



REYNARD THE FOX

A NEW TRANSLATION

James Simpson

Illustrations by Edith E. Newman



LIVERIGHT PUBLISHING CORPORATION
A DIVISION OF W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
NEW YORK LONDON



2015



PART I

*Reynard the Fox is summoned to the
court of the lion king, three times,
to face charges. Two of the
messengers learn the hard way
not to mess with the fox*



1

The lion, King of all beasts, commands all animals to come to his feast and his court




he woods were fresh, the trees adorned with blossoms, and the ground covered with herbs and sweet-smelling flowers. The birds sang harmoniously. It was the feast of Pentecost!¹ The lion, noble King of all beasts, wished to hold open court over the days of the feast.

Summons to court was made throughout his realm, and every animal was commanded to appear. All beasts came, both great and small, except Reynard the Fox. Reynard knew that he was guilty on many counts involving other animals who would appear at court. So he didn't dare show up.

¹ In Christianity, the religious feast of Pentecost commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit to the Apostles and others fifty days after Easter (see Acts 2:1–31).

The first accusation against Reynard,
made by Isengrim the Wolf

 Isengrim the Wolf came with his family and supporters and stood in front of the King. "High and mighty prince, my lord King, I beg this of you: that by your great power, justice, and mercy, you'll pity me, given the seriousness of the crimes that Reynard the Fox has committed against me and my wife. He entered my house against my wife's will, and relieved himself on my children so as to blind them! He and I agreed on a day when Reynard should come to excuse himself for this crime and swear by the holy saints that he wasn't guilty of it. But when the book of the saints was brought out, Reynard had second thoughts: he returned to his hole, as if he didn't care a thing about the matter. Dear King, many of the animals here at your court know this to be true. And yet Reynard has wronged me in many other respects too: no man alive could tell you all that I now leave untold. But I swear to avenge the shame he's inflicted on my wife. For that he'll pay, and dearly!"

The accusation of Courtoys the Dog



fter this speech, a little dog named Courtoys stood up and complained to the King. In the cold winter, when the frost was hard and he'd been starved, he had nothing but a sausage left. Reynard stole it from him.

Then Tybert the Cat spoke up. He advanced angrily, springing among them. "My lord the King, I hear that Reynard is accused of serious crimes. No one present has more to do to clear his name. The matter Courtoys complains about happened many years ago, and even if I don't lay charges, that sausage was mine. I'd got it one night at a mill, when the miller was fast asleep. If Courtoys had any claim to it, it came through me."

Then the panther spoke. "Tybert, maybe we should accuse Reynard: he's a murderer, a scavenger, and a thief. He cares more about eating the leg of a fat hen than he does about the love of anyone here—even our lord the King—and he's prepared to lose his reputation and honor for it.

"I'll tell you what I saw him do only yesterday to Cuwaert the Hare, who stands here by the King's protection. Reynard promised Cuwaert that he'd teach him his Apostles' Creed and

make him a virtuous chaplain.² Reynard required Cuwaert to sit between his legs and sing, crying out, '*Credo, Credo*.'³

"I happened to be passing by, and I heard the song. I came nearer and saw that Master Reynard couldn't care less about what he'd begun reading and singing. Instead, he began to play his old tricks, for he'd caught Cuwaert by the throat.

"If I hadn't been passing, he would've killed Cuwaert then and there: just look, you can see the wound still fresh on him. Truly, my lord King, you must on no account allow this crime to go unpunished and permit the criminal Reynard to go scot-free. If you don't exact justice according to the judgment of your own men, this is what'll happen: your children will be criticized and blamed on account of this for many years to come."

"Truly, panther," said Isengrim, "you're telling the truth: it's right that justice be done, for those who want only to live in peace."

2 The Apostles' Creed is one of the statements of belief for the early Christian Church.

3 "I believe, I believe." "Credo" is the first word of the Latin form of the Apostles' Creed.

Grimbart the Badger, the fox's nephew,
speaks up for Reynard, in the
presence of the King



Grimbart the Badger was Reynard's sister's son. He spoke angrily: "Sir Isengrim, you're malicious. It's a common proverb that an enemy's mouth seldom speaks well, and the charge you lay against my Uncle Reynard proves it. I wish you'd agree to this: that whoever of you two has sinned most against the other should hang by the neck like a thief on a tree. If Reynard were as tight with the King as you are with this court, he'd not consider it sufficient that you merely begged his forgiveness. You have bitten my uncle with your frightening teeth more times than I can tell.

"All the same, I'll go over some incidents that I know well. Don't you remember the fish Reynard threw down from the fisherman's basket, when you followed from afar? You ate the delicious fish alone, giving him no more than the skeleton and bones that you couldn't eat. You did the same thing with the fat slice of bacon that tasted so good. When my uncle inquired about his share, you answered him scornfully: 'Pretty young Reynard, I'll gladly give you your part,' but Uncle Reynard didn't get a scrap.

And he's the one who'd courageously won the bacon, since the man had thrown him in a sack, so that he barely escaped with his life.⁴ Reynard has suffered many such episodes because of Isengrim.

"My lords! Does this strike you as right? Yet there's more! Isengrim also complains that my Uncle Reynard has wronged him by mistreating his wife. It's true that my uncle had some dalliance with her, but that was seven years ago, before Isengrim was married! And if Reynard treated her lovingly and courteously, what's the harm in that? She was soon over it. There should be no accusation whatsoever about this incident. Were Isengrim a wise man, he would've let it go. He gains no honor by slandering his wife in this way, and she herself makes no accusation.

"But now Cuwaert the Hare also makes an accusation, which seems to me ill-advised: if he failed to learn his lesson, shouldn't Reynard his master beat him? If scholars weren't beaten and told off for their laziness, they'd never learn!

"And then Courtoys the Dog complains—Courtoys, of all animals! He'd got hold of a sausage in winter, when such things are hard to come by. Courtoys would've been smarter to have kept quiet here, since he'd stolen the sausage in the first place: *male quaesisti, male perdidisti!*⁵ It's only right that what was ill-gained be ill-lost. Who'll blame Reynard, if he took stolen goods from a thief? Whoever understands the law and can tell right from wrong knows that Reynard was in the right. And whoever is as wellborn as Uncle Reynard knows how to handle stolen goods. No nobleman would think it remotely wrong or illegal if Rey-

4 These are both stories recounted in other branches of the Reynard material.

5 "You acquired it badly, you badly lost it."

nard had hanged Courtoys when he found him with the sausage. The only reason for not hanging him would be to avoid insult to the crown. So, not wanting to do justice without permission, and out of respect for the King, Reynard didn't hang Courtoys. And what's his reward for this? Not a thing! What wounds him most is that *he's* the one being accused.

"My Uncle Reynard is a noble and honest creature. He detests falsehood of any kind. He does nothing without the advice of his priest. I declare it openly that, since my lord the King proclaimed his peace, Reynard has never intended harm to a soul. He eats only once a day, and lives as a recluse. He punishes his body and wears a hair shirt. It's more than a year since he's eaten flesh. And as those said who came from him just now, he's abandoned and given up his castle Wickedhole. He's built a hermitage for himself, where he now lives. No more hunting, no more lust for flesh. Instead, he lives by charity and takes nothing but what men give him out of charity, doing continual penance for his sins. He's become pale and lean from praying and self-disciplining vigils. Peace with God is all he wants."

As Grimbart, Reynard's nephew, stood and delivered this speech, the court saw Chauncleer the Cock coming down the hill. He carried a dead hen on a bier. Reynard had bitten its head off, and the evidence had to be shown to the King, so he'd know the truth.



The court saw Chaunticleer the Cock coming down the hill.
He carried a dead hen on a bier.

The cock accuses Reynard



Chaunticleer stepped up and piteously clapped his hands and feathers together. On each side of the coffin walked two sorrowful hens, Cantart and the good hen Crayant. They were the two prettiest hens between Holland and the Ardennes. Each bore a burning candle, which was long and straight. These hens were Coppen's sisters. They wept and wept: "We grieve for our dear sister Coppen!"

Two young hens bore the bier, and they cackled and wept so loudly because of the death of Coppen their mother that you could hear their wailing from miles away. They all came in front of the King.

Chaunticleer spoke for them: "Merciful lord, my lord the King, please hear our accusation. You'll be shocked by the frightful damage that Reynard has inflicted upon me and my children, who stand here before you!"

"It was in the beginning of April, when the weather was beautiful. I was feeling courageous and proud, partly because I'm so nobly born, and partly because I had eight handsome sons and seven beautiful daughters hatched by my wife. All were strong and plump, and all protected by a well-walled yard. There were six huge guard dogs in a shed. They'd torn the skin from many

animals, and so my own children were unafraid. Reynard the thief cast a greedy eye at my family, since they were so complacently certain that he couldn't touch them.

"How often has this fearsome thief crept carefully around our wall and lay in wait for us! How often have the dogs been set on him to chase him away! They once leapt on him by the riverbank, which cost him for his theft. I saw his skin smoking from the bite, but he escaped all the same. I hope God repays him someday.

"So we were free of Reynard for a long while, until finally he came dressed like a religious hermit. He brought me a letter to read, sealed by the King himself. This letter declared that the King had made peace throughout his realm, and that no beast or bird should harm or damage any other. What's more, Reynard said to me that he'd become a monastic recluse, and announced that he would undertake serious penance for his sins. He showed me his pilgrim's coat, with his fur and hair shirt beneath it.⁶

"*'Sir Chaunticleer,'* he went on, *'you have no need to fear me anymore. Take no special notice of me, for I'll never eat flesh again. I've grown so old that I'd rather work on the fate of my soul. I'll now say goodbye, for I've yet to say my monastic prayers for midday, midafternoon, and evensong.'*⁷

"So Reynard left, saying his creed. He then hid himself under a hedge. Relieved and delighted, I forgot my anxieties and went

6 Reynard hypocritically pretends to be a religious pilgrim, who undertakes an arduous pilgrimage as a form of punishment for sins committed, in the hope of pardon.

7 Reynard pretends to be performing the so-called canonical hours, prayers to be made in monastic communities at set times of the day and night.

to my children and clucked them all together, after which I foolishly took them for a stroll outside my wall. Bad things follow from such thoughtless behavior, for Reynard came creeping between us and the gate. He snatched one of my children and stuffed him in his pouch, which has caused us such terrible grief. For after he'd tasted just one chick, no hunter or dog could keep him from all of us. He's lain in wait night and day so cunningly that he's stolen many of my children. Of fifteen, I have only four left! The thief has killed them!

“And just yesterday the body of Coppen my daughter, who lies here upon this bier, was recovered by the dogs. I lay this charge in your presence, gracious King, that you might take pity on me for the unreasonable harm I've suffered through the loss of my children.”

The King calls for counsel



he King spoke: “Sir badger, listen to this latest charge against your uncle the hermit: if I live a year he’ll pay dearly, despite all his praying and fasting!

“Now listen to me, Sir Chaunticleer: Your accusation is sufficient. Your daughter we give over to death, since we can’t bring her back to life. We entrust her to God, as we sing her vigil mass and bury her reverently. We’ll then take counsel among these lords, deciding how we might best enforce justice for this terrible murder, and how we might bring this false thief to law.”

Then they began the service for the dead (*Placebo domino*),⁸ with the appropriate verses, which would take me too long to repeat now. When the requiem mass had ended, she was buried, with a marble gravestone polished as brightly as any mirror, in which an epitaph in large letters had been incised:

**Coppen, Chaunticleer’s daughter, whom Reynard the
Fox bit, lies buried here. Lament her death, for she was
shamefully murdered.**

⁸ “I will please the Lord.” An abbreviated form of the Office of the Dead, drawn from a Psalm text (Vulgate 114:9).

The King then sent for his lords and the wisest of his council, to deliberate on Reynard the Fox's punishment for this dreadful murder. The beasts concluded that they should send for Reynard. There was no way he could evade a summons to appear in the King's court and hear judgment against him.

They also decided that Bruin the Bear should be the messenger.

All this seemed good and proper to the King, who addressed Bruin the Bear: "Sir Bruin, I want you to carry this message. But take good care of yourself, for Reynard is wicked and dangerous. He has lots of tricks up his sleeve, and he'll lie, flatter, and do nothing but ponder how he can deceive and mock you."

Bruin replied: "Good lord, it'd be a bit late in the day for the fox to deceive me! I've learned my law cases. I think he comes too late to make a fool of me."

Thus Bruin left merrily. We can all regret that he didn't return in quite so merry a mood.

How Bruin the Bear fares with Reynard the Fox



Now Bruin was on his way to the fox, fully convinced that the fox couldn't outwit him. He entered a dark forest, into which Reynard tended to take a side track when he was being hunted. Beside it were a high mountain and a clearing, which Bruin had to traverse on his way to Wickedhole. Reynard had many escape holes, but Wickedhole was the best and most secure. He hid there whenever he needed to, and whenever he was afraid.

Now, when Bruin arrived at Wickedhole, he found the gate securely shut. So he went and sat upon his tail in front of the gate.

"Reynard, are you at home? It's Bruin here! The King has sent me to you. You must come to court to plead your case. The King has sworn by God that if you don't come, or if I fail to bring you with me to receive sentence, you're a dead man. He'll either hang you or set you on the wheel. Reynard, do as I suggest: come to court!"

Reynard lay just within the gate enjoying the sun, as he often did, when he heard Bruin. He went directly into a hole. Wickedhole was full of holes—here one and there another, and over

there yet another narrow, crooked, and long hole with many exits. Reynard opened and shut these according to need. Whenever he brought prey home, or whenever he knew that anyone was after him for his crimes, he ran into his secret chambers. There he hid from his enemies so that they couldn't find him. In this way he'd tricked many beasts that had tried to capture him. So Reynard reflected on how best to bamboozle the bear, and how to save trouble for himself.

He emerged from his hole: "Welcome, Uncle Bruin!⁹ I heard you before, but I was saying my prayers for evensong, and so tarried a little, dear uncle. Whoever sent you over this long hill did you no favors. I can't thank him, for I see that you're so exhausted that the sweat is running down your face. Your trip is completely unnecessary, since I was coming to court tomorrow. But I'm happy you've come all the same, because your wise counsel will help me in court. Couldn't the King find some less important messenger than you? That's amazing, because, apart from the King, you're the noblest and wealthiest figure in court.

"I wish we were already at court, but I'm afraid I won't be able to come just now, for I've eaten so much food that I fear my stomach will burst. The food was new to me, which made me eat more of it."

"Dear nephew, what food was it that's filled you up?"


"Dear uncle, how would it help you if I told you what I ate? I eat but simple food. A poor man is no lord—you can see that in

9 Reynard frequently calls other animals with no possible family relation to him "uncle" or "aunt." He does this to insinuate intimacy and trust. More often than not, the animals whom he addresses in this way will soon become his victims.

me. We poor folk must oftentimes eat what we'd prefer not to, if we had better food. They were great honeycombs that I was obliged to eat because of hunger. They've made my belly so great that I'm afraid I'll burst."

Bruin answered immediately: "Reynard, what on earth are you talking about? Do you think honey is so worthless? We ought to praise and love honey as the very best of foods! Dear Reynard, help me get a great swag of that honey. I'll be a true friend and stick with you if you help me to have just a part of it."

Bruin eats the honey

ncle Bruin, I think you're pulling my leg."
"So help me God, Reynard, no. I wouldn't joke around with you!"

So Reynard replied: "Is it true, then, that you love honey so much? I'll give you enough honey that ten bears wouldn't be able to eat it at one meal. But there's one condition: that I can secure your friendship."

"Don't say ten bears, nephew Reyner," said the bear; "that wouldn't work at all: if I had all the honey between here and Portugal, I'd gobble it up all alone."

"Okay, so here's the deal. There's a farmer called Lantfert who lives next door. He's got so much honey that you couldn't eat it in seven years. It's all yours, if you're prepared to be my friend and help me against my enemies at court."

Bruin the Bear promised him: if his belly was full, he'd be loyal to him above everyone else, for sure. Reynard the trickster laughed at this: "Okay, if you're after seven barrels of honey, they're yours. Leave it to me."

This pleased the bear so well and made him laugh so much that he could hardly stand. Reynard thought to himself all the

while: *Things are going swimmingly; I'll lead him where he'll be laughing on the other side of his face.* He continued to Bruin: "Down to business; I'm going the extra mile for you, Bruin, just so you understand how fond I am of you. There's no one who'd work so tirelessly for you."

The bear thanked him, but thought that Reynard was dragging his feet.

"Now, uncle," said Reynard, "we'll need to go a fair distance. Follow me and I'll introduce you to as much honey as you can carry." The fox meant by this "as much honey as you can carry while being beaten," but the poor dimwit didn't spot the deeper meaning.

So they took themselves off to Lantfert's yard, where Bruin was deliriously happy.

Consider a moment this fellow Lantfert the carpenter. It was true what men said about him: he was a strong carpenter working with serious timber. Just the other day he'd brought a great oak into his yard, and begun to cut it. As carpenters do, he'd hammered two wedges in the oak, to force it open. Reynard was particularly happy to see the wedges, since they suited his plan perfectly. So he said to the bear, laughing all the while: "Just take a look at this tree; it's chockablock full of honey. See if you can get into it, but be careful not to eat too much! Honeycombs might be sweet and delicious, but take care not to eat too many. Eat them moderately, so you don't suffer indigestion. Dear uncle, it's me who'd get the blame if the honeycombs harmed you in any way."

"Cousin Reynard, don't be down in the mouth on my account! Do you take me for a fool? We should exercise moderation in all we eat."

"That's true; why should I be worried for you? Go as far as you can and creep into the tree."

Bruin the Bear rushed toward the honey, and stepped in with his two front feet, putting his head into the cleft of the tree. Reynard sprang lightly back and knocked a wedge out. At this point nothing could help Uncle Bruin, neither flattery nor reproach: he was stuck fast in the tree.

In this way the nephew brought his uncle into prison through trickery, so that the uncle couldn't escape at all. Brawn nor brain, foot nor head: nothing was going to help him.

Bruin's strength and courage were of no help at all. He saw that he was trapped, and began to roar and bray and scratch with his hind legs. He made such a racket that Lantfert the carpenter rushed out, knowing nothing of what this hullabaloo amounted to, carrying a sharp hook in his hand. Bruin remained fixed and frightened in the cleft of the tree, which held his head and forefeet fast. He twisted, he wrestled, and he roared, but it was no good: he was clueless about how to pull himself out.

From afar Reynard saw Lantfert the carpenter approaching. "How's the honey?" he asked Bruin. "Is it any good? Take care you don't overindulge, it won't do you any good. You won't be returning to court anytime soon once Lantfert comes. And try not to eat too much of what he'll dish out. I suggest you take a drink first, so it won't stick in your throat."

Having offered this advice, Reynard turned homeward to his castle. Lantfert came and found the bear stuck fast in the tree. He ran to his neighbors and said: "Come on, you lot, into my yard—there's a bear stuck fast there!"

Word spread instantly throughout the village. No one paused, but husbands and wives all ran as fast as they could, each armed

either with staff, rake, or broom. Some pulled a stake from the hedge, some grabbed a flail. The priest picked up the cross, and the parish clerk brought a weather vane. The priest's wife Julocke came with her distaff—she'd been spinning.¹⁰ Old women came, who had only single teeth left in their head.

Now Bruin wasn't feeling great: it was one against many. When he heard the villagers' terrific racket, he wrestled and pulled so hard that he extracted his head, but he left behind all the skin from his head and both his ears. No man ever saw a more hideous animal, for blood ran over his eyes. Before he could extract his feet, he had to leave his claws and paw pads behind.

The deal turned out badly for Bruin. He thought he'd never escape, now that his feet were so sore, and he couldn't see a thing because of the blood running down across his eyes. Lantfert approached with the priest. Everyone in the parish began to hit Bruin's head and face hard. He received plenty of hard knocks.

Every reader take note: if you're in a bad way, you're everyone's victim. The bear's story proves it: each of the villagers, great and small, were fierce and furious with him. Even old Hugelin with the crooked leg, and Ludolf with the broad, long nose—they were both ready to attack. One had a leaden hammer and the other a great leaden ball, and they let him have it with these. Then there were the villagers Sir Bertolt with the long fingers, Lantfert, and tall Ottram: these guys did more harm to the bear than all the others, since they had a sharp hook, and a crooked staff well leaded at the end, to play at ball. The villagers Baetkyn, Ende, Abelquak, my good Dame Bave, and the priest with his

10 In Catholic Europe, of course, priests were forbidden to marry. The picture of parish life given here falls far short of the doctrinal ideal.



No man ever saw a more hideous animal.

staff and Dame Julocke: they all inflicted so much harm on the bear that they would have happily killed him. They gave it to him with all they had.

Bruin the Bear sat and cried and groaned, for he had to take all that was dished out. Lantfert was the highest born of them all, and made the most noise, for Dame Pogge of Chafporte was his mother, and his father was Macob the stopper maker—a large, powerful, and independent type. They pelted Bruin with no shortage of stones. First Lantfert's brother sprang forward with a staff and whacked the bear on the head, so that he couldn't either hear or see.

The bear then sprang free between the bushes and the river among a crowd of women. He rushed with such force that he pushed a fair number of the villagers into the river, which was wide and deep. The priest's wife was among them, and he was so sorry to see his wife lying in the water that he left off beating the bear and cried, "Dame Julocke is in the water! Every man look to it! I'll absolve all the sins of those who can help!" Everyone then left Bruin the Bear and did as the priest asked.

When Bruin the Bear saw that they were running away from him to save the woman, he jumped into the water and swam as fast as he could. The priest shouted angrily and pursued the bear, crying, "Come back, you false thief!"

The bear swam into the fastest current and left them to their hue and cry. He was so glad to have escaped them. He bitterly cursed the honey tree, and the fox who'd betrayed him, since he'd crept in so far that he lost both cap and ears. It was two or three miles he swam downstream before he recovered from exhaustion on the bank. He was heavy of heart, groaning and sighing, with blood flowing into his eyes. He huffed and puffed as frantically as if he were dying.

And the fox? Before he returned from Lantfert's house he stole a plump hen and stuffed her in his pouch. He then ran smartly away on a path where he figured no one would come. Running in a sweat toward the river, he was beside himself with happiness, thinking the bear was dead. So he said to himself: "I have scored here, for now my biggest enemy in court is dead. And no one will blame me for his death! Why shouldn't I rejoice?"

With these words the fox looked toward the river, where he saw Bruin the Bear recovering. The moment he saw the bear, he was as depressed as he'd been happy before. He angrily told Lantfert off: "Damn you, Lantfert, you ignorant fool: may God give you a shameful death! You've lost such good meat that's rich and fat, and you've let the bear escape when you had him for the taking! Many's the man who'd have gladly eaten him. You've lost a fat bear!"

Blaming Lanfert in this way, he found the bear badly wounded by the river. Bruin was bloody and ill, for which he thanked no one so much as Reynard. Reynard scorned him: "Dear priest, *dieu vous garde!*"¹¹

"Just look at the red thief," said the bear to himself; "I see the pitiless rascal coming."

"Haven't you forgotten something at Lantfert's?" said the fox. "I'm not sure you paid him for the honeycombs that you stole from him. If you haven't, it'd be disgracefully dishonest. I'd happily be the messenger myself to go and pay him. Wasn't the honey any good? I have more where that came from. Dear uncle, tell me, before I take off, what's the religious order you intend to enter? You're wearing a new hood. Is it a monk or an abbot

11 "May God protect you" (spoken by Reynard in French, the language of polite society, in order further to mock Bruin).

that you'll be? Whoever shaved your crown nipped off your ears. You seem to have lost your top, and removed your gloves. I'm inclined to think that you're off to sing compline."¹²

Bruin the Bear heard all this. He couldn't avenge himself, and this made him both furious and heavy-hearted. He let the fox say whatever he wanted to, and endured it with bitterness, before jumping back into the river. He was worried about his appearance in court, for he'd lost both ears, along with the skin and the claws of his forefeet.

If he'd been faced with a hunter wanting to kill him then and there, Bruin couldn't have escaped. Once he was out of the river he had to move, without knowing quite how to. So listen, then, to what he did: he sat upon his thighs and began to push himself forward on his hindquarters, painfully rolling and tumbling up to half a mile until he finally made it to court.


When they saw him from a distance, some in court were unsure what creature it was who rolled like that. Finally the King recognized him. You can be sure that he wasn't very pleased.

"This is Bruin the Bear, my friend. Lord God, who's wounded him? He's all red about the head! I'd say he's about to die. Where on earth can he have been?"

The beast came before the King and addressed him.

12 The final canonical hour of the day, a prayer spoken before going to bed.

The bear accuses the fox

 lay a plaint to you, merciful lord Sir King, so you can see how I've been mistreated. I beg you to avenge this treatment on Reynard, the cruel beast. For I've been brutally handled in your service. I've lost both my front paws, along with my cheeks and my ears, by his treasonous deceit!"

"How dare that false thief Reynard do this!" replied the King. I declare, Bruin, and swear it by my crown, I'll avenge myself on him. You'll happily thank me, for sure."

The lion sent for all the wise beasts and demanded their counsel: How could he avenge the monstrous crimes of the fox?

The council concluded, old and young, that Reynard be summoned. He must be forced to suffer any sentence the court should give him. They judged Tybert the Cat best equipped to deliver the summons, because he was especially intelligent. The King thought this advice was good.



10

The King sends Tybert on
another embassy to the fox.
How Tybert fares with Reynard

Sir Tybert,” commanded the King, “go to Reynard, and deliver him a second summons: he must come to court to answer charges. Though he’s cruel to other animals, he trusts you and will follow your advice. You’ll tell him this. If he refuses to come, he’ll receive a third summons. If he fails to come a third time, then we’ll proceed mercilessly against him and all his family.

“My lord the King,” replied Tybert, “those who counseled you weren’t any friends of mine. What could I do there? Reynard won’t come or go on my account. I beg you, dear King, send some other animal to him. I’m a small weakling. Bruin the Bear, who’s so big and strong, couldn’t bring him—how, then, should I do the job?”

“No,” said the King, “Sir Tybert, you’re wise and learned. Though you’re small, there are a few crafty animals who can do more with brains than with brawn.”

Tybert replied: “Someone has to it, so it might as well be me. God give me grace to succeed, for my heart is in my boots.”

As Tybert was preparing to go directly to Wickedhole, he saw a St. Martin's bird come flying from a distance. He cried loudly: "Welcome, gentle bird, turn here and fly on my right side!"

The bird flew up to a tree that stood on the cat's left side. Tybert was uneasy—this was a bad omen, for had the bird flown on his right side, he would've been glad. Instead, he was full of foreboding that his journey wouldn't end well. He nonetheless did as many do, and gave himself better hope than his heart could muster.

So he ran toward Wickedhole. There he found the fox standing in front of his house. "God give you a good evening, Reynard. The King has threatened to execute you if you don't come to court with me right now."

"Tybert, my dear cousin, you're warmly welcome. May good fortune always be yours!"

It hurt the fox to speak kindly to the cat. Even if he uttered the words, his heart didn't think the same thing at all. We'll see that before they take their leave of each other.

"Let's spend the evening together," suggested Reynard. "I'll entertain you well, and tomorrow morning, first thing, we'll go together to court. Good nephew, let's act as I propose, since I've no kin whom I trust as well as I trust you. The traitor Bruin the Bear was here. He treated me so malevolently, and seemed so strong, that I wouldn't have accompanied him for a thousand pounds. But cousin, I'll go with you tomorrow morning early. First thing."

"It's best that we leave right now, for the moon is shining as brightly as if it were day. I never saw better weather."

"No, dear cousin, there are creatures who might meet us by day and treat us well. Those same creatures could mistreat us

by night. To walk by night provokes suspicion. Therefore wait out this night here with me."

"What should we eat, if we stayed here?"

"There's nothing much to eat around here. You can have a good and sweet honeycomb. What do you say, Tybert—do you fancy some of that?"

"I don't care a farthing for honeycomb. Don't you have anything else? Now, if you were to give me a good fat mouse, I'd be better pleased."

"A fat mouse?" said Reynard. "Well, there's a priest living close by, with a barn by his house, in which there are so many mice that a cart couldn't carry them away. I've often heard the priest complain about the damage they do."

"Dear Cousin Reyner,¹³ lead me there. I'll do anything for you in return."

"Sure, Tybert—but tell me the honest truth: Do you really love mice?"

"Love mice?" said the cat. "I love mice better than anything! Don't you know that mice taste better than venison, even than flans or pasties? If you want to do the right thing by me, take me to the mice! You'll win my love that way, even if you'd murdered both my parents and all my kin."

"You're pulling my leg."

"So help me God I'm not."

"Tybert," said the fox, "if I'd known that, I would've arranged for you to eat your fill of mice this very night!"

"My fill of mice?—that would be some haul!"

13 "Reyner" is an affectionate abbreviation of "Reynard," here used by Tybert to suggest (a false) intimacy between cat and fox.

"Really, Tybert, you're playing games with me."

"Not at all," he said. "If I had a fat mouse I wouldn't sell it for a gold coin."

"Let's go, then, Tybert. I'll bring you to the very place before we part."

"Reyner," said the cat, "with you as my guide, I'd happily go as far as Montpellier."¹⁴

So off they went together to the priest's barn. It was securely walled about with mud, which had been penetrated the night before by none other than the fox himself, who'd stolen a good fat hen from the priest. The angry priest had accordingly set a trap just in front of the hole to pay the fox back. He passionately wanted to capture him.

The fox, cunning thief that he was, knew all this well enough, and advised Tybert: "Cousin, creep into this hole, and you won't have to wait long before catching heaps of mice—can't you hear them squeaking already? I'll wait for you here at this hole until you return. Tomorrow we'll go to court together. So what's the holdup? Come on, so we can go back to my wife, who's waiting for us and will welcome us well."

"Cousin Reynard, let me get this straight: You're proposing that I go into this hole here? Priests are so wily and cunning. I'm afraid this will end badly."

"Fiddlesticks, Tybert! I never saw you afraid of anything. What's the matter with you, cat?"

The cat was ashamed and sprang directly into the hole, where

¹⁴ Montpellier (southern France) was famous in the Middle Ages for its university faculty of medicine.

he was instantly trapped by the neck before he could say "Jack Robin." Thus Reynard deceived his guest and cousin.

The moment Tybert was aware of the trap, he was afraid and tried to spring back out, but the trap had snapped shut. Tybert began to twist, as he was nearly strangled. He called out, wailing and making a hideous racket.

Reynard stood in front of the hole and heard it all. He was pleased with his trick, and said: "Tybert, you love mice as long as they are plump and good. If the priest or Martinet his son had known that, they're so kind they'd bring you a sauce to go with the mice. Tybert, you're singing while you eat. Is that how they act in court? Lord God, if Isengrim were stuck there with you, then I'd be really happy. He's afflicted me too often."

Tybert couldn't escape, but mewed and panted so loudly that Martinet, the priest's son, jumped up and cried out noisily: "God be thanked! My trap has caught the thief who's been stealing our hens. Everyone up! Payback time!"

With these words the priest got out of bed in a most unfortunate moment, and woke everyone else in the house.

He cried loudly: "The fox is taken!" Everyone leapt and ran. The priest himself ran out stark-naked. Martinet was the first to find Tybert. The priest gave an offering candle to Julocke, his wife, and asked her to light it at the fire, while he hit Tybert with a mighty staff. There were many hard strokes for Tybert across his whole body. Martinet was so angry that he knocked out one of the cat's eyes. The naked priest raised his staff and was about to strike when Tybert, seeing that he would certainly die, sprang between the priest's legs with claws spread and teeth bared, taking the priest's right stone with him. That leap shamed the priest.

The thing fell on the ground. When Dame Julocke saw it, she swore by her father's soul that she'd have rather paid a whole year's church-offering money than have the priest suffer this particular harm and shame. She said: "In the devil's name the trap was set there. Look, Martinet, dear son—this is your father's stone on the floor! I'm shamed and hurt, for even if he's healed of the wound, he's a man lost to me. He'll never be able to play that sweet game again!"

The fox stood on the outside of the hole and heard all this talk. He laughed so much that he could hardly stand. He spoke very quietly: "Dame Julocke, settle down and calm your sorrows. Even if the priest has lost one of his stones, it won't hinder his congress with you. There's many a chapel in this world in which only one bell is rung." Thus the fox scorned and mocked Dame Julocke the priest's wife, who was very upset.

The priest fell down in a swoon. They took him up and brought him to bed. The fox then returned to his territory, and left Tybert the Cat in great dread and danger. As far as the fox knew, the cat was as good as dead. But when Tybert saw that they were busy about the priest, he began to bite and gnaw right through the trap. He sprang out of the hole and went rolling and tumbling toward the King's court.

A beautiful dawn had broken before he arrived in court, in very sorry condition. He'd been poorly welcomed at the priest's house, and with the fox's advice his body had been beaten. Plus he was missing an eye.


When the King understood that Tybert had been treated in this way, he was plain furious. He uttered fierce threats against the thief Reynard, immediately summoning his council. He demanded to know how he might bring the fox to law.

Sir Grimbart, the fox's sister's son, spoke up: "Lords, even if my uncle were twice as bad, there is a remedy all the same. Let him be treated like a free man. He must be summoned a third time. If he still refuses to come, then he's guilty of all the crimes of which he's been accused."

"Grimbart," said the King, "who would you think should go and summon Reynard to come? Who will risk his ears, or his eye, or his life? Which animal has the courage? I don't believe there's anyone here foolish enough to do it."

Grimbart replied: "So help me God, I'm fool enough! I'll take the message to Reynard myself, if that's your command."

Grimbart the Badger brings Reynard to law, before the King himself

ow off you go, Grimbart, and look out for yourself, for Reynard is dangerous, deceptive, and subtle. You'll need to look well about you and beware of him."

Grimbart said he would sort this matter out.

So Grimbart proceeded to Wickedhole. When he arrived, he found Reynard the Fox at home. Dame Ermilyn his wife lay with her cubs in a dark corner.

Grimbart greeted his uncle and aunt: "Uncle, don't let absence from court damage you while you stand accused. If you think it wise, it's now high time that you accompanied me to court. Your continued absence can do you no good, since you're accused of many things there, and this is your third warning. I'm telling you the truth: if you hang around all day tomorrow, no mercy can help you—you'll see that within three days your house will be besieged. There'll be a gallows, and a rack erected in front of it. I'm telling you straight: You won't escape with either wife or child. The King shall take all your lives. So in my view it's best that you come with me to court. Your cunning will perhaps help you out of this tight spot. You've survived greater dangers before now, and who knows, you might be acquitted of each accusation,

and all your enemies might be shamed. You've often wriggled out of tighter corners than what's required just now."

"What you say is true," replied Reynard. "The smart thing is for me to accompany you—now I'm all out of tricks. Perhaps the King will show mercy if I come to speak with him face-to-face. The court can't survive without me—the King understands that very well. Even if I have some enemies, it doesn't trouble me at all. All the council will judge me, but wherever great courts of kings or lords are gathered, Reynard must devise fine plans. Subtle stratagems are required. They can play their parts as much as they like, but mine is best, and I'll come out on top.

"There are many in court who've sworn to inflict maximum damage on me. This distresses me. For many hostile enemies are capable of more damage than one. All the same, nephew, it's better that I accompany you to court and answer for myself, rather than putting myself, my wife, and my children in danger of destruction. Come on, then, let's go. The King is more powerful than I am, so I have to do just as he wishes. Patiently suffering his will is the best I can do."

Reynard then spoke to Dame Ermilyn: "I put my cubs in your keeping. Look after them well, and especially Reynkin, my youngest son. He pleases me so well—I hope he'll follow in my steps. And there is Rosel, an exceptionally skillful thief. I love them as well as any man could love his children. If God protects me, I'll repay you properly when I return."

Thus Reynard took leave of his wife. God, how sorrowfully Ermilyn remained behind with the cubs! The supplier and caretaker of Wickedhole was gone, and the house wasn't stocked.

Reynard confesses himself



hen Reynard and Grimbart had traveled a certain distance together, Reynard said: "Dear cousin, I'm truly afraid, for I go in fear and danger of my life. I feel such repentance for my sins that I'll confess myself to you, dear cousin, since there's no priest available here. If all my sins were forgiven, my soul would be less troubled."

Grimbart answered: "Uncle, will you confess yourself? You must first promise to stop stealing and roving."

Reynard said that he well understood that. "Now hear, dear cousin, what I say: *Confiteor tibi, pater*,¹⁵ of all the misdeeds that I've done. I'll gladly receive my penance for them."

Grimbart said: "What are you saying? Do you really wish to confess yourself? Then say it in English so that I can understand you!"

To which Reynard replied: "I've wronged all living animals, especially my Uncle Bruin the Bear, whose crown I made all bloody. And I taught Tybert the Cat to catch mice, for I taught her to leap into a trap where she was beaten. I also greatly wronged Chaunticleer and his children, of whom I've eaten a good many.

¹⁵ "I confess to you, father." Drawn from the prayer of confession in the mass of the Catholic Church.



"Uncle, will you confess yourself? You must promise first to stop stealing and roving."

“Neither has the King gone scot-free, since I’ve slandered him and the Queen so many times that they’ll never wholly escape my wicked tongue.

“I’ve also tricked Isengrim the Wolf more times than I can count. I called him ‘uncle,’ for example, but that was only to deceive him, for he’s no kin to me. I made him a monk at Elmare, where I myself also became one. That trick ended up hurting him and profiting me, for I had the bell rope tied to his feet. He so much enjoyed the ringing of the bell that he wished to learn how to do it, for which he ended up having good deal of grief. He rang so loudly that the folk in the street were afraid of the noise, and were puzzled as to what might be in the bell. They arrived before he had a chance to ask to be made a monk, and so he was beaten almost to death.

“After this I taught him to catch fish, and from those lessons he also ended up on the receiving end of many thumps.

“I also led him to the house of the richest priest in Vermedos. This priest had a pantry in which plenty of bacon was hanging. I’d been accustomed to filling my belly many times in this barn and had made a hole into which I made Isengrim creep. There he found the tubs with beef and many good cuts of bacon. But he ate so much and with such excessive gluttony that he wasn’t able to get back out of the hole through which he’d entered, since his belly was so swollen.

“I went into the village and made a great racket, yet listen to what I did then: I ran to the priest where he sat eating as fat a capon as you could find anywhere. I grabbed that capon and ran away with it as fast as I could. The priest cried out and said, ‘Take and kill that fox! I don’t believe anyone ever saw anything so outrageous: the fox comes directly into my house and takes

my hen from me right in front of my nose! Whoever saw a more shameless thief?’

“He took his table knife and threw it at me, but missed. I ran, and he shoved the table from him, in hot pursuit shouting, ‘Kill him!’ So I’m running fast, with all of them after me, and each wanting to harm me. I ran to exactly the place where Isengrim was, and there I let the capon drop, because it was too heavy for me. Against my will, I left it there, and then sprang through a hole where I wanted to be.

“As the priest picked up his capon, he saw Isengrim and cried, ‘Hit him, friends! Here’s the thief, the wolf—look to it that he doesn’t escape!’ They all ran together with sticks and staves, and made such a huge racket that all the neighbors came out and rained hard blows on him and threw big stones. He dropped as if he were dead. They dragged him and drew him across stones and stumps outside the village and threw him into a ditch, where he lay all night. I’ve no idea how he got out of that one.

“Afterward, on another occasion, Isengrim promised that he’d be my friend for a whole year after, if I’d help him fill his belly. So I led him to a place where I told him there were seven hens and a cock who sat on a perch. All were nice and fat. There was a trapdoor there, to which we climbed, at which point I told him to trust me: he need only creep through the door and he’d find many fat hens. Isengrim went laughing into the hen-house and tried to find hens here and there, finally saying to me, ‘Reynard, you’re pulling my leg, for I don’t find what I’m looking for.’

“‘Dear uncle,’ I said, ‘if you creep in just a little farther, you’ll find what you’re after. If you want the prize, you need to take the risk! I’ve cleared the path for you.’

“So I made him creep yet farther in and shoved him so far

forward that he fell down on the floor, for the space was narrow. His fall was loud, at which all the sleepers sprang up. Those who slept beside the fire cried out that the trapdoor was open and that something had fallen in, but they had no idea what it was. They got up and lit a candle. When they saw Isengrim they struck and wounded him almost to death.

“Thus I’ve brought Isengrim into many tight corners—more than I can count. In fact I could remember many more if I put myself to it, which I’ll tell you afterwards. I’ve also made love with Dame Arswind, his wife. I wish I hadn’t, and I really regret this. It shamed her, and I’m truly sorry for it.”

Grimbart said: “Uncle, I don’t quite understand you. You say you’ve wronged his wife, but you speak as if you weren’t being entirely sincere. I can’t figure out what you mean, or where you’ve learned this kind of talk. Dear uncle, it’d be disgraceful if I openly confessed to having slept with my own aunt!”

“Nephew, I’m your uncle, and I’d upset you if I said anything against women. Now I’ve told you all that I can think of: give me my penance and absolve me, for I’m truly repentant.”

Grimbart was subtle and wise. He snapped a branch off a tree and said: “Now, uncle, you’ll hit yourself three times with this rod. Then lay it down on the ground and jump over it three times without bending your legs and without tripping over. Then pick it up and kiss it sweetly in token of your meekness and in obedience to your given penance, which I have imposed upon you. Herewith you are forgiven for all the sins you’ve committed up to today; I forgive them all.”¹⁶ The fox was delighted.

16 Grimbart takes on the role of priest (for which he has no authority whatsoever), and imposes a ridiculously easy penance, or punishment, for Reynard to perform.

Grimbart said to his uncle: "Uncle, look to it from now on that you do good works, read your psalms, go to church, observe feast days, make charitable gifts, and abandon your sinful and wicked life—your theft and your treason—so you'll deserve God's mercy." The fox duly promised that he'd do all this, and off they both went to court together.

Right by their route stood a cloister of black nuns, where many geese, hens, and capons walked outside the walls. As they went on talking, the fox led Grimbart out of the direct path, to where the poultry wandered outside the walls, just by the barn. The fox eyed them and noticed a nice fat young capon that sauntered along with his fellows. Reynard leapt on him and captured him. Feathers flew all over the place, but the capon escaped. Grimbart said: "Uncle, you cursed man, what are you up to? Will you fall again into your old ways for one of these capons? You've made a confession and you ought to be repentant!"

Reynard answered: "Truly, cousin, I forgot everything! Please pray to God to forgive me, for I'll never do it again."

Then they turned again to their road, and crossed a little bridge. The fox, all the while, kept a lookout for poultry, for he just couldn't help it. What sticks to the bone can't be cut away. Even if he were to be hanged, he'd be unable to stop looking out for poultry whenever he could see any.

Grimbart observed his manner and said: "False and deceptive fox! Just look at the way your eyes seek out poultry!"

The fox replied: "Cousin, you wrong me with such words. You're distracting me from my devotion and prayers. Let me say a Lord's Prayer for all the souls of poultry and geese that I've eaten and deceptively stolen from these holy nuns."

Grimbart wasn't too pleased, but the fox always kept his eye on the poultry, until at last they regained the main road. And then they took themselves to court. How Reynard trembled when they approached the court! He knew very well that he'd have to answer for the many serious felonies and robberies that he'd committed.



PART II

*In a very tight corner,
Reynard the Fox not only
escapes hanging but turns the
tables on all his enemies*



Reynard comes to court and excuses himself before the King



At first, when it was known in court that Reynard the Fox and Grimbart his cousin had arrived, even those without kin and courtly supporters prepared to lay accusations on Reynard the Fox. Reynard conducted himself as if he hadn't a care in the world, and pretended to be in a much better position than he actually was. He passed proudly with his nephew through the main street of the city, looking as if he were the King's son and as if he hadn't wronged a soul in the slightest. He proceeded right through the main entrance of the court. Standing directly in front of the King, he said this:

"God grant you great honor and renown! Never did a King have a more faithful servant than I have been, and remain, to Your Grace. I nonetheless happen to know that there're many in this court who'd destroy me if only you'd believe them. Thanks be to God that it's beneath your crown lightly to believe these liars. We should complain to God Himself that these deceptive flatterers are most credited in lords' courts. These same villains are promoted so as to damage the good. The Lord God will duly pay them back for it!"

"Peace! Reynard, false thief and traitor!" said the King. "How

well you can tell pretty stories, but they won't help you one jot. Do you think you can be my friend with such flattering words, you who have so often ill-served me, as we shall now know for sure? Have you observed the peace that I commanded?"

Chaunticleer couldn't contain himself, but crowed: "Think what I have lost in this peace!"

"Silence, Chaunticleer! Hold your tongue and let me do the talking to this foul thief!

"You robber, you say you love me, and that you've treated my messengers well—those poor fellows Tybert the Cat and Bruin the Bear, who are both still bloody. Don't deny it or speak up for yourself—it'll cost you your life this very day!"

"In the name of the Father and Christ the son,"¹⁷ said the fox, "dear lord and mighty King: if Bruin's crown is bloody, what's that to do with me? He was the one who ate honey at Lantfert's house in the village, and brought the harm on himself, when he was beaten. If he'd wanted to, he could have taken vengeance—he's such a strong fellow—before he jumped in the water. Then Tybert the Cat came, whom I welcomed politely. If he went out without my advice to steal mice at a priest's house and the priest punished him, should I be blamed? If so, I wouldn't be happy, my liege lord. You can do what you will with me, regardless of the justice of my cause. You can boil, roast, hang, or blind me: I'm unable to escape you, and we all stand under your jurisdiction. You're mighty and strong, while I am feeble, with no resources if you put me to death. You wouldn't need much to take vengeance on me."

17 The beginning of a Trinitarian liturgical formula.

While they were speaking, Bellin the Ram and his ewe Oleway sprang up. "My lord the King, hear our accusation!"

Bruin the Bear stood up, with all his family and supporters. The whole crowd was there: Tybert the Cat, Isengrim the Wolf, Cuwaert the Hare, the panther and the boar, the sheep, Brunel the Goose, the kid and the goat, Boudewyn the Ass, Bore the Bull, Hamel the Ox, the weasel, along with Chaunticleer the Cock and Pertilote and all their offspring. The whole lot of them made a huge uproar. They came openly in front of the King, and forced the arrest of the fox.

Reynard is arrested and condemned to death



he King convened a parliament to address the matter of Reynard's offenses. It was judged that he should be put to death. The fox answered all the charges. No one ever heard charges so well put from such beasts, nor, from the other side, such subtle defensive inventions. The fox defended himself so brilliantly, and with such technical skill, that those who heard him were amazed. Those who heard and saw it can tell the whole truth about it, so I'll be brief and focus on the fox.

The King and the council heard witnesses for the prosecution with regard to Reynard's transgressions. It ended up going with them as it often does: the weakest had the worst of it.

They delivered their judicial sentence: that the fox should be put to death, hanged by the neck. At this news Reynard didn't feel so playful. All his flattery and deception were useless to him now. The judgment was delivered and couldn't be avoided. Grimbart his nephew and many of his extended family didn't have the heart to watch him die, and so took their leave of the court.

The King considered the matter and noticed how many of his young subjects, who were closely related to Reynard, left weep-

ing. He said this to himself: "Here I need to think again. Reynard is certainly a felon, but there're many good men in his family."

Tybert the Cat spoke: "Sir Bruin and Sir Isengrim: How slow you are! It's almost evening. There are plenty of hedges and bushes hereabouts, and if he escaped from us and were delivered from this danger, he'd never be captured again. He's so wily and subtle, and he knows so many tricks! So will we hang him or not? Why are you all standing around—it'll be nighttime before the gallows will be ready!"

Isengrim considered the matter: "There's a gallows right beside us."

But he sighed as he spoke. The cat noticed this and said: "Isengrim—you're afraid! Is this being done against your will? Don't you remember that Reynard worked hard to put both your brothers to death by hanging? If you had any brains, you'd repay him, and not delay so long."

Reynard is led to the gallows



Isengrim was taken aback: "You're making too much of a fuss, Sir Tybert. If we had a good halter fit for his neck and it were strong enough, we'd soon put paid to the fox."

Reynard, who hadn't said anything for some while, addressed Isengrim: "Shorten my agony. Tybert owns a strong cord that caught him in the priest's house when he bit the priest's stone off. He can climb well and moves quickly—let him pull on the rope. Isengrim and Bruin: it's right that you should treat your nephew in this way. I'm sorry that I live so long! Get on with the job—it's a sorry business that you're being so slow about it. Go on ahead, Bruin, and lead me away. Isengrim: you follow us, and be on the lookout that I don't escape."

Bruin the Bear remarked: "What Reynard says is the best advice I've ever heard."

So Isengrim immediately commanded his kin and friends to be certain that Reynard didn't escape, for, he said, "He's wily and deceptive." They held him both by the feet and by the beard, so ensuring that he didn't give them the slip.

The fox heard all these words that concerned him so directly,



"Get on with the job—it's a sorry business that you're being so slow about it."

yet said this: "Dear Uncle Isengrim, I feel you're going to too much trouble to inflict pain and damage on me. If I were so bold, I'd beg you to be merciful, even though my pain and sorrow is welcome to you. I well know that if my aunt your wife remembered old times, she wouldn't permit harm of any kind to me. I'm wholly at your mercy to do with me now whatever you like. May God give you, Bruin and Tybert, a horrible death if you don't inflict on me the worst you can. I know where I'm going—one dies but once. In fact I wish I were already dead! I saw my father die, and it was all over quickly."

"Let's get to it!" said Isengrim. "You're blaming us for working too long, so let's not delay a second longer!"

He advanced aggressively on one side, while Bruin stood on the other, and so led Reynard to the gallows. Tybert, whose throat was still sore from the trap, and whose gullet still hurt from blows delivered through the trickery of the fox, capered ahead of them and carried the rope, thinking that he was finally about to get even.

Tybert, Isengrim, and Bruin went rapidly with Reynard to the appointed place where felons were executed. Noble the King, the Queen, and all the courtiers followed to watch Reynard's death. The fox was afraid lest matters went south, and thought rapidly about how he could escape death. He also thought about how he could trick and shame those three who wished him dead, by deceiving the King to come over to his side against them. He thought only about this—how he could escape with trickery.

This is what he thought: *It's no surprise that the King and many others are angry with me—I deserve it, though I still hope to be their best friend. And yet I'll never do a good turn for one of them! I don't care how strong the King is, or how wise his councils. As long as I can speak, I'll*

rise as high in court as they would have me on the gallows. I've got so many tricks up my sleeve!

Then Isengrim said: "Sir Bruin, think about your red head, which you got through Reynard's tricks. Now we can pay him back fair and square. Tybert: you weigh the least. Climb up quickly and bind the rope tightly to the beam. Make a slip knot or a noose. You'll get your revenge on him today. Bruin, look to it that Reynard doesn't escape—hold him tight! I'll help set up the ladder, so he can mount it."

Bruin said: "Trust me! I'll hold him well!"

The fox then said: "Now I'm really scared, because I see death coming my way and I can't escape. My lord the King, and dear Queen, and all of you who stand by: I ask but one concession before I take my leave of this world, that I might be allowed to make my confession openly and recount my sins so clearly that my soul isn't burdened. I don't want anyone to be blamed afterwards for my robberies, or for my treason. My death will be more acceptable to me, and I ask that you each pray to God that He have mercy on my soul."



16

Reynard makes open confession in the presence of the King and of all those who would hear it



All present pitied Reynard when he spoke these words. They thought it was a small concession for the King to grant his request. The King gave the fox permission to confess, which pleased Reynard, who hoped that things might yet take a turn for the better.

This is what he said: "Now God help me! I have wronged everyone here. I was, nonetheless, one of the best children anywhere since the moment I was weaned. I went and played with the lambs because I gladly heard them bleat. I spent so much time with them that I bit one, and so first learned to lap blood, which tasted so good. After I got a taste for flesh, I hungered after more. So I went with the goats into the forest where I heard the kids bleat, and I killed a couple of them. I grew courageous once I'd killed hens and geese wherever I found them. My teeth became completely bloody after this. I became so fierce and angry that I killed whatever I could catch.

"I then happened to find Isengrim in winter, where he hid under a tree. He told me that he was my uncle. When I heard

him relate our family connection, we teamed up, which I now wish had not happened. We swore to each other to be faithful and to hold fast together, and began to roam as a pair. He stole the big things and I the small. Everything was common property between us, even if he had the best deal and I didn't get even half of mine. Whenever Isengrim got a calf or a sheep, he looked fierce and angrily drove me away, keeping both his part and mine. He's such a good guy, is Isengrim!

"Yet these affairs were trifling. Whenever we had the luck to take an ox or a cow, Isengrim turned up with his wife and seven children, so that not even the smallest ribs came my way: they'd eat up all the flesh, and I had to be content with my lot, given that I didn't need it quite as much as they did. For I've got so much treasure, both silver and gold, that seven carts wouldn't be able to carry it."

When the King heard Reynard speak of this treasure of his, he burned with greedy desire for it.

"Reynard, might you tell me what's happened to all this treasure?"

The fox replied: "My lord, I'll tell you the whole story. The treasure was stolen. If it hadn't been stolen, it would have cost you your life: you would have been murdered, heaven forbid, which would have been the most dreadful event under heaven."

When the Queen heard this she took fright and cried loudly: "Oh, dear, Reynard: What are you saying? I beg you in the name of the long voyage which your soul is about to make, tell us the plain truth of what you know about the murder that was planned for my lord. Speak so we can all hear it now!"

Listen to the way in which the fox flatters the King and the Queen, and how he wins their goodwill and love. Listen also to

how he blocks those who work for his death. He'll unpack his bag of tricks by flattery, and lie with seductive words. He'll make it seem as if everything he said should be taken as gospel truth.

With a mournful expression the fox addressed the Queen: "Now I can't escape death. Given that you beg me so passionately, I'm unprepared to endanger my soul. If I did, I'd be going into the eternal pains of hell. I won't say a thing that I can't prove, for the King would have been horribly murdered by members of his own court. I have to say that those who were most involved in this conspiracy were my next of kin, whom I'd not betray, were it not for the pains of hell threatening me."

The King was somber. "Reynard, are you telling me the truth?"

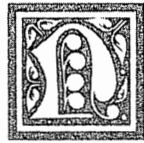
"I'm afraid so," said the fox. "Don't you see my predicament? Would I damn my soul? What would I gain by telling anything but the truth? I'm on the very brink of death: neither prayer nor wealth can help me."

Then the fox trembled deceitfully, as if he were afraid. The Queen pitied him, and begged the King to treat him mercifully so as to avoid any more damage, and to command the people to hold their peace and give audience to the fox.

The King commanded everyone to hold their tongue and permit the fox to say whatever he wanted, without let or hindrance. So listen to what he said.

"So," said the fox, "now that you are all still, and since it's the King's will, I'll openly declare this treason. As I do, I'll not spare anyone whom I know to be guilty."

Reynard endangers all who wished to
execute him, and secures the King's grace



Now observe how the fox began. He called Grimbart, his dear cousin, who'd always helped him in a tight spot, as a witness. He did so because Grimbart's testimony would be more credible, and so he could lie more persuasively about his enemies.

So he began: "My lord and father had found King Ermeric's treasure buried in a pit. When he took possession of this treasure, he grew proud and arrogant to the point that he held all other animals, who'd previously been his companions, in low esteem. He sent Tybert the Cat into the wild territory of Ardennes to Bruin the Bear,¹⁸ to pay homage to Bruin. He ordered Tybert to tell Bruin that if he wanted to be King, he should come to Flanders. Bruin was delighted by this news, because he'd long wished to be King. So Bruin went to Flanders, where my father received him graciously. He immediately sent for my nephew the wise Grimbart, along with Isengrim the Wolf and Tybert the Cat. These five then met up between Ghent and the village of Ifte. There they plotted together a whole long, dark night. With the

¹⁸ The Ardennes Forest, in modern Belgium and Luxembourg.

devil's help and skill, and with my father's wealth, they conspired and swore to the King's death.

"Now listen to the astonishing business: the four of them swore on Isengrim's head that they'd make Bruin King and lord, and bring him to the throne at Aachen,¹⁹ where they'd set the crown on his head. If there were any of the King's friends or kin who resisted, then my father would, with all his wealth, drive them out and deprive them of their power.

"One morning it chanced that Nephew Grimbart, drunk with wine, revealed the plot in secrecy to his wife Sloepcade, and told her to keep it secret. She immediately forgot her oath and confessed it to my wife, on a heath where they had both gone on pilgrimage. She confessed it only as long as my wife first swore on her honor and by the three holy Kings of Cologne that she would never, for love or hate, tell it to another soul but keep it secret. My wife, however, didn't keep it secret at all when she got home to me. She revealed all she'd heard, as long as I'd keep it all secret. She supplied so many tokens of evidence that I judged it was true. My hair stood on end and my heart grew heavy as lead and as cold as ice.

"I remembered that a similar thing happened to the frogs a while ago.²⁰ The frogs were free, and yet complained that they had no King and weren't governed, since a community without a

19 Aachen (French Aix-la-Chapelle), in Western Germany, near Cologne. Aachen was an imperial city of Charlemagne (ca. 742-814) and the place where German kings preferred to be crowned, between the tenth and fifteenth centuries.

20 An Aesopian fable, translated by Caxton in his own volume of Aesopian materials. See William Caxton, *Caxton's Aesop*, ed. R. T. Lenaghan (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 90-91, for Caxton's own version of this fable.

governor was undesirable. So they appealed loudly to God that He'd ordain one to rule over them: they all desired this. God heard their request. Because it was not unreasonable, He sent a stork, who swallowed as many of them as he could find. He was utterly pitiless. The frogs complained, but by then it was too late: those who were previously free and afraid of no one were now bound and obliged to strengthen their King. For this reason, rich and poor, I feared that the same might happen to us.

"Thus, my lord King, I was so worried about you, for which you're repaying me now with small thanks. I know Bruin the Bear is a vicious, rapacious thief. I thought that if he were King we'd all be destroyed. I also know that our sovereign lord the King is a figure of such high birth—so mighty and so generous and so merciful—that I thought a change involving acceptance of a stinking thief, and repudiation of a noble, mighty, stately lion, would have been truly disastrous. For the bear and his ancestors have more mad craziness in their dumb heads than anyone else. So I was really sorry and thought hard about how I could obstruct and break my father's treacherous counsel, which was set to make a lord and King of a peasant traitor who was worse than a thief.

"I prayed continually to God, that He'd preserve our King in honor and health, and grant him long life. But I also thought that if my father should keep his treasure, he'd manage to find a way to depose the King.

"I was hard-pressed to think where my father had hidden his treasure. I spied as closely as I could at all times in woods, bushes and fields where my father seemed to be checking things. Whether it was by night or day, in cold weather or hot, I was always beside him to work out where his treasure was laid up.

"Once I lay down flat on the ground and saw my father run-

ning out of a hole. Now listen to what I saw him do: When he came out of the hole he looked quickly about him to discover if he'd been seen. When he couldn't see anyone, he stopped up the hole with sand and made it even and plain like the ground around it. He had no idea that I'd seen this. He stroked the ground where his tracks were with his tail, and licked the ground so that no one would notice the tracks. I learned tricks then from my father that I'd never known about before. He then left and went off to the village on business.

"I wasn't slow about it, but leapt to the hole. No matter how well he supposed that he'd secured it, I wasn't such a fool that I couldn't easily find the hole. I scratched and scraped at the sand with my feet and crept in, where I found a bigger pile of silver and gold than I'd ever seen. There is no one here who's ever seen so much in a single heap in all his life. I then took Ermilyn my wife to help me and we didn't rest by day or night before we'd carried away this precious treasure with immense labor to another place, situated much better under a hedge in a deep hole.

"While my wife and I were working away, my father was with those who were conspiring against the King. Now hear what they did. Bruin the Bear and Isengrim sent word to all the surrounding territory declaring that, if any man wanted wages, he should come to Bruin and he'd pay them. My father ran through the land bearing the letters, not having a clue that he'd been robbed of his treasure. For all the world, he'd not find a penny of it.

"When my father had moved across all the territory between the Elbe and the Somme, and had hired plenty of soldiers to supply Bruin the following summer, he returned to the bear and his fellows. He reported to them his adventures in the land

of Saxony—how hunters and their hounds had pursued him every day, and how he'd barely escaped alive. After telling them all this, he showed the four traitors some letters. These hugely pleased Bruin, since the names of twelve of Isengrim's family were written in them, not counting the bears, the foxes, the cats and the badgers, who had all sworn to stand ready when the first messenger should call them to help the bear, as long as they had their wages a month in advance. Thank God I saw all this!

"After his report, my father went to the treasure hole to gaze on the hoard. Now he began to suffer grievously, once he failed to find what he was looking for, since his hole had been broken and the treasure carried off. The way he acted then makes me weep: in anger and sorrow he went and hanged himself.

"Thus stood Bruin's conspiracy, because of my cunning. Now consider my bad lot: the traitors Isengrim and Bruin were in the King's innermost circle, and sat with him on the high bench of justice, whereas I, poor Reynard, had no thanks or reward. I buried my own father so the King should live.

"My lord," said the fox, "where are they who'd act in this way—that's to say, who'd destroy themselves to save you?"

The King and the Queen hoped to win the treasure. Without taking counsel, they brought Reynard into their confidence, asking him if he'd be so kind as to tell them where the treasure was.

"How," Reynard replied, "should I tell the King, or those who'd hang me to protect the traitors and murderers, where my treasure is? With their flattery they want only to kill me. I'd be crazy to do that!"

The Queen then spoke: "Not at all, Reynard, the King grants you your life, and pardons you completely as long as you're a wise and faithful counselor to my lord."

“Dear lady, if the King believes me and if he will pardon and forgive all my past crimes, then there will never be so rich a King as I’ll make him, with the precious and incalculable treasure that I’ll put in his possession.”

The King answered: “Ah, my lady, will you believe the fox? I don’t mean to offend you, but he’s born to rob, steal, and lie. Treachery is innate to him—it cleaves to his very bones and can’t be drawn out of him.”

“No, my lord, you can believe him this time, even though he was a felon in the past. Now he’s a changed man: you’ve heard him indict his father and his nephew the badger. He would’ve accused other beasts if he’d been a false and treacherous liar.”

The King said: “My lady, if you see it like that, and think it best to act in this way, I’ll take responsibility for all the crimes of Reynard and believe him, even though it might end up harming me. But I swear by my crown that if he breaks the law just one more time, he and his family will pay for it unto the ninth degree!”

The fox looked on the King from time to time, and was secretly glad. “I’d be stupid not to tell the whole truth,” he said.

The King picked up a straw from the ground, and proceeded to pardon the fox for all his and his father’s crimes. No wonder the fox was happy, for he was no longer in danger of death, and had got off scot-free from the power of his enemies.

“My lord the King, and my noble lady the Queen: God repay the great honor you do me! I’ll think how I can best thank you for it, so that you’ll be the richest King in the world. There’s no one alive to whom my treasure is better entrusted than to you both.”

Then the fox picked up a straw, and gave it to the King, say-

ing: "My most dear lord, may it please you to receive here the rich treasure that King Ermeric once had, for I give it to you with a liberal heart and acknowledge it openly."

The King received the straw and tossed it jokingly aside with a laugh, thanking the fox profusely. The fox laughed to himself.

The King carefully listened to the fox's counsel. All those present stood entirely at his disposition. "My lord," he said, "now listen, and mark my words well. To the west of Flanders there's a forest called Hulsterloe, and a lake called Krekenpit nearby. This area is so deserted that sometimes no one goes there in a whole year except those who know what they're about. That's where the treasure lies hidden. Note that the place is called Krekenpit. I would advise you, so as to avoid any harm whatsoever, that you and my lady go there together. I don't know anyone trustworthy enough whom I'd trust to go in your stead. So go yourself.

"When you come to Krekenpit, you'll find two birch trees right beside the pit. My lord, go to the birch trees: that's where the buried treasure is. You'll have to scrape and dig a little moss away from one side. You'll find many jewels set in gold and silver. You'll also find the crown that King Ermeric wore in his time—the one Bruin the Bear would've worn if he'd had his way. You'll see many expensive jewels, with precious stones set in gold, which cost thousands of pounds. When, my lord the King, you've taken possession of all this treasure, how often will you say in your heart: *Reynard, Reynard—how trustworthy you were after all, you who through your subtlety buried and hid this treasure trove here! May God grant you good chance wherever you are right now!*"

The King replied: "Sir Reynard, you must join us in digging up this treasure: I don't know the way, and won't ever be able to find it. I've often heard of Paris, London, Aachen, and Cologne.

But it strikes me that you are playing with us, since the place name Krekenpit is made-up.”

This order wasn’t good for the fox, who, dissembling, replied indignantly: “My lord the King, you’re as close to the truth as Rome is from the moon. Do you imagine that I’d lead you up the garden path? Never! I’ll dispel your doubts and direct you to the place with good testimony.”

He called loudly: “Cuwaert the Hare, up you come before the King!” The beasts looked to the King and wondered what he would do.

The fox said to the hare: “Cuwaert, are you cold? Why all the trembling and shaking? No need to be afraid, but tell my lord the King the truth. I charge you to do so by the faith and loyalty you owe both him and my lady the Queen in all such matters as I’ll require of you.”

Cuwaert replied that he’d tell the truth even if he’d lose his life in telling it. “I won’t lie, if I know the truth—you’ve ordered me so forcefully.”

“Then tell us: Don’t you know where Krekenpit is?”

The hare said: “I knew twelve years ago very well where Krekenpit was—why ask me this question? It’s in a forest called Hulsterloe in a warren in the wilderness.

“I’ve endured hunger and cold there, more than I can tell. That’s where Father Simonet the Frisian²¹ used to counterfeit money, which he used to support himself and all his associates. But that was all before I became friends with Ryn the Dog, who helped me escape many dangers, as he could well testify if he

21 Frisia extends along the northwest coast of the Netherlands and along the coasts of both Germany and Denmark.

were here. Never in my days did I wrong the King or do otherwise than I should have done within the law.”

Reynard replied: “Return to that company, Cuwaert, now that my lord the King is not interested in hearing anything more from you.” The hare returned and went again to the place from which he’d come.

The fox said: “My lord the King: Is what I said proven true?”

“Yes, Reynard,” said the King. “Forgive me. I was wrong not to believe you. Now, dear Reynard, lead us the way to the pit where the treasure is.”

The fox replied: “It’s amazing. Can you really believe that I wouldn’t go with you if I could? If it were in any way possible for me to come with you, as long as it caused no embarrassment to Your Lordship, I’d come for sure. But I’m afraid it’s just not possible. Listen to what I must say, even though it disgraces and shames me to do so.

“When Isengrim the Wolf, in the devil’s name, entered a religious order and became a shaven monk, the food for six monks wasn’t enough for him. He complained and lamented so insistently that I pitied him as my kinsman, because he’d grown lethargic and ill. I counseled him to abandon his religious vocation, which is exactly what he did.

“I therefore stand cursed by the Pope’s ban and judgment. So I intend to travel to Rome first thing tomorrow to be forgiven and pardoned for this.²² From Rome I’ll go by sea to the Holy Land and will never return until I’ve done so many good works that I can accompany you honorably. My lord the King, it’d bring

²² Rome was one of the principal destinations for pilgrims seeking pardon for sin.

you disgrace if I were to join you now in any land. It'd be said that you traveled with a person under sentence."

The King replied: "Since the Church has censured you, it would be judged beneath my dignity if you accompanied me. I'll therefore take Cuwaert or someone else to show me Krekenpit. I advise you, Reynard: absolve yourself from the Pope's judgment."

"My lord the King," said the fox, "I'll go to Rome as quickly as I can, just as you say. I won't rest by night or day until I've been forgiven."

"Reynard, it strikes me that you are converted to the right path. God give you grace to accomplish your spiritual goal!"

As soon as this discussion ended, the noble King went and stood on a raised stage of stone. He commanded silence to all the beasts. They were all to sit in a ring around him on the grass, according to rank and birth. Reynard the Fox stood by the Queen, whom he had reason to love well.

The King then declared: "Hear ye, all who are poor and rich, young and old, who are present here before me. Reynard, one the principal officers of my household, had acted so badly that he was to have been hanged this very day. He has now, in this court, done so much that my wife the Queen and I have promised him our grace and friendship. The Queen has pleaded so actively for Reynard that I have made my peace with him. I freely give him his life and limbs.

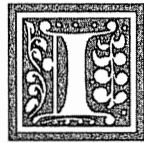
"I further command, on pain of death, that you respect Reynard, his wife, and his children, wherever you should happen to meet them, by day or night. I'll hear no more accusations against Reynard. If he's committed crimes before now, he will no more. He will instead mend his ways. Tomorrow morning he's off early to the Pope for pardon and forgiveness for all his sins."

Tiselin the Raven heard this pronouncement, and leapt to where Isengrim, Bruin, and Tybert were sitting: "How do you think you're going now? You're in for it. You poor saps, what are you doing here? Reynard is now a squire, honored and mighty in the court. The King has judged him free of all charges and has forgiven him his misdeeds. Each of you will be betrayed and indicted."

Isengrim said, "How can this be? I think you're lying, Tiselin."
"Not so."

The wolf and the bear then went to the King. Tybert the Cat was deeply distressed because he was so afraid. To have the friendship of the fox he'd forgive the loss of his eye at the priest's house. He was so upset that he had no idea what to do. He wished he'd never seen the fox, and left court.

The wolf and the bear are arrested through
the work of Reynard the Fox



Isengrim walked arrogantly across the court and stood in front of the King. He thanked the Queen and angrily spoke ill of the fox, so that the King heard it. The King himself was angered by this, and ordered the immediate arrest of the wolf and the bear. Never was more harm done to mad dogs than was done to them. They were both so tightly bound all night that they could stir neither hand nor foot. They were scarcely able to roar or move a single limb.

Now listen to how the fox worked. He hated the bear and the wolf, and persuaded the Queen to grant him this: as much as a foot length and width of the bear's skin from his back, to make a pilgrim's pouch for himself.

The fox was then ready, except that he needed four sturdy shoes. So listen to how he got those shoes. He said to the Queen: "Madam, I'm your pilgrim. Here's my Uncle Sir Isengrim, who has four strong shoes that would serve me well. If he would give me just two of them, I'd actively pray for your soul's health on my pilgrimage. For it's right and proper that a pilgrim always think of and pray for those who support him. And you'd profit your soul, if you want to, if you could also procure two shoes from

my Aunt Arswind. She can spare them easily, because she goes about only rarely, and stays always at home."

The Queen then said: "Reynard, it's only fitting that you have shoes such as these. You can't very well do without them. They'll serve to keep your feet in good state as you cross many a high mountain and many stony roads. You couldn't find a better set of shoes than those of Isengrim and his wife, since they're good and strong. Even if it endangers their life, each of them shall give you two shoes for you to perform your noble pilgrimage."



19

Isengrim and his wife Arswind are obliged
to have their shoes plucked off. Reynard
puts the shoes on to go to Rome



So the false pilgrim has his two shoes from Isengrim's feet. They were pulled off from the claws to the sinews. Never did you see a hen being roasted who lay more still than did Isengrim when his shoes were pulled off. He didn't move a muscle, even though his feet bled when he was unshod. Then his wife Dame Arswind was required to lie down in the grass in somber mood. In addition, she lost her two hind shoes.

The fox was overjoyed, and spoke scornfully to his aunt: "My dear aunt, it pains me that you've suffered so much for me, except in this one respect: you're the dearest of all my kin, and so I'll gladly wear your shoes. You'll also profit from my pilgrimage, and share in the pardon that I will, with the help of your shoes, fetch from across the sea."

Dame Arswind was so angry that she could hardly speak a word. She nonetheless said this: "Ah, Reynard, now you have all you want. I hope God avenges it!"

Isengrim and his companion the bear held their peace, since

they were ill at ease, for they were tied up and sorely wounded. Had Tybert the Cat been there, he would have suffered too. He wouldn't have escaped without some distress and shame.

The next day, when the sun was up, Reynard had the shoes that he'd taken from Isengrim and Arswind greased. He donned them and went to the King and Queen, speaking happily to them: "Noble lord and lady, God give you a good day! I desire of Your Grace that a priest bless my pilgrim's bag and staff. That's only right and proper for a pilgrim."

The King then sent for Bellin the Ram. When he came, the King said: "Sir Bellin, you'll say a mass for Reynard and give him his pouch and staff, because he's about to go on pilgrimage."

The ram replied: "I daren't do that, for Reynard has said that he's been cursed by the Pope."

"What of that?" said the King. "Master Gelys has explained to us that no matter how much a man has sinned, as long as he intends to forsake those sins, confess himself, and receive penance and make satisfaction by the priest's counsel, then God will forgive him and be merciful. Reynard will travel abroad to the Holy Land to be forgiven all his sins."²³

Bellin answered the King: "I refuse to get involved in this matter in any way, unless you protect me from harm in the spiritual court before Bishop Take-it-now and before his Archdeacon Loose-wind, and before his official Sir Lets-take-it-all."

The King started to get angry and said: "I won't ask you this much for a long while. I'd prefer to hang you than be forced to ask you so insistently."

When the ram saw that the King was angry, he was so afraid

²³ Jerusalem was also an especially important pilgrimage site.

that he trembled. He went straight to the altar and sang from his books and read those things that seemed appropriate to Reynard, who didn't much care for any of it, except that the blessing would make him look good.

After Bellin the Ram had performed all this service devoutly, he hung a pouch, covered with the skin of Bruin the Bear, on the fox's neck, along with a small prayer book. Reynard was ready for his journey. He turned to the King as if he were sad to leave, and pretended to weep as if he were grieving in his heart. If he had any sorrow whatsoever, however, it was only because all the others weren't trapped in the same way he'd caught the wolf and the bear. All the same, he stood and asked all of them to pray for him, just as he would pray for them.

The fox thought he was tarrying too much, and would gladly have left, since he knew perfectly well he was guilty. The King said: "Reynard, it pains me that you're so impatient to leave and won't stay any longer."

"No, my lord, it's time to go, for one shouldn't waste time in doing good works. I pray you give me leave to depart, for I must perform my pilgrimage."

"God be with you now," said the King. And he commanded the entire court to accompany Reynard on his way, except the wolf and the bear, both of whom lay bound. No one dared show any sign of pity for them. And if only you could have seen Reynard—how meekly he went forth with his pouch and his Psalter on his shoulder and his shoes on his feet! You'd have laughed.

He started out, putting on a wise face to the world. In his heart, however, he was amused by the fact that all those who accompanied him had, only a little time earlier, been so hostile to him. And he now judged the King, who'd hated him so

intensely, in the same way. Reynard had made such a fool of him and had fully satisfied his objective. He was now a humble pilgrim.

“My lord the King,” said the fox, “I pray you to return now. I wouldn’t want you to come any farther with me, since harm might befall you if you did. You’ve arrested two murderers. If they escaped, you might be harmed by them. I pray that God keep you from misadventure.”

With these words he stood on his hind legs, and asked all the animals, great and small, who wished to share in his pardon that they should pray for him. They all said that they’d remember him in their prayers.

Reynard parted from the King and his court with such sadness that many of them felt sad themselves. He then said happily to Cuwaert the Hare and Bellin the Ram: “Dear friends, shall we take our leave of each other already? You and God will accompany me farther. Neither of you ever made me angry. You’re good to walk with—you’re courteous, friendly, and no beast ever laid an accusation against you. You’re of good character, and holy in your living. You both live as I did when I was a recluse. As long as you have leaves and grass you’re happy. You don’t care about bread, flesh, or any food of that kind.” With such flattering words Reynard seduced these two.

They accompanied him until they came to his house at Wickedhole.