

The Eagle and the Jackdaw

An eagle, swooping down on powerful wings, seized a lamb in her talons and made off with it to her nest. A jackdaw saw the deed, and his silly head was filled with the idea that he was big and strong enough to do as the eagle had done. So with much rustling of feathers and a fierce air, he came down swiftly on the back of a large ram. But when he tried to rise again, he found that he could not get away for his claws were tangled in the wool. And so far was he from carrying away the ram that the ram hardly noticed he was there. The shepherd saw the fluttering jackdaw and at once guessed what had happened. Running up, he caught the bird and clipped its wings. That evening, he gave the jackdaw to his children. "What a funny bird this is!" they said, laughing. "What do you call it, father?"

"That is a jackdaw, my children. But if you should ask him, he would say he is an eagle."

Moral: Vanity can make you overestimate your powers.

The Dancing Monkeys

A prince had some monkeys trained to dance. Being naturally great mimics of men's actions, they showed themselves most apt pupils; and when arrayed in their rich clothes and masks, they danced as well as any of the courtiers. The spectacle was often repeated with great applause, until on one occasion, a courtier, bent on mischief, took from his pocket a handful of peanuts and threw them upon the stage. The monkeys, at the sight of the peanuts, forgot their dancing and became (as indeed they were) monkeys instead of actors and, pulling off their masks and tearing their robes, they fought with one another for the peanuts. The dancing spectacle thus came to an end amidst the laughter and ridicule of the audience.

Moral: Those who pretend will reveal themselves by their actions.

The Hare and the Hound

A dog, having given a long chase to a fine hare that showed himself to be a splendid runner, was at length forced, by want of breath, to give up the pursuit. The owner of the dog thereupon taunted him for having allowed himself to be beaten by the hare. "Ah, master," answered the dog, "it's all very well for you to laugh, but we had different risks. He was running for his life, while I was only running for my dinner."

Moral: Motivation makes all the difference.

The Woodman and the Serpent

One wintry day, a woodman was tramping home from his work when he saw something black lying on the snow. When he came closer, he saw it was a serpent, which was to all appearances dead. But he took it up and put it in his coat to warm while he hurried home. As soon as he got indoors, he put the serpent down on the hearth before the fire. The children watched it and saw it slowly come to life again. One of them stooped down to stroke it, but the serpent raised its head and showed its fangs and was about to bite the child to death. So the woodman seized his axe and, with one stroke, cut the serpent in two. “Ah,” he said, “there is no gratitude from the wicked.”

Moral: Sometimes help causes great damage.

The Eagle and the Arrow

An eagle was soaring through the air when it suddenly heard the whiz of an arrow and felt itself wounded to death. Slowly it fluttered down to the earth, with its lifeblood pouring out of it. Looking down upon the arrow with which it had been pierced, it found that the shaft of the arrow had been feathered with one of its own plumes. “Alas!” it cried as it died. “Bitter is it to die but doubly bitter to find that I have helped to speed the means of my death!”

Moral: We often give our enemies the means for our own destruction.