

RUSSIAN FOLK TALES

From
Alexander Afanasiev's Collection
Illustrated by A.Kurkin

Raduga Publishers
Moscow
1985

English translation © Raduga Publishers 1985

The Animals in the Pit

There was once an old couple whose only possession was a hog. One day the hog went off to the forest to eat acorns. On the way he met a wolf. "Hog, hog, where are you going?" "To the forest to eat acorns." "Take me with you." "I would," said the hog, "but there's a deep, wide pit on the way, and you won't be able to jump over it." "Oh, yes, I will," said the wolf. So off they set. On they went through the forest until they came to the pit. "Go on, jump," said the wolf. The hog jumped right over to the other side. Then the wolf jumped and fell straight in. The hog ate his fill of acorns and went home. The next day the hog went off to the forest again. On the way he met a bear. "Hog, hog, where are you going?" "To the forest to eat acorns." "Take me with you," said the bear. "I would, but there's a deep, wide pit on the way, and you won't be able to jump over it." "I'll jump over it alright," said the bear. They came to the pit. The hog jumped right over to the other side. But the bear jumped and fell straight in. The hog ate his fill of acorns and went home.

The third day the hog went off to the forest again to eat acorns. On the way he met Squint-Eye the hare. "Good-day to you, hog!" "Good-day, Squint-Eye!" "Where are you going?" "To the forest to eat acorns." "Take me with you." "No, Squint-Eye, there's a deep, wide pit on the way, and you won't be able to jump over it." "What a thing to say! Of course I will!" Off they went and came to the pit. The hog jumped right over to the other side. The hare jumped and landed in the pit. Then the hog ate his fill of acorns and went home.

The fourth day the hog went off to the forest to eat acorns. On the way he met a fox, who also asked the hog to take her with him. "No," said the hog, "there's a deep, wide pit on the way, and you won't be able to jump over it." "Oh, yes, I will," said the fox. And she landed in the pit as well. So now there were four of them down there, and they began racking their brains about how to get food.

"Let's howl without taking a breath for as long as we can and eat the one who stops first," said the fox. So they began to howl. The hare was the first to stop, and the fox went on the longest. So they seized the hare, tore him to pieces and ate him. They grew hungry again and agreed to howl as long as they could and eat the one that stopped first. "If I stop first, you must eat me," said the fox. So they began to howl. This time the wolf was the first to give up, he just couldn't go on any longer. So the fox and the bear seized him, tore him to pieces and ate him.

But the fox cheated the bear. She gave him only a little of the meat and hid the rest to eat when he wasn't looking. The bear grew hungry again and said: "Where do you get food, Mistress Fox?" "Don't you know, Master Bruin? Stick your paw in your ribs, grab hold of them and yank, then you'll find out." The bear did as he was told, yanked at his ribs, and that was the end of him. Now the fox was all alone. After feasting off the bear, she began to feel hungry again.

Now there was a tree by the pit, and in that tree a thrush was building a nest. The fox sat in the pit watching the thrush and said to it: "Thrush, thrush, what are you doing?" "Building a nest." "What for?" "For my children." "Get me some food,

Thrush. If you don't, I'll gobble your children up." The thrush racked its brains about how to get the fox some food. It flew to the village and brought back a chicken. The fox gobbled up the chicken and said again: "Thrush, thrush, you got me some food, didn't you?" "Yes, I did." "Well, now get me some drink." The thrush racked its brains about how to get the fox some drink. It flew to the village and brought back some water. The fox drank her fill and said: "Thrush, thrush, you got me some food, didn't you?" "Yes, I did." "And you got me some drink, didn't you?" "Yes, I did." "Well, now get me out of the pit."

The thrush racked its brains about how to get the fox out. Then it dropped sticks into the pit, so many that the fox was able to climb over them out of the pit, lay down by the tree and stretched out. "Now," she said, "you got me some food, didn't you, thrush?" "Yes, I did." "And you got me some drink, didn't you?" "Yes, I did." "And you got me out of the pit, didn't you?" "Yes, I did." "Well, now make me laugh." The thrush racked its brains about how to make the fox laugh. "I'll fly away," it said, "and you follow me. " So the thrush flew off to the village and perched on the gate of a rich man's house, while the fox lay down by the gate. Then the thrush began to call out: "Mistress, mistress, give me a knob of lard! Mistress, mistress, give me a knob of lard!" Out raced the dogs and tore the fox to pieces.

Oh, I was there and drank mead-wine, it wetted my lips, but not my tongue. They gave me to wear a cloak so gay, but the crows cawed loudly on their way: "Cloak so gay! Cloak so gay!" "Throw it away," I thought they said, so I did straightway. They gave me to wear a cap of red, but the crows cawed loudly as they sped: "Cap of red! Cap of red!" "Cap off head," I thought they said, so I pulled it off—and was left with naught.

Translated by Kathleen Cook