



The Adventures of the Younger Son of the Jackal

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

African

Easy
7 min read

Now that the father and elder brother were both dead, all that was left of the jackal family was one son, who was no less cunning than the others had been. He did not like staying in the same place any better than they, and nobody ever knew in what part of the country he might be found next.

One day, when he was wandering about he beheld a nice fat sheep, which was cropping the grass and seemed quite contented with her lot.

'Good morning,' said the jackal, 'I am so glad to see you. I have been looking for you everywhere.'

'For ME?' answered the sheep, in an astonished voice; 'but we have never met before!'

'No; but I have heard of you. Oh! You don't know what fine things I have heard! Ah, well, some people have all the luck!'

'You are very kind, I am sure,' answered the sheep, not knowing which way to look. 'Is there any way in which I can help you?'

'There is something that I had set my heart on, though I hardly like to propose it on so short an acquaintance;

but from what people have told me, I thought that you and I might keep house together comfortably, if you would only agree to try. I have several fields belonging to me, and if they are kept well watered they bear wonderful crops.'

'Perhaps I might come for a short time,' said the sheep, with a little hesitation; 'and if we do not get on, we can part company.'

'Oh, thank you, thank you,' cried the jackal; 'do not let us lose a moment.' And he held out his paw in such an inviting manner that the sheep got up and trotted beside him till they reached home.

'Now,' said the jackal, 'you go to the well and fetch the water, and I will pour it into the trenches that run between the patches of corn.' And as he did so he sang lustily. The work was very hard, but the sheep did not grumble, and by-and-by was rewarded at seeing the little green heads poking themselves through earth. After that the hot sun ripened them quickly, and soon harvest time was come. Then the grain was cut and ground and ready for sale.

When everything was complete, the jackal said to the sheep:

'Now let us divide it, so that we can each do what we like with his share.'

'You do it,' answered the sheep; 'here are the scales. You must weigh it carefully.'

So the jackal began to weigh it, and when he had finished, he counted out loud:

'One, two, three, four, five, six, seven parts for the jackal, and one part for the sheep. If she likes it she can take it, if not, she can leave it.'

The sheep looked at the two heaps in silence- -one so large, the other so small; and then she answered:

'Wait for a minute, while I fetch some sacks to carry away my share.'

But it was not sacks that the sheep wanted; for as soon as the jackal could no longer see her she set forth at her best pace to the home of the greyhound, where she arrived panting with the haste she had made.

'Oh, good uncle, help me, I pray you!' she cried, as soon as she could speak.

'Why, what is the matter?' asked the greyhound, looking up with astonishment.

'I beg you to return with me, and frighten the jackal into paying me what he owes me,' answered the sheep. 'For months we have lived together, and I have twice every day drawn the water, while he only poured it into the trenches. Together we have reaped our harvest; and now, when the moment to divide our crop has come, he has taken seven parts for himself, and only left one for me.'

She finished, and giving herself a twist, passed her woolly tail across her eyes; while the greyhound watched her, but held his peace. Then he said:

'Bring me a sack.' And the sheep hastened away to fetch one. Very soon she returned, and laid the sack down before him.

'Open it wide, that I may get in,' cried he; and when he was comfortably rolled up inside he bade the sheep take him on her back, and hasten to the place where she had left the jackal.

She found him waiting for her, and pretending to be asleep, though she clearly saw him wink one of his eyes. However, she took no notice, but throwing the sack roughly on the ground, she exclaimed:

'Now measure!'

At this the jackal got up, and going to the heap of grain which lay close by, he divided it as before into eight portions—seven for himself and one for the sheep.

'What are you doing that for?' asked she indignantly. 'You know quite well that it was I who drew the water, and you who only poured it into the trenches.'

'You are mistaken,' answered the jackal. 'It was I who drew the water, and you who poured it into the trenches. Anybody will tell you that! If you like, I will ask those people who are digging there!'

'Very well,' replied the sheep. And the jackal called out:

‘Ho! You diggers, tell me: Who was it you heard singing over the work?’

‘Why, it was you, of course, jackal! You sang so loud that the whole world might have heard you!’

‘And who it is that sings—he who draws the water, or he who empties it?’

‘Why, certainly he who draws the water!’

‘You hear?’ said the jackal, turning to the sheep. ‘Now come and carry away your own portion, or else I shall take it for myself.’

‘You have got the better of me,’ answered the sheep; ‘and I suppose I must confess myself beaten! But as I bear no malice, go and eat some of the dates that I have brought in that sack.’ And the jackal, who loved dates, ran instantly back, and tore open the mouth of the sack. But just as he was about to plunge his nose in he saw two brown eyes calmly looking at him. In an instant he had let fall the flap of the sack and bounded back to where the sheep was standing.

‘I was only in fun; and you have brought my uncle the greyhound. Take away the sack, we will make the division over again.’ And he began rearranging the heaps.

‘One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, for my mother the sheep, and one for the jackal,’ counted he; casting timid glances all the while at the sack.

‘Now you can take your share and go,’ said the sheep. And the jackal did not need twice telling! Whenever the sheep looked up, she still saw him flying, flying across the plain; and, for all I know, he may be flying across it still.

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