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## The Language of the Beasts

Once upon a time there was a man who had much goods. One day he went to market. There came a greyhound, which ate some meat. The butcher gave it a blow, which made it yelp. Seeing this, the heart of the man was touched with compassion. He bought of the butcher half a piece of meat and flung it to the greyhound. The dog took it and went away. It was the son of a king of the nether world.

Fortune changed with the man. He lost all his possessions, and began to wash for people. One day, he had gone to wash something, he stretched it on the sand to dry. A jerboa appeared with a ring in its ear. The man ran after it, killed it, hid the ring, made a fire, cooked the jerboa and ate it. A woman came out of the earth, seized him, and demanded, "Haven't you seen my son, with an ear-ring?"

"I haven't seen anybody," he answered; "but I saw a jerboa which had a ring in its ear."

"It is my son." She drew him under the earth and told him: "You have eaten my son, you have separated me from him. Now I will separate you from your children, and you shall work in the place of my son." He who was changed into a greyhound saw this man that day, and said to him: "It is you who bought some meat for a greyhound and threw it to him?"

"It is I."

"I am that greyhound. Who brought you here?"

"A woman," answered the man, and he recounted all his adventure.

"Go and make a complaint to the King," answered the other. "I am his son. I'll tell him: 'This man did me a good service,' When he asks you to go to the treasure and take as much money as you wish, answer him: 'I don't want any. I only want you to spit a benediction into my mouth,' If he asks you, 'Who told you that?' answer, 'Nobody.'"

The man went and found the King and complained of the woman. The King called her and asked her: "Why have you taken this man captive?"

"He ate my son."

"Why was your son metamorphosed into a jerboa? When men see one of those they kill him and eat him." Then addressing the man: "Give her back the ear-ring." He gave it to her.

"Go," said the King, "take this man to the place from which you brought him."

The son of the King then said to his father: "This man did me a favor; you ought to reward him."

The King said to him: "Go to the treasure, take as much money as you can."

"I don't want money," he answered; "I want you to spit into my mouth a benediction."

"Who told you that?"

"Nobody."

"You will not be able to bear it."

"I will be able."

"When I have spat into your mouth, you will understand the language of beasts and birds; you will know what they say when they speak; but if you reveal it to the people you will die."

"I will not reveal it." So the King spat into his mouth and sent him away, saying to the woman, "Go and take him back where you found him." She departed, and took him back there.

He mounted his ass and came back to his house. He arranged the load and took back to the people the linen he had washed. Then he remounted the beast to go and seek some earth. He was going to dig when he heard a crow say in the air:

"Dig beneath; you will sing when God has made you rich."

He understood what the crow said, dug beneath, and found a treasure. He filled a basket with it. On the top he put a little earth and went home, but often returned to the spot. On one of these occasions his ass met a mule, which said:

"Are you working still?"

The ass replied: "My master has found a treasure and he is taking it away."

The mule answered: "When you are in a crowd balk and throw the basket to the ground. People will see it, all will be discovered, and your master will leave you in peace."

The man had heard every word of this. He filled his basket with earth only. When they arrived at a crowd of people the ass kicked and threw the load to the ground. Her master beat her till she had enough. He applied himself to gathering the treasure, and became a rich merchant.

He had at home some chickens and a dog. One day he went into the granary, and a hen followed him and ate the grain. A cock said to her:

"Bring me a little."

She answered, "Eat for yourself."

The master began to laugh. His wife asked him:

"What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing."

"You are laughing at me."

"Not at all."

"You must tell me what you are laughing at."

"If I tell you I shall die."

"You shall tell me, and you shall die."

"To-night." He brought out some grain and said to his wife, "Give alms." He invited the people, bade them to eat, and when they had gone he brought food to the dog, but he would not eat. The neighbor's dog came, as it did every day, to eat with his dog. To-day it found the food intact.

"Come and eat," it said.

"No," the dog answered.

"Why not?"

Then the dog told the other: "My master, hearing the chickens talk, began to laugh. His wife asked him: 'Why are you laughing?' 'If I tell you, I shall die.' 'Tell

me and die,' That is why," continued the dog, "he has given alms, for when he reveals his secret he will die, and I shall never find anyone to act as he has."

The other dog replied: "As he knows our language, let him take a stick and give it to his wife until she has had enough. As he beats her let him say: 'This is what I was laughing at. This is what I was laughing at. This is what I was laughing at,' until she says to him, 'Reveal to me nothing.'"

The man heard the conversation of the dogs, and went and got a stick. When his wife and he went to bed she said to him, "Tell me that now."

Then he took the stick and beat her, saying: "This is what I was laughing at. This is what I was laughing at. This is what I was laughing at," until she cried out:

"Don't tell it to me. Don't tell it to me. Don't tell it to me."

He left her alone. When the dogs heard that, they rejoiced, ran out on the terrace, played, and ate their food. From that day the wife never again said to her husband, "Tell me that!" They lived happy ever after. If I have omitted anything, may God forgive me for it.