

- A farmer, his wife and their small child lived in a village.
- There was also a baby mongoose in the house, who they believed would be their son's companion and friend in future.
- One day the farmer and his wife went out leaving the child alone with the mongoose.

ONCE a farmer and his wife lived in a village with their small son. They loved him very much. "We must have a pet," the farmer said to his wife one day. "When our son grows up, he will need a companion. This pet will be our son's companion." His wife liked the idea.

One evening, the farmer brought with him a tiny mongoose. "It's a baby mongoose," said his wife, "but will soon be fully grown. He will be a friend to our son."





Both the baby and the mongoose grew. In five or six months the mongoose had grown to its full size — a lovely animal with two shining black eyes and a bushy tail. The farmer's son was still a baby in the cradle, sleeping and crying alternately.

One day, the farmer's wife wanted to go to the market. She fed the baby and rocked him to sleep in his little cradle. Picking up the basket, she said to her husband, "I'm off to the bazar. The baby is sleeping. Keep an eye on him. Frankly, I don't like to leave the child alone with the mongoose."

"You needn't be afraid," said the farmer. "The mongoose is a friendly animal. It's as sweet as our baby and they are the best of friends, you know."

The wife went away, and the farmer, having nothing to do in the house, decided to go out and take a look at his fields not far away. He ran into some friends on the way back and didn't return for quite some time.

- *The farmer's wife returned home from the market carrying a heavy basket.*
- *She found the mongoose at the entrance of the house with blood on his face and paws.*
- *She jumped to the conclusion that it was her son's blood, and the mongoose was the guilty one.*

The farmer's wife finished her shopping and came back home with a basketful of groceries. She saw the mongoose sitting outside as if waiting for her. On seeing her he ran to welcome her, as was customary. The farmer's wife took one look at the mongoose and screamed. "Blood!" she cried. The face and paws of the mongoose were smeared with blood.

"You wicked animal! You have killed my baby," she screamed hysterically. She was blind with rage and with all her strength brought down the heavy basket full of groceries



on the blood-smeared mongoose and ran inside to the child's cradle.

The baby was fast asleep. But on the floor lay a black snake torn and bleeding. In a flash she realised what had happened. She ran out looking for the mongoose.

"Oh! You saved my child! You killed the snake! What have I done?" she cried touching the mongoose, who lay dead and still, unaware of her sobbing. The farmer's wife, who had acted hastily and rashly, stared long at the dead mongoose. Then she heard the baby crying. Wiping her tears, she went in to feed him.

(a story from The Panchatantra)

Questions

1. Why did the farmer bring a baby mongoose into the house?
2. Why didn't the farmer's wife want to leave the baby alone with the mongoose?
3. What was the farmer's comment on his wife's fears?
4. Why did the farmer's wife strike the mongoose with her basket?
5. Did she repent her hasty action? How does she show her repentance?

Do you have a pet — a cat or a dog? If not, would you like one? How would you look after it? Are you for or against keeping birds in a cage as pets?