

Mary Leapor, "The Fox and the Hen. A Fable"

Description

MARY LEAPOR

"The Fox and the Hen. A Fable"

'Twas on a fair and healthy Plain,
There liv'd a poor but honest Swain,
Had to his Lot a little Ground,
Defended by a quick-set Mound:
'Twas there he milk'd his brindled Kine, 5
And there he fed his harmless Swine:
His Pigeons flutter'd to and fro,
And bask'd his Poultry in a Row:
Much we might say of each of these,
As how his Pigs in Consort wheeze; 10
How the sweet Hay his Heifers chew,
And how the Pigeons softly coo:
But we shall wave this motley Strain,
And keep to one that's short and plain:
Nor paint the Dunghill's feather'd King, 15
For of the Hen we mean to sing.

A Hen there was, a strange one too,
Cou'd sing (believe me, it is true)
Or rather (as you may presume)
Wou'd prate and cackle in a Tune: 20
This quickly spread the Pullet's Fame,
And Birds and Beasts together came:
All mixt in one promiscuous Throng,
To visit Partlet and her Song.
It chanc'd there came amongst the Crew, 25
Of witty Foxes not a few:
But one more smart than all the rest,
His serious Neighbour thus address:
'What think you of this Partlet here?
'Tis true her Voice is pretty clear: 30
Yet without pausing I can tell,
In what much more she wou'd excel:
Methinks she'd eat exceeding well.'
This heard the list'ning Hen, as she
Sat perch'd upon a Maple-tree. 35

The shrewd Proposal gall'd her Pride,
 And thus to *Reynard* she reply'd:
 "Sir, you're extremely right I vow,
 But how will you come at me now?
 You dare not mount this lofty Tree, 40
 So there I'm pretty safe, you see.
 From long ago, (or Record lies)
 You Foxes have been counted wise:
 But sure this Story don't agree
 With your Device of eating me. 45
 For you, Dame Fortune still intends
 Some coarser Food than singing Hens:
 Besides e'er you can reach so high.
 Remember you must learn to fly.

I own 'tis but a scurvy way,
 You have as yet to seize your Prey, 50
 By sculking from the Beams of Light,
 And robbing Hen-roosts in the Night:
 Yet you must keep this vulgar Trade
 Of thieving till your Wings are made.

Had I the keeping of you tho', 55
 I'd make your subtle Worship know,
 We Chickens are your Betters due,
 Not fatted up for such as you:
 Shut up in Cub with rusty Chain,
 I'd make you lick your Lips in vain: 60
 And take a special Care, be sure,
 No Pullet should come near your Door:
 But try if you could feed or no,
 Upon a Kite or Carrion Crow.
 Here ceas'd the Hen. The baffl'd Beast 65
 March'd off without his promis'd Feast.

NOTES:

4 *quick-set Mound* Likely a raised boundary formed of living plants, esp. thorny ones such as hawthorne (OED).

15 *the Dunghill's feather'd King* A rooster, or cock.

21 *Pullet* A young domestic hen (OED).

23 *Throng* A large densely packed gathering of people or animals (OED).

24 *Partlet* A name traditionally applied to a hen (OED).

37 *Reynard* A proper name applied traditionally (chiefly in literature) to a fox (OED).

59 *Cub* • A stall, pen, or shed • for farm animals (*OED*).

64 *Kite* • A bird of prey • (*OED*).

SOURCE: *Poems Upon Several Occasions* (London, 1748), pp. 97-100. [*Google Books*]

Edited by Josh Hernandez