

The Blackbird and his Wife

Once upon a time there lived a blackbird and his wife. They sang so sweetly that everyone passing beneath the tree would stop and listen. It was the most beautiful music; it was as though gold and silver rain were falling into your ears.

One day the king was passing and he heard the two birds singing. He said to his servants, "Catch those birds! I will keep them in a silver cage and they will sing to me." So the servants set a trap, but they only caught one of the birds: the blackbird's wife. They put her into a silver cage and hung her over the king's bed. But she was so sad that she wouldn't sing at all.

As for the blackbird, when he saw that his wife had been trapped, he was angry. He took a sharp thorn for a sword and took half a walnut shell and wore it as a helmet. With the other half, he made himself a little drum. Soon he was marching towards the palace, beating the drum: rat-tat-tat.

On the way he met a fox.

"Where are you going, Mr Blackbird?"

"To fight the king!"

"I'll come with you. For years he's hounded me and hunted me."

"Come with me," said the blackbird.

Next the blackbird met some ants.

"Where are you going, Mr Blackbird?"

"To fight the king!"

"We'll come with you. For years he's poisoned us and poured hot water onto our nests."

"Then come with me."

Next the blackbird met a river.

"Where are you going, Mr Blackbird?"

"To fight the king!"

"Can I come with you? For years he's drained me and dirtied me."

"Come with me."

And they marched along until they came to the king's palace.

Rat-tat-tat! They marched up the golden steps to the door, and knocked. A servant opened the door. The blackbird drew his sword and said, "I've come to fight the king!" The servant led him to the king, sitting on his golden throne.

“What do you want?” said the king.

“I want my wife.”

“Well, you shan’t have her!”

“Then,” said the blackbird, “you and I are at war.” He began to beat his drum: rat-tat-tat. The king laughed to his servants.

“Take this cheeky bird to the hen-house and throw him in. The chickens will have pecked him to pieces by morning.”

So the blackbird was locked inside the hen-house. Straightaway he called the fox, who came and snarled and snapped at the chickens who were terrified. All night they huddled in the corner, quivering and quaking.

The next morning, there was the blackbird, marching backwards and forwards, beating his drum: rat-tat-tat.

When the king heard that the blackbird was still alive, he was angry.

“Tonight,” he shouted, “throw him in with the elephants – they’ll have trampled him to a pulp by morning!”

So on the second night he was locked in the elephant compound.

Straightaway he called the ants.

Soon they were crawling up the elephants’ trunks and into their ears, tickling and stinging until the elephants lay on the ground, quivering and quaking and begging to be left alone!

The next morning, there was the blackbird, beating his little drum: rat-tat-tat.

This time the king was beside himself with rage.

“Tonight,” he bellowed, “that blackbird will be tied to my bed, and I will watch him carefully!”

So on the third night he was tied to the king’s bedpost. In the middle of the night, the blackbird called the river. Straightaway the river came flowing. It covered the floor, it poured under the door, it flowed through the palace. The king’s bed began to float, his blankets were wet, his pyjamas clung to his skin. Soon he was quivering and quaking, shivering and shaking.

“Very w-well, Mr Blackbird,” he trembled, “I give in. Take your wife and g-go.” And the king opened the door of the cage. The blackbirds flew out of the window, over the rooftops, over the fields and the forests until they came to their tree. And as the bright sun rose into the sky they sang together, and if you’d been listening it would have been as though gold and silver rain had fallen into your ears.

2

The Blackbird and his Wife

(page 1)

- 1 Why did the king want to have the blackbirds?

(page 1)

- 2 Why was the blackbird’s wife sad?

(page 1)

- 3 What instrument did the blackbird play on the way to the palace?

4 The king treated the animals badly.

(a) What had the king done to the fox?

(b) What had the king done to the ants?

5 *For years he's drained me and dirtied me .*

What does the word *drained* mean?

Tick **one**.

filled up with water

☐

stirred up with water

☐

emptied out of water

☐

worn out the water

☐

6 The blackbird said: "*You and I are at war.*"

How do you know that the king was **not** worried by this?

(pages 3 and 4)

- 7 Draw lines to match these characters to the help they gave the blackbird.

fox

frightened the king

ants

scared the chickens

river

terrified the elephants

(page 4)

- 8 **Find** and **copy two** words that describe how scared the king was.

1. _____

2. _____