

The Adventures of the Jackal's Eldest

Son

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

African

Intermediate

10 min read

Now, though the jackal was dead, he had left two sons behind him, every whit as cunning and tricky as their father. The elder of the two was a fine handsome creature, who had a pleasant manner and made many friends. The animal he saw most of was a hyena; and one day, when they were taking a walk together, they picked up a beautiful green cloak, which had evidently been dropped by some one riding across the plain on a camel. Of course each wanted to have it, and they almost quarrelled over the matter; but at length it was settled that the hyena should wear the cloak by day and the jackal by night. After a little while, however, the jackal became discontented with this arrangement, declaring that none of his friends, who were quite different from those of the hyena, could see the splendour of the mantle, and that it was only fair that he should sometimes be allowed to wear it by day. To this the hyena would by no means consent, and they were on the eve of a quarrel when the hyena proposed that they should ask the lion to judge between them. The jackal agreed to this, and the hyena wrapped the cloak about him, and they both trotted off to the lion's den.

The jackal, who was fond of talking, at once told the story; and when it was finished the lion turned to the hyena and asked if it was true.

'Quite true, your majesty,' answered the hyena.

'Then lay the cloak on the ground at my feet,' said the lion, 'and I will give my judgment.' So the mantle was spread upon the red earth, the hyena and the jackal standing on each side of it.

There was silence for a few moments, and then the lion sat up, looking very great and wise.

'My judgment is that the garment shall belong wholly to whoever first rings the bell of the nearest mosque at dawn to-morrow. Now go; for much business awaits me!'

All that night the hyena sat up, fearing lest the jackal should reach the bell before him, for the mosque was close at hand. With the first streak of dawn he bounded away to the bell, just as the jackal, who had slept soundly all night, was rising to his feet.

'Good luck to you,' cried the jackal. And throwing the cloak over his back he darted away across the plain, and was seen no more by his friend the hyena.

After running several miles the jackal thought he was safe from pursuit, and seeing a lion and another hyena talking together, he strolled up to join them.

'Good morning,' he said; 'may I ask what is the matter? You seem very serious about something.'

'Pray sit down,' answered the lion. 'We were wondering in which direction we should go to find the best dinner. The hyena wishes to go to the forest, and I to the mountains. What do you say?'

'Well, as I was sauntering over the plain, just now, I noticed a flock of sheep grazing, and some of them had wandered into a little valley quite out of sight of the shepherd. If you keep among the rocks you will never be observed. But perhaps you will allow me to go with you and show you the way?'

'You are really very kind,' answered the lion. And they crept steadily along till at length they reached the mouth of the valley where a ram, a sheep and a lamb were feeding on the rich grass, unconscious of their danger.

'How shall we divide them?' asked the lion in a whisper to the hyena.

'Oh, it is easily done,' replied the hyena. 'The lamb for me, the sheep for the jackal, and the ram for the lion.'

'So I am to have that lean creature, which is nothing but horns, am I?' cried the lion in a rage. 'I will teach you

to divide things in that manner!' And he gave the hyena two great blows, which stretched him dead in a moment. Then he turned to the jackal and said: 'How would you divide them?'

'Quite differently from the hyena,' replied the jackal. 'You will breakfast off the lamb, you will dine off the sheep, and you will sup off the ram.'

'Dear me, how clever you are! Who taught you such wisdom?' exclaimed the lion, looking at him admiringly.

'The fate of the hyena,' answered the jackal, laughing, and running off at his best speed; for he saw two men armed with spears coming close behind the lion!

The jackal continued to run till at last he could run no longer. He flung himself under a tree panting for breath, when he heard a rustle amongst the grass, and his father's old friend the hedgehog appeared before him.

'Oh, is it you?' asked the little creature; 'how strange that we should meet so far from home!'

'I have just had a narrow escape of my life,' gasped the jackal, 'and I need some sleep. After that we must think of something to do to amuse ourselves.' And he lay down again and slept soundly for a couple of hours.

'Now I am ready,' said he; 'have you anything to propose?'

'In a valley beyond those trees,' answered the hedgehog, 'there is a small farmhouse where the best butter in the world is made. I know their ways, and in an hour's time the farmer's wife will be off to milk the cows, which she keeps at some distance. We could easily get in at the window of the shed where she keeps the butter, and I will watch, lest some one should come unexpectedly, while you have a good meal. Then you shall watch, and I will eat.'

'That sounds a good plan,' replied the jackal; and they set off together.

But when they reached the farmhouse the jackal said to the hedgehog: 'Go in and fetch the pots of butter and I will hide them in a safe place.'

'Oh no,' cried the hedgehog, 'I really couldn't. They would find out directly! And, besides, it is so different just eating a little now and then.'

'Do as I bid you at once,' said the jackal, looking at the hedgehog so sternly that the little fellow dared say no more, and soon rolled the jars to the window where the jackal lifted them out one by one.

When they were all in a row before him he gave a sudden start.

'Run for your life,' he whispered to his companion; 'I see the woman coming over the hill!' And the hedgehog, his heart beating, set off as fast as he could. The jackal remained where he was, shaking with laughter, for the woman was not in sight at all, and he had only sent the hedgehog away because he did not want him to know where the jars of butter were buried. But every day he stole out to their hiding-place and had a delicious feast.

At length, one morning, the hedgehog suddenly said:

'You never told me what you did with those jars?'

'Oh, I hid them safely till the farm people should have forgotten all about them,' replied the jackal. 'But as they are still searching for them we must wait a little longer, and then I'll bring them home, and we will share them between us.'

So the hedgehog waited and waited; but every time he asked if there was no chance of getting jars of butter the jackal put him off with some excuse. After a while the hedgehog became suspicious, and said:

'I should like to know where you have hidden them. To-night, when it is quite dark, you shall show me the place.'

'I really can't tell you,' answered the jackal. 'You talk so much that you would be sure to confide the secret to somebody, and then we should have had our trouble for nothing, besides running the risk of our necks being broken by the farmer. I can see that he is getting disheartened, and very soon he will give up the search. Have patience just a little longer.'

The hedgehog said no more, and pretended to be satisfied; but when some days had gone by he woke the jackal, who was sleeping soundly after a hunt which had lasted several hours.

'I have just had notice,' remarked the hedgehog, shaking him, 'that my family wish to have a banquet tomorrow, and they have invited you to it. Will you come?'

'Certainly,' answered the jackal, 'with pleasure. But as I have to go out in the morning you can meet me on the road.'

'That will do very well,' replied the hedgehog. And the jackal went to sleep again, for he was obliged to be up early.

Punctual to the moment the hedgehog arrived at the place appointed for their meeting, and as the jackal was not there he sat down and waited for him.

'Ah, there you are!' he cried, when the dusky yellow form at last turned the corner. 'I had nearly given you up! Indeed, I almost wish you had not come, for I hardly know where I shall hide you.'

'Why should you hide me anywhere?' asked the jackal. 'What is the matter with you?'

'Well, so many of the guests have brought their dogs and mules with them, that I fear it may hardly be safe for you to go amongst them. No; don't run off that way,' he added quickly, 'because there is another troop that are coming over the hill. Lie down here, and I will throw these sacks over you; and keep still for your life, whatever happens.'

And what did happen was, that when the jackal was lying covered up, under a little hill, the hedgehog set a great stone rolling, which crushed him to death.

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