



The Lion and the Jackal

One day, a young lion was hunting in the hills when he found a cave.

“This cave would make a perfect home for our family,” he thought. “It will shelter us at night, and each morning we can go down to the river to catch some food. In fact, I think I’ll catch some now,” and he bounded down the hillside towards the river.

The young lion raced along the muddy bank and hurled himself over a bush in an attempt to catch a deer. He missed and landed instead right in the middle of a patch of deep mud. He struggled to get free, but the more he struggled, the deeper he sank.

“Oh no! I’m stuck!” he gasped. “What can I do now? Perhaps, if I roar loud enough, one of the other lions may hear me.”

All day long, the young lion roared, but no one came. He remained stuck in the mud, which had begun to dry, making it even harder for him to move.

“Who can possibly help me?” he groaned. “My friends don’t know where I am, and all the other animals are afraid of me. I’m going to die here.” For a whole week, he lay trapped in the mud.

“I’m done for,” he thought. But suddenly he heard a sniffing noise.

“Please help!” he gasped.

A grey head peered cautiously around the bush. It was a jackal.

“Don’t run away, jackal,” said the lion. “Please save me.”

“Why should I save you?” replied the jackal. “You’d just eat me as soon as you were out of that mud.”

“If you help me now, I will always be your friend,” said the lion. “Everything I catch I will share with you and your family.”

The jackal knew that if she did not help him, he would slowly starve to death.

“Do you promise?” she asked.

“As the king of the beasts, I give you my word,” said the lion.

Very cautiously, she crept across the dried mud towards the lion. Then she began to dig.

“It would help if we had some water to soften the mud,” she said. So she found a coconut shell and started to carry water to pour round the lion’s legs.

“You loosen the mud around your paws and I’ll push from under your stomach,” said the jackal. “One last effort and you’ll be free.”

And she stood back, hoping that she had been right to trust him.

“Thank you, jackal,” said the lion. “Thank you for trusting me; thank you for helping me. From now on, I will always be your friend.”

With that, the lion went off and caught some food for them both. And so it was that the lion and the jackal became good friends.

One day, the lion and the jackal sat together on the ledge by the the river.

“Why don’t we all live here?” said the lion. “We could shelter in these caves and even take turns to look after the little ones.”

“What a great idea!” replied the jackal.

The next day, the lions and the jackals all moved into their new home. Within a few hours, the lion cubs and the little jackal pups were making friends, playing together and chasing each other over the rocks.

As the dry months passed, the river dwindled and the lush green grass became brown and shrivelled. Each day the lion and the jackal hunted together but food

became hard to find. The lion kept to his word and they shared out the catch, even when there was not really enough to go around. All the animals began to feel rather grumpy and bad-tempered.

One day, two of the older lions sat on the ledge watching the hunt.

“Just look at our young lion down there wasting his time. There’s not enough food to go around, and our catch is still shared with all those jackals.”

“Yes,” agreed the other. “It’s time we got rid of them and all their noisy pups.” And so they went on.

Unfortunately, one of the sharp-eared jackals playing nearby overheard the old lions moaning and immediately went off and told his friends.

“Those smelly old lions do nothing but sleep all day,” he complained. “And that young lion wouldn’t catch anything without the help of our cunning mother jackal.”

Before long, other rumours and tales were being told. The lion cubs and jackal pups began to squabble and fight when they played together. When anything went wrong, the lions would blame the jackals, and the jackals would blame the lions!

Then, one day when food was so scarce that no one had eaten for several days, one of the old lions spotted a jackal pup carrying a bone in its jaws.

“Those good-for-nothing jackals must be catching food and keeping it all for themselves,” he growled, and roughly snatched the bone from the puppy.

“Just look at this,” he said to the young lion, dropping the bone in front of him. “As well as sharing our food, those sly

jackals are catching meat and keeping it for themselves. It's time we drove them out of here."

"It is a puzzle," said the young lion, "but the mother jackal is my friend. I will ask her about this."

So he took the bone over to where she sat. One of the jackal puppies was crying. "...and then that old lion took my bone away," whimpered the little pup.

The jackal shook her head as the young lion approached.

"This is no good," she said. "If we cannot live happily together we shall have to leave this ledge. How can we trust the lions when they steal from our pups?"

"Where did the pup get this food from?" asked the young lion.

"This isn't fresh food," said the mother jackal. "He's saved this bone from the catch we made last week."

"Of course; now I understand," said the lion. "I knew that we could trust each other. Spreading rumours and telling tales has undermined our friendship."

That night, he called the lion family together. He told them all about how the jackal had saved his life, and about the promise he had made to share his catch with the jackals and not harm them. The other lions hung their heads in shame.

"We are sorry," they said. "We had no idea. If that jackal had not trusted you and helped you, you would have died. Our unkind words have caused a lot of trouble and unhappiness. We must go and apologise at once."

And so they did - and from that day on, the two families lived as friends.