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Opening extract from
**The Lion Storyteller Awesome
Book of Stories**

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THE Lion Storyteller AwESome Book of STories

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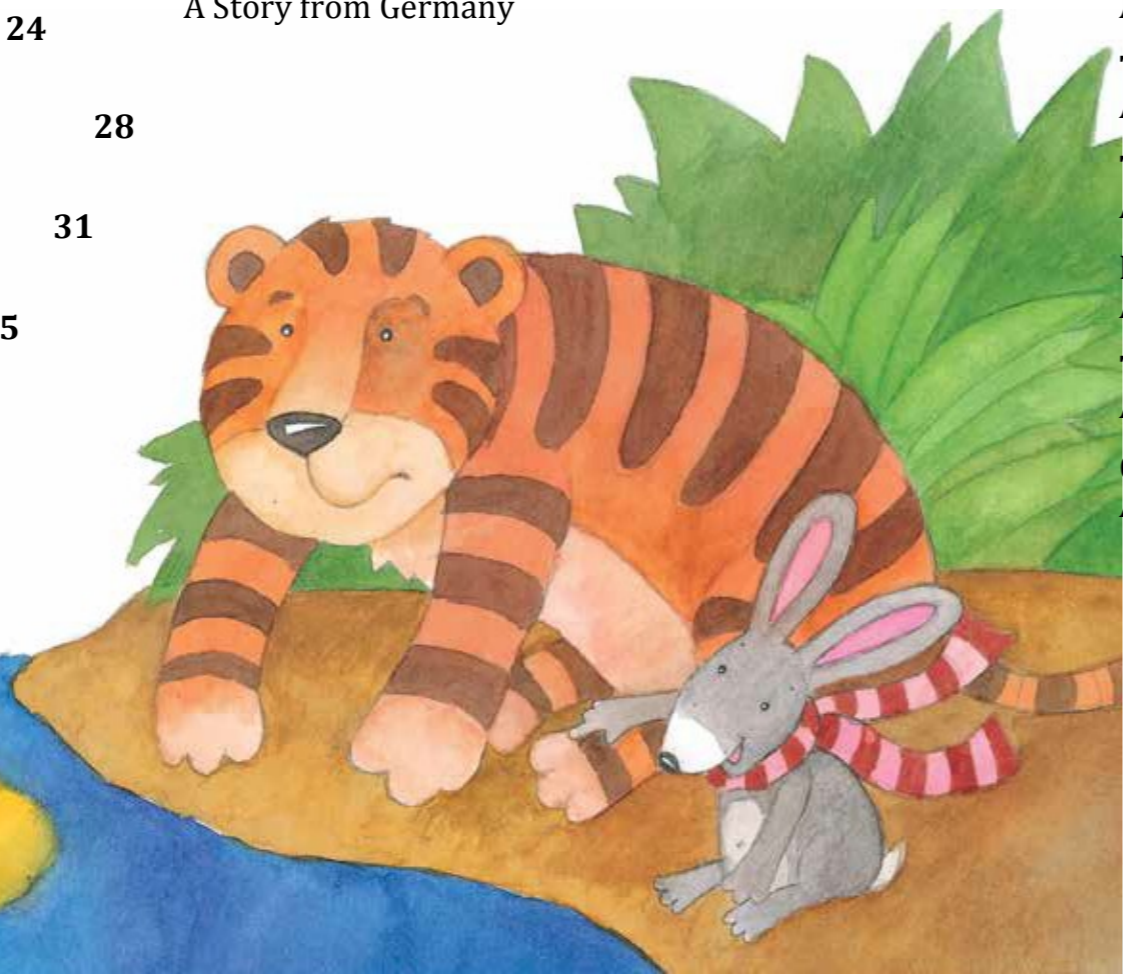
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LION
CHILDREN'S

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Introduction

It's hard to tell a story you don't love.

That's my experience, anyway. Some stories grab hold of you by the collar and shout, "Tell me! Tell me, please."

And others are just, "Meh, if you have to tell me, fair enough."

But I don't really see us in a long-term relationship, here."

When I wrote the two books that are bundled together in this collection, I spent hours in the bowels of the Pittsburgh Public Libraries, gathering up collections of stories from around the world. Then I spent hours more, in my study, reading what I'd gathered and letting the stories speak.

Some tales, like "The Mouse and the Lion", leaped and roared at me.

Others, like "Tortoise Brings Food", crept up on me (slowly and carefully – when you read it, you'll see). And Danny and Granny

and "The Big, Soft, Fluffy Bed" jumped up and down and made all kinds of noises until I paid attention. They have all

become lifelong friends.



I have gathered the stories in this collection from every part of the globe. Some of them may be familiar to you. But I hope that many more will be new – that you will share my delight in discovering them for the first time and also come to appreciate, as I did, how similar our dreams and values are, regardless of culture, nature or race.

I have also consciously chosen stories that I believe encourage the very best human traits. I really think that stories can encourage children to be more kind or gentle or compassionate – that's another of my hopes for this book.

I also hope that, as you read these stories yourself, or read them to the children in your life, they will become your friends as well as mine. I can't guarantee it, of course. Stories don't work like that. But I'm happy to have the chance to introduce them to you – the stories in this collection – and see what happens.

Perhaps you will make a few friends as well.

Bob Hartman





The Fox and the Crow

Fox crept slowly – crept up on Crow.

But as he sprang into the air – red fur flying and white teeth flashing – Crow flew away into the branches of a tall tree.

It was not Crow that Fox wanted, but the fat piece of cheese she held in her beak. So he stood thinking for a moment, and, when he had come up with another plan, Fox trotted towards the tree and called to Crow in his most pleasant voice, “Crow! Dear Crow, I’m sorry I startled you. I was just overcome, that’s all.”

Overcome? wondered Crow silently. And she stared at Fox, confused. “How else can I put it?” Fox said. “It is rare that one stumbles upon such beauty as yours in this rough and ordinary world.”

Crow stared, more puzzled than ever. Beauty? Me? she wondered. And she went to fly away.

“I can tell by your expression,” Fox continued, “that you are not following my meaning. Stay with me, just a moment, and I will explain.

“I have seen crows before. Many crows, in fact. But none with such shiny feathers as yours. None with such shapely wings. And certainly none with such deep black eyes.”

Crow could not hide her pleasure! This was all a surprise to her. But a wonderful surprise, to be sure. She wanted to say, “Go on. More please!” But there was the cheese to consider and, besides, Fox showed no signs of stopping!

“It is not only your appearance that has touched me,” he went on, “but your considerable talent as well. Most birds of your kind would have launched themselves clumsily from the ground. But you soared! The graceful arc of your wings was a picture – no, a poem! – against the evening sky!”

Crow was trembling now, overwhelmed by Fox’s flattery. And so she was totally unprepared for what came next.

“Dare I say it?” Fox whispered. “Is it too much to hope for? But is it possible, just possible, that flying is not your only gift? Is it possible that you can also... sing?”

“If so, then I would love nothing more than to hear you. Could you...? Would you... (Dare I even suggest such a thing?) ... honour me with just one note from that lovely crow throat?”

Crow could no longer think. She was so taken in by Fox’s sweet words that she forgot even the simplest thing – that crows cannot sing. Not even one note.

So Crow opened her mouth, and two things happened.

The most awful “squawk” came out of her beak. And the cheese came out as well!

In fact, it dropped straight to the ground, where Fox gobbled it down in one bite.

“Thank you very kindly,” he grinned. “I knew something wonderful would come out of that mouth of yours.”

Then he trotted off into the forest, leaving Crow feeling foolish and flattered all at the same time.





City Mouse and Country Mouse

City Mouse went to visit Country Mouse.

He shut the door of his flat. He climbed into the lift.

He walked into the garage, hopped into his car and nosed his way out onto the city streets.

He stopped at one light after another, crawling slowly past office blocks and theatres and restaurants.

He sped up a little when he reached the suburbs. He motored past schools and parks and shopping malls, and row after row of houses.

Finally, City Mouse reached the country. Fields flew by, dotted with hungry sheep. Then barns and hedgerows and trees and hills. He drove faster and faster, slowing down only to race around the occasional tractor. And then he stopped. For there, at the side of the road, sat Country Mouse's cosy country cottage.

Flowers filled the front garden, and the back garden too. And there were apple trees and pear trees, and birds singing all around.

The two friends sat in the garden and chatted. They sipped home-made cider and shared simple country meals – bread and cheese and pickle.

But after a few days of this, City Mouse found that he was just a little bit bored.

“This is all very pretty,” he said to his friend. “But it’s nothing compared to the city! There’s so much to see there! So much to do! So much excitement and adventure!”

“Well, let’s go then!” squeaked Country Mouse. “Let’s go at once!”

So they packed their things, watered the plants and hopped into the car.

And City Mouse took Country Mouse back with him to the city.

They drove fast at first, slowing down only to race around the occasional tractor. They flew past hills and trees and hedgerows and barns, and fields dotted with hungry sheep.

They slowed down when they reached the suburbs, driving past row after row of houses. They motored past shopping malls, parks and schools. And at last they reached the city.

They were barely crawling along now – past restaurants and theatres and office blocks – stopping at one light after another.

Country Mouse pressed his long nose against the window and just stared.

“You were right!” he said, gazing up at the tall, tall buildings. “There is so much to see! So much to do! Let’s start at once!”

So they parked the car in the garage and walked out onto the city streets. They tried on fancy clothes, looked at expensive jewellery and ate their dinner at a restaurant so fine that Country Mouse could not even pronounce the names of the food on the menu! But as they walked home, talking and laughing about what they had done, they were suddenly met by a gang of very big and very hungry City Cats.

“What do we do now?” asked Country Mouse. “We run!” squeaked City Mouse. “I told you the city was exciting!”

And that’s what they did, scampering this way and that, through city streets and city alleys, until they had left the City Cats far behind.

They leaned against a city building and huffed and puffed, but before they could catch their breath, they were surprised by a pack of noisy City Dogs!

“What now?” trembled Country Mouse.

“We run again!” squeaked City Mouse. “I told you the city was full of adventure!”

Over city pavements and under city cars they raced until they ducked at last into a hole in a city wall. And while the dogs barked outside, they crept along a narrow, dark passage towards a pinprick of light at the other end.

“I smell cheese!” squeaked Country Mouse. “Careful!” warned City Mouse, but before he could stop him, his friend was racing to the light at the end of the hole. There was cheese, he could smell it. There was cheese, he could taste it. There was cheese! Lying there, just waiting for him, on top of a contraption made of metal and wood. But just before he could grab it, City Mouse raced to his side and pushed Country Mouse out of the way. And the metal sprang up from the wood and chopped the cheese in half! “City cheese board?” asked Country Mouse. “City mousetrap,” answered his friend. “I think it’s time we went home.” So the two friends crept carefully back to City Mouse’s flat. City Mouse slept soundly that night. But Country Mouse tossed and turned. At first, the noise of the traffic kept him awake, but when, at last, he fell asleep, his dreams were filled with cats’ teeth and dog growls and the “snap” of waiting traps. When morning came, City Mouse crawled out of bed and found his friend packing his bags. “I’m going home,” said Country Mouse. “The city may be exciting. It may be filled with adventure. But it’s also very dangerous! And I think I would be happier in the country, where I belong.” City Mouse was sad to see his friend go, but he understood, he really did. For he was much happier where he belonged as well. So the two friends locked up the flat and climbed in the lift and went down to the garage. They hopped into the car. And, crawling through the city, motoring through the suburbs and flying through the country, City Mouse took his friend back home.