

Reading

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At the Bank of the River Kopai

Many years ago, I went on a picnic beside the lovely river Kopai, near Santiniketan. (It is not really a river, but a stream flowing over pebbles, between narrow banks of yellow sand. Its water is so clear that we could see the bottom of the stream with its pebbles, green undergrowth and tiny fish swimming by.)



All at once we heard a distant noise of joyful shouting and were astonished to see a large party of men, women and children walking upstream. Some were in the water, which was only knee-high in the shallow places and came up to the waist in the deeper pools in the stream.

When the party drew near us, we noticed that they were local tribal people. They were all wet to the skin and laughing gaily. The younger men and older boys were walking in the river-bed itself, against a fairly strong current. They all had fishing-nets, wire strainers, old buckets and baskets with large holes in the bottom. The last is called a "Polo" and is used for trapping fish. The basket is dumped over a shoal of fish. Some are caught inside. Then a hand is inserted through the hole and out comes a wriggling fish.

The old men, the women and children were walking along the banks, keeping pace with those in the water. Every fish that was caught was flung on this or that bank, where the others pounced on it, gutted it and threw it into a large basket. A number of these baskets were carried on the heads of the people on the banks.

The older boys had spears and short sticks, with which they prodded under the bushes overhanging the edges of the stream. From time to time, they would drag out quite large prawns and add them to the heaps inside the baskets.

So they went along upstream, laughing and talking. We were told that they all belonged to one of the villages downstream. Indeed, almost all the people of the village, including babes-in-arms, had turned out except the sick and the very old. It was one of their annual fishing holidays.

‘What will you do with all this fish?’ we asked a woman.¹ She was astonished. ‘Why, the whole day’s catch will be taken to the “Morhal’s” (or headman’s) house and he will divide the fish among all the families in the village, according to their needs. None will be left out and no one will get too much. We all live beside Kopai.’ With this, she went hurrying along to catch up with the rest of the party. For us, it was a never-to-be-forgotten experience.

The Stork and the Crab

Read the story carefully.

Once upon a time, there lived a stork beside a pond. There were many fish and water animals in the pond. The stork had plenty to eat and lived happily. But after a few years, he started to get old. Sometimes he could not catch fish to eat. He was very worried.



He came up with a plan. He stood by the edge of the pond looking sad and thoughtful. The fish, frogs and crabs asked him the reason for his sadness. The stork replied, 'I am scared for you all, my friends. I have lived by the pond for so long. To think that it will no longer have any water scares me. When that happens, you will die and I will be all alone.'

'Why, Mister Stork?' asked a crab.

'I heard people say that they will empty the water in the pond and grow crops over it.'

The creatures believed the stork. They asked him to find a way out.

The sly stork said, 'I am only a bird. I cannot do much but I know of a bigger and deeper lake a little way from here. I can take you all there if you wish.'

'Yes, please, Mister Stork. We don't want to die,' the fish and the other creatures cried.



The stork took a few fish in its beak and set out. But it did not take them to the lake. It flew up to a big rock and ate them. Then it returned to the pond to take more fish. This carried on for some time.

Soon, most of the fish had been eaten by the stork and the pond was half empty. Only the crabs were left. The stork thought, 'I want to eat a crab. Let me take a crab this time.'

'Shall I take you to the beautiful lake, Master Crab?' the stork asked the crab who had spoken to him earlier.

'Yes, please,' cried the crab happily and climbed on the stork's back. The stork flew off. After some time, the crab looked down for his new home but could see no lake.

He asked the stork, 'Where is the big lake you are taking me to?'

The stork laughed and exclaimed, 'Do you see the big rock down there? I am taking you there like all your other friends.'

The crab saw the fish bones lying on the big rock. He realised what the stork was about to do. It dug its claws deep into the stork's neck. The stork could not breathe or fly and fell to the ground, dead. The crab went back to the old pond and told the others the truth about the stork.

'You saved us!' they cried. 'If it wasn't for you, the stork would have eaten us all.'

Write whether the statements are true (T) or false (F).

The Thieves and the Pot of Gold

Read the story carefully.

Rajan, the snake charmer, lived in a little hut by the river Ganges with his wife Amba. They were poor but happy. Every day, Rajan picked up the pot in which he kept his snake, along with his mat and pipe and went to the village square. He played the pipe and out came the snake from the pot, swaying its head from side to side. People ooh-ed and aah-ed, clapped and threw coins. In the evening, Rajan collected the money, fed his snake and returned home to his wife.

One day, he said to his wife, 'Today, I will go to the town with the snake. There are more people in a town and I will get more money.'

Rajan walked to the town. In the busy town square, he put down his pot and started playing his pipe. Soon, the snake came out and began swaying from side to side. A large crowd gathered and threw gold coins at their feet. Rajan had never seen so much money in his life. In the evening, he collected all the money, fed the snake, put it back in the pot and hurried home.

When his wife saw the gold coins, she was overjoyed. 'We are rich! We will be able to eat well now and never have to worry about money again.' She put the gold in a big pot. 'Tomorrow, we must find a safe place to hide it.'

Three thieves were watching them through the window. They had heard about the gold and were waiting for Rajan and Amba to fall asleep so that they could steal it.

Late into the night, Amba heard a noise. 'What's that?' she whispered, sitting up in bed. She was worried about the gold. She got up and picked up the pot with the gold. Then, she looked at the other pot with the snake and thought, 'That's just as precious.' So she picked up both pots and took them to the top of the house where she thought they would be safe.

Outside, the thieves had seen Amba carry up the pots. They stood on each other's shoulders and reached the top. Carefully, they picked up a pot and ran away. But when they opened the lid, to their horror, a deadly snake came out and hissed angrily. The thieves threw down the pot and ran away in fear.



The next morning, when Rajan got ready to leave for the town, there was only one pot in the house. He opened it to find it full of gold. He understood what had happened. He quietly sat down to play his pipe. Soon, the snake came back to him. 'I knew you would be back,' Rajan said to the snake with a smile, as he set out for the town.

A Answer the questions in a few lines

