



Just So Stories

Eight Animal Tales by Rudyard Kipling, retold
for young readers

CLASSIC STORY SHELF · THE ACTIVE HOME

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How the Whale Got His Throat



In the sea, once upon a time, there was a Whale, and he ate fishes. He ate the starfish and the garfish, the crab and the dab, the plaice and the dace, and the really truly twirly-whirly eel. He ate so many fishes that at last there was only one small fish left in all the sea — a small, clever 'Stute Fish, who swam just behind the Whale's right ear, to stay out of harm's way.

'I'm hungry!' said the Whale, standing up on his tail. 'Noble and generous Whale,' said the small 'Stute Fish, 'have you ever tasted Man?' 'No,' said the Whale. 'What is it like?' 'Nice,' said the 'Stute Fish,

'but nubbly.' 'Then fetch me some!' said the Whale, and he made the sea froth with his tail.

So the 'Stute Fish told him where to find a shipwrecked Mariner, sitting on a raft in the middle of the sea with his toes in the water. The Whale swam and swam, and opened his mouth back and back and back — and swallowed the Mariner, raft and all, down into his warm, dark inside cupboard.



But the Mariner was a man of clever ideas. Inside the Whale he jumped and danced and bumped and thumped, and sang at the top of his voice, until the Whale got the most terrible hiccups. 'This is very uncomfortable,' hiccupped the Whale. 'Take me home to my white cliffs, and I'll think about it.'

So the Whale swam to the Mariner's home shore, and opened his mouth — and out walked the Mariner. But first, the Mariner took his raft and his jack-knife and some string, and he tied the raft into a grating, like a lattice window, and fixed it firmly in the Whale's throat.

And that is why, to this very day, a whale cannot swallow anything bigger than a sprat. He eats tiny, tiny things, slowly and carefully — and the Mariner went home, and the 'Stute Fish swam away and hid himself in the mud, because he was so clever and so small.

Lesson: Think before you gobble! The whale learned to eat small things slowly — and clever thinking can solve a very big problem.

Words to know: **mariner** — a sailor · **grating** — a frame of crossed bars, like a tiny gate

How the Camel Got His Hump



In the beginning of years, when the world was new, there was a Camel who lived in the middle of the Howling Desert, because he did not want to work. He ate sticks and thorns and prickles, and when anyone spoke to him he only said, 'Humph!' — nothing more.

The Horse came to him on Monday morning with a saddle on his back. 'Camel, O Camel, come out and trot like the rest of us!' 'Humph!' said the Camel, and the Horse went away and told the Man. The Dog came with a stick in his mouth. 'Fetch and carry like the rest of us!' 'Humph!' said the Camel. The Ox

came with a yoke on his neck. 'Plough like the rest of us!' 'Humph!' said the Camel, and that was all.

At the end of the day the Man called the Horse, the Dog, and the Ox together. 'I'm sorry for you,' he said, 'but that Humph-thing in the Desert won't work. You three will have to do his work as well as your own, until he learns.' The three animals were very angry about that, and they went grumbling to the edge of the Desert.



Then along came the Djinn in charge of All Deserts, rolling in a dust-cloud, as Djinns do. 'Djinn,' said the Horse, 'is it right for anyone to be idle, with the world so new?' 'Certainly not,' said the Djinn. 'Well,' said the Dog, 'there's a thing with a long neck and

long legs, and he hasn't done a stroke of work since Monday. He won't even trot.' 'What does he say?' asked the Djinn. 'He says Humph! — and that's all.'

The Djinn found the Camel looking at his own reflection in a pool of water. 'My long and bubbling friend,' said the Djinn, 'what's this I hear about you not working?' 'Humph!' said the Camel. 'You say that far too often,' said the Djinn. 'You have missed three days of work — and for every day, I will give you one humph of your very own.' And PUFF! The Camel's back, which had been smooth and flat, swelled up into a great big lolloping HUMPH — a hump!

'There,' said the Djinn. 'That hump will let you work three days without eating, because you can live on it. And don't you ever say I never did anything for you. Now go and work like everyone else.' And the Camel went away and joined the Horse, the Dog, and the Ox, and from that day to this, every camel carries his hump — to remind him that helping is better than Humph!

Lesson: Work is easier when everyone helps. Saying 'Humph!' instead of helping only makes more work for you in the end.

Words to know: **djinn** — a magical desert spirit, a little like a genie · **idle** — not working; being lazy

How the Rhinoceros Got His Skin



Once upon a time, on an uninhabited island, there lived a kind baker who had a cook-stove, a flour sack, and a fine big currant cake he had baked all for himself. He was just sitting down under a palm tree to eat it when along came a Rhinoceros from the mainland — and in those days, the Rhinoceros's skin fitted him quite tight, with no wrinkles anywhere.

The Rhinoceros had no manners at all — he had none then, and he has none still. 'How!' he said, very rudely, and he took the cake right out of the baker's hands and ate it up, every crumb, and stomped back

into the desert. The baker shook his fist. 'You will be sorry,' he called, 'for that cake and those manners!'

Five weeks later there came a great heat wave, and all the animals took off their skin coats to be cool. The Lion unbuttoned his, the Leopard slid out of his — and the Rhinoceros unzipped his skin, rolled it up, and left it on the beach while he splashed in the sea to cool down.



While the Rhinoceros was splashing, who should come by but the baker! He found the empty Rhinoceros skin lying on the sand — and he remembered his cake. From his lunch bag he took a handful of dry cake crumbs, the crumbly, scratchy, tickly kind from the bottom of the tin, and he shook

them all inside the Rhinoceros's skin and rubbed them in well.

When the Rhinoceros came out of the sea, he zipped his skin back on — and it ITCHED. He rolled in the sand, but the crumbs only rubbed in worse. He scratched himself against a palm tree until his smooth skin wrinkled up into great folds over his shoulders and his front legs. He scratched and scratched until his nice tight skin was loose and creased and cross-looking — just like a rhino's skin today.

And he went home very angry indeed. But from that day to this, every rhinoceros has great folds in his skin and a rather grumpy temper — all because of cake crumbs, and cake, and very bad manners.

Lesson: Greediness and grumpiness come back on you. Cake tastes better when it is yours — and manners matter, even in the desert.

Words to know: **currant** — a tiny dried grape, baked into cakes · **unzipped** — undid a fastening and opened something up

How the Leopard Got His Spots



In the days when everybody started fair, the Leopard lived in a place called the High Veldt, where the ground was all sandy-yellow and the rocks were yellow-brown. He was a sandy-yellowish colour himself, and so was his hunting friend the Archer — and the animals they hunted, the Giraffe and the Zebra, could not see them coming at all, because everybody matched the yellow ground.

Then something changed. The Giraffe and the Zebra and their friends grew tired of being surprised, and they moved away to a great new forest — a speckly, sparkly forest full of tree shadows and sunny

patches, where the light fell in stripes and blotches through the leaves. 'You'll never find us now,' they said.



The Leopard and the Archer followed, hungry as could be. But in the forest, standing in the speckly shadows, the Leopard was the wrong colour entirely! He glowed yellow against the dark trees, and the Giraffe and the Zebra saw him coming from far away and simply wandered off into the dappled shade.

'We must change our coats,' said the Archer, 'to match this speckly place.' He was a clever friend, and he knew about colours. 'You need spots,' he told the Leopard. 'Little round blotches, so you look like

the sunshine coming through the leaves.' And he dipped his five fingertips in dark forest colour and pressed them all over the Leopard's yellow coat — pat, pat, pat — leaving little groups of five black spots everywhere, just like a handprint.

The Leopard looked at himself in a pool. Where the Archer's fingertips had pressed, there were spots; and in the speckly forest light, a spotted leopard was nearly invisible. 'Now,' said the Leopard happily, 'I can lie on a branch in the dappled shade, and nobody will ever see me.' And from that day to this, every leopard wears the spots the Archer gave him — five little fingertip marks at a time.

Lesson: Things change, and smart creatures change with them. The leopard's new spots were just what he needed for his new home.

Words to know: **veldt** — the open grassland of southern Africa · **dappled** — marked with patches of light and shade

How the Elephant Got His Trunk



In the far-off days, the Elephant had no trunk. He had only a blackish, bulgy nose, about as big as a boot, that he could wriggle from side to side — but he couldn't pick up anything with it. And there was one baby Elephant, the Elephant's Child, who was full of enormous curiosity. He asked questions about everything he saw.

He asked his tall aunt the Ostrich why her tail feathers grew just so. He asked his tall uncle the Giraffe what made his skin spotty. He asked his broad aunt the Hippopotamus why her eyes were red, and his hairy uncle the Baboon why melons

tasted just so. 'Too many questions!' they all said. 'Hush! Don't ask so many questions!'

At breakfast one morning, the Elephant's Child asked a brand-new question: 'What does the Crocodile have for dinner?' Everybody said 'Hush!' very loudly — but the Kolokolo Bird said, sadly, 'Go to the banks of the great grey-green, greasy Limpopo River, all hung about with fever trees, and find out for yourself.' So the Elephant's Child filled his trunk — his little boot of a nose, that is — with bananas and melons and sugar cane, and off he went.



On the bank of the Limpopo, he found what he thought was a log of wood. 'Excuse me,' he said

politely, 'have you seen a Crocodile in these parts?' The log of wood opened one eye — because it WAS the Crocodile! 'Come closer, little one,' whispered the Crocodile, 'for I am the Crocodile, and today I begin with — YOU!' And he caught the Elephant's Child by his little nose!

The Elephant's Child sat back and pulled, and the Crocodile pulled, and the kind Bi-Coloured Python Rock Snake came and pulled too — and the little nose stretched, and stretched, and STRETCHED into a long, wonderful trunk! At last the Crocodile let go with a plop, and the Elephant's Child wrapped his sore new trunk in cool banana leaves. Then he discovered what it could do: it could pick up grass without kneeling, shower cool mud over his back, whisk flies away with a branch, and even sing a trumpet song.

He hurried home across Africa, frisking and whisking his trunk. His families said, 'Come here — you and your questions!' But the Elephant's Child picked fruit down for everyone with his trunk, and sprayed cool water over them all, and trumpeted a happy song. 'Bananas!' said his hairy uncle the Baboon. 'That is a very useful nose indeed!' And nobody told him to hush ever again.

Lesson: Asking questions is a wonderful thing — even if some people sigh about it. Curiosity took the Elephant's Child on a journey, and brought him home with a trunk.

Words to know: **curiosity** — wanting to know and learn about things · **trunk** — an elephant's long nose, used for picking up, smelling, and spraying

The Sing-Song of Old Man Kangaroo



Old Man Kangaroo had short legs like other animals in the beginning, and he was very proud. At breakfast time he went to the Great Spirit of the Australian sky and said, 'Make me different from all other animals by five o'clock this afternoon.' The Spirit said, 'Run along, then,' and sent him to see the little god Nqa, who was sitting in a sand-pit.

'Make me different from all other animals,' said Old Man Kangaroo to Nqa, 'and make me very truly famous, by five o'clock.' Nqa jumped up. 'Dingo!' he called. 'Yellow Dog Dingo — wake up! See what I've brought you!' And Yellow Dog Dingo, always hungry,

opened one eye and saw Old Man Kangaroo standing in the sand-pit, showing off his little short legs.

'What about it?' growled Dingo. 'Chase him,' said Nqa. 'Chase him all day, until his legs grow long.' And Yellow Dog Dingo grinned a great hungry grin and leaped up — and Old Man Kangaroo leaped too, and the chase was ON.



They ran and ran. They ran through the desert and the salt-pans, over the mulga and the spinifex, past the rivers and the ranges. Old Man Kangaroo's little short legs ached and stretched as he bounded. 'Goodness!' he panted. 'This is not quite what I had in mind!' But Dingo kept coming, and Kangaroo kept

bounding — bigger and bigger bounds, on longer and longer legs.

They bounded all the morning and all the afternoon, and at five o'clock sharp they came to a river, and Old Man Kangaroo took one ENORMOUS hop right across it, and sat down on the far bank with his long new legs stretched out in front of him. Dingo stopped on the other side, too tired to jump, and lay down with his tongue out. 'Thank you,' said Old Man Kangaroo politely, across the water. 'I believe I am quite different enough.'

And from that day to this, every kangaroo has long, strong back legs for bounding over Australia — because Old Man Kangaroo ran from Yellow Dog Dingo till five o'clock, and got exactly what he asked for: he was different from all the other animals, and very truly famous too.

Lesson: Be careful what you wish for! Old Man Kangaroo wanted to be different from other animals — and by five o'clock, he certainly was.

Words to know: **dingo** — a wild dog of Australia ·

bounding — leaping along in big jumps

The Beginning of the Armadillos



In the beginning of years, on the banks of the turbid Amazon, there lived a Painted Jaguar, a Sticky-Prickly Hedgehog, and a Slow-Solid Tortoise. The Hedgehog could curl up into a tight ball of prickles, but he could not swim a single stroke. The Tortoise could swim beautifully, but he couldn't curl up — not even a little bit.

The Painted Jaguar's mother had taught him how to catch them both: 'A hedgehog, my son, you must drop into the water, and he will uncurl. A tortoise, my son, you must scoop out of his shell with your

paw.' The Jaguar remembered the rhyme perfectly — the trouble was telling the two friends apart!

One evening the Jaguar found the Hedgehog and the Tortoise talking together under a big Brazil-nut tree, and he grinned. 'Now I have you!' he said. 'But which of you is which? My mother warned me — one of you I drop in the water, and one of you I scoop out with my paw. Hmm. You,' he said to the Hedgehog, 'you don't look prickly enough. Uncurl, and prove you're a tortoise!'



The two friends looked at each other — and had a wonderful idea. 'Jaguar,' said the Hedgehog, 'give us until tomorrow. We're going to practise.' And all night long, under the Brazil-nut tree, the Tortoise

taught the Hedgehog how to swim — paddle, paddle, paddle — and the Hedgehog taught the Tortoise how to curl up — tuck, tuck, tuck. It was hard work, and their backs ached, and the Hedgehog's prickles got quite bendy with practising.

In the morning the Jaguar came back, hungry and sure of himself. He dropped the curled-up one into the river, exactly as his mother taught him — but POP! It uncurled in the water and swam away, because it was the Hedgehog, who had learned to swim! Then he tried to scoop the other one out of its shell — but it had curled itself into a smooth tight ball and rolled away into the prickly bushes, because it was the Tortoise, who had learned to curl!

The Painted Jaguar sat down and shook his sore paw, more puzzled than ever. And the two friends? The Hedgehog's prickles had flattened into strong scaly plates from all that swimming, and the Tortoise's shell had grown tight bands from all that curling — and between the two of them, they had become the very first Armadillos. And armadillos live on the Amazon to this very day.

Lesson: Quick thinking and teamwork! The hedgehog and the tortoise each shared their best

trick — and together they made something brand new.

Words to know: armadillo — a small animal with a shell of bony plates, which can roll into a ball · **turbid** — cloudy and muddy, like a stirred-up river

The Cat That Walked by Himself



In the beginning, all the tame animals were wild. The Dog was wild, and the Horse was wild, and the Cow was wild — and the Cat was wildest of all, and walked by himself in the Wet Wild Woods. Then the Woman built the First Cave House, and lit the First Fire, and began to tame the wild things with her cleverness.

First came the Dog, who promised to help hunt and guard, in return for roast meat. Then the Horse, who promised to carry her, for sweet hay. Then the Cow, who promised warm milk, for fresh grass. And the Cat watched it all from the shadows of the Wet

Wild Woods, and said, 'I am not a friend, and I am not a servant. I am the Cat who walks by himself, and I wish to come and go as I please.'

But the warm cave looked comfortable, and the Cat made a bargain with the Woman — a proper bargain, fair on both sides. 'If ever I catch mice in your cave,' said the Cat, 'and if I am kind to the baby, will you let me sit by your fire?' 'Done,' said the Woman. 'If you do those things, the fire is yours to sit by — but you will still walk by yourself, and go your own way, because that is what you are.'



The Cat kept the bargain beautifully. He caught the mouse that nibbled the stores. He purred the baby to sleep when it cried. And the Woman kept her side

too: she poured him warm milk, and left the best place by the fire empty for him.

But the Man said, 'The Cat is no friend of mine,' and the Dog said, 'If he is not kind to me, I shall chase him up a tree.' And the Cat didn't mind one bit. 'Chase away,' he said, washing his whiskers. 'I keep my bargain with the Woman, and I sit by her fire — and all places are alike to me, because I walk by myself.'

And that is how it has been ever since. The Cat comes and goes as he pleases. He sits by our fires and catches our mice, and he is kind to babies — and then he slips out into the night, waving his wild tail, walking by his wild lone through the Wet Wild Woods. Just as he always wanted.

Lesson: The Cat kept his bargain and his freedom too. Some creatures are friends by a deal, and some by love — and the Cat is happy being both wild and welcome.

Words to know: **bargain** — an agreement where each side promises something · **tame** — gentle and used to living with people

About this book

The eight tales in this book are from *Just So Stories* by Rudyard Kipling, first published in 1902. They are in the public domain. These retellings follow Kipling's tales closely, told in fresh words for young readers — with a gentler ending here and there where the originals grow rough — and the illustrations are original to The Active Home.

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