FABLES

Indian Fables – Panchatantra

For other stories, an introduction to fables in general and to Indian fables see The Allyn and Bacon Anthology of Traditional Literature edited by Judith V. Lechner. Allyn and Bacon/Longman, 2003.

Jackal and the War Drum

From: Ryder, Arthur. The Panchatantra. Translated from ancient Sanskrit. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1925. This is an adaptation from Ryder’s translation by J. Lechner.

Once a hungry jackal was wandering through the land when he came upon a king's battle ground. While resting there a moment, he heard a great sound which threw him into a panic. He imagined the worst, thinking himself as good as dead already. What creature could have made that sound? How powerful it must be! After a few minutes, however, he noticed a drum and began to watch it closely. Soon he noticed that the drum made sounds only when the grasses hit it. Otherwise it was quite helpless to make noise. Upon realizing this, the jackal gathered his courage and crept close to the drum, and even began to hit it on both ends.

"What a find," he thought, "A noisemaker like this must be truly great. It's likely to be stuffed with meat and fat." And with that he began to tear the skin covering off the drum. He had to struggle long, since the skin was very tough, but he finally had it open. Great was his disappointment when he discovered that the drum was empty.

"And so, my King," said Shrewd Jackal, "Often it is the weak and empty things that make the biggest noise." Realizing how foolish he had been, King Lion now agreed that the best thing to do would be to explore the source of the mysterious sound. Shrewd Jackal went off to discover a bull peacefully grazing in the meadow, and he brought Wise Bull to court. King Lion and Wise Bull soon became best of friends. Wise Bull, who was not only peaceful but wise, became King Lion's adviser. As Shrewd Jackal saw King Lion spend all his waking hours in the company of Wise Bull he became more and more jealous. He devised a way to turn the friends against one another. Through many stories, each designed to demonstrate another point about false or foolish people, Shrewd Jackal managed to turn love to hate.