

The Jackal and the Pea-Hen

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Indian

Intermediate
3 min read

Once upon a time a Jackal and a Pea-hen swore eternal friendship. Every day they had their meals together, and spent hours in pleasant conversation.

Now, one day, the Pea-hen had juicy plums for dinner, and the Jackal, for his part, had as juicy a young kid; so they enjoyed themselves immensely. But when the feast was over, the Pea-hen rose gravely, and, after scratching up the ground, carefully sowed all the plum-stones in a row.

‘It is my custom to do so when I eat plums,’ she said, with quite an aggravating air of complacent virtue; ‘my mother, good creature, brought me up in excellent habits, and with her dying breath bade me never be wasteful. Now these stones will grow into trees, the fruit of which, even if I do not live to see the day, will afford a meal to many a hungry peacock.’

These words made the Jackal feel rather mean, so he answered loftily, ‘Exactly so! I always plant my bones for the same reason.’ And he carefully dug up a piece of ground, and sowed the bones of the kid at intervals.

After this, the pair used to come every day and look at their gardens; by and by the plum-stones shot into tender green stems, but the bones made never a sign.

‘Bones do take a long time germinating,’ remarked the Jackal, pretending to be quite at his ease; ‘I have known them remain unchanged in the ground for months.’

'My dear sir,' answered the Pea-hen, with ill-concealed irony, 'I have known them remain so for *years!*'

So time passed on, and every day, when they visited the garden, the self-complacent Pea-hen became more and more sarcastic, the Jackal more and more savage.

At last the plum-trees blossomed and bore fruit, and the Pea-hen sat down to a perfect feast of ripe juicy plums.

'He! he!' sniggered she to the Jackal, who, having been unsuccessful in hunting that day, stood by dinnerless, hungry, and in consequence very cross; 'what a time those old bones of yours do take in coming up! But when they do, my! what a crop you'll have!'

The Jackal was bursting with rage, but she wouldn't take warning, and went on: 'Poor dear! you do look hungry! There seems some chance of your starving before harvest. What a pity it is you can't eat plums in the meantime!'

'If I can't eat plums, I can eat the plum-eater!' quoth the Jackal; and with that he pounced on the Pea-hen, and gobbled her up.

Moral—It is never safe to be wiser than one's friends.

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