

The Cat and the Two Sparrows

by Jean de La Fontaine

Contemporary with a sparrow tame

There lived a cat; from tenderest age,
Of both, the basket and the cage

Had household gods the same.

The bird's sharp beak full oft provoked the cat,
Who play'd in turn, but with a gentle pat,
His wee friend sparing with a merry laugh,
Not punishing his faults by half.

In short, he scrupled much the harm,
Should he with points his ferule arm.

The Sparrow, less discreet than he,
With dagger beak made very free.

Sir Cat, a person wise and staid,
Excused the warmth with which he play'd:

For 'tis full half of friendship's art

To take no joke in serious part.

Familiar since they saw the light,

Mere habit kept their friendship good;

Fair play had never turn'd to fight,

Till, of their neighbourhood,

Another sparrow came to greet

Old Ratto grave and Saucy Pete.

Between the birds a quarrel rose,

And Ratto took his side.

"A pretty stranger, with such blows

To beat our friend!" he cried.

"A neighbour's sparrow eating ours!

Not so, by all the feline powers."

And quick the stranger he devours.

"Now, truly," saith Sir Cat,

"I know how sparrows taste by that.

Exquisite, tender, delicate!"

This thought soon seal'd the other's fate.--

But hence what moral can I bring?

For, lacking that important thing,

A fable lacks its finishing:

I seem to see of one some trace,
But still its shadow mocks my chase.