

Aesop's Fables

18. THE CAGED BIRD AND THE BAT

By Nicky Grischotti

In a village far, far away there once lived a pretty little songbird. She was in fact a very grumpy, bad-tempered little songbird. You see, she'd been caught and trapped by a young woodsman named Fergus Fowler and he had locked her in a cage outside his cottage window.

So there she sat looking out through the bars, longing to be free, mumbling and grumbling all through the day.

'That nasty, horrible, grubby little good for nothing...with his muddy knees and dirty feet and his hooks and his nets and his traps...going about catching us happy folk...'

But, oh, when she sang! You've never heard such a beautiful sound. She would sing of the fields and the flowers, of the wind ruffling her feathers and the sun warming her wings. She would sing of the sound of waterfalls and cool mountain streams tinkling and splashing over pebbles.

It was a magical song that you wished to hear from the first light of dawn till last thing at night...

But that is something our little songbird...never...ever...did. Not a peep, not a whistle, not a single twitter tweet would she utter during daytime hours.

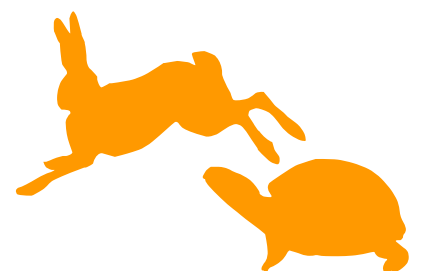
'I have my reasons,' said the songbird smugly to herself. 'Oh no...no I'll not do that again...I've learned that sure enough.'

Now Fergus Fowler wasn't such a bad young lad. He was a kind, sensitive boy and he was a really terrible hunter and if he did by some extraordinary good luck actually catch a guinea-fowl or field mouse he always set it free. He couldn't bear to see it suffer.

The only creature that Fergus Fowler had ever actually trapped and kept and loved very much was the songbird.

'What a wonderful song,' he said. 'Now you can sing for me every day!' But the little songbird hadn't sung from that day to this.

'I might be a useless hunter,' Fergus mumbled to the little bird, feeding her some of his bread, 'but you're a bit of a useless songbird too. You're very sweet and pretty, but you never, EVER sing!'





Which was true, as far as he knew, because it was only when the moon was up and the owls awake, when Fergus Fowler was sound asleep in his bed that the little songbird opened her tiny beak... and sang.

She would sing her beautiful tunes all through the long night hours while Fergus snored inside. But each day at dawn, as the sun rose over the meadows, the little songbird would fall silent and pretend to be asleep.

Late that night, while Fergus was sound asleep, the little songbird began her song. A tiny bat flew past and hearing the beautiful sound he clung to the bars of the cage and asked: 'Little songbird, you sing such lovely songs, but why do you only sing at night and never during the day like all the other birds in the forest?'

'Oh, I have a clever plan,' tweeted the bird. 'You see, the last time I sang during the day a trapper caught me in his nets and locked me in this cage. So I'll not make that mistake again!'

But the Bat replied, 'Well it's no use your doing that now when you're a prisoner. If only you'd done that before you were caught, you might still have been free.'

And the cheeky bat flew off into the night.