

The fox repaid in his own coin



This story is adapted from the famous poem *The Canterbury Tales*. A group of people going to visit Canterbury Cathedral meet at an inn in London at the start of their journey. To pass time along the way, they decide that each person should tell a story. This is the story told by one of the priests.

In a poor widow's yard lived a fine cockerel, named Chanticleer. One night he awoke terrified. He told his mate, Pertelot, his dream of a hound that threatened him. Dame Pertelot laughed. Chanticleer's dream, she said, was caused by indigestion.

While Chanticleer enumerated other dreams that had come true, he looked on Dame Pertelot's face, and took courage. By dawn, Chanticleer was strutting around as fierce as a lion.

Some days later, as he was proudly crowing at the sun, he spied a fox hiding in a herb bed. Remembering his dream, Chanticleer wanted to flee, but the fox said, "Gentle sir, don't be afraid. I am your friend. I only came to hear your sweet voice. Your father came to my house once. I never heard anyone but you sing as well as he did. Let me hear you imitate your father."

Chanticleer, flattered by the sly fox's remarks, stretched his neck, closed his eyes, and began to crow loudly. The fox, jumping up, seized him by the throat, and fled towards the woods. Dame Pertelot made such a racket that the widow ran from her cottage. She called the neighbours, who helped chase the fox. But as Chanticleer lay helpless in the fox's grip he made a plan.

"Dear sir," said he to his captor, "if I were you, I would turn on those proud people and tell them that you're keeping this cockerel, and will eat him, whatever they do."

"Indeed," declared the fox, "I shall."

But, as he spoke, the cockerel slipped from his mouth and quickly flew out of reach.

"Oh alas," said the fox, "I'm sorry I scared you. I mean no harm. Gentle sir, come down again, and let me explain."

But Chanticleer replied that he had been deceived once and would not be deceived again. And so the fox was paid in his own coin – flattery.

Story based on 'The nun's priest's tale' from *The Canterbury Tales*
Geoffrey Chaucer (1343–1400)
retold in the *Children's Encyclopaedia* by Arthur Mee