

The Young Leopard and the Ram

Tips for Telling

Beavers will need an introduction to the story to explain the names:

- A **ram** is a male sheep, a **ewe** (pronounced "you") is a female sheep, and a **lamb** is a baby sheep.
- **Leopards** are large spotted cats, as large as sheep. They are carnivorous (meat eating) and prey on deer and antelope. They live in Africa and southern Asia.
- A **jackal** is a type of wild dog, about the size of a cocker spaniel. They often live alone, eating the leftovers of a kill when a large cat is full. Sometimes they hunt in packs and can bring down deer and antelope.

In this story, stress how timid the young leopard is and stress how brave the ram is. This story comes from the Hottentots of southwest Africa.

The Story

A young leopard was on his way home after an unsuccessful day's hunting when he found himself face to face with a huge ram. Now the leopard had never seen such a creature and had no idea whether it was ferocious or not.

Thinking it best to play safe he said, "Good afternoon, friend. I don't think we've met before. May I ask your name?"

The ram, of course, knew very well what leopards were like and decided that the best way to protect himself was to put on a brave face.

"I am the great ram," he bleated, on his loudest voice, "the terror of the bush. And who might I ask, and what business do you have in this territory?"

"Oh, I am only a leopard, sir," said the young animal, quaking all over. "And I was just passing through. If it's all the same to you, I'll be going now."

And with that the leopard bounded off as fast as his trembling legs would carry him.

A mile or so away the jackal stumbled upon the leopard as he lay, nervous and panting, in the undergrowth.

"What on earth is the matter?" asked the jackal, thinking there might be some danger about.

"Oh, my friend," gasped the leopard, "I can't tell you what a narrow escape I've just had. Imagine it: I came face to face with the great ram, the terror of the bush."

"You young fool," said the jackal. "You've just missed the chance of the first-rate meal." Then he thought for a moment.

"You know," he said, "if only you could take me to the spot where you bumped into him we might both get a meal out of it. I'll see you tomorrow."

In admiration the leopard watched the jackal trot away, and only wished that he were as brave as that.

Since the jackal knew that the leopard would try to talk himself out of going back to see the ram, he decided he would have to bully him into it.

"Look," he said, when he returned the following day. "I've brought a leather strap. If I tie one end around your neck and the other end around my waist, like this, we'll be able to keep

together, and you won't have any reason to feel nervous."

The leopard didn't look convinced but allowed the jackal to lead him back along the track, all the same.

As they approached, the ram lifted his head and sniffed the air.

"My dear," he said quietly to his wife, "I'm afraid that these may be our last minutes. I can smell the leopard in the air, and I don't think he'll be so easily fooled a second time."

His wife, though, had an idea. "There is just one chance," she said, "if you take the child." And she nuzzled the lamb toward its father and whispered something in the ram's ear.

At that moment the jackal and the leopard burst through the undergrowth. A violent twitching on the leather strap told the jackal that his young companion was having second thoughts.

But the jackal knew that the strap was fastened tightly and that the leopard couldn't creep away, no matter how badly he wanted to.

What the jackal didn't know was how brave the ram would turn out to be in the moment of danger.

"Oh, thank you jackal," said the ram, in a remarkably steady voice. "My wife and I were at our wits' end to know how to feed the baby, for it simply turns its nose up at the grass we offer, and refuses to eat anything but leopard."

Unseen by the others, the ewe then gave the baby's bottom a gentle nip, at which it let out an ear-piercing bleat.

The was altogether too much for the young leopard. He screamed, turned on his heels and dashed headlong into the bushes, dragging the unfortunate jackal after him.

The leopard had been so terrified by the encounter, and the jackal had been bumped and bruised by his homeward journey, that the two of them left the ram and his family well alone after that.

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