

A Fair Share

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Welcome to Once Upon a Meadow. Our stories are written for the ear, so for those able, we recommend listening while reading along. Transcripts may contain minor errors; please check the audio before quoting.

Once upon a time, there lived a community of creatures, who shared a meadow, with a stream running through it. There was Bear, Crow, Rabbit, and the Squirrels. One summer evening, the animals gathered in a circle for their weekly meal together. There was a huge pile of food.

Being the biggest and most powerful animal, Bear took over and served the dinner. Brown Squirrel and his boyfriend, Gray Squirrel, were given a pile of pine nuts; Rabbit enjoyed a mound of wild lettuce, and Bear took an entire road-killed opossum for himself. There was only a bag of potato chips left, which none of the animals wanted, because people food made their tummies hurt. Crow stood at the edge of the gathering. She didn't get anything.

As they all began crunching and munching, Crow looked at her empty plate. She cocked her head and said, "Caw, please, Caw, can I have some food, too?"

Nobody said anything as they were all busy eating and talking.

"Caw, excuse me, Caw," interrupted Crow, "but I didn't get anything. I should get my fair share."

Now then, Crow was not a very picky eater, although she was more discerning than her city cousin, Seagull, who would swallow whole discarded hotdogs off the sidewalk.

"I'd be happy," said Crow, "to have some nuts or lettuce, and I'm quite fond of flattened opossum."

The rest of the animals ignored Crow and continued their conversations. Crow fluffed her feathers because she was getting upset. She hopped into the circle to get everyone's attention.

Bear looked and grumbled, "What's your problem? Do you want special treatment?"

"No," said Crow. "I just think that *everyone* should get their fair share. And I didn't get my fair share at *all, all, all.*"

The other animals stopped chattering and listened.

"Oh, I see," said Rabbit, who was a sensitive soul but hadn't thought much about Crow's situation because the lettuce was so very tasty. But now Rabbit began to understand and said: "So Crow, you didn't mean that *only* you should get a fair share."

"Caw, Exactly, Caw," said Crow, "We all should get our fair share."

Rabbit twitched their ears excitedly and said, “So, when Bear asked whether you wanted special treatment, you thought... um... well...” Rabbit struggled to put their own thoughts into words.

“I thought,” said Crow, “that he was refusing to recognize that *he* was causing a problem.”

“The problem being that your plate is empty,” chittered Gray Squirrel. He wasn’t as perceptive as his partner, but even *he* could see the issue.

“And Crow didn’t mean that we should *only* care about Crows,” said Brown Squirrel. He put a reassuring paw on his partner’s shoulder.

“Right! I meant that no one should have to go hungry,” explained Crow. “If we truly care, then we’re on our way to being fair.”

“But is it enough to just *care* about others?” asked Grey Squirrel. He flicked his tail uncertainly.

“You’re right,” said Brown Squirrel. “Caring is where fairness starts, not where it ends. It’s important to talk about problems, but then we need to *do* something.”

But before Brown Squirrel could share his idea, Bear interrupted. He didn’t like being challenged.

“Crow doesn’t appreciate how far she has come,” Bear growled. “Back in the day, crows weren’t even allowed to come to our meals. I think Crow is getting *uppity*.”

(Animals gasp.)

All of the animals gasped. Even Gray Squirrel knew that “uppity” was not a nice word.

Crow flapped up onto a stump. “*Caw* Uppity? *Caw*, you say I’m uppity? Let me tell you about uppity!”

(Crow sings)

“Bears would snarl if you shaved them half hairless.
Give birds one wing and they could not care less
If they tell me we’re part-way to fairness,
I say that just lets them share less.

I’m a Crow, you know I will speak up.
It’s time for the blackbirds to beak up!
I am tired of subtlety,
You bet that I’m uppity.
I’m a crow, *Caw*, I’m a crow.

If you move your feet slowly you get there.
But don’t shuffle to justice if you care!
Spread your wings and swoop past what’s been unfair,
To a world where injustice is nowhere.

I am Crow and you know I will act up.
It’s time that your bias got packed up.
I am tired of subtlety,
You bet that I’m uppity.
I’m a crow, *Caw*, I’m a crow.”

At first, the animals were surprised and a little startled by Crow's song. But then...

(Animals talk excitedly over one another.)

The animals realized that Crow's message was inspiring.

(Animals cheer.)

They all started cheering. Each animal offered Crow some of their food. Even Bear lumbered over and offered her a heaping pawful of mashed opossum.

After the meal, Brown Squirrel cleared his throat. He finally had a chance to share his idea for turning talk into action. Brown Squirrel proposed that the animals vote for who should distribute the food. He nominated Crow because she knew what it was like to be excluded and she stood up for what was right. The animals voted, and Crow won the election unanimously.

From then on, Crow used her experience to assure that everyone got a fair share, including big old Bear.

The meadow wasn't a perfect place, but it was more fair than it had been. Sometimes the trees dropped plenty of nuts; sometimes the wild greens grew in abundance; and sometimes there was a delicious dead animal in the forest. Other times, during a drought or a hard winter, there was less to go round. But whatever nature provided, Crow made sure that none of the animals went hungry. Everyone had their fair share.