

THE JACKAL AND THE SPRING

ONCE upon a time all the streams and rivers ran so dry that the animals did not know how to get water. After a very long search, which had been quite in vain, they found a tiny spring, which only wanted to be dug deeper so as to yield plenty of water. So the beasts said to each other, 'Let us dig a well, and then we shall not fear to die of thirst;' and they all consented except the jackal, who hated work of any kind, and generally got somebody to do it for him.

When they had finished their well, they held a council as to who should be made the guardian of the well, so that the jackal might not come near it, for, they said, 'he would not work, therefore he shall not drink.'

After some talk it was decided that the rabbit should be left in charge; then all the other beasts went back to their homes.

When they were out of sight the jackal arrived. 'Good morning! Good morning, rabbit!' and the rabbit politely said, 'Good morning!' Then the jackal unfastened the little bag that hung at his side, and pulled out of it a piece of honeycomb which he began to eat, and turning to the rabbit he remarked:

'As you see, rabbit, I am not thirsty in the least, and this is nicer than any water.'

'Give me a bit,' asked the rabbit. So the jackal handed him a very little morsel.

'Oh, how good it is!' cried the rabbit; 'give me a little more, dear friend!'

But the jackal answered, 'If you really want me to give you some more, you must have your paws tied behind you, and lie on your back, so that I can pour it into your mouth.'

The rabbit did as he was bid, and when he was tied tight and popped on his back, the jackal ran to the spring and drank as much as he wanted. When he had quite finished he returned to his den.

In the evening the animals all came back, and when they saw the rabbit lying with his paws tied, they said to him: 'Rabbit, how did you let yourself be taken in like this?'

'It was all the fault of the jackal,' replied the rabbit; 'he tied me up like this, and told me he would give me something nice to eat. It was all a trick just to get at our water.'

'Rabbit, you are no better than an idiot to have let the jackal drink our water when he would not help to find it. Who shall be our next watchman? We must have somebody a little sharper than you!' and the little hare called out, 'I will be the watchman.'

The following morning the animals all went their various ways, leaving the little hare to guard the spring. When they were out of sight the jackal came back. 'Good morning! good morning, little hare,' and the little hare politely said, 'Good morning.'

'Can you give me a pinch of snuff?' said the jackal.

'I am so sorry, but I have none,' answered the little hare.

The jackal then came and sat down by the little hare, and unfastened his little bag, pulling out of it a piece of honeycomb. He licked his lips and exclaimed, 'Oh, little hare, if you only knew how good it is!'

'What is it?' asked the little hare.

'It is something that moistens my throat so deliciously,' answered the jackal, 'that after I have eaten it I don't

feel thirsty any more, while I am sure that all you other beasts are for ever wanting water.'

'Give me a bit, dear friend,' asked the little hare.

'Not so fast,' replied the jackal. 'If you really wish to enjoy what you are eating, you must have your paws tied behind you, and lie on your back, so that I can pour it into your mouth.'

'You can tie them, only be quick,' said the little hare, and when he was tied tight and popped on his back, the jackal went quietly down to the well, and drank as much as he wanted. When he had quite finished he returned to his den.

In the evening the animals all came back; and when they saw the little hare with his paws tied, they said to him: 'Little hare, how did you let yourself be taken in like this? Didn't you boast you were very sharp? You undertook to guard our water; now show us how much is left for us to drink!'

'It is all the fault of the jackal,' replied the little hare. 'He told me he would give me something nice to eat if I would just let him tie my hands behind my back.'

Then the animals said, 'Who can we trust to mount guard now?' And the panther answered, 'Let it be the tortoise.'

The following morning the animals all went their various ways, leaving the tortoise to guard the spring. When they were out of sight the jackal came back. 'Good morning, tortoise; good morning.'

But the tortoise took no notice.

'Good morning, tortoise; good morning.' But still the tortoise pretended not to hear.

Then the jackal said to himself, 'Well, to-day I have only got to manage a bigger idiot than before. I shall just kick him on one side, and then go and have a drink.' So he went up to the tortoise and said to him in a soft voice, 'Tortoise! tortoise!' but the tortoise took no notice. Then the jackal kicked him out of the way, and went to the

well and began to drink, but scarcely had he touched the water, than the tortoise seized him by the leg. The jackal shrieked out: 'Oh, you will break my leg!' but the tortoise only held on the tighter. The jackal then took his bag and tried to make the tortoise smell the honey-comb he had inside; but the tortoise turned away his head and smelt nothing. At last the jackal said to the tortoise, 'I should like to give you my bag and everything in it,' but the only answer the tortoise made was to grasp the jackal's leg tighter still.

So matters stood when the other animals came back. The moment he saw them, the jackal gave a violent tug, and managed to free his leg, and then took to his heels as fast as he could. And the animals all said to the tortoise:

'Well done, tortoise, you have proved your courage; now we can drink from our well in peace, as you have got the better of that thieving jackal!'

[*Contes Populaires des Bassoutos*, recueillis et traduits par E. Jacottet.
Paris: Leroux, éditeur.]