



The Clever Mouse Deer

(Malaysia)

One day, a buffalo was eating grass by the riverbank when he heard the voice of someone crying in pain.

“Help! Help! Please let me free,” heard the buffalo. He ran to the river where the voice came from. There he found a crocodile with a big log on his back. “Help me, Mr Buffalo! This log fell on my back. I cannot move and I’m in pain,” cried the crocodile.

Feeling sorry for the crocodile, the buffalo used his strong horn to lift the log off the crocodile. The log was very heavy. The buffalo tried with all his might until the crocodile was free.

“Thank you, Mr Buffalo! You are very kind to help me,” said the crocodile.

“You are welcome,” replied the buffalo. “I’m happy to be of help to you.”

As the buffalo was leaving, the crocodile suddenly bit one of the buffalo’s legs. The buffalo screamed in pain. The crocodile said, “I’m very hungry, Mr Buffalo. I cannot help wanting to eat your leg.”

The buffalo was disappointed at the crocodile, whose life the buffalo saved. The buffalo could not believe that the crocodile would return his kindness that way.

The mouse deer was passing by and saw the buffalo’s leg in the mouth of the crocodile. He asked the buffalo what happened.



“I saved the crocodile’s life by removing the log off his back. But now he wants to have me for dinner!” the buffalo cried, having been let down by the crocodile. The mouse deer thought for a moment. “Hmmm... I could not believe that the buffalo has the strength to lift such a big and heavy log off the crocodile,” the mouse deer exclaimed.

“It’s the truth. I lifted the log by myself,” replied the buffalo proudly.

“He is telling the truth, Mr Mouse Deer,” added the crocodile.

The mouse deer replied, “I will only believe in your strength, Mr Buffalo, if I see you lift the log.” The mouse deer then asked the crocodile to free the buffalo’s leg. The crocodile was curious what the mouse deer was up to so he released the buffalo.

“Now that you’re free, Mr Buffalo, put the log back on the crocodile’s back. Prove to me you are strong enough to lift the log,” said the mouse deer.

The buffalo was challenged to prove his strength to the mouse deer. He gathered all his might to lift the heavy log until it was again on the crocodile’s back. The crocodile screamed in pain as the log landed on his body. “Oh no! Please take this log off me, Mr Buffalo,” pleaded the crocodile.

“Aha, I got you! You fell into my trick,” exclaimed the mouse deer. “Now that you are in pain, Mr Crocodile, you know how the buffalo felt when you bit his leg.”

The buffalo wanted to relieve the crocodile of his pain. “But if I free him this time, he might want to bite me again,” thought the buffalo.

The crocodile replied, "I realize I have been ungrateful to the buffalo. I'm sorry for what I did, Mr Buffalo. I promise not to harm you again. Only you have the strength to help me."

The mouse deer and the buffalo felt the sincerity of the crocodile. The buffalo again used all his strength to lift the log off the crocodile's back.

"Thank you, Mr Buffalo. You are very compassionate," said the crocodile.

"Thank you, Mouse Deer, for teaching me to be kind to those who help me."

The mouse deer was happy to hear that the crocodile learned his lesson. He was also glad that the buffalo was safe. Once again, the mouse deer used his cleverness to help other animals.

Supplementary information

- The **mouse deer** is an animal the size of a typical cat. Its thin legs and tail resemble that of a deer, and it has the face and the body of a mouse; but it is neither a mouse nor a deer. It can be found on some parts of Borneo Island (Malaysia and Indonesia) and Palawan Island (Philippines).
- Because of its size, the mouse deer must be quick and smart. It has therefore gained prominence as a trickster in many folktales of Malaysia and Indonesia, where it is known as *cancil* or *kancil* (pronounced as "kan-chil"). Trickster characters, like the mouse deer, are funny and intelligent; they play tricks and games, often to raise the awareness of the other characters in the folktales.