



The Jackal and the Iguana

Flora Annie Steel

Indian

Intermediate

4 min read

One moonlight night, a miserable, half-starved jackal, skulking through the village, found a worn-out pair of shoes in the gutter. They were too tough for him to eat, so, determined to make some use of them, he strung them to his ears like earrings, and, going down to the edge of the pond, gathered all the old bones he could find together, and built a platform with them, plastering it over with mud.

On this he sat in a dignified attitude, and when any animal came to the pond to drink, he cried out in a loud voice, 'Hi! stop! You must not taste a drop till you have done homage to me. So repeat these verses, which I have composed in honour of the occasion:—

'Silver is his daïs, plastered o'er with gold;
In his ears are jewels,—some prince I must behold!'

Now, as most of the animals were very thirsty, and in a great hurry to drink, they did not care to dispute the matter, but gabbled off the words without a second thought. Even the royal tiger, treating it as a jest, repeated the jackal's rhyme, in consequence of which the latter became quite cock-a-hoop, and really began to believe he was a personage of great importance.

By and by an iguana, or big lizard, came waddling and wheezing down to the water, looking for all the world

like a baby alligator.

‘Hi! you there!’ sang out the jackal; ‘you mustn’t drink until you have said—

‘Silver is his daïs, plastered o’er with gold; In his ears are jewels,—some prince I must behold!’

‘Pouf! pouf! pouf!’ gasped the iguana. ‘Mercy on us, how dry my throat is! Mightn’t I have just a wee sip of water first? and then I could do justice to your admirable lines; at present I am as hoarse as a crow!’

‘By all means!’ replied the jackal, with a gratified smirk. ‘I flatter myself the verses *are* good, especially when well recited.’

So the iguana, nose down into the water, drank away, until the jackal began to think he would never leave off, and was quite taken aback when he finally came to an end of his draught, and began to move away.

‘Hi! hi!’ cried the jackal, recovering his presence of mind; ‘stop a bit, and say—

‘Silver is his daïs, plastered o’er with gold;
In his ears are jewels,—some prince I must behold!’

‘Dear me!’ replied the iguana, politely, ‘I was very nearly forgetting! Let me see—I must try my voice first—Do, re, me, fa, sol, la, si,—that is right! Now, how does it run?’

‘Silver is his daïs, plastered o’er with gold;
In his ears are jewels,—some prince I must behold!’

repeated the jackal, not observing that the lizard was carefully edging farther and farther away.

‘Exactly so,’ returned the iguana; ‘I think I could say that!’

Whereupon he sang out at the top of his voice—

‘Bones make up his daïs, with mud it’s plastered o’er,
Old shoes are his ear-drops: a jackal, nothing more!’

And turning round, he bolted for his hole as hard as he could.

The jackal could scarcely believe his ears, and sat dumb with astonishment. Then, rage lending him wings, he flew after the lizard, who, despite his short legs and scanty breath, put his best foot foremost, and scuttled away at a great rate.

It was a near race, however, for just as he popped into his hole, the jackal caught him by the tail, and held on. Then it was a case of 'pull butcher, pull baker,' until the lizard made certain his tail must come off, and the jackal felt as if his front teeth would come out. Still not an inch did either budge, one way or the other, and there they might have remained till the present day, had not the iguana called out, in his sweetest tones, 'Friend, I give in! Just leave hold of my tail, will you? then I can turn round and come out.'

Whereupon the jackal let go, and the tail disappeared up the hole in a twinkling; while all the reward the jackal got for digging away until his nails were nearly worn out, was hearing the iguana sing softly—

'Bones make up his daïs, with mud it's plastered o'er,
Old shoes are his ear-drops: a jackal, nothing more!'

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