



## THE CUNNING HERON AND THE CRAYFISH

Once, there was a great lake where an old heron lived for many years. The lake was filled with many fish and animals, and there was always food for him, so he never needed to worry about going hungry, even for a day. If he wanted a snack, all he had to do was swoop down to the water and catch a little fish or a frog or a mollusk. He lived happily for a long time, but as time passed he began to get older, and soon he found he was too old to dive into the lake for a snack. He was very hungry all the time now, and because he wasn't eating enough, he started to get skinny and weak. He could hardly remember the last time he'd eaten even a tiny little fish! And so one day he decided he must come up with a plan to get food without having to catch it himself.

He was very hungry so he thought long and hard, and came up with a great plan!

First, he found a perfect spot on the lake shore where he would be visible from all sides. Then he sat down and began to moan as loudly and sorrowfully as he could. He wailed with all his strength until he'd been heard by everyone who lived at the lake.

Soon enough a crayfish came to see what all the noise was about. When he poked his head out of the water, he saw the heron sitting there, upset and

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moaning, and he felt very sorry for him. He moved closer and asked, “Excuse me. What happened, why are you crying so loudly?”

The heron was prepared for this question. He sniffed as convincingly as he could and answered just as he had rehearsed.

“Oh, my friend!” he lamented. “I can’t catch fish anymore! I’m old and I’m weak! I believe it is finally time for me to give up on everything good in this life! I only hope that my life will soon be over, so I can stop suffering!” At the end he made sure to sob and cover his face with his wing so he could peek through his feathers and see if the crayfish believed him.

“Well,” said the crayfish, “If you have already made your peace, why are you wailing about it?”

“You see, dear crayfish, I was born right here by this lake. This is where I grew up and this is where I grew old. But I heard that this wonderful place will soon dry up, because it won’t rain for ten years. Not a single drop will fall from the sky!” Once again, the heron sobbed. The crayfish couldn’t believe his ears.

“What do you mean? Are you serious? And where did you hear such a thing?” the crayfish asked, shocked.

The heron was ready for these questions. “I heard it from a very educated astronomer. He said it wouldn’t rain for at least ten years. You can see for yourself that there is already less water than there used to be. This lack of rain will make it so that there is not a single drop, and the lake will completely dry up!”

An educated astronomer, the crayfish thought. It must be true! He clicked his pincers anxiously and hurried to tell everyone in the lake this terrible news. As soon as they heard the lake would dry up, they started to panic.

“What will we do?” they cried. “How will we live?”

“Let’s ask the heron if he knows anything else,” the crayfish said. The lake creatures were skeptical, but when they heard that the heron hadn’t even tried to catch a fish for days, they believed him immediately. They gathered around him.

“Please,” they begged him, “tell us how we can save ourselves from this danger!” The plan was working! The heron plumped up his wings and started talking in his most dreamy voice.

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“Well, my friends. Not far from here there is a beautiful deep lake, filled with so much water that even if it didn’t rain for ten years, it would never dry up. It’s covered in beautiful lotus flowers and lily pads. It’s not far away at all, you know. I’ll gladly take all of you there if you can just manage to get on my back.”

The heron was a very convincing actor, and everyone was so scared that they were inclined to believe him. After a while, they were all gathered even closer around the heron, begging him to fly them to the amazing lake one by one and save them from disaster.

This was exactly what the heron wanted. His plan worked! He agreed to take them, but told them that because he was old, he could only take one or two a day. Then, every day, he would take two trips, but as soon as he was out of view from the lake he would turn over so the creature would fall off his back, and as soon as it hit the ground he would swoop down and have his lunch! And every day, when he returned, he would tell the waiting creatures stories of the magical new lake and how happy their friends were there.

The heron, who was feeling very proud of himself for successfully tricking the lake creatures, was starting to feel stronger and a little more relaxed. His plan was foolproof – no one would ever know what he was doing! Then, one day, the crayfish came up to the heron and said,

“Listen here, you already took so many creatures to the new lake, which is wonderful, but I was the first to make friends with you. Isn’t it my turn to go to this beautiful new place?”

The heron was thrilled. He’d been eating only fish and frogs every day, as they’re the ones who had asked to go first, and he nearly drooled just imagining feasting on some juicy crayfish.

“Of course I’ll take you, friend,” the heron said, sneakily. “You can be next.”

And so the crayfish crawled on his back and they took off for the new lake. The crayfish had never been so high up in the air! He listened to the whooshing wind and marveled at the view from the sky. But as he was looking down he noticed a large pile of skeletons and bones on the ground below. Suddenly he realized that the heron had been deceiving everyone, himself included. He thought quickly,

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trying to stay calm, and called out to the heron,

“Friend! The lake seems to be very far away and I know I’m heavy, so you must be tired! Why don’t we take a break to relax?”

The heron was feeling very confident in his plan and decided that, since they were so high up, he might as well tell the crayfish what was happening.

“Oh, there is no lake! Your lake was never going to dry up, this was all just part of my plan to get lunch! You see that rock up there? I’m going to drop you on it and eat you!” He laughed, proud of himself for having such a great plan.

The crayfish didn’t have time to think! He grabbed the heron’s neck feathers with his pincers and pinched until the heron couldn’t fly and they fell out of the air. The heron smashed into the rock, but the crayfish held onto the bird and cushioned his fall in feathers.

As soon as they landed, the crayfish realized he was alive and laughed out with joy. He was so happy to have survived! When the others saw the crayfish coming back, they were very surprised and peppered him with questions. Why wasn’t he at the lake? Was it not big enough? The crayfish shook his head and sat down.

“My friends, the truth is we got fooled. The heron lied to us. He made up everything he said. Every day, he would take our friends to the tall rocks over there and drop them from very high up so he could have an easy lunch. But I discovered his plan, and I made sure he’ll never eat another one of us.”

“But what about the astronomer’s prediction?” the creatures asked. “What will we do when the lake dries up?”

“Ah,” the crayfish sighed. “This was another of the heron’s lies. The lake isn’t about to dry up, and there is no lake more beautiful than ours. Now he is gone, and we have nothing to fear and we can live our lives happily and safely!”