

*THE STREET MUSICIANS*

A MAN once possessed a donkey which had served him faithfully for many years, but at last the poor beast grew old and feeble, and every day his work became more of a burden. As he was no longer of any use, his master made up his mind to shoot him; but when the donkey learnt the fate that was in store for him, he determined not to die, but to run away to the nearest town and there to become a street musician.

When he had trotted along for some distance he came upon a greyhound lying on the road, and panting for dear life. 'Well, brother,' said the donkey, 'what's the matter with you? You look rather tired.'

'So I am,' replied the dog, 'but because I am getting old and am growing weaker every day, and cannot go out hunting any longer, my master wanted to poison me; and, as life is still sweet, I have taken leave of him. But how I am to earn my own livelihood I haven't a notion.'

'Well,' said the donkey, 'I am on my way to the nearest big town, where I mean to become a street musician. Why don't you take up music as a profession and come along with me? I'll play the flute and you can play the kettle-drum.'

The greyhound was quite pleased at the idea, and the two set off together. When they had gone a short distance they met a cat with a face as long as three rainy days. 'Now, what has happened to upset your happiness, friend puss?' inquired the donkey

‘It’s impossible to look cheerful when one feels depressed,’ answered the cat. ‘I am well up in years now, and have lost most of my teeth; consequently I prefer sitting in front of the fire to catching mice, and so my old mistress wanted to drown me. I have no wish to die yet, so I ran away from her; but good advice is expensive, and I don’t know where I am to go to, or what I am to do.’

‘Come to the nearest big town with us,’ said the donkey, ‘and try your fortune as a street musician. I know what sweet music you make at night, so you are sure to be a success.’

The cat was delighted with the donkey’s proposal, and they all continued their journey together. In a short time they came to the courtyard of an inn, where they found a cock crowing lustily. ‘What in the world is the matter with you?’ asked the donkey. ‘The noise you are making is enough to break the drums of our ears.’

‘I am only prophesying good weather,’ said the cock; ‘for to-morrow is a feast day, and just because it is a holiday and a number of people are expected at the inn, the landlady has given orders for my neck to be wrung to-night, so that I may be made into soup for to-morrow’s dinner.’

‘I’ll tell you what, redcap,’ said the donkey; ‘you had much better come with us to the nearest town. You have got a good voice, and could join a street band we are getting up.’ The cock was much pleased with the idea, and the party proceeded on their way.

But the nearest big town was a long way off, and it took them more than a day to reach it. In the evening they came to a wood, and they made up their minds to go no further, but to spend the night there. The donkey and the greyhound lay down under a big tree, and the cat and the cock got up into the branches, the cock flying right up to the topmost twig, where he thought he would be safe from all danger. Before he went to sleep he

looked round the four points of the compass, and saw a little spark burning in the distance. He called out to his companions that he was sure there must be a house not far off, for he could see a light shining.

When he heard this, the donkey said at once : ' Then we must get up, and go and look for the house, for this is very poor shelter.' And the greyhound added : ' Yes ; I feel I'd be all the better for a few bones and a scrap or two of meat.'

So they set out for the spot where the light was to be seen shining faintly in the distance, but the nearer they approached it the brighter it grew, till at last they came to a brilliantly lighted house. The donkey being the biggest of the party, went to the window and looked in.

' Well, greyhead, what do you see ? ' asked the cock.

' I see a well-covered table,' replied the donkey, ' with excellent food and drink, and several robbers are sitting round it, enjoying themselves highly.'

' I wish we were doing the same,' said the cock.

' So do I,' answered the donkey. ' Can't we think of some plan for turning out the robbers, and taking possession of the house ourselves ?'

So they consulted together what they were to do, and at last they arranged that the donkey should stand at the window with his fore-feet on the sill, that the greyhound should get on his back, the cat on the dog's shoulder, and the cock on the cat's head. When they had grouped themselves in this way, at a given signal, they all began their different forms of music. The donkey brayed, the greyhound barked, the cat miaowed, and the cock crew. Then they all scrambled through the window into the room, breaking the glass into a thousand pieces as they did so.

The robbers were all startled by the dreadful noise, and thinking that some evil spirits at the least were entering the house, they rushed out into the wood, their

hair standing on end with terror. The four companions, delighted with the success of their trick, sat down at the table, and ate and drank all the food and wine that the robbers had left behind them.

When they had finished their meal they put out the lights, and each animal chose a suitable sleeping-place. The donkey lay down in the courtyard outside the house, the dog behind the door, the cat in front of the fire, and the cock flew up on to a high shelf, and, as they were all tired after their long day, they soon went to sleep.

Shortly after midnight, when the robbers saw that no light was burning in the house and that all seemed quiet, the captain of the band said: 'We were fools to let ourselves be so easily frightened away;' and, turning to one of his men, he ordered him to go and see if all was safe.

The man found everything in silence and darkness, and going into the kitchen he thought he had better strike a light. He took a match, and mistaking the fiery eyes of the cat for two glowing coals, he tried to light his match with them. But the cat didn't see the joke, and sprang at his face, spitting and scratching him in the most vigorous manner. The man was terrified out of his life, and tried to run out by the back door; but he stumbled over the greyhound, which bit him in the leg. Yelling with pain he ran across the courtyard only to receive a kick from the donkey's hind leg as he passed him. In the meantime the cock had been roused from his slumbers, and feeling very cheerful he called out, from the shelf where he was perched, 'Kikeriki!'

Then the robber hastened back to his captain and said: 'Sir, there is a dreadful witch in the house, who spat at me and scratched my face with her long fingers; and before the door there stands a man with a long knife, who cut my leg severely. In the courtyard outside lies a black monster, who fell upon me with a huge wooden club; and that is not all, for, sitting on the roof,

is a judge, who called out: "Bring the rascal to me." So I fled for dear life.'

After this the robbers dared not venture into the house again, and they abandoned it for ever. But the four street musicians were so delighted with their lodgings that they determined to take up their abode in the robbers' house, and, for all I know to the contrary, they may be living there to this day.

[From the German, *Kletke*.]