

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: **The Fox and the Crab**

A crab crawled up out of its stream on to the green grass of a meadow, where he took his ease and convenience. Then a fox came along, saw the crab slowly crawling, and said to him derisively: "Mr. Crab, how is it that you walk so leisurely? Who took your speediness from you? Or when do you think to reach the end of the meadow? From your gait, I well perceive that you could move faster going backwards than forwards!" The crab was no fool but instantly replied: "Mr. Fox, you do not know my nature. I am noble and worthy; I am faster and lighter, and run more swiftly than you and your kind; if anyone does not concede me this, may the Devil teach him manners. Mr. Fox, would you care to race me for a wager? I shall stake a pound right now!"

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," said the fox. "Would you like to run from Berne to Basle, or from Bremen to Brabant?"

"Oh no," said the crab, "that would be too far. I was thinking we could race each other for half a mile, or a whole mile, that will not be too much for the two of us!"

"A mile, a mile!" the fox eagerly cried, then the crab spoke again: "I shall give you a nice handicap, and unless you accept it I shall not want to race."

"And what is to be the nature of this handicap?" asked the fox, who was curious. The crab replied: "It shall be precisely the length of a fox. You step before me, and I shall step behind you, so your hind feet are nudging my head, and when I say – Okay, let's go! – then we begin to run."

The fox was well pleased with these words; he said, "I shall obey you in every detail." And then he turned his hindquarters, with his strong bushy

tail, towards the crab, who sank his claws into it without the fox noticing, and cried, "Okay – let's go!" And the fox ran as he had never yet run in all his born days, so that his feet began to hurt; and when he approached the finish, he span swiftly around and cried: "Now where is that stupid crab? Where are you? You are tarrying far too long!" But the crab, who was now closer to the finishing-line than the fox, called from behind him: "Mr. Fox! What is the meaning of these words? Why are you so slow? I have been standing here a pretty while waiting for you! Why did you come at such a dawdle?"

The fox was thoroughly startled, and saying, "The Devil must have brought you here from Hell!" he paid his wager and whisked away, his tail between his legs.