## **A Carmine Coat**

On the edge of a cliffside summit in Myanmar there laid a golden jackal named Eskev. He had lost his pack, and no matter the direction he ran his friends were all that was on his mind. Eskev ran through the forest desperate to find his pack. He knew he did not belong in the forest; he sought the open plains and abolished all his fear to reach it. He sprinted through the torrential rain, climbed hills covered in jagged rocks, and hid from beasts lying in wait for their next meal. Eskev did not sleep and ran for six days until he could run no longer. Barely able to stand, the jackal skulked for critters to devour, scattered across the forest floor, but he could not find any.

The days raged on till the jackal had lost all his strength. He dragged himself across the ground looking for sustenance. Barely able to see or breathe, he could just make out the sounds of rushing water. By taking each step with care, the jackal came across a raging river. He used the remains of his energy and collapsed by the bank.

He drank as much as he could until he was sick. The river then spoke to Eskev and grabbed the jackal promising to quench his thirst forever, dragging him down to the pebble bed. Water filled Eskev’s lungs, and his eyes began to close but even though his body wanted to give in to the river, the jackal refused to die. The river tightened its hold on Eskev, but he kept fighting against the hand of the current. Even when being pulled across the river floor, even with both his ears mangled, stomach pierced, and eyes gouged, Eskev kept fighting. He finally broke free and swam as far as he could. He reached the surface, expelling the water from his lungs, but fell into a deep sleep being carried along to the river’s end.

When the jackal awoke he was blind, and the world was silent to him as he bled on a rock in the mouth of the river, until he heard a whisper that told him to climb. Without hesitation Eskev placed his paw on the base of the rock and began to crawl. Even without his eyes and ears, the jackal felt the wind carry his burden. After floating across the mouth of the river, he began to climb and hugged the dirt when the ground became steeper. Yet the higher he reached, the stronger he felt. The hunger and thirst ceased, ballads of the animals matched his stride, his ruined fur turned into a clean black, white, and gold coat, and his stomach was scarred but no longer bleeding. When Eskev arrived at the edge of the peak he could feel a burning sensation sink into his skull, and just as sudden his sight was restored. Awaiting his gaze beyond the peak was the entire stretch of Myanmar.

When Eskev stood proud on the mountain, the world became one with him. The jackal’s new saffron eyes had brought him the forest, the open plains, and the vast sky all-in view. His pulsating ears could now hear the quietest hiss alongside the turning of the earth. Every heartbeat from every creature was heard except his own which was silent from awe. The lucid air tickled his nose and tingled on his tongue. His coat reached out to touch the foliage beside him. Eskev could finally breathe without pain and unbridled a relentless howl. A howl that cracked the clouds and summoned the sun. Shining onto the Earth’s fringe and all who walked on it. The jackal noticed some creatures stalking on the open plains. It was the pack, his friends. Without hesitation he ran with full vigour down the mountain. Even when running back into the maze of the forest, Eskev could see through the trees, found scraps to feast on, and thus continued his journey without struggle. After days of ceaseless running, the jackal felt the sun blazing down on his coat as he left the forest. Open dry lands. At last, Eskev rested as he stepped onto the brittle ground.

Waking the next day, the jackal ambled across the plains until he saw a dark mass in the distance. Four golden jackals were wandering through the arid plains. He had reunited with his pack; he ran towards them. However, there was something different about his friends. They no longer had fair, shiny coats. Their fur was soaked, leaving a dark red trail behind them. Their scent was like tar of the air, cleaving all of Eskev’s senses with its bitter stain. Unsure of what he was witnessing, the jackal hid behind some parched stalks and peered at the faces of his family. Then he saw a lone jackal lying injured, whining for help.

The pack headed towards the lone jackal, pitying what they saw in front of them whilst stroking one another’s fur. Yet when the pack got closer, they started to change. Noticing the lone jackal’s wounds, the pack smiled and hummed as they writhed towards him. Their smiles slowly turned to grins, they licked their teeth as they lowered their heads, and dug their claws into the dust. Acid drooled from their jaws, bubbling the dirt beneath them. They were no longer laughing, they were giggling. They leered at the wounds unable to contain their excitement. The lone jackal felt their shadows overwhelm him and pleaded to them but froze upon seeing their eyes. Eyes that cut out your tongue and stabbed your pleas. These eyes had no life behind them, a dead stare reaching into the throat of their game. They played with him, circling his body and scratching his face, but the lone jackal could not move. Then the pack leapt.

They sunk their teeth into the lone jackal’s stomach, tore his throat, grabbed his legs and dragged his body across the ground ripping his skin. He tried to cry for help, but the pack kept peeling the flesh from his bone and their cackles drowned out the screams. When they eventually stopped the lone jackal was still alive. The pack watched and laughed at their work. Eskev could only watch in agony. As the tears began to form, all he could do was hunch low as he retreated before the pack could see him.

Alone in the forest, Eskev wandered beyond where any predator could find him, only thinking of food, water and sleep. Resting in a self-made cavern in the side of his mountain, the jackal felt the days become the same and the nights grow longer. However, one night whilst dozing he felt a brush against his paw. It was a blue pitta. He let the bird sing a melody as he drifted in and out of a slumber. When Eskev began succumbing to his exhaustion, he settled himself alongside the blue pitta and asked the bird:

“If I am closer to my end in comfort than in torment, how far did I run”?