

Aesop's Fables

20. THE LION AND THE ELEPHANT

By Jan Payne

It was nearly morning and the Lion had just gone to bed. He pulled the grass duvet over his head and closed his eyes. He was just about to fall asleep when a noise sounded across the plain.

'COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO!'

It was the Cockerel crowing. 'COCK-A-DOODLE-DOO!'

The Lion put his paws over his ears. 'Go away,' he cried, 'go away!'

But the Cockerel didn't want to go away. He wanted to tell the world what a beautiful morning it was.

The Lion kept his head under the duvet. 'That noise is driving me mad,' he said.

It was the same every morning. The sun came up and the Cockerel crowed. And each time he heard it the Lion hated it more. It made him feel afraid.

'Why is it,' he asked himself, 'that someone like me, who is brave and strong and fearless should be afraid of the sound of a harmless cockerel?'

He decided to talk to the other animals.

'Monkeys,' he asked, 'does the sound of the Cockerel make you feel afraid?'

'No,' said the monkeys together. 'We're not afraid of anything.'

'Hippopotamus,' asked the Lion, 'you are big and strong like me. Is there anything that frightens you?'

The hippopotamus was bathing in the river. He blew a stream of bubbles out of his nose.

'Nothing frightens me,' he said.

'Not even the sound of a cockerel crowing.'

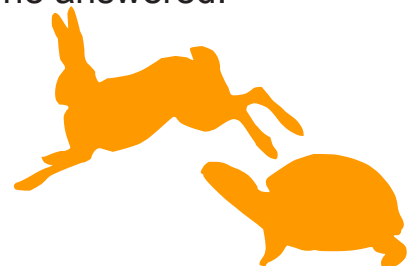
'Especially not the sound of a cockerel crowing.'

Ashamed of his weakness the Lion turned away. A crocodile was sunbathing near by.

'Are you afraid of anything, Crocodile?' the Lion asked.

The crocodile thought for a moment.

'Jam sandwiches!' he answered.





The Lion thought this was a strange thing for the crocodile to be afraid about, but he didn't argue.

Just then an elephant lumbered out of the forest.

'If anyone can answer my question, he can,' thought the Lion. 'Elephant, can I speak to you?' he asked.

'Not today, Lion,' said the Elephant, shaking his head. 'I have a problem.'

'Is it a serious problem?' asked the Lion.

'It is to me,' said the Elephant. And he shook his head so hard the Lion thought the Elephant's ears would come off.

'I've got a serious problem too,' said the Lion.

'Well, you tell me your serious problem and I'll tell you mine,' said the Elephant.

So the Lion told the Elephant all about how afraid he was of the crowing of the cock.

'I sympathise with you, Lion,' said the Elephant. And he gave his head another massive shake.

'Do you see a small insect buzzing around?' he continued.

The Lion could just make out a gnat near the Elephant's head.

'If that insect flies inside my ears,' continued the Elephant, 'I am positive I am done for.'

'You mean you are afraid of a tiny gnat?' queried the Lion.

'Yes,' said the Elephant.

The Lion thought about this for a minute. It was hard to believe that such a strong, wise and clever animal could be afraid of so small a thing. Now the Lion felt sorry for the Elephant.

'Your fear is worse than mine,' he told him. 'I am sorry now I troubled you at all.'

'I'm glad you did,' said the Elephant.

The next morning when the Cock crowed the Lion turned over in bed and went back to sleep.

'It's just a noise,' he told himself, 'it can't possibly hurt me.'

And he was right.