

Aesop's Fables

14. THE VAIN JACKDAW

By Rob John

One day a king was sitting in his garden watching a pair of peacocks walking proudly across the lawn.

'See how beautiful those birds are,' he said to the Queen. 'Our peacocks with their blue and green feathers and long shiny tails are the most beautiful birds in the whole world.'

Just then a swan flew over the garden and landed gracefully on the King's lake.

'No,' said the Queen. 'I think the swan with its long neck and silky white wings is the most beautiful bird in the world.'

'Peacock!' said the King.

'Wrong' said the Queen. 'Swan!'

The King didn't like being told he was wrong so he decided to hold a competition. All the birds were ordered to come to the palace garden on Saturday afternoon. There the King and Queen and their friends would decide which one was the most beautiful.

'There's no point,' said the Queen. 'The swan is bound to win.'

'Peacock!' said the King as he sent out his orders.

The birds were very excited when they heard about the competition and there was much polishing of beaks and combing of feathers as they all made themselves look beautiful for the great competition. All that is except for the jackdaws.

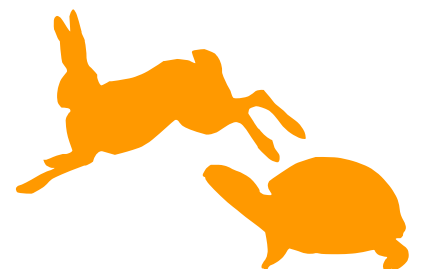
'No point,' said the Chief Jackdaw. 'We're not going to win this. Everyone knows that we jackdaws aren't beautiful.'

'I'm not bad looking,' said a young jackdaw. 'I might be in with a chance.'

'Don't make me laugh. Look at yourself. Your feathers are all grey and black, your beak's too long for your head and you look like you haven't had a bath in a month. You're a scruffy little jackdaw like us. We're clever and cunning and cheeky but none of us is ever going to win a beauty competition.'

The young Jackdaw was upset. 'Right,' he said. 'I'll show 'em.'

Next day the young jackdaw flew to the King's garden where he found two long green and blue peacock feathers lying in the grass.





He picked them up in his beak and carried them back to his nest. Then, down by the King's lake, he found three beautiful white swan's feathers and carried them off too. Soon he had lots of brightly coloured feathers from all sorts of birds and he started to work. First he stuck bright red and green parrot feathers onto his wings. Then on his tail he tied the beautiful long peacock feathers. For his head he made a hat from the silky white feathers of the swan and when his outfit was finished he looked at himself and said, 'Who's scruffy now?'

On the day of the competition the King and Queen and their friends sat in the garden as the birds paraded past. Last to appear was A strange brightly-coloured bird that no-one had ever seen before.

'What on earth is that?' said the King.

'I don't know,' said the Queen, 'I've never seen anything like it before but it's very very beautiful.'

'Yes it is,' said the King.

'Yes I am,' said the young jackdaw walking up and down in front of the crowd and showing off his fine colours.

There was no doubt about it. The King announced that this new bird was the winner.

The peacock and the swan both looked very cross as the young jackdaw bowed

to the cheering crowd. Then something terrible happened. His hat fell off.

'Just a minute,' said the swan. 'Aren't those my feathers?'

'And those wings,' said the parrot looking closely at the jackdaw. 'Didn't they used to belong to me?'

'And that tail,' said the peacock. 'I'd know that tail anywhere.'

Soon the young jackdaw was surrounded by birds pecking at his beautiful costume. They pulled away their lovely coloured feathers until his costume had all gone.

'It's just a jackdaw,' said the King.

'A scruffy, little jackdaw,' said the Queen.

The young jackdaw walked back to his nest very slowly.

'I just wanted to be special,' he said.

'You don't become special just by putting on fine clothes,' said the Chief Jackdaw.

'I know that. I know that now,' said the young jackdaw.

But the other jackdaws weren't listening to him. They'd already flown away and left him all alone.