

Fox and the Rooster

by Carole Gauntlett

Fox was very smart and very clever. He liked that about himself. Whenever he was feeling ESPECIALLY smart and clever, you could hear his long tail go, "Swish, swish, swish."

His forest neighbors knew that sound and always looked about to make sure that their children were close by. Some would even call their children in for dinner when dinner wasn't even started.

Because the other animals had gotten so very careful, it was getting harder and harder for Fox to find a tasty meal near home. Early one morning, Fox awoke feeling quite hungry. He set out for the edge of the forest to see what he could find.

When he reached his destination, the sun was just beginning to rise behind a quiet farm. There on a low fence, was a fat young rooster. He was trying his best to waken the barnyard animals with his little "Cock-a-doodle-do."

Fox stood and watched and listened as the young bird struggled to make himself heard. Rooster's small voice was barely loud enough to wake the piglets who were snuggled next to their mother quite near the fence. They looked up for a moment and went right back to sleep. "Swish, swish, swish." Fox stood and listened. After a moment, smiling politely, Fox said "Good Morning Rooster. You certainly are making a lot of noise. You DO know that you're going to wake all the other animals, don't you?" Swish, swish, swish.

"Of course I do! It's my JOB." said rooster. "Oh, My!" Said Fox. "You're in charge of ALL the animals on the WHOLE farm?" Rooster thought for a minute. He liked the way that sounded. Really, in a way, he supposed it was true. So, without looking Fox in the eye, he answered, "Yes, yes I am."

Swish, swish, swish.

"And you so young," said the Fox. "You do sound a lot like the old rooster who used to make that sound. The most beautiful sound for miles around."

"You think I sound like Old Rooster?" he asked smiling happily.

"Oh, My, Yes," said Fox. "Well, almost," he added.

Now Rooster knew that he shouldn't be talking to this stranger so he moved a bit further down the fence before he asked, "Almost?"

"Very, very close," said Fox as he inched forward. "You know that he would stretch his legs up tall and straight and 'Cock-a-doodle-do' for all to hear. "Maybe if you try that, you'll sound just like him." Swish, swish, swish.

"I can do that," said Rooster and he stretched his legs and tried his best. This time even the Mother Pig opened her eyes for a moment.

"Much, much better," said Fox. You've almost got it! Old Rooster used to stretch his neck out,

oh so far too. Maybe that will help." Fox moved closer as he spoke. Swish, swish, swish. Once again Rooster felt a little uneasy about this stranger but he WAS trying to help, wasn't he? Rooster stretched his legs and his neck as far as he could and tried again. This time the mother pig and her piglets got up and started for their trough.

"There! I did it!" said Rooster. "Thank you for your help. Now I sound just like Old Rooster."

"Very, very good," said Fox. "But I thought that you were in charge of waking ALL the animals, not just the pigs. Isn't that so?" Swish, swish, swish.

"Well, I AM," said Rooster. "Just like Old Rooster before me."

"Well then," said Fox. "There is one more thing that you can try. Old Rooster would stretch out his legs and his neck just like you, but then he would throw back his head, close his eyes and Cock-a-doodle-do so that every animal on the farm would give up sleeping.

Now Rooster was getting very tired but he did so want to sound as good as Old Rooster. He did SO want Fox to think that he was in charge of all the animals. So he determined to try one more time. He stretched his legs as far as he could. Swish. He stretched his neck as long as he could. Swish. He threw back his head and closed his eyes and before he could make another sound, Fox had caught his breakfast.

The moral of the story is: Don't lose your head to false flattery.