Translations/Traductions

Krylov’s Fables

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Book 4: Contents

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No. 1: The Quartet

A naughty Monkey
A Donkey
A Goat and a clumsy Bear all met
And together decided to form a quartet.
Armed with music, a viola, two violins and a bass
Under the lime trees they found themselves a place.
Ready to captivate the world with their skill
They drew on their bows and produced a loud squeal.
“Stop, lads, stop!” said the Monkey with a cry.
“That’s not how it goes. We’re sitting awry.
Bruin, change your place.
Move opposite the viola with your bass.
I’m the first violin. I’ll move opposite the second.
We’ll produce a brand new sound. That’s what I reckon.
The woods and the mountains will dance to the strain.”
They changed places but it soon became plain
The only result was a ghastly refrain.
“One moment!” cried the Donkey, “The secret I’ve identified!
We’ll produce a better harmony if we sit side by side.”
Following the Donkey’s decision
They sat in a neat row,
But achieved no precision
And for their efforts had nothing to show.
More than before they began to discuss;
To argue and to fuss
Who should sit where and how.
A nightingale chanced along, attracted by the dissonance.
“Please,” they all said, “try and find time to apply your patience
And help us in our great predicament.
We each have music and an instrument.
Perhaps you can see fit
To say where each of us should sit.”
“To be a musician,” was his reply, “you need ability
And an ear surpassing yours in sensitivity.
But you, my friends, sit how you will,
A musician’s post will never fill.”