

The Jackal and the Crocodile

Flora Annie Steel

Indian

Easy
6 min read

Once upon a time, Mr. Jackal was trotting along gaily, when he caught sight of a wild plum-tree laden with fruit on the other side of a broad deep stream. He could not get across anyhow, so he just sat down on the bank, and looked at the ripe luscious fruit until his mouth watered with desire.

Now it so happened that, just then, Miss Crocodile came floating down stream with her nose in the air. ‘Good morning, my dear!’ said Mr. Jackal politely; ‘how beautiful you look to-day, and how charmingly you swim! Now, if I could only swim too, what a fine feast of plums we two friends might have over there together!’ And Mr. Jackal laid his paw on his heart, and sighed.

Now Miss Crocodile had a very inflammable heart, and when Mr. Jackal looked at her so admiringly, and spoke so sentimentally, she simpered and blushed, saying, ‘Oh! Mr. Jackal! how can you talk so? I could never dream of going out to dinner with you, unless—unless—’

‘Unless what?’ asked the Jackal persuasively.

‘Unless we were going to be married!’ simpered Miss Crocodile.

‘And why shouldn’t we be married, my charmer?’ returned the Jackal eagerly. ‘I would go and fetch the barber

to begin the betrothals at once, but I am so faint with hunger just at present that I should never reach the village. Now, if the most adorable of her sex would only take pity on her slave, and carry me over the stream, I might refresh myself with those plums, and so gain strength to accomplish the ardent desire of my heart!

Here the Jackal sighed so piteously, and cast such sheep's-eyes at Miss Crocodile, that she was unable to withstand him. So she carried him across to the plum-tree, and then sat on the water's edge to think over her wedding dress, while Mr. Jackal feasted on the plums, and enjoyed himself.

'Now for the barber, my beauty!' cried the gay Jackal, when he had eaten as much as he could. Then the blushing Miss Crocodile carried him back again, and bade him be quick about his business, like a dear good creature, for really she felt so flustered at the very idea that she didn't know what mightn't happen.

'Now, don't distress yourself, my dear!' quoth the deceitful Mr. Jackal, springing to the bank, 'because it's not impossible that I may not find the barber, and then, you know, you may have to wait some time, a considerable time in fact, before I return. So don't injure your health for my sake, if you please.'

With that he blew her a kiss, and trotted away with his tail up.

Of course he never came back, though trusting Miss Crocodile waited patiently for him; at last she understood what a gay deceitful fellow he was, and determined to have her revenge on him one way or another.

So she hid herself in the water, under the roots of a tree, close to a ford where Mr. Jackal always came to drink. By and by, sure enough, he came liling along in a self-satisfied way, and went right into the water for a good long draught. Whereupon Miss Crocodile seized him by the right leg, and held on. He guessed at once what had happened, and called out, 'Oh! my heart's adored! I'm drowning! I'm drowning! If you love me, leave hold of that old root and get a good grip of my leg—it is just next door!'

Hearing this, Miss Crocodile thought she must have made a mistake, and, letting go the Jackal's leg in a hurry, seized an old root close by, and held on. Whereupon Mr. Jackal jumped nimbly to shore, and ran off with his tail up, calling out, 'Have a little patience, my beauty! The barber will come some day!'

But this time Miss Crocodile knew better than to wait, and being now dreadfully angry, she crawled away to the Jackal's hole, and slipping inside, lay quiet.

By and by Mr. Jackal came lirting along with his tail up.

'Ho! ho! That is your game, is it?' said he to himself, when he saw the trail of the crocodile in the sandy soil. So he stood outside, and said aloud, 'Bless my stars! what has happened? I don't half like to go in, for whenever I come home my wife always calls out,

"Oh, dearest hubby hub!
What have you brought for grub
To me and the darling cub?"

and to-day she doesn't say anything!

Hearing this, Miss Crocodile sang out from inside,

'Oh, dearest hubby hub!
What have you brought for grub
To me and the darling cub?'

The Jackal winked a very big wink, and stealing in softly, stood at the doorway. Meanwhile Miss Crocodile, hearing him coming, held her breath, and lay, shamming dead, like a big log.

'Bless my stars!' cried Mr. Jackal, taking out his pocket-handkerchief, 'how very very sad! Here's poor Miss Crocodile stone dead, and all for love of me! Dear! dear! Yet it is very odd, and I don't think she can be quite dead, you know—for dead folks always wag their tails!'

On this, Miss Crocodile began to wag her tail very gently, and Mr. Jackal ran off, roaring with laughter, and saying, 'Oho!—oho! so dead folk always wag their tails!'