

The Cock and the Hen Who Went Out into the World to Take a Look Around

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ONCE upon a time, a cock and a hen stood kicking and scraping and digging upon a garbage heap. Suddenly the cock began to flap his wings:

“Ho, ho! What I’ve found! Ho, ho, ho! What I’ve found!” he crowed.

“What have you found?” asked the mother hen.

“Some sleigh runners,” said the cock. He had uncovered a wood-plane shaving and a couple of bits of straw.

Now the hen grew envious, and she began to kick and scrape so that everything flurried about her. Suddenly she found some twine and a stick.

“Hey-ho, what I’ve found! What I’ve found!” crowed the hen.

“What have you found?” said father cock.

“I’ve found some timber and horse bits, timber and horse bits,” said the hen, preening and flapping her wings.

“A good ear has much to hear!” said the cock. “And it’s easy to dance

when fortune is your minstrel. We shall make ourselves a vehicle, and take a look around the world,” he said. “So favorable a wind doesn’t blow up every day.”

So the cock took the plane shaving and made a sleigh; he fastened the straw as shafts, and he took an old blackened besom for the carriage – for it was so good and soft to sit on. Then he went away into the barn and found himself a couple of fleas; these he bridled and harnessed before the sleigh.

Then the cock and the hen stepped up into the sleigh and drove off, and they went both quickly and well. The fleas dashed, for the cock lashed, and the hen laughed so that she fell backwards in her seat.

After they had gone a little distance, they met a mouse. “Good day and well met! You drive quickly today, my fellow,” she said.

“It is good we go so quickly; it is better we go so well,” said the cock. “Or

else we'd be driving like someone with a horse," he said, lashing the fleas so that they bucked in their harness.

"I too would like a vacation. May I come along?" asked the mouse.

"The sleigh is small and the horses are slight, so you'll have to sit up behind," said the cock.

The cock cracked his whip. And the fleas dashed, for the cock lashed, and the hen laughed so that she fell backwards in her seat.

After they had driven a distance, they met a sheep.

"Good day!" said the sheep.

"Good day to you," replied the cock.

"Are such good folk out driving in the lovely weather today? Sleighing is fun when one has such fine equipage and good horses," said the sheep.

"It's easy to divine what everyone else can see," said the cock. "And it usually shows on the horses which garden they graze in."

"May I come along?" asked the sheep. "She must ask, who does not receive an invitation," she said.

"It is quite impolite to answer before one is asked," replied the cock. "The sleigh is small and the horses are slight, so you'll have to sit up behind."

When the sheep had taken her seat, the cock cracked his whip. And the fleas dashed, for the cock lashed, and the hen laughed so that she fell backwards in her seat.

Now they drove a great distance, and then they met a hare jumping across the road.

"Good day and good courage!" said the hare.

"Good day and my thanks for that," replied the cock.

"You drive quickly, you do," said the hare.

"It continues as it began," said the cock. "The world is broad and the road is long, so I have to drive hard," he said.

"Would it be possible for me to come along?" asked the hare. "He who walks far and gathers little, he grows tired in the end," he said.

"The sleigh is small and the horses are slight, so you'll have to sit up behind. Otherwise, it's not heavy to drive that which is little to draw," said the cock.

So the hare got up behind and the cock cracked his whip. And the fleas dashed, for the cock lashed, and the hen laughed so that she fell backwards in her seat.

After they had driven a good distance farther, they met a fox.

"Bless our meeting!" said the fox.

"Thank you for that," the cock replied.

"You're driving handsomely today," said the fox.

"Yes, but not everyone likes it: some like it cold, and some like it hot; some like it lean, and some like it fat, replied the cock. "But since the day draws on and the road is long, the horses make all the difference," he said.

"Yes, craft and understanding account for much," said the fox. "If only it were so well that I too could join such a fine company, then I would show you shelter for the night. He who wants to enjoy something, he must contribute something, too" he said.

"A newly-begotten guest is often best, and no one can take a hostel along with them. "But the sleigh is small and the horses are slight, so you'll have to sit up behind." said the cock, cracking his whip.

Then they drove, the whole company. And the fleas dashed, for the cock lashed, and the hen laughed so that she fell backwards in her seat.

At great length the evening drew in, and the horses grew tired. "I know of a hostel close by here," said the fox; he had an old den, away in the forest. "I don't suppose it's anything like what you're used to, but as the old proverb says: it is better to lie in a house than upon the wild heath," he said. "We'll relax and retire for the darkest night."

"Whosoever wants a good day must think of a quiet night," replied the cock; he was weariest of them all, he was. "Wind and water go their way," he said.

So they unharnessed the fleas, and everyone went together into the fox's den.

"Many guests make for a crowded house, but there is always room in the house where there is room in the heart," said Mikkel. "Now let me count:

I - locks fox - one,
you - wee flea - two,
you - house mouse - three,
you - fair hare - four,
you - locky cockie - five,
you - penny henny - six,
you - leap sheep - seven...

there shall you lie!"

Then Mikkel bit off the sheep's head, and threw her away in a corner.

"That was one," said Mikkel. "Now let me see:

I - locks fox - one,
you - wee flea - two,
you - house mouse - three,
you - fair hare - four,
you - locky cockie - five,
you - penny henny - six...

there shall you lie!"

And then he bit off mother hen's head.

"Who is there left, do you think?"

I - locks fox - one,
you - wee flea - two,
you - house mouse - three,
you - fair hare - four,
you - locky cockie - five...

there shall you lie!"

Then he bit off the cock's head, and threw him into the corner with the others.

"Now let me see who's left:

I - locks fox - one,
you - wee flea - two,
you - house mouse - three,
you - fair hare - four...

there shall you lie!" and things went the same way with the hare.

"That was four:

I - locks fox - one,
you - wee flea - two,
you - house mouse - three...

you're next in line, and there shall you lie!" and with that he bit the mouse.

Now just the fleas were left. And Mikkel wasn't able to catch them in the dark. They had noticed something sinister going on, hidden in his fur, and bit him so that he danced both on one

foot and two. Had he not been barefooted, then he would have worn out both his socks and his shoes. They remain there, even today, and Mikkel the fox has been tired and flea-bitten ever since.



Illustration by Theodor Kittelsen (1857–1914).