

The Tiger, the Brahmin, and the Jackal

Once upon a time, a tiger was caught in a cage. He tried to get out through the bars, but he couldn't. He growled loudly in anger when he failed.

By chance a poor Brahmin, a Hindu priest, came by. "Let me out of this cage, oh holy one!" cried the tiger.

"No, my friend," replied the Brahmin, "you would probably eat me if I did."

"Not at all!" cried the tiger. "In fact, I would be forever grateful and would do whatever you asked me to do."

Now when the tiger sobbed and sighed and wept and cried, the holy Brahmin's heart softened, and at last he agreed to open the door of the cage. Out popped the tiger and, grabbing the poor man, cried, "What a fool you are! What is to stop me from eating you now? After being locked up in the cage so long, I am just terribly hungry!"

The Brahmin begged the tiger not to eat him, but the tiger continued to growl and move toward the Brahmin. "Please! Please stop," begged the Brahmin. "Wait—I have an idea! Let's ask the first three things that we find nearby whether you should eat me or let me live." The tiger agreed.

Seeing a holy fig tree nearby, the Brahmin first asked the tree what it thought, hoping the tree would reply kindly that the tiger should let the Brahmin live. But instead the tree said, "What do you have to complain about? Don't I give shade and protection to everyone who passes by me? And don't they who pass by still tear down my branches to feed to their cattle? Don't whimper and cry—be a man!"

Then the Brahmin, sad at heart, walked a bit farther until he saw a buffalo chained to a wheel that he was forced to turn to get water from a well. "Dear buffalo, please help me. Please, please tell this tiger to let me live. After all, I freed him from the cage in which he was locked up."

But the buffalo answered in a loud voice, "You are a fool to expect thanks from the tiger! Look at me! While I was able to give milk to my owner, he fed me the finest food, but now that I no longer have any milk, he chains me here and gives me garbage to eat!"

The Brahmin, even sadder, asked the road to give him its opinion.

"My dear sir," said the road, "how foolish you are to expect anything else! Here am I, useful to everybody, yet all, rich and poor, great and small, walk and trample on me as they go past, giving me nothing!"

Hearing this, the Brahmin turned back sadly. On the way he met a jackal, which is a wild dog. The jackal called out, "Why, what's the matter, Mr. Brahmin? You look as unhappy as a fish out of water!"

The Brahmin told him all that had occurred. "How very confusing!" said the jackal, when the Brahmin finished. "Would you mind telling me over again? Everything seems so mixed up."

The Brahmin told it all over again, but the jackal shook his head in a distracted sort of way and still could not understand.

"It's very strange," said the jackal, sadly, "but it all seems to go in one ear and out the other! I will go to the place where it all happened, and then perhaps I shall be able to give my opinion."

So they returned to the cage, where the tiger was waiting for the Brahmin, sharpening his teeth and claws.

"You've been away a long time!" growled the tiger. "But now let us begin our dinner."

"Our dinner!" thought the Brahmin, as his knees knocked together with fear. "What a remarkably interesting way of putting it!"

"Give me five minutes, my lord," the Brahmin begged, "in order that I may explain matters to the jackal here, since he doesn't understand."

The tiger agreed, and the Brahmin began the whole story over again, not missing a single detail, taking as long as possible to retell the story.

"Oh, my poor brain! Oh, my poor brain!" cried the jackal, wringing its paws. "Let me see! How did it all begin? Brahmin, you were in the cage, and the tiger came walking by . . . ?"

"Pooh!" interrupted the tiger. "What a fool you are! The Brahmin was not in the cage. *I* was in the cage."

"Of course!" cried the jackal, pretending to be afraid. "Yes! I was in the cage—no I wasn't—dear! Dear! Let me see—the tiger was in the Brahmin, and the cage came walking by—no, that's not it, either! Well, don't mind me, but begin your dinner, for I shall never understand!"

"Yes, you shall!" retorted the tiger, in anger at the jackal's stupidity. "I'll *make* you understand! Look here—I am the tiger . . ."

"Yes, my lord!"

"And that is the Brahmin . . ."

"Yes, my lord!"

"And that is the cage . . ."

"Yes, my lord!"

"And I was in the cage—do you understand?"

"Yes—no . . . Please, my lord . . ."

"Well?" cried the tiger impatiently.

"Please, my lord!—how did you get in?"

"How!—why in the usual way, of course!"

"Oh, dear me!—my head is beginning to spin again! Please don't be angry, my lord, but what is the usual way?"

At this the tiger lost patience, and, jumping into the cage, cried, "This way! Now do you understand how it was?"

"Perfectly!" grinned the jackal, as he quickly shut the door. "And if you will permit me to say so, I think matters will remain as they were!"

Adapted from Jacobs, Joseph, ed. *Indian Fairy Tales*. Illus. John D. Batten. London: David Nutt, 1892. pp. 66–69.