



The Jackal, the Barber and the Brahmin

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Indian

Intermediate
32 min read

A Barber and a Jackal once struck up a great friendship, which might have continued to this day, had not the Jackal been so clever that the Barber never felt quite on equal terms with him, and suspected his friend of playing him many tricks.

But this he was not able to prove.

One day the Jackal said to the Barber, 'It would be a nice thing for us to have a garden of our own, in which we might grow as many cucumbers, pumpkins, and melons as we like. Why should we not buy one?'

The Barber answered, 'Very well; here is money. Do you go and buy us a garden.' So the Jackal took the Barber's money, and with it bought a fine garden, in which were cucumbers, pumpkins, melons, figs, and many other good fruits and vegetables. And he used to go there every day, and feast to his heart's content. When, however, the Barber said to him, 'What is the garden like which you bought with the money I gave you?' he answered, 'There are very fine plants in it, but there is no fruit upon them; when the fruit is ripe I will let you know.' This reply satisfied the Barber, who inquired no further at that time.

A little while afterwards the Barber again asked the Jackal about the garden, saying, 'I see you go down to that

garden every day; is the fruit getting ripe?' 'Oh dear no, not yet,' answered the Jackal; 'why, the plants are only just coming into blossom,'

But all this time there was a great deal of fruit in the garden; and the Jackal went there every day, and ate as much as he could.

Again, a third time, when some weeks had passed, the Barber said to him, 'Is there no ripe fruit in our garden yet?' 'No,' said the Jackal; 'the blossoms have only just fallen; but the fruit is forming. In time we shall have a fine show of melons and figs there.'

Then the Barber began to think the Jackal was deceiving him, and determined to see and judge for himself. So next day, without saying anything about it, he followed him down to the garden.

Now it happened that very day the Jackal had invited all his friends to come and feast there. All the animals in the neighbouring jungle had accepted the invitation; there they came trooping by hundreds and dozens, and were very merry indeed—running here and there, and eating all the melons, and cucumbers, and figs, and pumpkins in the place.

The Barber peeped over the hedge, and saw the assembled wild beasts, and his friend the Jackal entertaining them—talking to this one, laughing with that, and eating with all. The good man did not dare to attack the intruders, as they were many and powerful. But he went home at once, very angry, muttering to himself, 'I'll be the death of that young jackanapes; he shall play no more pranks in my garden.' And watching his opportunity, he returned there when the Jackal and all his friends had left, and tied a long knife to the largest of the cucumbers that still remained; then he went home, and said nothing of what he had seen.

Early next morning the Jackal thought to himself, 'I'll just run down to the garden and see if there are no cucumbers or melons left.' So he went there, and picking out the largest of the cucumbers, began to eat it. Quick as thought the long knife, that was concealed by the cucumber leaves, ran into him, cutting his muzzle, his neck, and his side.

'Ah! that nasty Barber!' he cried; 'this must be his doing!' And, instead of going home, he ran as fast as he could, very far away into the jungle, and stretching himself out on a great flat rock prepared to die.

But he did not die. Only for three whole days the pain in his neck and side was so great that he could not move; moreover, he felt very weak from loss of blood.

At the end of the third day he tried to get up; but his own blood had sealed him to the stone! He endeavoured to move it by his struggles, but could not succeed. 'Oh dear! oh dear!' he murmured; 'to think that I should recover from my wound, only to die such a horrible death as this! Ah, me! here is the punishment of dishonesty!' And, having said this, he began to weep. It chanced, however, that the god of Rain heard his lamentations, and taking pity on him sent a kindly shower, which, wetting the stone, effected his release.

No sooner was the Jackal set free than he began to think what he could do to earn a livelihood—since he did not dare return to the Barber's house. It was not long before a feasible plan struck him. All around was the mud made by the recent rain; he placed a quantity of it in a small chattee, covered the top over carefully with leaves (as people do jars of fresh butter), and took it into a neighbouring village to sell.

At the door of one of the first houses to which he came stood a woman, to whom the Jackal said, 'Mai, here is butter—beautiful fresh butter! won't you buy some fresh butter?' She answered, 'Are you sure it is quite fresh? Let me see it.' But he replied, 'It is perfectly fresh; but if you open the chattee now, it will be all spoilt by the time you want it. If you like to buy it, you may take it; if not, I will sell it to some one else.' The woman did want some fresh butter, and the chattee the Jackal carried on his head was carefully fastened up, as if what it contained was of the best; and she knew if she opened it, it might spoil before her husband returned home; besides, she thought, if the Jackal had intended to deceive her, he would have been more pressing in asking her to buy it. So she said, 'Very well, give me the chattee; here is money for you. You are sure it is the best butter?' 'It is the best of its kind,'

answered the Jackal; 'only be sure you put it in some cool place, and don't open it till it is wanted.' And taking the money, he ran away.

A short time afterwards the woman discovered how she had been cheated, and was very angry; but the Jackal was by that time far away, out of the reach of punishment.

When his money was spent, the Jackal felt puzzled as to how to get a living, since no one would give him food, and he could buy none. Fortunately for him, just then, one of the bullocks belonging to the village died. The

Jackal found it lying dead by the roadside, and he began to eat it, and ate, and ate, and ate so much, that at last he had got too far into the animal's body to be seen by passers-by. Now, the weather was hot and dry. Whilst the Jackal was in it, the bullock's skin crinkled up so tightly with the heat that it became too hard for him to bite through, and so he could not get out again.

The Mahars of the village all came out to bury the dead bullock. The Jackal, who was inside it, feared that if they caught him they would kill him—and that if they did not discover him he would be buried alive—so on their approach he called out, 'People, people! take care how you touch me, for I am a great saint.' The poor people were very much frightened when they heard the dead bullock talking, and thought that some mighty spirit must indeed possess it. 'Who are you, sir, and what do you want?' they cried. 'I,' answered the Jackal, 'am a very holysaint. I am also the god of your village, and I am very angry with you because you never worship me, nor bring me offerings.'—'O my Lord,' they cried; 'what offerings will please you? Tell us only, and we will bring you whatever you like.'—'Good,' he replied. 'Then you must fetch here plenty of rice, plenty of flowers, and a nice fat chicken—place them as an offering beside me, and pour a great deal of water over them, as you do at your most solemn feasts, and then I will forgive you your sins.' The Mahars did as they were commanded. They placed some rice and flowers, and the best chicken they could procure, beside the bullock; and poured water over it and the offering. Then no sooner did the dry hard bullock's skin get wetted, than it split in many places, and to the surprise of all his worshippers the Jackal jumped out, seized the chicken in his mouth, and ran away with it, through the midst of them, into the jungle. The Mahars followed him over hedges and ditches for many, many miles, but he got away in spite of them all.

On, on, he ran—on, on, for a very long way, until at last he came to a place where a little kid lived under a little sicakai tree. All her relations and friends were away, and when she saw him coming she thought to herself, 'Unless I frighten this Jackal he will eat me.' So she ran as hard as she could up against the sicakai-tree, which made all the branches shake, and the leaves go rustle, rustle, rustle. When the Jackal heard the rustling noise he got frightened, and thought it was all the little kid's friends coming to help her. And she called out to him, 'Run away, Jackal, run away! Thousands and thousands of Jackals have run away at that sound—run away for your life!' And the Jackal was so frightened that he ran away. So, he who had deceived so many was outwitted by a simple little kid!

After this the Jackal found his way back to his own village, where the Barber lived, and there for some time he

used to prowl round the houses every night, and live upon any bones he could find. The villagers did not like his coming, but did not know how to catch him, until one night his old friend the Barber (who had never forgiven him for stealing the fruit from the garden) caught him in a great net, having before made many unsuccessful attempts to do so. 'Aha!' cried the Barber; 'I've got you at last, my friend. You did not escape death from the cucumber-knife for nothing! you won't get away this time. Here, wife! wife! see what a prize I have got!' The Barber's wife came running to the door; and the Barber gave her the Jackal (after he had tied all his four legs firmly together with a strong rope), and said to her, 'Take this animal into the house, and be sure you don't let him escape, while I fetch a knife to kill him with.' The Barber's wife did as she was bid, and taking the Jackal into the house laid him down on the floor. But no sooner had the Barber gone, than the Jackal said to her, 'Ah, good woman, your husband will return directly and put me to death. For the love of heaven, loosen the rope round my feet before he comes, for one minute only, and let me drink a little water from that puddle by the door, for my throat is parched with thirst.' - 'No, no, friend Jackal,' answered the Barber's wife. 'I know well enough what you'll do. No sooner shall I have untied your feet, than you will run away, and when my husband returns and finds you are gone he will beat me.'

'Indeed, indeed, I will not run away,' he replied. 'Ah, kind mother, have pity on me—only for one little moment.' Then the Barber's wife thought, 'Well, it is hard not to grant the poor beast's last request—he will not live long enough to have many more pleasures.' So she untied the Jackal's feet, and held him by a rope, that he might drink from the puddle. But quick as possible, he gave a jump, and a twist, and a pull, and jerking the rope out of her hand escaped once more into the jungle.

For some time he roamed up and down, living on what he could get in this village or that, until he had wandered very far away from the country where the Barber lived. At last one day, by chance, he passed a certain cottage, in which there dwelt a very poor Brahman, who had seven daughters.

As the Jackal passed by, the Brahman was saying to himself, 'O dear me, what can I do for my seven daughters! I shall have to support them all my life, for they are much too poor ever to get married. If a dog or a Jackal were to offer to take one off my hands, he should have her.' Next day the Jackal called on the Brahman and said to him, 'You said yesterday if a Jackal or a dog were to offer to marry one of your daughters, you would let him have her; will you, therefore, accept me as a son-in-law?'

The Brahman felt very much embarrassed, but it was certain he had said the words, and therefore he felt in honour bound not to retract, although he had little dreamed of ever being placed in such a predicament. Just at that moment all the seven daughters began crying for bread, and the father had no bread to give them.



“The jackal took her to his den.” Illustration by Charles Buckles Falls, published in *The Wild Flower Fairy Book* by Esther Singleton (1905), Dodd, Mead and Company.

Observing this, the Jackal continued, ‘Let me marry one of your seven daughters, and I will take care of her. It will at least leave you one less to provide for, and I will see that she never needs food.’ Then the Brahman’s heart was softened, and he gave the Jackal his eldest daughter in marriage, and the Jackal took her home to his

den in the high rocks.

Now you will say there never was a jackal so clever as this. Very true; for this was not a common jackal, or he could never have done all that I have told you. This Jackal was, in fact, a great Rajah in disguise, who, to amuse himself, took the form of a jackal; for he was a great Magician as well as a great Prince.

The den to which he took the Brahman's daughter looked like quite a common hole in the rocks on the outside, but inside it was a splendid palace; adorned with silver, and gold, and ivory, and precious stones. But even his own wife did not know that he was always a Jackal, for the Rajah never took his human form except every morning very early, when he used to take off the jackal skin and wash it and brush it and put it on again.

After he and his wife, the Brahman's daughter, had lived up in their home in the rocks happily for some time, who should the Jackal see one day but his father-in-law, the old Brahman, climbing up the hill to come and pay him a visit! The Jackal was vexed to see the Brahman, for he knew he was very poor, and thought he had most likely come to beg—and so it was. The Brahman said to him, 'Son-in-law, let me come into your cave and rest a little while. I want to ask you to help me, for I am very badly off, and much in need of help.'

'Don't go into my cave,' said the Jackal, 'it is but a poor hole, not fit for you to enter (for he did not wish his father-in-law to see his fine palace); but I will call my wife, that you may see I have not eaten her up, and she and you and I will talk over the matter, and see what we can do for you.'

So the Brahman, the Brahman's daughter, and the Jackal all sat down on the hillside together, and the Brahman said, 'I don't know what to do to get food for myself, my wife, and my six daughters. Son-in-law Jackal, cannot you help me?'

'It is a difficult business,' answered the Jackal, 'but I'll do what I can for you;' and he ran to his cave and fetched a large melon, and gave it to the Brahman, saying, 'Father-in-law, you must take this melon, and plant it in your garden, and when it grows up, sell the fruit you find upon it, and that will bring you in some money.' So the Brahman took the melon home with him, and planted it in his garden.

By next day the melon that the Jackal had given him had grown up in the Brahman's garden into a fine plant, covered with hundreds of beautiful ripe melons. The Brahman, his wife, and family were overjoyed at the sight. And all the neighbours were astonished, and said, 'How fast that fine melon plant has grown in the

Brahman's garden!

Now it chanced that a woman who lived in a house close by wanted some melons, and seeing what fine ones these were she went down at once to the Brahman's house and bought two or three from the Brahman's wife. She took them home with her, and cut them open—but then, lo and behold I marvel of marvels! what a wonderful sight astonished her! Instead of the thick white pulp she expected to see, the whole of the inside of the melon was composed of diamonds, rubies, and emeralds; and all the seeds were enormous pearls. She immediately locked her door, and taking with her all the money she had, ran back to the Brahman's wife, and said to her, 'Those were very good melons you sold me, I like them so much that I will buy all the others on your melon plant.' And giving her the money, she took home the rest of the melons. Now this cunning woman told none of her friends of the treasure she had found, and the poor stupid Brahman and his family did not know what they had lost, for they had never thought of opening any of the melons; so that for all the precious stones they sold they only got a few pice.

Next day when they looked out of the window, the melon plant was again covered with fine ripe melons, and again the woman who had bought those which had grown the day before came and bought them all. And this went on for several days. There were so many melons, and all the melons were so full of precious stones, that the woman who bought them had enough to fill the whole of one room in her house with diamonds, rubies, emeralds, and pearls.

At last, however, the wonderful melon plant began to wither, and when the woman came to buy melons one morning, the Brahman's wife was obliged to say to her in a sad voice, 'Alas! there are no more melons on our melon plant.' And the woman went back to her own house very much disappointed.

That day the Brahman and his wife and children had no money in the house to buy food, and they all felt very unhappy to think that the fine melon plant had withered. But the Brahman's youngest daughter, who was a clever girl, thought, 'Though there are no more melons fit to sell on our melon plant, perhaps I may be able to find one or two shrivelled ones, which, if cooked, will give us something for dinner.' So she went out to look, and searching carefully amongst the thick leaves, found two or three withered little melons still remaining. These she took into the house and began cutting them up to cook, when, more wonderful than wonderful! within each little melon she found a number of small emeralds, rubies, diamonds, and pearls I The girl called

her father and mother, and her five sisters, crying, 'See what I have found! See these precious stones and pearls! I dare say inside the melons we sold there were as good or better than these. No wonder that woman was so anxious to buy them all. See, father—see, mother—see, sisters!'

Then they were all overjoyed to see the treasure; but the Brahman said, 'What a pity we have lost the benefit of my son-in-law the Jackal's good gift, by not knowing its worth! I will go at once to that woman, and try and make her give us back the melons she took.'

So he went to the melon buyer's house, and said to her, 'Give me back the melons you took from me, who did not know their worth.' She answered, 'I don't know what you mean.' He replied, 'You are very deceitful; you bought melons full of precious stones from us poor people who did not know what they were worth, and you only paid for them the price of common melons—give me some of them back, I pray you.' But she said, 'I bought common melons from your wife, and made them all into common soup long ago; therefore, talk no further nonsense about jewels, but go about your business.' And she turned him out of the house. Yet all this time she had a whole room full of the emeralds, diamonds, rubies, and pearls, that she had found in the melons the Brahman's wife had sold her.

The Brahman returned home, and said to his wife, 'I cannot make that woman give me back any of the melons you sold her; but give me the precious stones our daughter has just found, and I will sell them to a jeweller, and bring home some money.' So he went to the town, and took the precious stones to a jeweller, and said to him, 'What will you give me for these?' But no sooner did the jeweller see them, than he said, 'How could such a poor man as you become possessed of such precious stones? You must have stolen them: you are a thief! You have stolen these from my shop, and now come to sell them to me!'

'No, no, sir; indeed no, sir,' cried the Brahman. 'Thief! thief!' shouted the jeweller. 'In truth, no, sir,' said the Brahman, 'my son-in-law, the Jackal, gave me a melon plant; and in one of the melons I found these jewels.'—'I don't believe a word you say,' screamed the jeweller (and he began beating the Brahman, whom he held by the arm); 'give up those jewels which you have stolen from my shop!'—'No, I won't,' roared the Brahman; 'oh! oh-o! oh-o-o! don't beat me so; I didn't steal them.' But the jeweller was determined to get the jewels; so he beat the Brahman, and called the police, who came running up to his assistance, and shouted till a great crowd of people had collected round his shop. Then he said to the Brahman, 'Give me up the jewels you stole from me, or

I'll give you to the police, and you shall be put in jail' The Brahman tried to tell his story about his son-in-law the Jackal, but of course nobody believed him; and he was obliged to give the precious stones to the jeweller, in order to escape the police, and to run home as fast as he could. And every one thought the jeweller was very kind to let him off so easily.

All his family were very unhappy when they heard what had befallen him. But his wife said, 'You had better go again to our son-in-law the Jackal, and see what he can do for us.' So next day the Brahman climbed the hill again as he had done before, and went to call upon the Jackal. When the Jackal saw him coming he was not very well pleased. So he went to meet him, and said, 'Father-in-law, I did not expect to see you again so soon!' 'I merely came to see how you were,' answered the Brahman, 'and to tell you how poor we are; and how glad we should be of any help you can give us.' 'What have you done with the melons I gave you?' asked the Jackal. 'Ah,' answered the Brahman, 'that is a sad story!' And beginning at the beginning, he related how they had sold almost all the melons without knowing their value; and how the few precious stones they had found had been taken from him by the jeweller. When the Jackal heard this, he laughed very much, and said, 'I see it is no use giving such unlucky people as you gold or jewels, for they will only bring you into trouble. Come, I'll give you a more useful present.' So, running into his cave, he fetched thence a small chattee, and gave it to the Brahman, saying, 'Take this chattee; whenever you or any of the family are hungry, you will always find in it as good a dinner as this.' And putting his paw into the chattee, he extracted thence currie, and rice, and pilau and all sorts of good things, enough to feast a hundred men; and the more he took out of the chattee, the more remained inside.

When the Brahman saw the chattee, and smelt the good dinner, his eyes glistened for joy; and he embraced the Jackal, saying, 'Dear son-in-law, you are the only support of our house.' And he took his new present carefully home with him.

After this, for some time, the whole family led a very happy life, for they never wanted good food; every day the Brahman, his wife, and his six daughters, found inside the chattee a most delicious dinner; and every day when they had dined they placed it on a shelf, to find it replenished when next it was needed.

But it happened that hard by there lived another Brahman, a very great man who was much in the Rajah's confidence; and this man smelt daily the smell of a very nice dinner, which puzzled him a good deal. The rich

Brahman thought it smelt even nicer than his own dinner, for which he paid so much; and yet it seemed to come from the poor Brahman's little cottage. So one day he determined to find out all about it; and, going to call on his neighbour, he said to him, 'Every day, at about twelve o'clock, I smell such a very nice dinner—much nicer than my own; and it seems to come from your house. You must live on very good things, I think, although you seem so poor.'

Then, in the pride of his heart, the poor Brahman invited his rich neighbour to come and dine with him; and lifting the magic chattee down from the shelf, took out of it such delicate fare as the other had never before tasted. And in an evil hour he proceeded to tell his friend of the wondrous properties of the chattee, which his son-in-law the Jackal had given him; and how it never was empty! No sooner had the great man learned this, than he went to the Rajah, and said to him, 'There is a poor Brahman in the town who possesses a wonderful chattee, which is always filled with the most delicious dinner. I should not feel authorised to deprive him of it; but if it pleased your highness to take it from him he could not complain.' The Rajah hearing this, determined to see and taste for himself. So he said, 'I should very much like to see this chattee with my own eyes.' And he accompanied the rich Brahman to the poor Brahman's house. The poor Brahman was overjoyed at being noticed by the Rajah himself, and gladly exhibited the various excellences of the chattee; but no sooner did the Rajah taste the dinner it contained, than he ordered his guards to seize it, and take it away to the palace, in spite of the Brahman's tears and protestations; thus, for a second time, he lost the benefit of his son-in-law's gift.

When the Rajah had gone, the Brahman said to his wife, 'There is nothing for it but to go again to the Jackal, and see if he can help us.'—'If you don't take care,' she answered, 'you'll put him out of all patience at last; I can't think why you need to have gone talking about our chattee.'

When the Jackal heard the Brahman's story he became very cross, and said, 'What a stupid old man you were to say anything about the chattee; but see, here is another, which may aid you to get back the first. Take care of it, for this is the last time I will help you.' And he gave the Brahman a chattee, in which was a stout stick tied to a very strong rope. 'Take this,' he said, 'into the presence of those who deprived you of my other gifts, and when you open the chattee, command the stick to beat them; this it will do so effectually, that they will gladly return you what you have lost; only take care not to open the chattee when you are alone, or the stick that is in it will punish your rashness.'

The Brahman thanked his son-in-law, and took away the chattee; but he found it hard to believe all that had been said. So, going through the jungle on his way home, he uncovered it just to peep in and see if the stick were really there. No sooner had he done this, than out jumped the rope, out jumped the stick; the rope seized him and bound him to a tree, and the stick beat him, and beat him, and beat him, until he was nearly killed. 'Oh dear! oh dear!' screamed the Brahman, 'what an unlucky man I am! Oh dear! oh dear! stop, please stop! good stick, stop! what a very good stick this is!' But the stick would not stop, but beat him so much that he could hardly crawl home again.

Then the Brahman put the rope and stick back again into the chattee, and sent to his rich neighbour and to the Rajah, and said to them, 'I have a new chattee, much better than the old one; do come and see what a fine one it is.' And the rich Brahman and the Rajah thought, 'This is something good; doubtless there is a choice dinner in this chattee also, and we will take it from this foolish man as we did the other.' So they went down to meet the Brahman in the jungle, taking with them all their followers and attendants. Then the Brahman uncovered his chattee, saying, 'Beat, stick, beat—beat them every one!' and the stick jumped out, and the rope jumped out, and the rope caught hold of the Rajah and the rich Brahman and all their attendants, and tied them fast to the trees that grew around; and the stick ran from one to another, beating, beating, beating, beating the Rajah, beating his courtiers, beating the rich Brahman, beating his attendants, and beating all their followers; while the poor Brahman cried with all his might, 'Give me back my chattee—give me back my chattee!'

At this the Rajah and his people were very much frightened, and thought they were going to be killed. And the Rajah said to the Brahman, 'Take away your stick, only take away your stick, and you shall have back your chattee.' So the Brahman put the stick and rope back into the chattee, and the Rajah returned him the dinner-

making chattee. And all the people felt very much afraid of the Brahman, and respected him very much.

Then he took the chattee containing the rope and stick to the house of the woman who had bought the melons, and the rope caught her, and the stick beat her; and the Brahman cried, 'Return me those melons, return me those melons!' And the woman said, 'Only make your stick stop beating me, and you shall have back all the melons.' So he ordered the stick back into the chattee, and she returned him them forthwith—a whole roomful of melons full of diamonds, pearls, emeralds, and rubies.

The Brahman took them home to his wife, and going into the town, with the help of his good stick, forced the jeweller who had deprived him of the little emeralds, rubies, diamonds, and pearls he had taken to sell to give them back to him again, and having accomplished this, he returned to his family; and from that time they all lived very happily. Then, one day the Jackal's wife invited her six sisters to come and pay her a visit. Now the youngest sister was more clever than any of the others; and it happened that, very early in the morning, she saw her brother-in-law the Jackal take off the jackal skin, and wash it, and brush it, and hang it up to dry; and when he had taken off the jackal-skin coat, he looked the handsomest Prince that ever was seen. Then his little sister-in-law ran, quickly and quietly, and stole away the jackal-skin coat, and threw it on the fire and burnt it. And she awoke her sister, and said, 'Sister, sister, your husband is no longer a jackal; see, that is he standing by the door.' So the Jackal Rajah's wife ran to the door to meet her husband, and because the jackal's skin was burnt, and he could wear it no longer, he continued to be a man for the rest of his life, and gave up playing all jackal-like pranks; and he and his wife, and his father and mother and sisters in law, lived very happily for the rest of their days.

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