

The Lion & the Gnat Aesop's Fables

"Away with you, vile insect!" said a Lion angrily to a Gnat that was buzzing around his head. But the Gnat was not in the least disturbed.

"Do you think," he said spitefully to the Lion, "that I am afraid of you because they call you king?"

The next instant he flew at the Lion and stung him sharply on the nose. Mad with rage, the Lion struck fiercely at the Gnat, but only succeeded in tearing himself with his claws. Again and again the Gnat stung the Lion, who now was roaring terribly. At last, worn out with rage and covered with wounds that his own teeth and claws had made, the Lion gave up the fight.

The Gnat buzzed away to tell the whole world about his victory, but instead he flew straight into a spider's web. And there, he who had defeated the King of beasts came to a miserable end, the prey of a little spider.



The least of our enemies is often the most to be feared.

Pride over a success should not throw us off our guard.

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THE WHITE RABBIT AND THE MARTEN

THE white rabbit lived in town, but he was very unhappy there. The dogs chased him and the children pulled his ears.

“I’m tired of this city life,” said he. “I will run away into the country. There I shall be much safer among the animals of the woods.”

So he ran away to the country. Soon he met a wild rabbit. Now wild rabbits are always gray.

“No one in town wears gray,” said the white rabbit, scornfully. “The best people always wear white and look very fine. That is why my coat is so soft and white. Ours was the best family in town.”

The gray rabbit put his ears very far back. He said never a word, but ran away into the woods.

One day the white rabbit met a marten. The marten is small and brown. His fur is worn by the best people and he knows they think much of him. He could not understand why the white rabbit should think himself any better than a marten. So he asked the white rabbit many questions.

“I cannot talk with you now,” was the answer, “for I must hurry home to my family. Come and take dinner with me to-morrow and then I will gladly an-

swer all your questions. People who come from the city know a great deal and like to tell what they know."

"Thank you," replied the marten. "I shall be glad to come and hear all about the city."

The next day he brushed his fur and washed his face and paws very carefully. The gray rabbits watched him go to the rabbit's home in the brush heap. They put their ears very far back and exclaimed, "The marten is wise, but he will be wiser when he comes home!"

The marten and his host had a fine dinner, you may be sure. The marten thought the rabbit ate very fast, but it was not polite to say so. He watched the rabbit's mouth and tried to eat like him. Then he began to ask questions.

"What makes the slit in your lip?" asked he.

“My family in town all ate with knives and forks. My knife slipped and cut my lip,” was the answer.

“Why do you keep moving your mouth and whiskers?”

“Because I am always planning and worrying. My family always worried. Out here in the country we do not think enough of the terrible things that may happen. Perhaps a great fire might come and burn up all these trees; or a flood might swell the river and drown us. The birds make us forget these awful things. We are too happy.”

The marten did not agree with this and shook his head. He did not mean to do this, however, because he did not want the white rabbit to think him different from town people. So he pretended some grass had tickled his nose.

After dinner they went out for a walk.

“What makes you hop?” asked the marten.

“My family always hop. People in town never step along like country people. See how well I look and how clumsy that moose cow is over there.”

Just then they heard a soft step on the brown pine needles. The marten flattened himself on the ground, and his brown fur could not be seen. The white rabbit quickly hopped away and hid in the bushes.

When the two met again that day, the marten asked, “Why did you run so fast?”

“I used to run races when I was in town,” was the reply. “The boys and the dogs all played with me. Every one goes fast when in town. I forgot how slow the country people are.”

The marten ran along with the rabbit.

“Why is your tail so short and why are your ears so long?” he asked.

“Every one in town wears something on his head. I wanted to be like the others, so I wore long ears to cover my head. When my ears were finished there was only a little ball of fur left for my tail.”

The marten ran to the tallest pine tree and climbed up where he could see the white rabbit. Then he screamed back, “I don't believe a word of it! I DON'T BELIEVE A WORD OF IT!”

Paul Bunyan

Many years ago, Paul Bunyan was born in the northeastern American state of Maine. His mother and father were shocked when they first saw the boy. Paul was so large at birth that five large birds had to carry him to his parents. When the boy was only a few weeks old, he weighed more than 45 kilograms.

As a child, Paul was always hungry. His parents needed 10 cows to supply milk for his meals. Before long, he ate 50 eggs and 10 containers of potatoes every day.

Young Paul grew so big that his parents did not know what to do with him. Once, Paul rolled over so much in his sleep that he caused an earthquake. This angered people in the town where his parents lived. So, the government told his mother and father they would have to move him somewhere else.

Paul's father built a wooden cradle -- a traditional bed for a baby. His parents put the cradle in waters along the coast of Maine. However, every time Paul rolled over, huge waves covered all the coastal towns. So his parents brought their son back on land. They took him into the woods. This is where he grew up.

As a boy, Paul helped his father cut down trees. Paul had the strength of many men. He also was extremely fast. He could turn off a light and then jump into his bed before the room got dark.

Maine is very cold for much of the year. One day, it started to snow. The snow covered Paul's home and a nearby forest. However, this snow was very unusual. It was blue. The blue snow kept falling until the forest was covered.

Paul put on his snowshoes and went out to see the unusual sight. As he walked, Paul discovered an animal stuck in the snow. It was a baby ox. Paul decided to take the ox home with him. He put the animal near the fireplace. After the ox got warmer, his hair remained blue.

Paul decided to keep the blue ox and named him Babe. Babe grew very quickly. One night, Paul left him in a small building with the other animals. The next morning, the barn was gone and so was Babe. Paul searched everywhere for the animal. He found Babe calmly eating grass in a valley, with the barn still on top of his back. Babe followed Paul and grew larger every day. Every time Paul looked, Babe seemed to grow taller.

In those days, much of North America was filled with thick, green forests. Paul Bunyan could clear large wooded areas with a single stroke of his large, sharp axe.

Paul taught Babe to help with his work. Babe was very useful. For example, Paul had trouble removing trees along a road that was not straight. He decided to tie one end of the road to what remained of a tree in the ground. Paul tied the other end to Babe. Babe dug his feet in the ground and pulled with all his strength until the road became straight.

In time, Paul and Babe the Blue Ox left Maine, and moved west to look for work in other forests. Along the way, Paul dug out the Great Lakes to provide drinking water for Babe. They settled in a camp near the Onion River in the state of Minnesota.

Paul decided to get other lumberjacks to help with the work. His work crew became known as the Seven Axemen. Each man was more than 2 meters tall and weighed more than 160 kilograms. All of the Axemen were named Elmer. That way, they all came running whenever Paul called them.

The man who cooked for the group was named Sourdough Sam. He made everything -- except coffee -- from sourdough, a substance used in making sourdough bread.

Every Sunday, Paul and his crew ate hot cakes. Each hot cake was so large that it took five men to eat one. Paul usually had 10 or more hot cakes, depending on how hungry he was. The table where the men ate was so long that a server usually drove to one end of the table and stayed the night. The server drove back in the morning, with a fresh load of food.

Paul needed someone to help with the camp's finances. He gave the job to a man named Johnny Inkslinger. Johnny kept records of everything, including wages and the cost of feeding Babe. He sometimes used nine containers of writing fluid a day to keep such detailed records.

The camp also was home to Sport, the **Reversible** Dog. One of the workers accidentally cut Sport in two. The man hurried to put the dog back together, but made a mistake. He bent the animal's back the wrong way. However, that was not a problem for Sport. He learned to run on his front legs until he was tired. Then, he turned the other way and ran on his back legs.

Big mosquitoes were a problem at the camp. The men attacked the insects with their axes and long sticks. Before long, the men put barriers around their living space. Then, Paul ordered them to get big bees to destroy the mosquitoes. But the bees married the mosquitoes, and the problem got worse. They began to produce young insects. One day, the insects' love of sweets caused them to attack a ship that was bringing sugar to the camp. At last, the mosquitoes and bees were defeated. They ate so much sugar they could not move.

Paul always gave Babe the Blue Ox a 35-kilogram piece of sugar when he was good. But sometimes Babe liked to play tricks. At night, Babe would make noises and hit the ground with his feet. The men at the camp would run out of the buildings where they slept, thinking it was an earthquake.

When winter came, Babe had trouble finding enough food to eat. Snow covered everything. Ole the **Blacksmith** solved the problem. He made huge green sunglasses for Babe. When Babe wore the sunglasses, he thought the snow was grass. Before long, Babe was strong and healthy again.

One year, Paul's camp was especially cold. It was so cold that the men let their facial hair grow very long. When the men spoke, their words froze in the air. Everything they said remained frozen all winter long, and did not melt until spring.

Paul Bunyan and Babe left their mark on many areas. Some people say they were responsible for creating Puget Sound in the western state of Washington. Others say Paul Bunyan and Babe cleared the trees from the states of North Dakota and South Dakota. They prepared this area for farming.

Babe the Blue Ox died in South Dakota. One story says he ate too many hot cakes. Paul buried his old friend there. Today, the burial place is known as the Black Hills.

Whatever happened to Paul Bunyan? There are lots of stories. Some people say he was last seen in Alaska, or even the Arctic Circle. Another tradition says he still returns to Minnesota every summer. It says Paul moves in and out of the woods, so few people ever know that he is there.

John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed)

Johnny Appleseed was an early American hero. His real name was John Chapman. Americans might not know the story of John Chapman, but almost everyone has heard of Johnny Appleseed.

Johnny Chapman was born in Massachusetts in seventeen seventy-four. He grew apple trees on land he owned in Ohio and Indiana. He traveled with settlers as they moved west. He supplied them with apple seeds and young trees and, it is said, religion.

Johnny Appleseed By Edgar Lee Masters

When the air of October is sweet and cold as the wine of apples
Hanging ungathered in frosted orchards along the Grand River,
I take the road that winds by the resting fields and wander
From Eastmanville to Nunica down to the Villa Crossing.

I look for old men to talk with, men as old as the orchards,
Men to tell me of ancient days, of those who built and planted,
Lichen gray, branch broken, bent and sighing,
Hobbling for warmth in the sun and for places to sit and smoke.

For there is a legend here, a tale of the croaking old ones
That Johnny Appleseed came here, planted some orchards around here,
When nothing was here but the pine trees, oaks and the beeches,
And nothing was here but the marshes, lake and the river.

Peter Van Zylen is ninety and this he tells me:
My father talked with Johnny Appleseed there on the hill-side,
There by the road on the way to Fruitport, saw him
Clearing pines and oaks for a place for an apple orchard.

Peter Van Zylen says: He got that name from the people
For carrying apple-seed with him and planting orchards
All the way from Ohio, through Indiana across here,
Planting orchards, they say, as far as Illinois.

Johnny Appleseed said, so my father told me:
I go to a place forgotten, the orchards will thrive and be here
For children to come, who will gather and eat hereafter.
And few will know who planted, and none will understand.

I laugh, said Johnny Appleseed: Some fellow buys this timber
Five years, perhaps from to-day, begins to clear for barley.
And here in the midst of the timber is hidden an apple orchard.
How did it come here? Lord! Who was it here before me?

Yes, I was here before him, to make these places of worship,
Labor and laughter and gain in the late October.
Why did I do it, eh? Some folks say I am crazy.
Where do my labors end? Far west, God only knows!

Said Johnny Appleseed there on the hill-side: Listen!
Beware the deceit of nurseries, sellers of seeds of the apple.
Think! You labor for years in trees not worth the raising.
You planted what you knew not, bitter or sour for sweet.

No luck more bitter than poor seed, but one as bitter:
The planting of perfect seed in soil that feeds and fails,
Nourishes for a little, and then goes spent forever.
Look to your seed, he said, and remember the soil.

And after that is the fight: the foe curled up at the root,
The scale that crumples and deadens, the moth in the blossoms
Becoming a life that coils at the core of a thing of beauty:
You bite your apple, a worm is crushed on your tongue!

And it's every bit the truth, said Peter Van Zylén.
So many things love an apple as well as ourselves.
A man must fight for the thing he loves, to possess it:
Apples, freedom, heaven, said Peter Van Zylén.

Pecos Bill

Pecos Bill had one of the strangest childhoods a boy ever had. It all started after his father decided that there was no longer enough room in east Texas for his family.

"Pack up, Ma!" he cried. "Neighbors movin' in fifty miles away! It's getting' too crowded!"

So they loaded up a wagon with all their things. Now some say they had fifteen children while others say eighteen. However many there were, the children were louder than thunder. And as they set off across the wild country of west Texas, their mother and father could hardly hear a thing.

Now, as they came to the Pecos River, the wagon hit a big rock. The force threw little Bill out of the wagon and he landed on the sandy ground. Mother did not know Bill was gone until she gathered the children for the midday meal. Mother set off with some of the children to look for Bill, but they could find no sign of him.

Well, some people say Bill was just a baby when his family lost him. Others say he was four years old. But all agree that a group of animals called coyotes found Bill and raised him. Bill did all the things those animals did, like chase lizards and howl at the moon. He became as good a coyote as any.

Now, Bill spent seventeen years living like a coyote until one day a cowboy rode by on his horse. Some say the cowboy was one of Bill's brothers. Whoever he was, he took one look at Bill and asked, "What are you?"

Bill was not used to human language. At first, he could not say anything. The cowboy repeated his question. This time, Bill said, "**varmint.**"

That is a word used for any kind of wild animal.

"No you aren't," said the cowboy.

"Yes, I am," said Bill. "I have fleas."

"Lots of people have fleas," said the cowboy. "You don't have a tail."

"Yes, I do," said Bill.

"Show it to me then," the cowboy said.

Bill looked at his backside and realized that he did not have a tail like the other coyotes.

"Well, what am I then?" asked Bill.

"You're a cowboy! So start acting like one!" the cowboy cried out. Well that was all Bill needed to hear. He said goodbye to his coyote friends and left to join the world of humans.

Now, Pecos Bill was a good cowboy. Still, he hungered for adventure. One day he heard about a rough group of men. There is some **debate** over what the group was called. But one storyteller calls it the "Hell's Gate Gang."

So Bill set out across the rough country to find this gang of men. Well, Bill's horse soon was injured so Bill had to carry it for a hundred miles. Then Bill met a rattlesnake fifty feet long. The snake made a hissing noise and was not about to let Bill pass. But after a tense minute, Bill beat the snake until it surrendered. He felt sorry for the varmint, though, and wrapped it around his arm.

After Bill walked another hundred miles, he came across an angry mountain lion. There was a huge battle, but Bill took control of the big cat and put his saddle on it. He rode that mountain lion all the way to the camp of the Hell's Gate Gang.

Now, when Bill saw the gang he shouted out, "Who's the boss around here?"

A huge cowboy, nine feet tall, took one look at Bill and said in a shaky voice, "I was the boss. But you are the boss from here on in."

With his gang, Pecos Bill was able to create the biggest ranch in the Southwest. Bill and his men had so many cattle that they needed all of New Mexico to hold them. Arizona was the pasture where the cattle ate grass.

Pecos Bill invented the art of being a cowboy. He invented the skill of throwing a special rope called a **lasso** over a cow's head to catch wandering cattle.

Some say he used a rattlesnake for a lasso. Others say he made a lasso so big that it circled the whole Earth.

Bill invented the method of using a hot branding iron to permanently put the mark of a ranch on a cow's skin. That helped stop people from stealing cattle. Some say he invented cowboy songs to help calm the cattle and make the cowboy's life easier. But he is also said to have invented **tarantulas** and **scorpions** as jokes. Cowboys have had trouble with those poisonous creatures ever since.

Now, Pecos Bill could ride anything that ever was. So, as some tell the story, there came a storm bigger than any other. It all happened during the worst drought the West had ever seen. It was so dry that horses and cows started to dry up and blow away in the wind. So when Bill saw the windstorm, he got an idea. The huge tornado kicked

across the land like a wild bronco. But Bill jumped on it without a thought.

He rode that tornado across Texas, New Mexico and Arizona, all the time squeezing the rain out of it to save the land from drought. When the storm was over, Bill fell off the tornado. He landed in California. He left a hole so deep that to this day it is known as Death Valley.

Now, Bill had a horse named Widow Maker. He got that name because any man who rode that horse would be thrown off and killed and his wife would become a widow. No one could ride that horse but Bill.

And Widow Maker, in the end, caused the biggest problem for Pecos Bill. You see, one day Bill saw a woman. Not just any woman, but a wild, red-haired woman, riding a giant catfish down the Rio Grande River.

Her name was Slue-foot Sue. And Bill fell in love with her at first sight. Well, Bill would not rest until he had asked for her hand in marriage. And Slue-foot Sue accepted.

On their wedding day, Pecos Bill dressed in his best buckskin suit. And Sue wore a beautiful white dress with a huge steel-spring bustle in the back. It was the kind of big dress that many women wore in those days — the bigger the better.

Now, after the marriage ceremony Slue-foot Sue got a really bad idea. She decided that she wanted to ride Widow Maker. Bill begged her not to try. But she had her **mind made up**.

Well, the second she jumped on the horse's back he began to kick and buck like nothing anyone had ever seen. He sent Sue flying so high that she sailed clear over the new moon.

She fell back to Earth, but the steel-spring bustle just bounced her back up as high as before.

Now, there are many different stories about what happened next. One story says Bill saw that Sue was in trouble. She would keep bouncing forever if nothing was done. So he took his rope out -- though some say it was a huge rattlesnake -- and lassoed Sue to catch her and bring her down to Earth. Only, she just bounced him back up with her.

Somehow the two came to rest on the moon. And that's where they stayed. Some people say they raised a family up there. Their children were as loud and wild as Bill and Sue were in their younger days. People say the sound of thunder that sometimes carries over the dry land around the Pecos River is nothing more than Pecos Bill's family laughing up a storm.

Casey Jones By Wallace Saunders

Come all you rounders if you want to hear
A story 'bout a brave engineer,
Casey Jones was the rounder's name
"Twas on the Illinois Central that he won his fame.

Casey Jones, he loved a locomotive.
Casey Jones, a mighty man was he.
Casey Jones run his final locomotive
With the Cannonball Special on the old I.C.

Casey pulled into Memphis on Number Four,
The engine foreman met him at the roundhouse door;
Said, "Joe Lewis won't be able to make his run
So you'll have to double out on Number One."

If I can have Sim Webb, my fireman, my engine 382,
Although I'm tired and weary, I'll take her through.
Put on my whistle that come in today
Cause I mean to keep her wailing as we ride and pray.

Casey Jones, mounted the cabin,
Casey Jones, with the orders in his hand.
Casey Jones, he mounted the cabin,
Started on his farewell Journey to the Promised Land.

They pulled out of Memphis nearly two hours late,
Soon they were speeding at a terrible rate.
And the people knew by the whistle's moan.
That the man at the throttle was Casey Jones.

Need more coal there, fireman Sim,
Open that door and heave it in.
Give that shovel all you got
And we'll reach Canton on the dot

On April 30, 1900, that rainy morn,
Down in Mississippi near the town of Vaughan,
Sped the Cannonball Special only two minutes late
Traveling 70 miles an hour when they saw a freight.

The caboose number 83 was on the main line,
Casey's last words were "Jump, Sim, while you have the time."
"At 3:52 that morning came the fareful end,
Casey took his farewell trip to the Promised Land.

Casey Jones, he died at the throttle,
With the whistle in his hand.

Casey Jones, he died at the throttle,
But we'll all see Casey in the Promised Land.

His wife and three children were left to mourn
The tragic death of Casey on that April morn.
May God through His goodness keep them by His grace
Till they all meet together in that heavenly place.

Casey's body lies buried in Jackson, Tennessee
Close beside the tracks of the old I.C.
May his spirit live forever throughout the land
As the greatest of all heroes of a railroad man.

Casey Jones, he died at the throttle,
Casey Jones, with the whistle in his hand.
Casey Jones, he died at the throttle,
But we'll all see Casey in the Promised Land.