



Aesop's Fables

6. THE GNAT AND THE LION

By Jan Payne

Far, far away in a hot land called Africa, lived a Gnat and a Lion. These two creatures were complete opposites. One was weak and one was strong. One was huge and one was tiny. One was fierce and one was timid. They met one dark night, and this is what happened...

The Gnat had gone to sleep. He had made himself a swinging hammock on a blade of grass and he was snoring gently. The Lion was awake. He was hunting and his roar could be heard in the distance.

It woke the Gnat.

'What is that?' he asked.

The Lion roared again. The sound was even louder.

'It's getting closer,' thought the Gnat, holding his breath.

A minute later the Lion came into view. When the Gnat saw who it was he felt relieved. 'Oh!' he said. 'It's only you.'

This annoyed the Lion. 'Only me!' he murmured silkily, narrowing his yellow eyes. 'Are you aware I am the King of the Beasts.'

When Lions narrow their eyes and murmur silkily, they are at their most dangerous. But the Gnat wasn't worried.

He opened his tiny mouth and yawned. 'You may be the King of the Beasts,' he said, 'but I can outwit you anytime.'

The Lion snorted. 'Ha!' he said. 'I could flatten you with one swipe of my paw.'

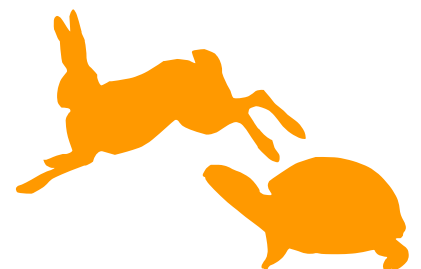
The Gnat stood up on his spindly legs. 'Go on then,' he said.

The Lion raised his paw above his head and brought it down as hard as he could. The Gnat jumped out of the way. 'Missed,' he said.

Humming a little tune he began buzzing round the Lions head. 'Zzz, Zzz, Zzz, Diddly, Diddly, Dee. Zzz, Zzz, Zzz, Try and catch me.'

The Lion was furious. He twisted his head this way and that. He snapped, he snarled, he swirled his tail, he swiped with his paws. But the Gnat was too nimble.

A thought came into the Lion's head. 'If I keep perfectly still, the Gnat will settle down, and I can pounce.'





But the Gnat didn't settle down. He acted quickly. He flew straight up the Lion's nose! And began to bite!

Roaring with pain the Lion shook his head. He stuffed his claws up his nose.

The Gnat pulled the hairs inside the Lion's nostrils. 'Make me the King of the Beasts,' he called.

'Never,' roared the Lion.

The Gnat bit him again. The Lion's nose began to swell. He could hardly breathe.

'Say it,' said the Gnat. 'Say: the Gnat is the King of the Beasts.'

The Lion could bear it no longer. 'The Gnat is King of the beasts,' he muttered.

His face hurt. His nose was running. His eyes were watering. Without saying another word the once proud Lion turned and disappeared into the long grass.

The Gnat was full of glee. 'I am the smartest creature that ever lived,' he boasted.

He began looking for a new place to make his home. He wanted something soft and comfortable. Ahead, draped over a bush was what looked like a white, lacy shawl.

'That's perfect,' said the Gnat. And he wrapped himself in it.

At first, the Gnat didn't notice a small creature moving swiftly towards him, climbing delicately over the lacy threads. When he did, it was too late.

'Hello, Gnat,' said the Spider.

The Gnat tried to fly away, but he was stuck.

'You can't harm me,' he said, 'I'm the new King of the Beasts.'

'We'll see about that,' said the Spider.

And he ate the Gnat for his supper.