The Bear, the Dog, and the Cat — Variant 1

Once there was a peasant who had a good dog, but when she grew old she stopped barking and guarding the yard with the barns. The peasant did not want to feed her bread and drove her off the yard. The dog went into the forest and lay down under a tree to die. Suddenly a bear came along and asked: "Why are you lying here, dog?" — "I've come to die of hunger! You see what people are like nowadays: as long as you have strength they feed and water you, but once your strength fails from old age, they drive you off the yard." — "Well, dog, are you hungry?" — "You bet I am!" — "Well, come with me; I'll feed you."

So they went. They came across a stallion. "Watch me!" the bear said to the dog and began tearing up the earth with his paws. "Dog, hey dog!" — "What?" — "Look, are my eyes red?" — "Red, bear!" The bear began tearing the earth even more angrily. "Dog, hey dog! What, is my fur bristling?" — "It's bristling, bear!" — "Dog, hey dog! What, is my tail up?" — "It's up!" Then the bear grabbed the stallion by the belly; the stallion fell to the ground. The bear tore him apart and said: "Well, dog, eat as much as you want. And when you've cleaned it all up, come to me."

The dog lived on, worrying about nothing; but once he had eaten everything and was hungry again, he ran to the bear. "Well, brother, have you eaten?" — "I have; now I've had to go hungry again." — "Why go hungry! Do you know where your women are reaping?" — "I do." — "Well, let's go; I'll sneak up to your mistress and grab her baby from the cradle, and you chase me and take it from me. Once you've taken it, carry it back; then she'll feed you bread as before." All right, the bear ran up, sneaked up and carried off the baby from the cradle. The baby cried out, the women rushed after the bear, chased and chased but could not catch him, so they turned back; the mother weeps, the women mourn.

Out of nowhere the dog appeared, caught up with the bear, took the baby and carried it back. "Look," the women say, "the old dog took the baby back!" They ran to meet them. The mother was overjoyed. "Now," she says, "I'll never abandon this dog!" She brought him home, poured some milk, crumbled some bread and gave it to him: "Here, eat!" And she said to her husband: "No, hubby, we must protect and feed our dog; he took my baby back from the bear. And you said he had no strength!" The dog recovered, fattened up: "God grant," he says, "health to the bear! He didn't let me die of hunger," — and became the bear's best friend.

Once the peasant had a party. At that time the bear came to visit the dog. "Hello, dog! Well, how are you getting on — eating bread?" — "Thank God!" answers the dog. "It's not just living, it's a feast. What shall I treat you to? Let's go into the house. The hosts are carousing and won't see you pass; you go into the house and quickly under the stove. Whatever I get, I'll treat you with that." All right, they got into the house. The dog sees that the guests and hosts are quite drunk, and began treating his friend. The bear drank a glass, another, and it went to his head. The guests started singing, and the bear wanted to start his own; and the dog persuades him: "Don't sing, or there'll be trouble." No use! The bear does not quiet down but starts his song louder and louder. The guests heard the howling, grabbed clubs and began beating the bear; he broke free and ran, barely alive he made it away.

The peasant also had a cat; she stopped catching mice and started playing pranks: wherever she climbed, she'd break something or spill something from a jug. The peasant drove the cat out of the house, and the dog sees that she is suffering without food, and began secretly bringing her bread and meat and feeding her. The mistress started watching; when she found out about this, she began beating the dog; beat and beat, and kept saying: "Don't bring the cat beef, don't bring the cat bread!" So about three days later the dog went out of the yard and sees that the cat is quite dying of hunger. "What's wrong with you?" — "I'm dying of hunger; I was full as long as you fed me." — "Come with me."

So they went. The dog comes to the herd and began digging the earth with his paws, and asks: "Cat, hey cat! What, are the eyes red?" — "Nothing's red." — "Say they're red!" The cat says: "Red." — "Cat, hey cat! What, is the fur bristling?" — "No, it's not bristling." — "Say, you fool, that it's bristling." — "Well, it's bristling." — "Cat, hey cat! What, is the tail up?" — "Nothing's up." — "Say, you fool, that it's up!" — "Well, it's up." The dog rushes at the mare, and the mare kicks him with her hind legs: the breath went out of the dog! And the cat says: "Now indeed the eyes are bloodshot, the fur is bristled, and the tail is curled. Farewell, brother dog! And I'll go die."