

The Lion and the Donkey

One day as the lion walked proudly down a forest aisle and the animals respectfully made way for him, a donkey brayed a scornful remark as he passed. The lion felt a flash of anger. But when he turned his head and saw who had spoken, he walked quietly on. He would not honor the fool with even so much as a stroke of his claws.

Moral: Nobody is too strong or too good to avoid criticism.

The Monkey and the Cat

Once upon a time, a cat and a monkey lived as pets in the same house. They were great friends and were constantly in all sorts of mischief together. What they seemed to think of more than anything else was to get something to eat, and it did not matter much to them how they got it. One day they were sitting by the fire, watching some chestnuts roasting on the hearth. How to get them was the question. "I would gladly get them," said the cunning monkey, "but you are much more skillful at such things than I am. Pull them out and I'll divide them between us." The cat stretched out her paw very carefully, pushed aside some of the cinders, and drew back her paw very quickly. Then she tried it again, this time pulling a chestnut half out of the fire. A third time and she drew out the chestnut. She went through this performance several times, each time singeing her paw severely. As fast as she pulled the chestnuts out of the fire, the monkey ate them up. Now the master came in and the rascals scampered away, leaving Mistress Cat with a burnt paw and no chestnuts. From that time on, they say, she contented herself with mice and rats and had little to do with Sir Monkey.

Moral: Selfishness can ruin a friendship.

The Donkey Carrying the Image

A sacred image was being carried to the temple. It was mounted on a donkey adorned with garlands and gorgeous trappings, and a grand procession of priests and pages followed it through the streets. As the donkey walked along, the people bowed their heads reverently or fell on their knees, and the donkey thought the honor was being paid to himself. With his head full of this foolish idea, he became so puffed up with pride and vanity that he halted and started to bray loudly. But in the midst of his song, his driver guessed what the donkey had got into his head and began to beat him unmercifully with a stick. "Go along with you, you stupid donkey," he cried. "The honor is not meant for you but for the image you are carrying."

Moral: People should not take credit that is due to others.

The Peacock and the Crane

A peacock, puffed up with vanity, met a crane one day and, to impress him, spread his gorgeous tail in the sun. “Look,” he said. “What have you to compare with this? I am dressed in all the glory of the rainbow, while your feathers are gray as dust!”

The crane spread his broad wings and flew up toward the sun. “Follow me if you can,” he said. But the peacock stood where he was among the birds of the barnyard while the crane soared in freedom far up into the blue sky.

Moral: The useful is more valuable than the ornamental.

The Horse and the Groom

A dishonest groom regularly sold half of the oats that were daily allowed for a horse, the care of which was entrusted to him. He would, however, keep brushing the animal’s coat for hours to make him appear in good condition. The horse naturally resented this treatment. “If you really wish me to look sleek,” said he, “then in the future, give me half the currying and leave off selling half my food.”

Moral: A person can hide bad deeds behind good appearances.