fool. Stunned by their guile, I stood there like a pillar of salt and pondered: "Why did I want to hear these geese pray? Am I a churchman? Better be on your way, fool. Sniff around, and you may find something else."

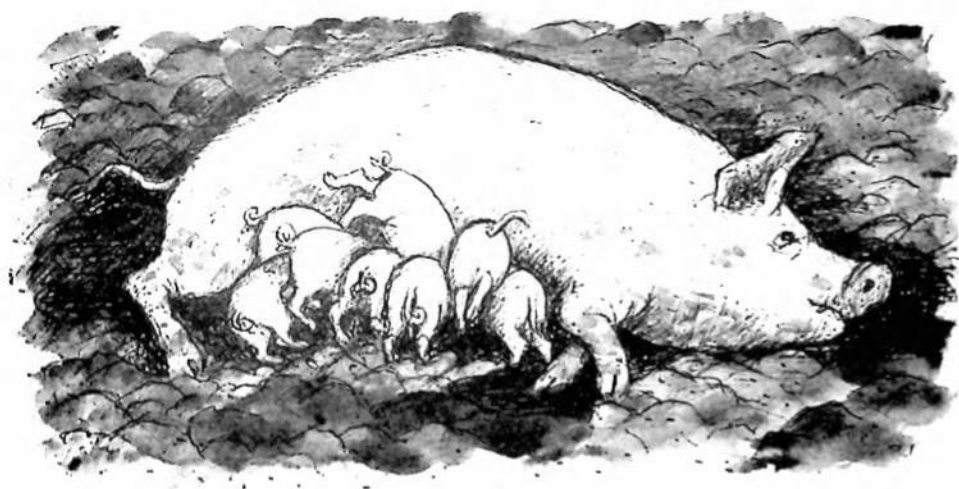
'Fate was good to me, for pretty soon I spied Sow Lokha wallowing in the mud with her pink Piglets Porosiatka. I counted seven of them. "Hey Sow, my little dove," I shouted, "get out of that mire fast, because I'm going to eat your piglets up!" To this, she replied from the muddy puddle: "That's fine with me. You can have them if you wish. But there is one sin here that can never be forgiven: the piglets are still unbaptized. How could you eat them?"

'I scratched the back of my head and thought: "Well, this is a serious setback indeed! What should I do now?"

'Old Sow came up with a quick solution: "Listen, Hungry, over there are a stream and gristmill. Just follow us and wait beneath the dam while I perform baptismal rites. After the piglets have been scrubbed clean and christened, I'll push them all into your mouth one after the other."

'I thought, "Well, that sounds fair enough. This Sow Lokha is honest and pious, and piglets have no wings so they won't fly away." Humming a happy tune, I followed them to the dam.

'While I waited down below, Sow and her children splashed around in the water above the dam. They were grunting, oink-oinking and murmuring what seemed to me like a prayer. "Well," I told myself, "be patient. It would be very rude to interrupt while she is baptizing her piglets." But was she? Not at all! With her strong teeth, she lifted the sluice gate up and a cold mass of water came pouring and roaring down all over



'Pretty soon I spied Sow Lokha wallowing in the mud with her pink Piglets Porosiatka.'



me. I was swept away down the river like a blade of straw. When I managed to drag myself back onto the bank, the swinish family was gone. I stood there all soaked like a dishrag and thought: "Pious, indeed! How cunningly that Sow dragged me down into this. What's the matter with me? Do I have rocks in my head? What am I – a Catholic or Orthodox Christian that I'll eat only baptized pigs?"

'I decided then and there never to be fooled again by anybody. Ravenously hungry, I walked on. Then I caught sight of Ram Baran lolling aimlessly. I stalked him and he didn't even try to escape. So I shouted from a distance: "Hey, Ram! Wait a minute! I have something important to tell you!" He stopped and asked: "What kind of news do you have?" "The news is I'm going to eat you up!" I said. "How do you like that, you horned hermit?"

'Now, do you think Ram got scared and begged me to spare his life? No! Not at all! Instead, he bowed low and bleated out: "Sir, God Himself has brought you to me! I've been looking for you for the last three days! Don't be surprised and don't laugh at me when I tell you I'm determined to end my life. There is no way I can go on living in this world. All my people are in bondage and their only hope is you, Wolf Nesyty. That's why I am not afraid of you."

'On hearing that, my jaw dropped. I just stood there stupid as a bean. "What are you babbling, you clown? This is beyond me. I don't understand it. Explain in plain language what you mean." I could see by the expression on his wrinkled face that he was searching for the right words. "Sir, wait just a moment and you will learn the cause I am ready to die for. I'll also tell you why my horned countrymen will worship you as the savior and father of their land. But first I want to tell you my secret agony. I'm no ordinary ram. I am a sheep patriot and proud of it. My aim is to awaken and liberate the entire sheep nation. I will become a sheep Moses and lead them out of slavery, out of their barn and to freedom. Oh, how much work and suffering I took upon myself – but all for nothing. It's impossible to force any fresh idea into narrow sheep brains. Their hearts are timid and they say: «What do we need freedom for? Wolves will get us in the fields. For us, to dream of freedom is a sin.»"

'Then Ram Baran put his right hand to his heart. "Consider the confusion of my soul. How cruelly fate mocks me." He recited pathetically:

In my soul are things prophetic,
But sheep, as always, apathetic,
Demand but fodder and a barn.

'I could only vaguely guess that he was talking about something important. When he said the word "barn" his voice faltered and his eyes glazed with tears. But he quickly regained his composure and continued: "To find relief, I went to a fortuneteller who gave me this advice: «If you want to help your sheep you must sacrifice your own life. Go into the fields, unhappy one. Stay there for three days until you meet a wolf-knight from afar. He will swallow you whole. At that very moment, a new star will start shining for your sheep.» My dear sir, I'm dying to ask you now: Have you not a sign or a hint regarding this prophecy? Can you swallow me right now?"

'By this time I was sure Ram was insane, so I said, "Calm down, my son. Last night I had a prophetic dream. That's why I was waiting for you here. I'm going to bolt you down really fast." Ram exclaimed: "Glory be to God. At last my soul is at peace." Then he turned to me and said: "My dear sir, you stay right here, while I go to the top of that hill. To gain impetus, I'll run very fast and jump straight into your open mouth. While you swallow me, please remember this is a patriot who is dying."

'I was a damned fool to agree to that. When Ram's horns collided with my head, I wheeled about, fell down, rolled over a few times and blacked out. Ram took off like greased lightning. When I came to, I stood up and wept for pain and shame. I cursed my bad luck and stupidity. "What's the matter with me? Am I a sheep's father? Why didn't I grab him and have a delicious meal?" As I searched my soul for answers, I concluded that my sensitivity was to be blamed. My heart was jelly-soft. Why did I waste time listening to that patriotic rubbish? From now on nobody was going to outsmart me! I'd make my feelings as hard as steel. But I was hungry! Very hungry! And that was no joke!



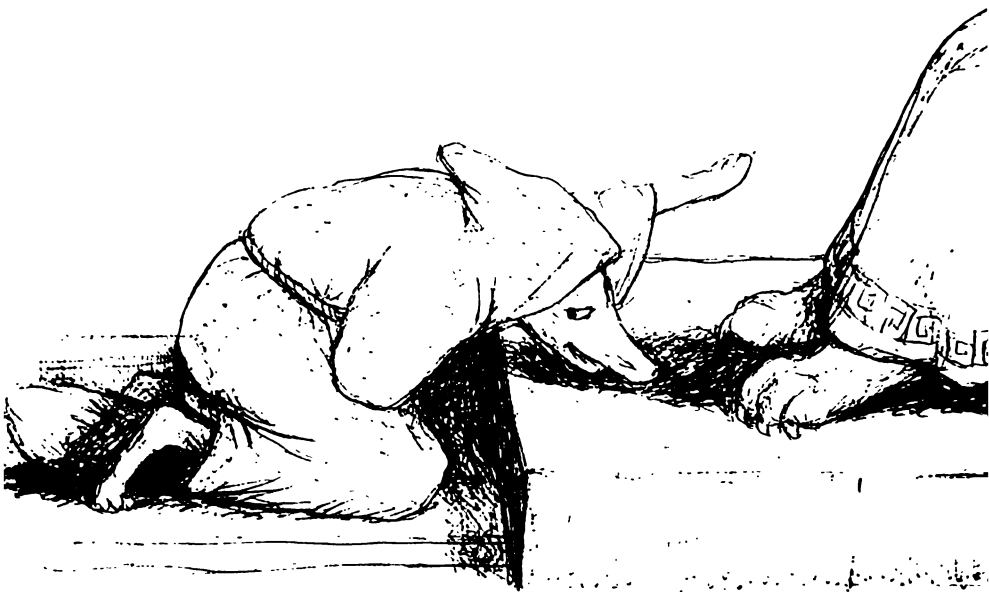
'I'm no ordinary ram. My aim is to awaken and liberate the entire sheep nation.'

'So I started out again, determined and with my teeth gnashing. As I trudged along a road I came across a man. It was Tailor Kravets. I had no reason to be afraid of a tailor so I rushed upon him and growled: "Tailor, I am going to eat you up! Don't you try to run, or defend yourself, or beg for life! Hunger is scratching my insides!" He answered: "Who? Me run? I'm not fast enough! I'm too weak to defend myself. And who would pay attention if I begged? But how can you eat me up? You seem too small. Allow me to measure you." Before I had made up my mind what to do, he put his measuring rod on my back, then seized me by the tail and started hitting me. Whack! Whack! I almost fainted. "Ouch!" I screamed. "What do you think you're doing, Tailor Kravets?" I wailed. "I'm teaching you a lesson you'll never forget! Don't you ever touch Man!" "Yes, Tailor Kravets, I promise. I'll never do it again as long as I live!" But he kept on hitting me anyway. No matter what I did — no matter how I howled or cried, swore or begged, he went right on thrashing and flailing me as if I were a sheaf of wheat. I was afraid my flesh would fly off my bones. As I was beginning to feel near death, I pulled with all my might, and broke off half my tail. That's how I escaped. Afterward, I was so sick I had to stay in my lair for three whole days.'

Exhausted and hoarse, Wolf looked blankly at the mold-covered walls separating him from the Heavens, the Earth and the deep Seas. He told his invisible confidants: 'Now you see what I've been through? After all that, can you still tell me to be quiet and not complain? And on top of all that, now the traitor Fox Mykyta has told King Lion outrageous lies about us! I'll never be happy again. I'm going to cry a little more, then I'll hang myself.'

While Cat and Bear were still sound asleep, Wolf emptied all three porridge pots and licked them clean.





'Oh King,' Fox cried out, 'my heart is breaking too!'

Sweet words are like a spider's net.
Don't be lured in, to your regret.

Chapter 8

Early the next morning, after breakfast, Fox went to King Lion and fell at his feet: 'Oh King Tsar Lev, give me your blessing for this pilgrimage.'

'What a pity, my son,' Lion replied, 'that you have to leave for a foreign land so soon!'

'Oh King,' Fox cried out, 'don't say that! My heart is breaking too! But what can we do except say: "God's will be done!"'

'Yes, yes, you're right,' Lion agreed. 'I'm glad you're so pious. And I'd be happy to help you out. Do you need anything for the trip?'

'Oh, K...K...King,' sobbed Fox, 'you are so k...k...kind. As you see, I don't even have a bag for my travels. Bear the Growler has lots of fur; maybe he would be willing to give me some.'

To this, Lion replied: 'It does not matter whether he is willing to give you some fur or not! I shall order it to be torn off him! Is there anything else you need?'

'You are so generous, my Lord! As you see, I'm bare-foot, and I badly need a pair of sturdy boots. It would

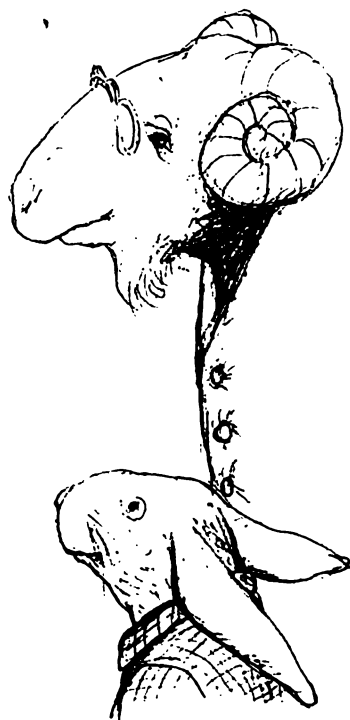
be very hard on my feet with all the stones and barbs lying around. Since Wolf has two pairs of boots, I think he would gladly give me one pair as a present.'

'Ho, there!' King Lion roared. 'It's not up to him to decide. Run to the dungeon and tear a length of fur off Bear! And pull a pair of boots off Wolf! Now my entourage, accompany Fox Mykyta with all the honors due him as far as the mound at the edge of the forest. Meanwhile, I'll lie down and rest a while.'

With a bag riding on his hip and a stick in his hand, Fox started out. His lamblike meekness and gentle behavior contrasted sharply with the loud chattering of the *boyars* and barons who strutted and pranced around him like a flock of crows. Billy Goat Basyliy, the Honorable Secretary of State, and Jack Yats the Rabbit, Chief of the Royal Guards, walked right along beside Fox like his best friends. They competed for his attention and tried to impress him with witty commentaries. They talked about the social and political problems of the multicultural and multiracial empire that were getting more serious each day, and called for immediate solutions.

In the meantime, they reached the mound and, pleasant as their conversation was, they had to leave Fox Mykyta there. Fox brushed away a tear with his sleeve and said: 'Oh, Jackie, come closer to me. How dreadful that I... I must p...p...part with you now. And you, Billy, my dear friend! I love you so much I can't imagine life without you. Please don't reject my plea. Accompany me a little further, just like my own brothers!'

Then Fox burst into tears and bowed low at their feet: 'Among all the beasts, only you two are fair and pure of heart. You never kill or rob, because you don't need meat. When I was a hermit, you were an excellent example for me.'



'Among all the beasts,' Fox wept, 'only you two are fair and pure of heart.'

Talking like this, Fox enticed them as far as his hole. 'Listen, Billy,' he said to Goat, 'browse here for a while and wait for us. Jackie, my dear kinsman, come with me into my house. When my wife hears that I'm going on a pilgrimage, she'll start a scene, and I cannot stand a woman's weeping. You're an expert in matters of such a delicate nature. So let's go. Your presence alone will cheer her up.'

Rabbit had a sympathetic heart. 'Oh, poor woman,' he said fighting back tears. 'I love her like my own mother.' And he entered Mykyta's hole.

How Lysytsia and the children wailed when Mykyta appeared! 'You're here at last!' Lysytsia rushed to him. 'Children, your father is alive!' Jack was very moved as he watched the loving couple embrace and kiss.

'How was it, my darling?' Lysytsia kept asking. 'Is the trouble over? Tell me about it. I cannot wait to hear. I was afraid you were already dead...'

Fox closed her mouth with a kiss and said: 'Let's be cheerful, sweetheart! Our King – may his empire bask in eternal glory – has forgiven me all my sins and I enjoy his grace again. As for my implacable enemies, they must be half dead by now. The royal wrath hit all three of them – Cat, Wolf and Bear. They were forced to shut up and were thrown in the dungeon. And this mealy-mouthed baboon of a rabbit testified against me. I can let him go alive, or strangle him outright unless he pays a handsome ransom.'

When poor Jack heard this, he felt as if a hound were at his heels. 'Hey, Billy!' he screamed. 'Fox wants to eat me up! Billy, help! Save me, Billy!'

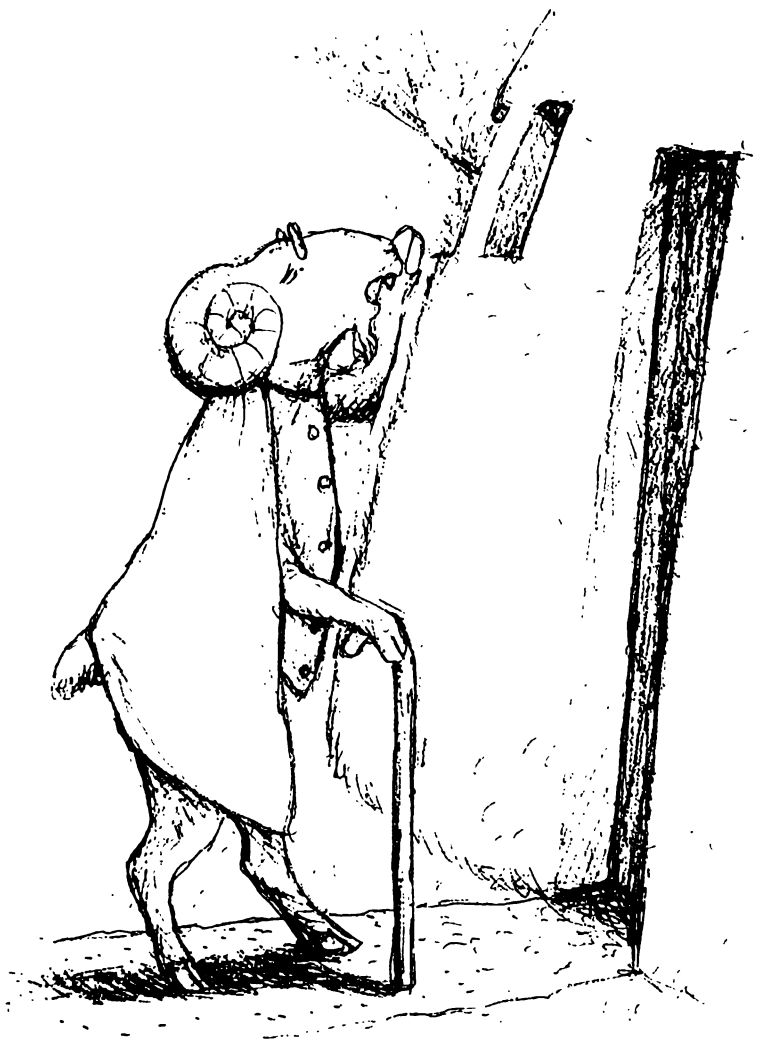
'Shut up, you miserable squealer!' Fox barked, and sank his fangs into Rabbit's throat. 'That's how I settle



disputes!' he growled. 'This is my warning to all the goons: *Beware of Fox!* Hey children, how about roasted rabbit for supper? Afterward, our sleep will be very sweet. And now, my dear wife, listen to how I escaped death by lying.'

Fox sat down in his comfortable chair, put his feet up and told the entire story from beginning to end. He was a master storyteller. Lysytsia and the cubs laughed and trembled. Under the spell of his words, they were transported to the royal palace, then to the courtroom and from there to the execution site. 'Good gracious,' said Lysytsia after Fox had finished his story. 'I must say, you know how to defend yourself. The only thing I don't like is your going on that pilgri...'

'Darling,' Fox interrupted, 'do you really think I'm a fool? When death was winking at me, my tongue said



Billy Goat Basyliy asked, 'How come I heard Jackie scream, "Help! Billy, help!"?'

whatever the saliva brought forth. Me, a pilgrim? Ha! What a joke! The King, the pilgrimage and such nonsense mean nothing at all to me. I'm staying here with you, my darling, so let's not talk about the pilgrimage anymore.'

At that point a call was heard from outside: 'Jackie, where are you? Why do you keep me waiting so long? Get off your butt. It's time to go!'

Fox rushed out: 'Billy, don't be angry with me! I know you must be pretty bored, but Jack is having such a wonderful time with Lysytsia and the cubs. They almost died laughing when Jack told them a story about a lovesick nanny goat. Now they're enjoying a very serious and friendly talk.'

'How come I heard Jackie scream. "Help! Billy, help!"?' Goat asked.

'Oh, that,' answered Fox. 'When Lysytsia learned about the pilgrimage, she fainted and dropped to the floor. But Jackie — God bless him — poured water on her chest and called to you: "Hey, Billy! Help! Poor auntie is dying!" But don't worry, everything is all right now.'

Goat looked relieved. 'Thank God! I had the impression somebody was skinning my friend Jack.'

'Billy, you should be ashamed to even suggest it! You wait here and Jack will come out with an armful of presents. And now, you bearded sage, I have a favor to ask. King Lion asked me to write him about a secret matter before I set out. While Jack was enjoying himself with my family, I wrote two thick letters. Would you take them back to him?'

'Of course,' Goat replied. 'But what if I lose them, or the seal gets damaged?'

'I see what you mean,' said Fox. 'I'll put them into my bearskin bag. They'll be perfectly safe in there.'

Fox raced into the house, and laughed to himself: 'Some letter!' He put Rabbit's head into the bag, tied it up and took it to Goat. 'Here are the letters. Carry them carefully, and don't break the seal on the bag. Rabbit asked me to give you his apologies for staying a little longer. Your fleet-footed friend will catch up with you very soon.'

As Goat turned to leave, Fox put his arm around his shoulders: 'There is something else I wish to tell you, my friend. King Lion is very fond of a good story, and highly values a smooth style. Now I don't mean to brag, but I'm sure he will like these letters. Wherever it was possible, I put in many favorable words about you. After reading them, the King will shower you with his grace and honors more than ever. But always be on your toes and don't be too modest! Remember, courage wins the war. Tell the King this: "It was I, your Secretary of State, who advised Mykyta on this, and he practically owes his success to me!"'

When Billy Goat heard that, he jumped for joy like a little kid, kissed Mykyta and exclaimed: 'Only now do I know who wishes me well! My friend and brother! I feel like I'm in paradise. I know your wit very well. Lion will cock his tail for joy! I'll be wined and dined and all honors will come my way. The entire country will be saying: "Look, what a stylist Goat is!" Don't worry, I'll be bold. Nobody will ever know who the real writer was. Well, goodbye! God permitting, I'll pay you in kind for all your goodness!'

'Goodbye,' said Fox Mykyta, and when Goat was gone, he burst out: 'What a moron! And he's an Honorable Secretary! The thought makes me feel like throwing up. What a government! What a state! Here only fools

reap honors and glory, while the poor and weak cannot escape the claws of the mighty! Wasn't Goat a member of the tribunal that sentenced me to death? Well, I have my revenge! As long as he lives and even after his death, he will not get rid of the stain I have splashed across his face. The saying "as stupid as a goat" will live forever!

Meanwhile, Billy Goat arrived at the palace. He stood in front of the throne and cheerfully pronounced: 'Your Majesty, Fox Mykyta sends his humble greetings and this package. In it you will find two letters. Their language, style and thoughts are superb. It's not surprising, because I gave him many hints regarding style and composition. So my merit is here, too.'

The King took the package, untied it and looked inside. When he saw the contents, he roared: 'What's this? Some long-eared letter! Billy, you crazy Goat, you've brought me a bloody letter!'

Then Lion pulled Rabbit's head out of the bag and roared again so frightfully Goat fell to the ground. 'That's how Fox makes fun of me! And this moronic



Goat helped him! I swear by the royal mane never again to believe Mykyta's accursed lies! Ho, there! Run to the dungeon and set free Wolf, Bear and Cat! For mistreating my friends, I give them permission to tear fur from Billy Goat and all his shaggy relatives! Fox, who escaped the noose by telling lies, I declare an outlaw. Anybody who can catch him may kill him without court proceedings or fear of punishment.'

That's how Jack Yats the Rabbit and Billy Goat Basyliy lost their lives. Even though they were victims of malice and power, nobody had a good word to say about them – especially not about Goat. He had wheedled those in power and found a place for himself in the palace through the Queen. He had become a decorated courtier, an honorable secretary and, in addition to that, a member of the tribunal. In spite of all this, he gave up his goatish ghost because of Fox Mykyta's cunning.

Even now, what person mentions goats with respect? When some villain dies because of some trifling matter, do not people say: 'He perished as a scapegoat'? When an arrogant, high-living and smooth-tongued profiteer gives in to death's whim, people cry for him no more than they would for a goat.



Life is a war and has always been,
A mare will show you what I mean.

Chapter 9

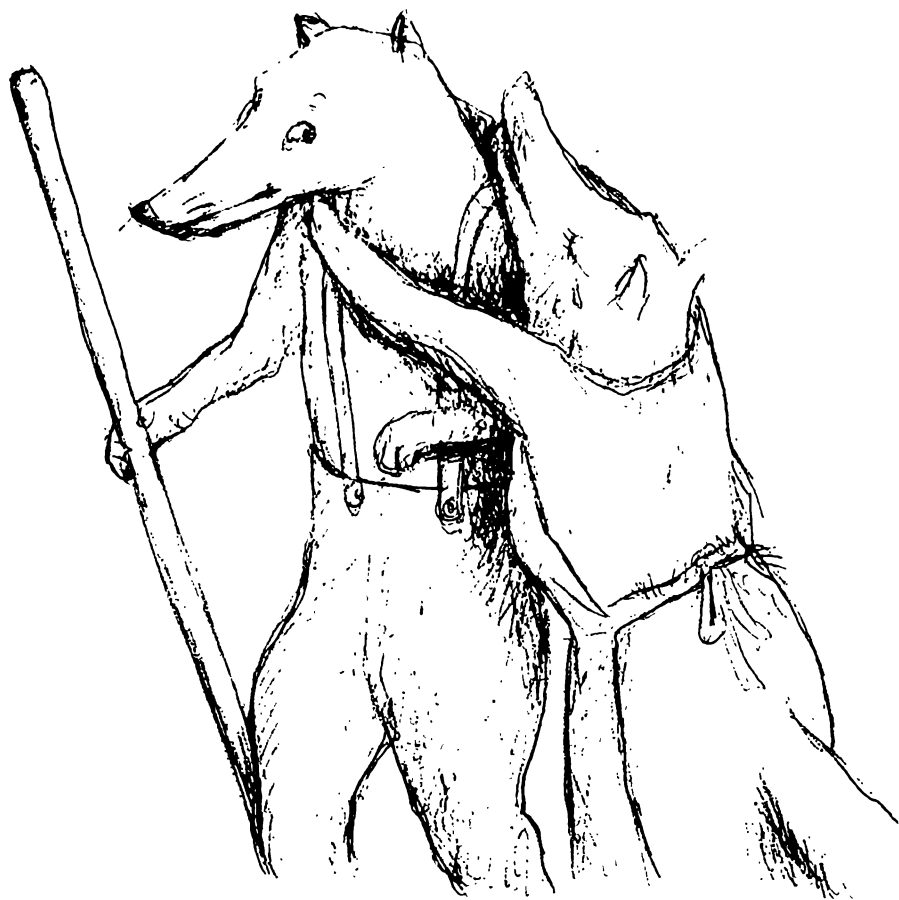
Fox Mykyta emptied a glass of honey wine, as was his custom after a good dinner, and sat in his comfortable armchair smoking his pipe. A pleasant feeling of well-being and satisfaction spread throughout his entire body. He had never felt better in his life, and acted like one who had never done anything wrong. Overpowered by sweet drowsiness, he put his pipe aside and closed his eyes. Just as the borderline between reality and dream began to dissolve, an urgent rap on the gate made him instantly alert. Was it a friend or foe? He rushed out. When he saw who it was, he exclaimed: 'Ah, Babye! It's you again. How are you? Have you come directly from the King? What's the news there? Rain or shine?'

Careworn, Babye sighed and said: 'Not very good. The King has sworn to destroy you. He is in constant consultation with the generals. He has called up the army. It looks like they will be here in three days.'

'Is that all?' Fox asked. 'No reason for concern, old Babye. Don't you believe those threats. We'll go to the palace today. You can be sure I'll settle everything to my advantage, one way or the other. But now come into the house. It's time for a snack. Lysytisia is making a roast and you must be hungry!'



Babye sighed: "The King has sworn to destroy you."



'Mykyta, your children will be orphaned! Don't go! Hide at home!'

Fox and Babye chatted while eating the delicious roast. The cubs rolled and wrestled on the floor. 'Look at Mina,' Fox said. 'She already knows how to catch a chick. And Mitsko, that spunky little beast, caught a duck yesterday!'

'You can be proud of them,' said Babye, 'and rightly so. Children usually take after their father.'

'Well, yes, that's true to a certain degree,' Fox added. 'Talent is important, no doubt about it. But I think that education plays a bigger part here.'

After Fox and Babye had finished their snack, Fox rose and said: 'Okay, let's go, uncle.'

When Lysytsia heard this, she became alarmed. 'What!' she screamed. 'Mykyta, are you going away again to the palace? This time your children will be orphaned! Mykyta, don't go! Hide at home. Come to your senses!' She burst into tears and embraced him tightly to keep him from leaving.

Fox kissed her, pushed her gently away and said: 'My darling wife, calm down. It's better to meet danger in the open than wait for lightning to strike you in a corner. My philosophy is this: life is a war, and everybody fights the best way he knows how. Some fight with their teeth, some with their wings, others with strong claws or fast legs. What do we foxes fight with? Our minds. We are not fertile like the carp or fleet footed like the hare. Nor do we have the owl's keen sight.

'The only weapon available to us is a clever head, which should be used at all times. We should know instantly what to do in every situation. We should put out our nets to catch others, but take care not to fall into them ourselves. The King threatens war. Even

though I'm not afraid of his army, I believe it's safer to go to his palace than wait here for God-knows-what. I'm used to this sort of thing. When I realize how smoothly I can lie, my tongue starts itching right away.'

Lysytsia had to admit that her husband was right, and she felt reassured. Fox reminded her to keep the gate and doors locked all the time, then he and Babye left.

'What's the matter with you, uncle?' Fox asked. 'Forget your worries. Look at the beauty all around! He who's alive is a king today!'

'My nephew,' Babye said, 'you cannot escape the penalty! Who has ever seen anything like it — putting Rabbit's head into a bag and sending it to the King through Billy Goat as a gift!'

Fox burst out laughing. 'It was quite a prank, wasn't it? Cheap and hurtful! And I'm proud of it. But to be punished for it? No, never! Nowadays, if you want to survive and not fade away, you cannot be like some saintly hermit who lives in the desert. If you don't watch out, you'll end up in someone else's teeth. Jack jumped in front of me like some brat, calling "Catch me, Red!" How could I endure that sort of thing? I don't know how it happened, but I grabbed him and he lost his head. As for Billy Goat, he's the one who screamed in court: "Fox is guilty! To the gallows with him!" And when I got out of that mess, he comes a-creeping with a kiss! To hell with him! It's my sin and his loss. Killings and revenge are popular among all beasts. Lion himself often plunders, and when he doesn't want to do it personally, bears and wolves do it for him.'

Mykyta pushed some snuff into his nostrils, sneezed and continued: 'Let me tell you a story. Once, when Wolf the Hungry and I were on a cross-country walk, we found ourselves far beyond civilization. We saw



'Forget your worries,' Fox told Babye. 'Look at the beauty all around!'



neither inns nor shelters — nothing but wide empty steppes. It was close to the noon hour, the sun was burning mercilessly and our hunger was simply unbearable. As we trudged along with our tongues lolling out of our mouths, all at once we saw Colt Losha, a sleek and lovable creature, grazing peacefully. Wolf started to breathe heavily and gnash his teeth. But his impulse to steal Colt was dampened when he saw Mother-Mare Jade Kobyla close by. Wolf said: "Mykyta, go over to Jade and ask if she would sell her colt to us."

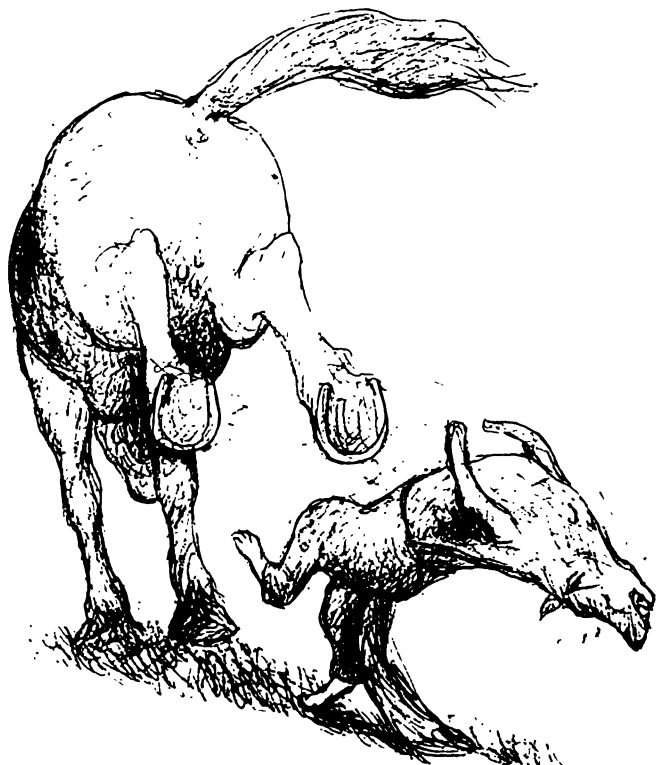
'I went, bowed to her and, after exchanging greetings, said: "I see your pasture here is pretty good, and your colt is a beauty! Is he for sale?"

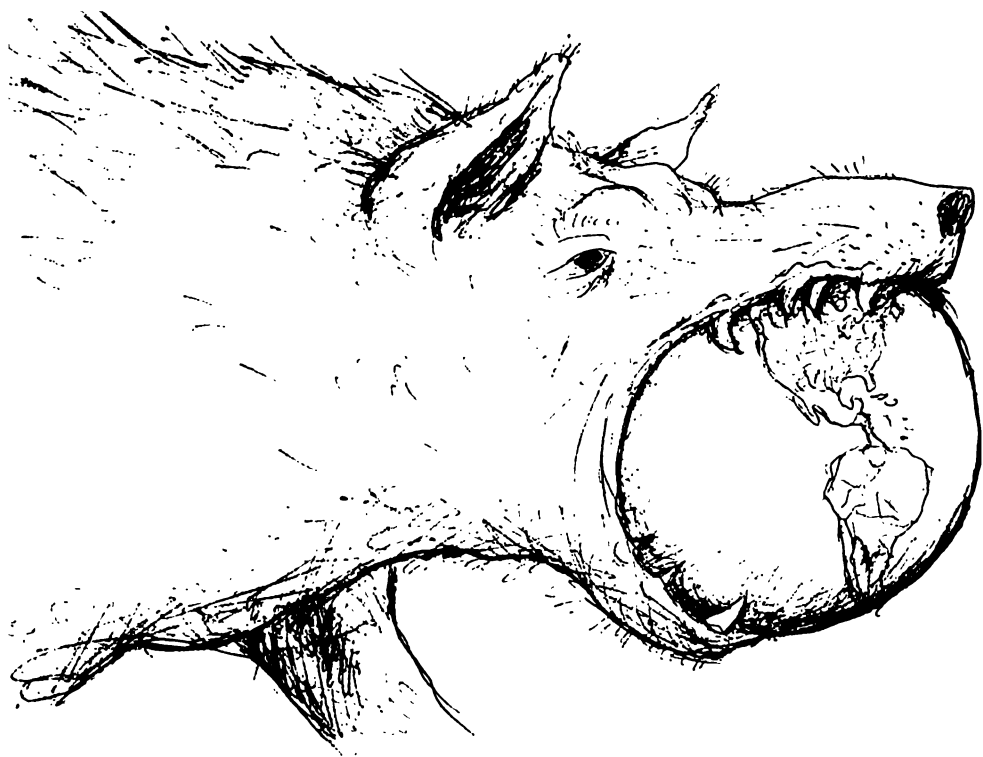
'I was pleasantly surprised when I heard her reply: "Certainly you may buy Losha if you want. I won't even ask an exorbitant price. The price tag is on my hind hoof if you are interested." I thought, "Aha, she's a smart one." But I wasn't as stupid as she thought I was to get behind that hoof. So I bowed and politely

said: "Thank you, mother, but I don't know how to read."

'I returned to Wolf and said: "Jade is gentle and willing to sell her colt, but won't tell me the price. She expects us to read the price tag on her hind hoof. It's too bad I couldn't understand it." Wolf shouted, "What! You good-for-nothing dumbbell! Can't you even read a few horsey letters? I know that alphabet. After all, I attended high school and college for five whole years!" Having said that, Wolf himself went to see Jade about the colt. "Read the price on my hind hoof," she repeated.

'As he lowered his head to read the price, Jade lunged a swift and hearty kick with her freshly shod hoof which snuffed out Wolf like a candle. Then she and



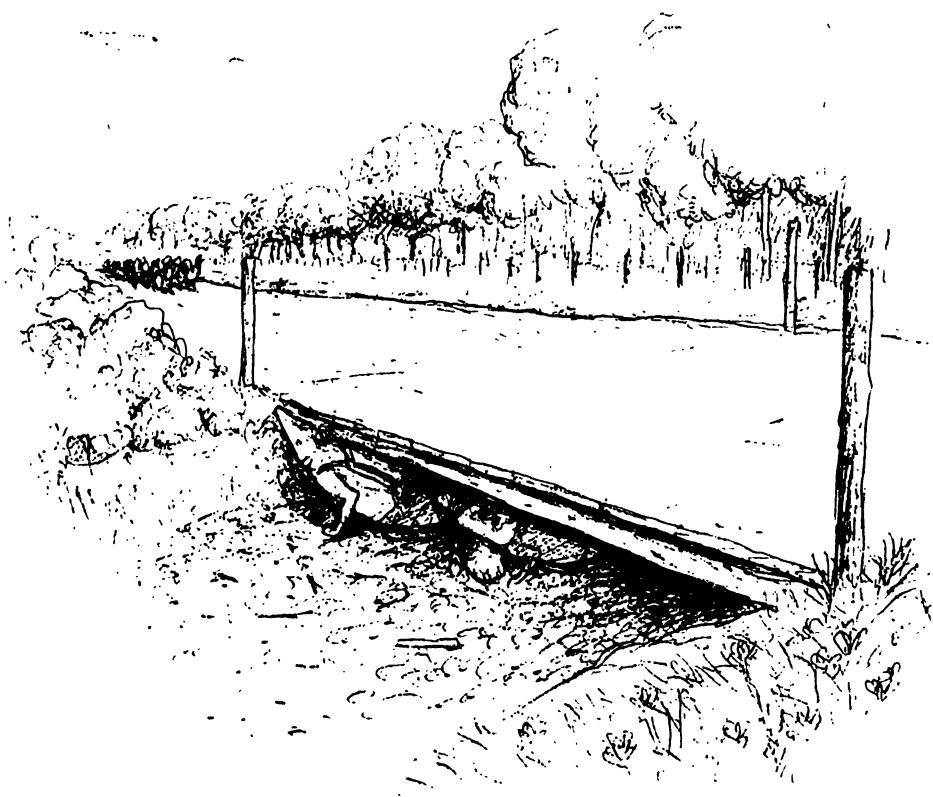


Losha galloped off, roaring with laughter. It took Wolf some time to regain consciousness. Finally he opened one eye and looked around. "Wolf," I jeered, "did you bolt down that whole colt? Insatiable monster! And you still look like you haven't had enough! Why didn't you invite me to dinner! Ungrateful miser! Have you forgotten I was the first to bargain with Jade? So you owe me a drink. But tell me honestly — was the price not too high? You didn't haggle long, and I liked the way you parted. She left very satisfied, and you fell into a deep sleep. Well, after such a splendid meal, it's good for your digestion. As for the horsey alphabet, you know it well and your knowledge is something to marvel at."

'I taunted him like that until night fell. All the while, he just lay there and stared at me with his left eye. The other was swollen shut.'

When Fox finished his story, Babye said: 'Mykyta, I don't find your joke funny. It has too much bitter truth in it. What's worse, Wolf is your most relentless foe. He'll try hard to do you in.'

'So what!' Fox snapped back. 'Spit on him! He's always full of malice. Wolf would swallow the world whole if his throat were not so narrow. A prudent man ridicules those who are malicious.'



'Sh . . . keep quiet!' Fox warned Babye as the chicken procession approached the bridge.

You think you're smart, and so did Fox,
Until he found that so were Cocks.

Chapter 10

Fox and Badger walked slowly along a hard-surfaced highway, engrossed in conversation. All at once, Mykyta elbowed Babye: 'Uncle, see that little bridge? Hide under it, fast!' Worried that maybe a hunter had seen them, Babye sprinted in great fear toward the bridge. Trembling with anticipation, Fox put his finger to his lips: 'Sh... keep quiet!'

Babye asked with his eyes: 'What is it?'

Fox motioned toward a chicken procession coming down the highway. They were on their way home from Lionburg, where they had attended Fox Mykyta's celebrated trial. Old Cock Piven was up front, leading his entire clan. They had drowned their sorrow in a few drinks and now sang a merry ditty about a mosquito as they marched.

Hey, what has caused that awful sound?
A mosquito has hit the ground!
Hey, Sir Mosquito, man of fame,
You're badly hurt, you might get lame.
Here comes a fly, a virgin maid,
She brings Mosquito-man first aid.
When Woodticks heard Mosquito fall,
They came as fast as they could crawl.

They knew for sure what they must do
To make his broken limbs like new.
They plugged his wounds, so wide and deep,
And after that, he fell asleep.

When the tipsy chickens had reached the bridge, Fox shot out of his hiding spot and seized Old Cock by the neck. 'Aha, you're here, you punk!' he barked. Cock squawked once and his head fell onto the road. As Fox pulled the carcass under the bridge, its wings were still flapping.

'By God, my nephew,' Babye gasped, 'you've dragged yourself into a new mess! Are you out of your mind? Don't you know that Cock Piven was a close friend of Bear and Tsarina Lvyytsia's favorite?'

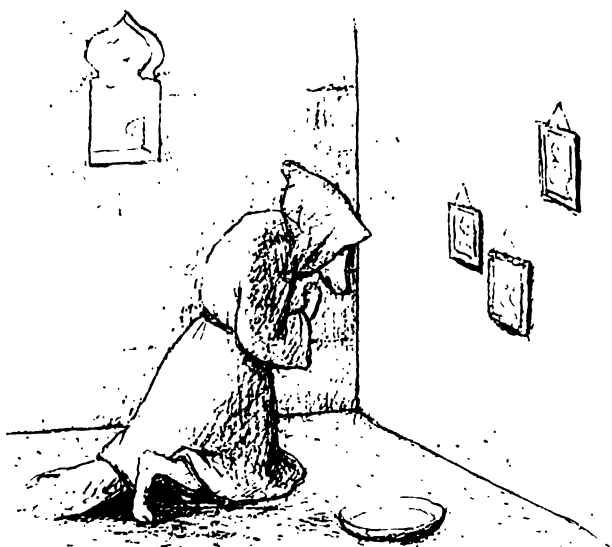
Fox ignored Babye and plucked the feathers: 'Sneeze on it! Look at this fabulous lunch! Now I'll give you a real treat!'

Even though Babye sometimes disapproved of his nephew, he had a deep admiration for his skill at survival and his optimism. As they crouched together under the bridge, Babye watched in fascination while Fox prepared their meal and related the story whose final chapter he had just witnessed.

'I've been carrying a grudge against Cock for a long time,' Fox said. 'Once when I was passing an orchard, hungry as usual, I noticed Cock Piven up in a willow tree. He was sitting there crowing his heart out. Well, I'm never short of good ideas. So, to lure him down, I pretended I was a monk. I approached the willow, reciting the fiftieth psalm, then raised my eyes modestly to him and said: "Oh, wonderful bird of paradise, I care about your spiritual well-being so much that I must talk to you." Cock crowed back jeeringly, "Oh Mykyta, daddy dear," he ridiculed, "you're so



Fox shot out of his hiding place and seized Old Cock by the neck.



thin. You look like you haven't eaten for a long time. I think you love my body more than my soul."

'I replied, "But I've renounced meat, and eat only honey and roots. I live in the darkest corner of the desert and keep a strict fast." Cock laughed back at me: "Honey certainly drips from your tongue, but your teeth are gnashing."

"To this I answered: "Oh, beautiful little bird, I have come all the way from the distant wilderness only for your sake. In my sleep I heard a voice from heaven saying: «Mykyta, get up! Go quickly to a certain village. There you will see a cock in a willow tree. That cock is a terrible sinner. Go to him. Make him repent.» I cannot bear the thought that you, who are so beautiful with your gorgeous red comb, might be thrown into

a cauldron of boiling black tar. So please come down, confess, repent and save your soul."

'But Cock remained as derisive as ever. "Oh, Mykyta, my daddy dear," he said to me. "What are my sins? Do I rob? Do I kill? Or is it just that I make fun of you?"

'To this I replied very, very sternly: "You naughty boy, you're going to die burdened with sins and *you don't even know what they are!* This is terrible. Don't you have twelve, fifteen, or even more wives? Admit it. For this alone you can go to hell."

'Here Cock became confused and alarmed. I had finally got to him. My sharp and angry tone had at last penetrated the innermost nook of his soul. He whimpered: "Oh, Mykyta, I do now see that sinful blot clearly and openly. Have pity on me. But my confession at this moment would not be worth much. I've neither fasted, nor prayed, nor feel repentance in my heart."

'I roared back savagely: "Sinner! The devil speaks through your tongue. It's he who fears confession. Don't postpone it. Come down to me this very moment!"

'Like ice in the sun, Cock's stubbornness melted. Slowly moving from branch to branch, he began to descend and soon stood on the ground beside me. I grabbed him. "Aha, here you are, angel eyes! I couldn't care less whether or not you confess, because you won't escape the real penitence. This is the end of you! I'm going to tear your red coat to pieces, and stuff your sinful flesh into my belly!"

'Cock realized that he had made a mistake, and hung his head. "Go ahead and eat me," he said sadly. "If it's God's will that I enter paradise through the gate of

your teeth, then take my body. Eat it and may it make you healthy. Take my red coat, too, which I like to wear in front of hens, and tear it to shreds. I don't mind."

'He hesitated a few seconds, tilted his head cocklike to give a searching look with one of his eyes, heaved a deep sigh and continued: "I have only one true regret: my death will bring an enormous loss to you. You see, our parson likes my voice so much that he asked me to become a cantor and choir conductor in the cathedral. In return, he promised me several loaves of bread, four hundred pounds of wheat and four sacks of first-class bran a year. I said yes, but only on condition that Fox Mykyta, the most dignified beast, be a sexton there. And now, when I am facing death, three clerics are on their way to your house to offer you the sextonship in order to relieve your miserable existence. I understand they even have an advance payment for you."

'Uncle Babye! I'm an artist. Every word evokes in me a flood of impressions and uncontrollable emotions. When I heard about that fabulous opportunity, my soul leaped. I clapped my hands and cried: "Me a sexton! Look at Mister Fox!" At that very moment, Cock jumped away, flew back up into the willow and cocked his eyeball haughtily. "And I was practically in your teeth!" he mocked.'

Fox spat with disgust: 'I hate to recall how that snob jeered, as if he were a general or something! I can forgive beatings and wounds, but as long as I live I'll revenge humiliation.'

While Fox was telling his story, he and Babye ate Cock with gusto until not a shred was left, except for the big bones. Afterward, they rested for a while and then resumed their leisurely trip with an air of thoroughly innocent and saintly travelers.



'Please come down, confess, repent and save your soul.'

'What I'm saying,' Fox continued, 'is that Cock had a lot of influence, was one of Bear's cronies and even ingratiated himself with the Queen. This is exactly what makes our rotten system so detestable! You cannot make a single step without official backing! No matter what you are — teacher, official, tradesman, poet, or any other expert, no matter how talented and industrious you are — all your efforts go up in a puff. All it takes is the word of some baron or a few scribbled lines by a duchess to turn all your endeavors to dust. May God's thunderbolt hit them all! That's how it is, my dear Babye. I know the power of favoritism and knowing it, I have no fear. As a matter of fact, I, too, was able to find somebody who would back me up in time of need.'

'Who was that?' Babye asked.

'At the palace a certain Monkey Malpa Froozya is employed as Tsarina's physician. That ugly widow is also a black magic fortuneteller. Even though she's no



longer young and hates men, she became infatuated with me — not without good reason, of course. It was I who procured that job for her, and I'm very glad I did. Froozya, with her prestige, can do anything she wants. Granted, she is my friend. But even so, she would back me up because she hates Wolf's guts. I'll tell you the story of why she hates him so, and make our trip seem shorter.

'Once during our extensive wanderings, Wolf and I found ourselves in distant Monkeyland somewhere down by the sea. We were deadbeat and hungry, and could hardly drag our feet. It seemed the best thing to do was lie down and die. As we staggered along, discouraged at our failure to catch anything edible, we noticed Malpa Froozya's house among the cliffs. "Listen, pal," Wolf said. "go into that hut and see if they'll invite us to dinner. Our situation is very, very bad."

'Well, I could see that for myself, so I went. Inside I saw a monkey who looked like the devil, sitting in the middle of the room. Her children were all around her. She was grooming one of them, picking lice from its shags while it sat on a chamber pot. You should have seen them! Each one was uglier and more repulsive than the other. They glared at me and I felt shivers run down my spine. Fic! I was afraid they would eat me up. Monkey Froozya came closer to me like a boiling thundercloud and screamed in a rasping voice: "What do you want here? Who are you, anyway?"

'I started lying right away, Babye. This is what I told her: "I have come to pay you my respects. I'm an honest and pious beast from a faraway country and probably a relation of yours. I'm on my way home from a pilgrimage and, after having heard so much about your wisdom and beauty, I decided to bend my knee to your superior intellect."

'Monkey was visibly impressed and softened right away. She licked her fleshy lips and said coquettishly: "Please, take a seat. You mean to say you've heard about me already!"

'I acted as if she had asked me something very obvious and exclaimed: "Have I heard about you? My dear lady, your fame is sweeping the country like a forest fire! Your name is on everybody's lips! And these adorable little angels — are they your children? Their daddy must be away on business." Froozya screeched: "My dear sir, I'm a widow. But you must be hungry. I'll prepare something for you in no time."

'I pretended to stop her: "No thank you, my dear lady! I wouldn't dare eat here. My heart and mind desire only your lovely words." Froozya said: "I see that you're not only very polite and clever, but a pleasant fellow to be with too. A guest like you is always welcome here. Well, we'll talk. But first I would like you to eat and drink."

'Froozya disappeared into her pantry, and when she came back she put in front of me three plates heaped with meat, hamburgers and sausages. Then she sat down beside me and kept urging: "Go ahead, eat! Don't be shy."

'Who, me shy? I stuffed the food into my mouth and let my jaws take over from there. Meanwhile, Froozya prattled on about the sensitivity of women and the inconstancy of men and about women being slaves of their families. Naturally, she mentioned her late husband. She rolled her eyes and sighed: "He didn't understand me."

'After that, she talked about the arts, fortunetelling, literature, the latest fashions, politics and opera. I ate, nodding my head knowingly. To show that I was inter-



'Those adorable little angels – are they your children?' Fox asked Monkey Froomya.

ested, I opposed her mildly once in a while. As soon as I had eaten my fill, I decided to leave. So I said: "My dear lady, I have found a real treasure here. You have strengthened my body and soul. Excuse my haste. I must leave now but I promise to visit you again soon." She didn't seem to hear me, but just kept babbling. I turned on my four heels and left.

'When I got back to Wolf, he reproached me: "Mykyta, you stayed in there more than two hours and I'm perishing here from hunger and heat. Well, did you bring anything for me? Did you eat?" I said: "Of course, I had a splendid lunch. But it would have been improper and shameful to take food with me. I advise you to go in yourself. That monkey is very hospitable, and I'm sure she'll find something for you too."

'Wolf went in. Since I know his character very well, I pressed my ear to the wall and listened. I heard him say: "It's hot." And she shot right back: "So what?" And then he sprawled upon a bench. "Come on," he growled. "Give me something to eat, you stupid ape! And who are they – the devil's brood? How ugly and stinking they are! God help me! And you – why are you so dour? One glance from you, and milk turns sour... Where's your husband, wench?"

'In his stupidity, Wolf ran on and on. Of course, Monkey Froozya would not take such insults. She grabbed a rock from the floor, hurled it at his snout and knocked out four of his teeth. His roar almost raised the roof off her hut. He might have killed her on the spot, but monkeys are more agile than wolves. Her children joined in the battle, too. While some of them bombarded Wolf with stones, others tried to tear his eyes out. The older ones beat him with clubs, and the toddlers spat at him. Fearing the worst, I opened the door and cried: "Wolf, run!" and he did.

'Since that day, Monkey Froozya has treated me with love and devotion, whereas Wolf is a bitter pill to her. Come what may, I believe in my good luck. I stay afloat during a flood, while others drown.'

Discussing this and other interesting matters, Fox and Babye reached Lionburg. Fox appeared before the royal court in the early afternoon.



When failures cause you lots of pain,
Prevent them – simply use your brain!

Chapter 11

Wise people used to say: 'Where there's wisdom, there's good luck.' Fox Mykyta believed it, too, and acted accordingly. Even when fear made his blood run cold, his movements were bold and swift, and he always carried his head high. Since he had come to face King Lion of his own free will, everybody stared at him as if he were a freak. Obviously, he was in great danger. Yet in spite of the atmosphere of fear and foreboding, for everyone expected a terrible thunderstorm to break, Fox appeared unconcerned and happy among all the glum faces.

'You accursed murderer!' roared the King. 'You have the nerve to come here, looking like that. Look at him, ladies and gentlemen, he acts as if he doesn't know he sent us a loathsome gift. You bag of lies and treason! Don't expect mercy! You've slain Jack Yats the Rabbit! And Billy Goat Basyliy, your accomplice in Jack's murder, has been torn to pieces! The same fate awaits you, Mister Fox!'

Mykyta's face turned white. He trembled as if he were hearing this news for the first time. He wrung his hands, burst into tears and wailed as loudly as he could: 'Oh, woe, oh, woe! Oh, unhappy me! Jack, the wonder boy, is dead, and that damned Goat has croaked too!



'You accursed murderer!' roared the King.



Oh, poor Mykyta, your treasure was stolen and now it is hidden somewhere! What am I to do? Oh, woe, oh, woe!"

The King made a threatening move: 'What are you babbling now, liar?'

Fox bowed his head submissively: 'Oh, King, kill me right now! With my treasure stolen, life has no more meaning. I'm better off dead! What an idiot I was to have trusted Jack and Goat. I sent you treasures through them in a sealed package – a very beautiful diamond that shines in darkness like the full moon over a lagoon and a ruby ring with magical powers. It wins everyone's love and admiration for the person

wearing it. There was a mirror made of emeralds for Her Majesty, Tsarina Lvytsia. A mere glance into it makes one healthy and handsome. It even has the power to revive a dead person. All those jewels, and more, were supposed to be delivered to you, my King. I never thought for a moment that Billy Goat would kill Jack and steal the treasure. How can I hope to recover it with them both dead? And how awful that evil tongues now accuse me of a crime I have not committed! Oh, my Tsar and Tsarina! Reject all ugly suspicions and disregard the gossip. Otherwise, coming generations will criticize you for treating your most faithful servant so unjustly!

Then Fox fell silent. King Lion frowned, and Queen Tsarina Lvytsia began to sob. She was exceedingly sensitive, especially after a sumptuous meal. That day she had put away a quarter of an ox.

After a while, Fox continued: 'I see that my enemies have pulled the wool over your eyes again. I'm fed up with life! Without your royal grace and love, the King's subjects are weak and walk in darkness. So goodbye, white world! And you, miserable enemies, come out into the open! Everyone with an ax to grind, step out! Let's fight until death! Well, where are you, cowards? You are only capable of whispering behind my back. To stand boldly face to face, to give your life for truth if need be, oh no, that's too much to expect from you.'

'You're lying, you miserable creep!' Wolf howled as he emerged from the sea of beasts. 'I'm willing to fight you. Before the eyes of God and in front of King Lion, I'll stop your tongue and make it impossible for you to deride me. I'm ready to fight until death to prove that you are an evil liar, a cheat and one who tramples upon sacred things! I accuse you not of what you have done to me personally, but of crimes committed against other beasts, especially against my dear wife.

'Listen everyone,' Wolf continued, 'to how she became scarred for life as a result of Fox Mykyta's malice. Once, as my wife Vovchytsia was sitting by a pond, Fox came running toward her. He was gorging himself on a tasty fried fish. "What are you eating, Mykyta?" my wife asked him. "Fish!" he replied joyfully. She begged him, "Give me a piece, please." "Auntie," he said, "if you want a fish, why don't you catch one? There are tons of fish at the bottom of the pond!" She began to whine: "I know, but I don't know how to get them." Fox said to her: "Don't worry, auntie — I'll teach you how. I catch them every day. No matter where I cast my net, I pull them in ten at a time." Vovchytsia became very interested. "What kind of a net do you have?" And he replied: "It's very easy, very simple to learn. Come along and I'll show you."

'It was winter and the pond was frozen over. Fox led her across the ice to a fish hole cut out by some fisherman. There he advised her: "The fish are in this hole. All you have to do is put your tail into the water, wait a while and then pull. In this way, you'll catch a bag full of fish."

'He sounded so sincere and well-meaning that she believed every word. So she sat down on the ice, put her tail into the water and waited. After a while, she said: "Fox, I feel a pinch." "Sh....," he said, "stay quiet. The fish are beginning to bite." In fact, it was frost. "Fox, should I pull now?" "No, not yet. Hold on longer."

'Vovchytsia was growing impatient. "But Fox, something's pulling and squeezing harder!" Fox admonished her: "For heaven's sake, why don't you shut up? You'll scare him away! It must be a pike as big as a ram!" By that time, her tail was frozen in solid ice. "Fox, I'm pulling now!" "No, wait a bit longer, yet! I'm sure it's a carp!"

When at last she could endure no longer, she pulled, slowly at first. But she knew right away something was wrong. Her tail was held back by something. Fox said: "Now is the time to pull out your catch, but be careful not to lose the fish." Vovchytisia tugged once more, but her tail wouldn't budge. She tried again; no change.

"Hey, auntie," said Fox, "be thankful some people from the village are coming to give you a hand. I see twenty of them."

On hearing that, Vovchytisia started howling with fear. And who wouldn't? Oh, my God! When the villagers



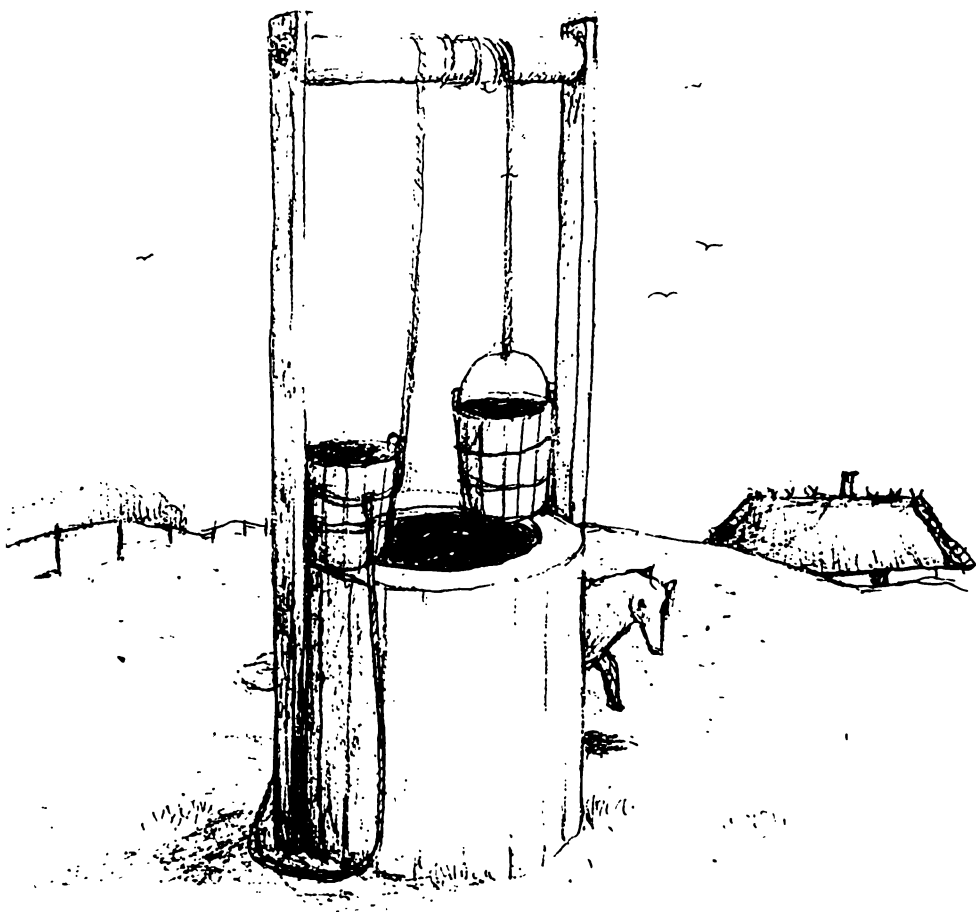
heard her howl, they came running to the pond and began beating her. Poor Vovchytsia twisted her behind, tugged and jerked her body in all directions trying to dodge the blows. At last, she gave a tremendous tug, and half her tail broke off. Only then was she able to escape the mob.'

To all this, Fox replied politely: 'Well, yes, it's true, but not *entirely* accurate. It's not fair to blame me for your wife's avarice. If she had been honorable and modest, she would have taken her tail out sooner. Then she could have had fish, and her tail as well. Instead she wanted to empty the entire pond. And now she is angry with me.'

All the beasts roared with laughter and Wolf was so mad that he clawed the ground. 'You scoundrell!' he shouted. 'You twist everything around to make yourself look innocent. But you won't last long to make fun of us. So many mean tricks mark your path. Tell me, was my wife guilty of avarice at the draw-well too, or was that your own fault?'

Wolf continued his story of woe: 'At a draw-well two steel buckets for getting out the water hung on a pulley. Fox was once thirsty, so he jumped into one of the buckets and went down. The other remained at the top. As he was enjoying his drink, a sudden thought occurred to him: "Oh, my God! What have I done? I came down easily, but who's going to pull me up?" He looked up, and saw his death staring down at him. The next person to draw water would kill him. He started to howl pitifully.

'It happened that Vovchytsia was passing by, and when she heard the crying in the well, she looked down the shaft and asked sympathetically: "What's going on down there?" Fox answered: "Auntie, dear, there are so many fish and lobsters down here! I've been



Fox was thirsty, so he jumped into one of the buckets and went down.



Vovchytsia heard the crying in the well. 'What's going on down there?'

catching them for half an hour. Not only am I filled like a pod, but I have a bucketful as well. It's too bad I have no more room for them. Get into the other bucket and come down. You can eat your fill, and take some home for your old man."

'It's a generally known fact that she-wolves are always hungry. When Vovchytisia heard of fish and lobsters, she jumped into the pail and swish! down she went. While she raced down, Fox went up. As he passed her, he cried: "Isn't it wonderful? While I go up, you go down. That's the way it is in this world. You won't find any fish down there, but you'll have time to ponder who's going to get you out."

'When my wife heard that devilish talk she became so terrified she went into a severe fit of colic. Not realizing what she was doing, she jumped around in the bucket and got wet all over. Then she began to howl so desperately she was heard far and wide. The villagers knew right away some creature was howling in the well. They came running. Do you think any of them had pity and helped her? Not one! And she who had a husband and small children! No. Once you're in their hands, you're done! The wrathful peasants raised hell: "A wolf in the well! Now we'll get even for the stolen foals and sheep! Let's get it out and beat it to death!"

'Honest people, imagine how my wife felt when they were pulling the bucket up with her in it. Beneath her, deep water. Above, at least twenty men waiting with sticks. What a hopeless situation! As soon as she emerged, all the sticks fell upon her. She shrank into the bucket and hid her face. She had two choices — either die there or escape. With the utmost effort, she jumped out of the bucket and into the thickest throng of sticks. It's simply impossible to explain how she came out of it alive. It was all your fault, you loathsome liar! It was one of your low-down tricks.'

'Wolfie,' Fox replied, 'if only you knew how grateful I was to her for her charity. She received what was supposed to fall upon my weak spine! What a noble she-wolf. You can be proud of her deed. I must admit she can stand more of the knotty grit than I can.'

That's how Fox ridiculed She-Wolf Vovchytisia. All the beasts found it very amusing and laughed their heads off, but Wolf was raging mad. He roared: 'You dishrag! May your tongue rot away! You always turn black into white and white into black! We're going to fight it out, not with our tongues but with our teeth and hands! I don't care if I die. I have to muzzle your lying mouth.'



Fox shot back: 'You are a rude, uncivilized and vulgar scoundrel. Do you think swearing is going to cover up your lack of honor? Oh, you're tops when it comes to name calling. But if it's a duel you want, I'll show you how I fight.'

King Lion Tsar Lev rose and said from the throne: 'Stop that row! I'm sick and tired of your quarreling! Even the devil himself wouldn't know who's right and who's wrong! Only a fight can show us which one of you is better. Be prepared and ready for tomorrow. And remember: *Might is right!*'





'Get up and greet the newborn day! It will decide whether you will be victorious or die in battle.'

When tolerance and reason reign,
Then life for all is sweet again.

Chapter 12

The sun rose very early, washed its face in the pearly dew, smiled and began to caress the world with its gentle rays. Well rested and refreshed, the forest community resumed its daily activity. But Fox Mykyta was not aware of all the hustle and bustle. He was still fast asleep in his comfortable bed. As he lay there with legs and arms outspread, somebody touched his shoulder.

'Hey there, sleepy, it's time to get up and greet the new-born day! It will decide whether you'll be victorious, or die in battle.' It was Monkey Froozya who spoke those words as she stood by Mykyta's bed and held his hand. She had been awake all night going everywhere like a spirit trying to win friends for him.

Fox murmured drowsily: 'Oh, confound it.' Then he opened his eyes and seeing Froozya, exclaimed: 'Froozya, is it you?' He jumped out of bed. 'With what news does God bring you here?'

'Oh, Mykyta,' she answered wistfully, 'I cannot forget the day we met for the first time. A woman never stops loving a man who causes her so much suffering; neither does she expect any gratitude. I worry about you a great deal. I care for you even though nobody knows it. The upcoming fight has forced me to come to you.'

Oh, Mykyta, Wolf is very strong! Sly and clever as you are, he could easily kill you. Wolf does not joke, you know. I have come to help you, because in some situations even an old woman can give good advice. So you should listen to me.'

Fox could not help being amused. 'My dear Froozya, you don't lack a single tooth in your sweet mouth! Why, then, this talk about being old? Be proud of your beauty and of your keen mind. What you intend to do is simply a generous deed. I'll gladly accept any advice you care to give me. So go ahead.'

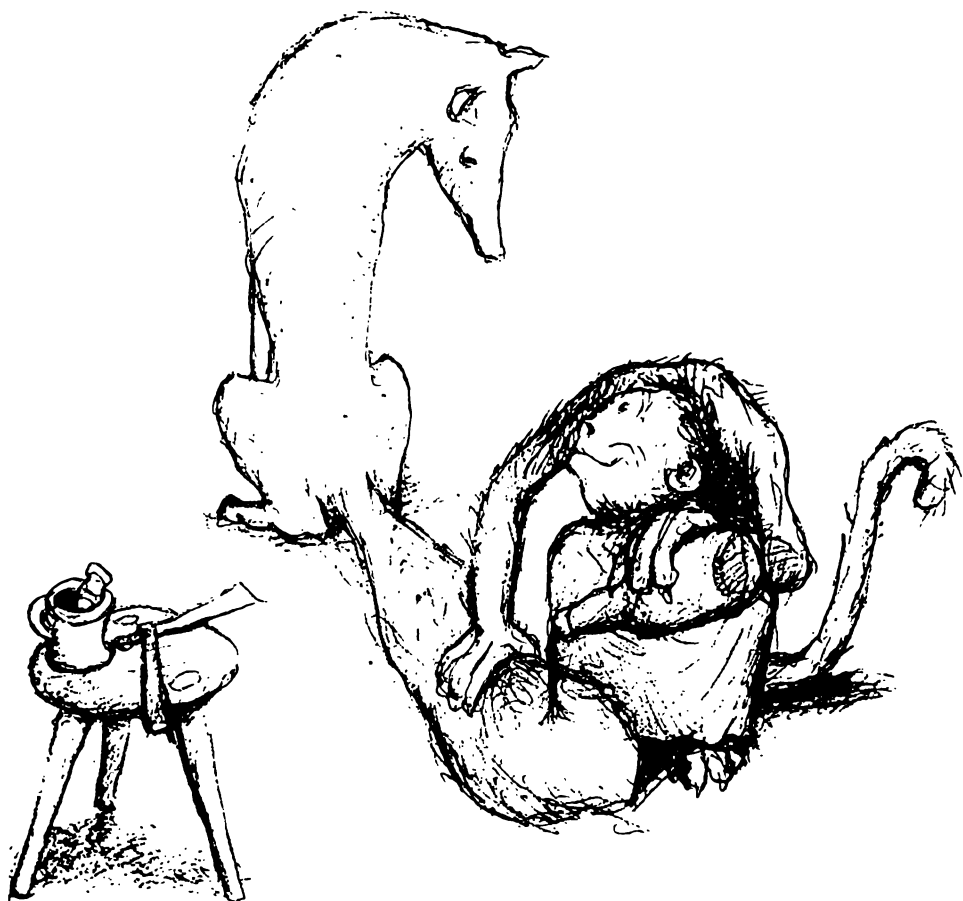
Froozya clapped her hands and a group of monkeys, who had been waiting outside, came running in.

'Ho, ho, ho!' said Mykyta, greatly surprised. 'Your entire family is here! Froozya, what does it mean?'

'Don't worry,' Froozya answered. 'Just take a seat on this bench, and keep quiet!'

At once the monkeys went to work. They washed Fox, soaped his body, shaved his face and snipped off all his hair. Then they drenched his bushy tail with olive oil. Froozya said, 'Mykyta, we've cut off all your hair except for that on your tail. We did it so it will be impossible for Wolf to hold onto you. As soon as he starts his attack, pretend you are scared and run, but not too fast. Let him come near you. Then dip your tail into the sand and hit him right across the chops. This will cool his enthusiasm. While he's busy rubbing the sand out of his eyes, come down on his neck and finish the monster off. Now go down on your knees. I'm going to say a potent charm:

Seye nevar owt si mrahc tsrif eht,
Esiw uoy ekam lliw mrahc dnoce eht,
Evol eurt — mrahc tsegnorts dna driht eht. *



Froozya drenched Fox's bushy tail with olive oil.

'Get up now, my friend, go into battle with confidence and come back victorious. And you, my monkeys, accompany Fox to the place where all the beasts are waiting.'

Escorted by the monkeys, Fox Mykyta headed proudly for the battlefield. He passed an elevated platform where the royal couple sat on makeshift thrones.

When King Lion saw the hairless Mykyta, he couldn't stop laughing: 'What a cunning beast he is!'

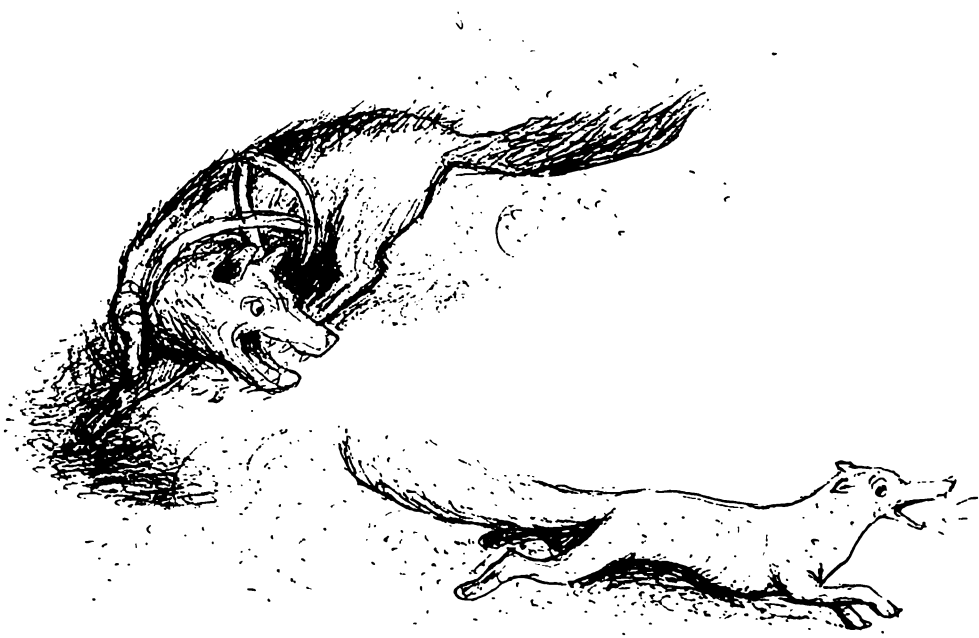
Mykyta, looking serious and severe, bowed at King Tsar Lev's feet, then to the Tsarina's knees. Perfectly composed, he entered the duel site surrounded by a solid mass of spectators.

Almost simultaneously, Wolf the Hungry appeared. He was in a murderous mood. His teeth gnashed and his eyes glowed with an eerie light.

The King signaled with his mace to start the fight. Drums rolled and trumpets shook the air like thunder.

The crowd fell silent. Everybody waited, holding their breath for the unusual single combat to begin. Nobody in living memory had seen anything like it. The duelists, now mortal foes, were known to have been close friends for years. Then there was the great difference in their size and age. Old Wolf the Hungry was powerfully built and a bully. Fox was much smaller and younger, and a highly intelligent schemer. The tension and thrill of the extraordinary spectacle gripped all the assembled beasts. Many sat high up in the trees to have a better view.

Wolf, as challenger, made the first move. It had always been his strategy to hurl the massive weight of his body against his opponent, bring him down and rip his



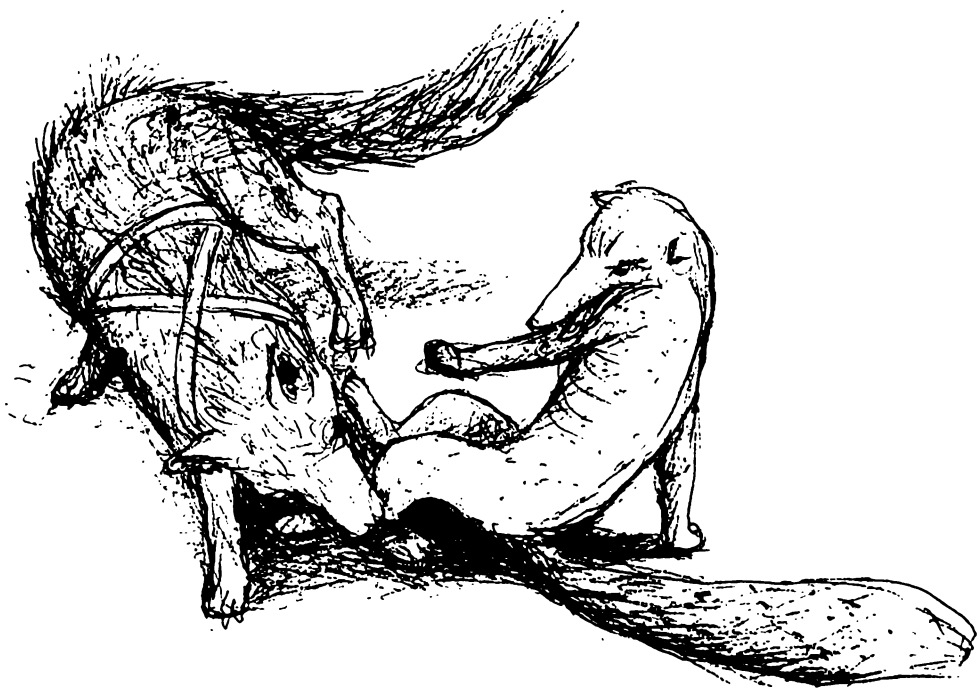
It seemed only a matter of seconds before Wolf would catch him.

jugular vein open. But it did not work this time. Fox anticipated Wolf's maneuver, jumped aside at the critical moment and, howling like a puppy in distress, ran away with Wolf close on his heels. It seemed only a matter of seconds before Wolf would catch him. Monkey Froozya, who was perched on a nearby branch, shrieked: 'Now Fox, now!' And exactly at that very moment, Fox dipped his tail in the sand, stopped, and hit Wolf with it right across the face. With his eyes full of sand, Wolf could not see a thing. 'Oh, you rotten beast,' he roared. He sat down on the ground to rub the sand out of his eyes.

'Well, Wolfie,' Fox said, 'should we make peace now? Or do you want to go on fighting? Come on, let's hear your voice!' He was about to lunge for Wolf's throat, when Wolf suddenly jumped and sank his teeth into Mykyta. Fox fell down.

'Aha, you lying wretch!' shouted Wolf. 'It's harvest time for you! You will now reap what you have sown! Now that you're in my hands, you'll pay for all your wrong and tricks!'

'Dear me, this sounds bad,' Fox thought. 'I might be dead here pretty soon. Let's try meekness.' To gain time, he began to plead: 'Uncle, have God in your heart! I'm a distant relative of yours, after all. Why are you so bent on killing me? It's not honorable for Wolf the Hungry and Fox Mykyta to be locked in a deadly fight like two inferior creatures. Ouch! That hurts! Dear uncle, hear me out. Please forgive me just this time and I swear that as long as I and all my family live, we'll serve you in peace. I'll do anything for you, no matter how difficult. I'll go without food and sleep. I'll provide you with geese, ducks, fish, lobsters and grouse. I'll fill your cupboards with venison. Consider too that I didn't want to fight with you. It took me a long time to decide on that. Just now I was careful not to hit you



'Ouch!' Fox cried out. 'Don't bite so hard! Show your mercy!'

too hard. I restrained myself. I'll do everything you wish. I'll even call myself a fool in public. Ouch! Don't bite so hard! Dear uncle! Show your mercy! Let me not pray in vain!

'That's enough!' Wolf growled. 'You're a thief, a liar and a swindler. You promise a doughnut, but what you give is just the hole! Though you swear to make us rich, I don't believe you.

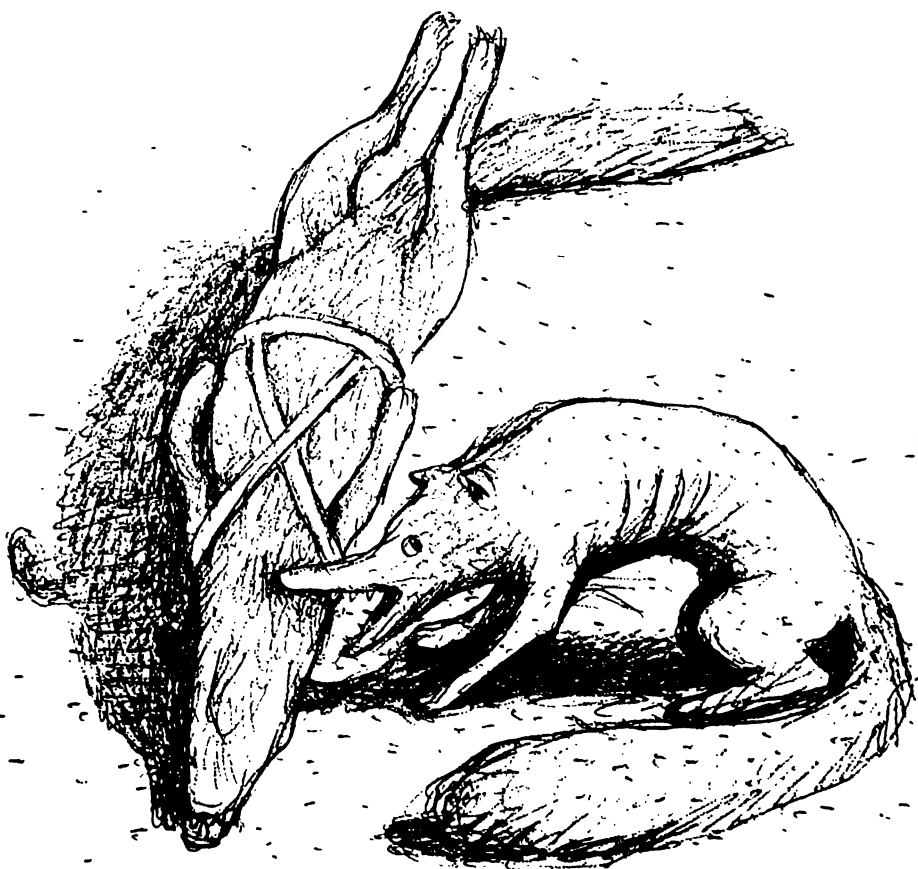
'You restrain yourself by throwing a cloud of sand into my eyes. No, lie as much as you wish, it won't change anything! I'm going to kill you! You cannot fool me. Pray quickly to God. Repent your sins because you will now be sent to join your ancestors.'

While he threatened Fox with words, Wolf wished he could get at his throat. But that was impossible, as he already had Mykyta's leg in his teeth. Meanwhile, Fox had devised a plan. He pretended to be praying while he was pushing his hind leg under Wolf's belly. Then aiming at his spleen, Fox gave such a powerful kick that Wolf saw stars and red circles. He opened his mouth and yelled: 'Ouch!'

That very instant, Fox pulled his leg out and gave Wolf another kick. This time Wolf blacked out and collapsed. Fox jumped on him and grabbed him by the throat. 'Now it's your turn to beg for mercy! You'll be paid for every time you've betrayed me!' barked Fox. Wolf foamed at the mouth and thrashed about with his legs. Then losing strength rapidly, he just growled.

When King Lion saw that Wolf was near death, he roared: 'Enough! Enough! This time the victor is Fox Mykyta!'

When he heard this, Fox stopped squeezing Wolf's throat and said, 'My King, I obey your royal order. It

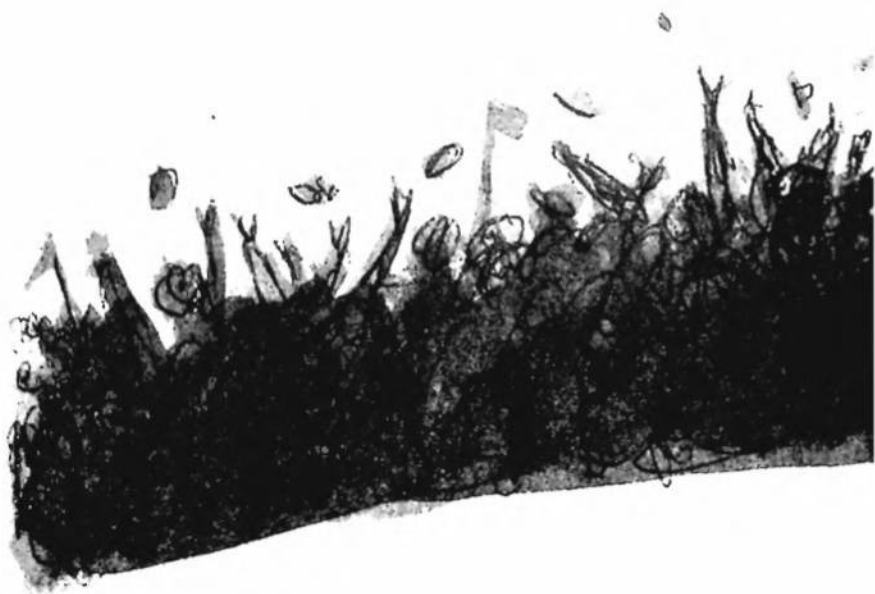


Fox jumped on Wolf and grabbed him by the throat.

is kind and wise. Besides, I don't want his death. I never take revenge on a weakling. I only wanted to get rid of the stain on my honor.'

His words were greeted by a prolonged ovation from the crowd of assembled beasts. Fox bowed to them humbly. Monkey Froozya appeared with a laurel wreath which she placed on Fox Mykyta's head. Everybody congratulated Fox and called him a great champion. Even those who had hated him and wanted him dead, now cheered and howled in adoration as he was being crowned: 'Hurray, may Mykyta live many years!' They lifted him upon their shoulders and sang, 'For he's a jolly good fellow!'

Fox Mykyta, our hero, was moved to tears. He bowed in all directions. Then he went down on his knees before the royal throne to hear the King's proclamation.



'Get up, Mykyta,' King Lion Tsar Lev said. 'In defending your honor, you have done a wonderful job. Your tarnished name has been cleansed. Let bygones be bygones and let's all begin again. The King forgives and is willing to forget all your sins. You've earned my love and respect. We have had too much hatred, too many quarrels and too much bloodshed. From now on, you will work for the common good as a member of the Royal Council. Accept this great honor from me. I am appointing you Chancellor and Keeper of the Royal Seal. Since you are able to stand by your convictions and can defend your own rights, you will also defend the State, I trust. Whatever you write, the King will not erase. Whatever you advise, the King will order to be carried out. But Fox, do everything conscientiously and justly.'

Fox was very moved and said: 'My King and father, I, too, want to forget all the old quarrels and hatreds.'



I am truly sorry for them. How can I ever repay you? Although I'm not very strong, I will dedicate myself entirely to your good and the State's welfare. Now, I have one request: please, allow me to go home for a day. My wife and little children must be crying and longing to see me. I would like to tell them the happy news as soon as possible.'

'Go to your family, my friend!' the King replied. 'The Queen and I wish to see their sadness disappear. It's time for cheerfulness and celebration! Go, stay at home three days and then come back together with your dear ones. I want to welcome them here.'

The story ends. As Fox takes leave,
He wipes his eyes upon his sleeve
And says to those who read this tale:
'May you be happy, free of woes!
And as for your relentless foes,
May all their plots against you fail!'



Biographical notes

The author

Ivan Franko (1856-1916), a great writer of the Ukrainian revolutionary, democratic movement, was born and raised in the province of Galicia in Western Ukraine, then under the rule of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The son of a fairly prosperous peasant and blacksmith, he developed at an early age a deep, spiritual attachment to his native soil. Much of his literary output – like that of his contemporary Emile Zola – was dedicated to exposing through a naturalistic portrayal the difficult life of working people. *Boa Constrictor* (1878) and *Boryslav smiyet'sya* (*Boryslav Smiles*, 1882) are prose works describing the difficult lot of the peasant community in its changeover to an industrial way of life. Many of the stories he wrote at this time deal with the fates of Ukrainian peasants forced to leave their land to seek work in the cities.

Franko always wrote in the Ukrainian vernacular in an effort to reach his people and refine and develop the language into an instrument for literary and scientific purposes. Although he was a nationalist, he remained politically non-doctrinaire and took a critical attitude toward Marxism. His sympathies lay with the kind of socialist reform advocated by the famous London Fabians of the period, and he greatly admired one of its founders, George Bernard Shaw. Along with them, he believed in the gradual spread of socialism by peaceful means.

He was imprisoned for his progressive ideals three times in his life. Out of this experience, he wrote *Na dni* (*At the Bottom*, 1880) and *Do svitla* (*Towards the Light*, 1890). He also completed some short poems and stories on Jewish life in Ukraine while serving a sentence in 1890. This was the first time in Ukrainian literature that Jews were treated in a sympathetic spirit and from a broadly humanitarian point of view that avoided stereotypes.

His poetic work is extensive and versatile. The celebrated collection of poems *Z vershyn i nyzyn* (*From Heights and Depths*, 1887) reflected both his love for his country and his socialist ideal for liberating it from foreign domination. His verse epic *Moysey* (*Moses*, 1905), in which the biblical story becomes a symbol for the fate of his people, is a jewel in Ukrainian literature.

In 1890, Franko began to bring out poems for children. The first was *Lys Mykyta*, the most lasting in popularity of all his works. The next year he issued an adaptation for children of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. This was followed in 1903 by a book of fables *Koly zviru hovoryly* (*When the Animals Talked*).

In addition to his own writings, he translated works by the great writers of western Europe – Shakespeare, Shelley, Byron, Goethe, Dante, Homer, Heine – to make them available to his people in their own language.

Franko exercised an immense influence on the cultural and political life of his country and his great humanitarianism has made him a national hero. In a public speech given on the 25th anniversary of his literary and political activity, he stated, 'I have always laid the utmost stress on the attainment of common human rights, for I know that in so doing, a people will best conquer national rights for themselves. In all my activity I have desired to be regarded not so much as a scholar, a poet, a publicist, as to be, above all, a man.'

The artist

When William Kurelek died at the age of 50 in 1977, he had become an exceptional figure in art, both in Canada and abroad. His farm background, which he re-created so palpably through painting, provides the subject matter for his four famous children's books: *A Prairie Boy's Winter* (1973), *A Prairie Boy's Summer* (1975), *Lumberjack* (1974) and *A Northern Nativity* (1976). Published by Tundra Books, they have won 22 national and international awards and been translated into six languages.

Kurelek was born and raised on the Canadian prairies during the harsh years of the Depression. His father, a Ukrainian, came to Canada, first settling on a grain farm in Alberta, then moving to a dairy farm in Manitoba not far from the United States border. When Kurelek was 18, he worked in the bush of Northern Ontario and Quebec as a lumberjack in order to finance his studies at the University of Manitoba. After obtaining his degree, he returned to the North a second time to earn enough to study painting in Europe. This lumber camp world, now passed into history, he re-created in *Lumberjack*.

Kurelek's childhood was much less idyllic than the paintings that come out of his rural experience suggest. His autobiography *Someone With Me* (1973) tells a story of an affection-starved boy, poverty, loneliness and a difficult young manhood that eventually led him in 1952 to commit himself to a psychiatric hospital in England where he received treatment for three and a half years and experienced conversion to Roman Catholicism and the faith to go on living and creating. After his return to Canada, his paintings began to appear in art galleries and, in 1960, he had his first one-man show at Toronto's Isaacs Gallery.

As a convert to Roman Catholicism, he was sensitive to all religions. In addition to his Christian paintings — of all denominations — he painted the history of Jewish people in Canada. Kurelek always felt close to all people regardless of their ethnic origin, and he showed it in his paintings of Eskimos, French Canadians, Poles, the Irish and, of course, Ukrainians. Had he lived, the list would have been longer, for he often spoke of painting all the ethnic groups of Canada. In the years immediately preceding his death,

he often expressed gratitude that his paintings had reached and touched so many people.

Throughout the 60s and up until his death, Kurelek enjoyed steadily increasing critical and financial success. His children's books have been published in the United States, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, Holland, Greenland and Norway — where a 70,000 one-volume edition of *A Prairie Boy's Winter* and *A Prairie Boy's Summer* has made him almost as well known as in his native Canada. A German edition is planned for this year. In addition to his children's books, Tundra Books also published *Fields*, a portfolio of 12 landscape paintings. Other books written and/or illustrated by William Kurelek are: *W.O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind*; *Jewish Life in Canada*; *The Last of the Arctic*; *O Toronto*; *The Passion of Christ*; and *Kurelek's Canada*.

Today, William Kurelek's paintings hang in major museums and art galleries in Canada, the United States and Europe. He is survived by his wife, Jean, and their four children.

The translator

Bohdan Melnyk was born in 1914 in Plavucha Velyka, Western Ukraine, and spent his childhood at home, helping his parents on their small farm. During the post-war period, the Ukrainian educational system lacked proper facilities and qualified teachers, so his father hired private tutors to prepare him for high school. At the age of 10, he was sent to the classical gymnasium in the city of Ternopil, despite severe economic depression and little opportunity for educated Ukrainians in their foreign-ruled land. It was not until after the outbreak of World War II that he obtained his teaching degree and a teaching position. However, in 1944 he was forced to flee to Germany. Four years earlier his parents and teenage sisters had been exiled to Siberia, where they died.

During these years of hardship, he devoted himself to learning English. He studied at a German school for interpreters, then in 1948, went to England where he held various jobs as a manual laborer. Three years later, he and his German-born wife, Elizabeth, immigrated to Canada and settled in St. Catharines, Ontario. In 1956, they became Canadian citizens. Their son, Roman, is a doctoral candidate in Physiological Psychology at the University of Toronto.

For the past 25 years, Melnyk has held a full-time job with a paper company to support his family while devoting all his free time to writing poetry and translating Ukrainian classics into English. He is presently writing his autobiography.

The author

Ivan Franko (1856-1916) is a giant of Ukrainian literature and politics. Imprisoned for socialist activities while a student, he never stopped working for the intellectual and political emancipation of the Ukrainian peasant. His enormous literary output includes novels, poetry and journalism, plus translations of Homer, Heine, Byron, Cervantes and Goethe intended to acquaint his people with Western culture. His long narrative poem *Moysey (Moses)* is considered his greatest work, but his joyful *Lys Mykyta* is most loved and quoted.

The artist

William Kurelek (1927-1977) grew up on the Canadian prairies where his Ukrainian-born father owned a farm. His boyhood provided him with subject matter for many paintings. His four children's books published by Tundra Books (*A Prairie Boy's Winter*, *A Prairie Boy's Summer*, *Lumberjack* and *A Northern Nativity*) have won 22 national and international awards and been translated into six languages. His illustrations for *Fox Mykyta* are lively and spirited evocations of the animal life he understood so well.

The translator

Born in Plavucha Velyka and educated in Ternopil in Western Ukraine, Bohdan Melnyk taught school until he was forced to flee the country in 1944. He lived in Germany and England before immigrating to Canada in 1951, at the age of 37. In addition to holding a full-time job, he writes poetry and translates Ukrainian literature, concentrating on the works of his favorite writer, Ivan Franko. He and his wife, Elizabeth, live in St. Catharines, Ontario. They have one son, Roman.

No single work in the English language plays a role parallel to that of Ivan Franko's *Lys Mykyta* in Ukrainian. In French, only Lafontaine's *Fables* compare in popularity. Since *Lys Mykyta* was first published in 1890, it has gone through more than 20 huge editions. In 1944, while Eastern Europe lay devastated by German and Russian armies, a new edition of *Lys Mykyta* appeared in Krakow.

To Ukrainian children it is as well known as Mother Goose is to English children, but it is also so cherished by adults that many know the whole poem by heart — 607 stanzas of six lines each, a total of 3,642 lines! Obviously, any work so intensely loved is more than just a good story that amuses and intrigues. To Ukrainians, *Lys Mykyta* represents the independence and effectiveness of the individual. Fox stands alone and wins against all odds; he never surrenders to fear or pessimism, even with the mob clamoring for his death and the noose tightening around his neck; he turns the weapons of his attackers back upon them and does it with style and wit; he shows that the individual counts and can triumph no matter how powerful or numerous the enemy.

The origins of the Reynard the Fox stories are lost in antiquity. During the medieval period, versions surfaced all over Europe in which Reynard was seen as the Devil. But he was a delightfully devilish devil whose roguish humor won him affection even while his behavior shocked moral sensibilities. Ivan Franko followed the story line of Goethe's *Der Reineke Fuchs*, supplementing it with Ukrainian folk elements, simplifying it, sharpening the humor and turning it into a felicitous work of art. His version is the most modern and the one closest to our own understanding. Its publication in English is long overdue.

Ukrainian-born Bohdan Melnyk has devoted much of his 27 years since coming to Canada to translating the works of Ivan Franko. He first translated *Lys Mykyta* into English verse, paralleling the original almost line for line, before creating this charming light-hearted prose version that is as fun-filled as Franko's. How fortunate that he had William Kurelek to illustrate it!