

THE FOX AND THE CROW

Once upon a time . . . a big crow stole a lump of cheese and went to perch on a branch of a tree to eat it in peace. A passing fox sniffed the air and stopped below the tree, his mouth watering.

"Cheese?" he said. "Mmm. I'd love . . . if only I could . . ." he said to himself, greedily, wondering how to get hold of the morsel.

After a moment or two, he spoke to the crow: "You are a fine crow! I've never seen anyone so big and strong. What lovely thick shiny feathers you have! Your slender legs; the sign of a noble bird and you also have a regal beak.

That's it: the beak of a king! You ought to be crowned King of the Birds!"

When the crow heard such glowing praise of his beauty, he stretched to his full length and triumphantly flapped his wings.

In his softest voice, the fox went on: "What lovely eyes you have. You don't seem to have a single fault! You're quite perfect." The crow had never been flattered so much in all his life. "Though I haven't heard your voice yet," went on the fox, "I expect that such a perfect creature like yourself can have nothing less than a wonderful singing voice!"

The crow had, till then, been blissfully drinking in the fox's praise, but he felt a prick of doubt at the sweet words about his voice. He had never heard that crows were fine singers! Of course, being a very fine crow, perhaps that meant he had a beautiful voice as well. The fox could be right! And the crow gazed down at the fox as he said: "Now then, King of the Birds, let me hear a sweet song . . ."

Throwing caution to the winds, the crow opened his beak and, taking a deep breath, loudly cawed: "Cra, Cra, Cra!" The lump of cheese fell through the air and the fox caught it neatly in his jaws. "I deserved that!" he told himself as he enjoyed the titbit. Then, licking his lips, he again spoke to the crow on the branch.

"Silly crow. You're the ugliest bird I've ever seen, you have the worst voice I've ever heard, but most of all, you're the most stupid bird I've ever met! And thanks for the cheese." And off he trotted well satisfied with himself..