

The Man and the Alligator

From the book “Children’s Classics in Dramatic Form” by Augusta Stevenson
From a folk tale of Spanish Honduras

CHARACTERS:

The Man
The Alligator
The Wolf
The Leopard
The Rabbit

SCENE I

TIME: The morning after the cyclone

PLACE: The Man’s garden

(The Man enters the garden carrying his big stick and small net. The garden has been almost destroyed by the Alligator, who still wallows among the beds.)

MAN: There should be enough apples on the ground to fill my net. ‘T was a fierce storm last night! *(He looks about; sees the Alligator; shows indignation.)* Thou—within my garden!

ALLIGATOR: *(Meekly.)* Be not angry with me, O master! By accident I—

MAN: *(Indignantly.)* Accident! Thou hast wallowed among my flowers by accident, hast thou?

ALLIGATOR: It is true; not of my own will came I hither.

MAN: *(More indignantly.)* Thou hast broken my fruit trees by accident, I suppose!

ALLIGATOR: *(Nodding.)* It was not of my own intentions, I assure you. I—

MAN: *(Interrupting.)* Thou art this moment crushing my strawberry plants beneath thy great body! I’ve a mind to beat thee with my big stick!

ALLIGATOR: Do not beat me, O master! The cyclone is at fault.

MAN: *(Surprised.)* The cyclone?

ALLIGATOR: *(Nodding.)* Aye, it blew me here from the river last night.

MAN: Ha, ha! A likely story!

ALLIGATOR: I speak the truth. A great waterspout lifted me out of the river. Then a fierce wind caught me and blew me about as if I were a feather. Finally, I was dropped here within thy garden.

MAN: (*Only half convinced.*) Well, there's no cyclone to blow thee back. Wilt thou be good enough to walk thyself out?

ALLIGATOR: Alas! I can scarcely move me. I fear some of my ribs are broken.

MAN: Nonsense! Out with thee!

ALLIGATOR: But see how the wind has crippled me! It has even blown some of my claws loose—

MAN: (*Interrupting.*) I am sorry for thee, but thou canst not remain here.

ALLIGATOR: I will go now, if thou wilt help me.

MAN: (*Surprised.*) I help thee?

ALLIGATOR: (*Nodding.*) I will be so grateful to thee!

MAN: Oh, I know how grateful thou canst be! The other animals have told me that!

ALLIGATOR: What say they?

MAN: That thou art the most cruel of all the animals—that thou never dost anyone a favor—

ALLIGATOR: (*Interrupting.*) Nonsense! No one could be more grateful for favors than I! I'll prove it to thee!

MAN: Prove it? How?

ALLIGATOR: If thou wilt help me to the river, I'll show thee where to find the biggest fish.

MAN: Well—that's something—

ALLIGATOR: And when thou wouldst cross the river, I'll carry thee.

MAN: Of a surety, that's good of thee! Perhaps, after all, thou art not so black as thou art painted. I'll help thee this time.

ALLIGATOR: Thanks to thee, master. I will never forget thy kindness; I will always be thy friend.

MAN: Why, I am glad to help thee. Now how am I to get thee to the river?

ALLIGATOR: Carry me, please, O master!

MAN: What! Carry thee?

ALLIGATOR: (*Nodding.*) I'll get into thy net.

MAN: Thou get into my small net!

ALLIGATOR: Only hold thy net open!

MAN: (*Holding his net open.*) I tell thee, thou canst never get in!

ALLIGATOR: See how I fold my arms! My legs go under—so! No I roll myself up and up and up! And now I am in—all in!

MAN: Well, seeing is believing!

ALLIGATOR: Please to tie up thy net, master, that I may not fall out.

MAN: (*Tying net.*) 'T is done! (*Throwing net over shoulder.*) Thou art heavy!

ALLIGATOR: I know, it will be hard work for thee, but some day thou wilt see how grateful I am.

(*The Man goes, carrying the Alligator over his shoulder and his big stick in his hand.*)

SCENE II

TIME: The afternoon of the same day

PLACE: The river bank

(*Enter the Man carrying the Alligator over his shoulder. He stops, throws down his big stick and places the Alligator carefully on the bank.*)

MAN: Our journey is ended, brother. (*Untying net.*) Now then, roll thyself out!

(*The Alligator comes out of the net.*)

MAN: Well, how dost thou feel now?

ALLIGATOR: Much better, thanks to thee; but I'm very hungry and I find I'm still quite weak. I pray thee help me down the bank, O master!

MAN: (*Helping the Alligator down the bank.*) Now, then, thou art close to the water. (*He turns to go.*)

ALLIGATOR: Just a little farther, please. I am still so weak!

MAN: Then I'll help thee into the water. (*He helps the Alligator into the water.*) Now thou art in; and now I will depart. (*He turns to go.*)

ALLIGATOR: (*Seizing the Man's leg.*) Not yet!

MAN: Let go of my leg!

ALLIGATOR: Why?

MAN: (*Indignantly.*) Why! Why!

ALLIGATOR: (*Nodding.*) Why and wherefore?

MAN: Thou art hurting me!

ALLIGATOR: It will soon be over.

MAN: What dost thou mean?

ALLIGATOR: What I have just spoken.

MAN: Why dost thou look at me so?

ALLIGATOR: (*Slowly.*) Because—I—mean—to—eat—thee.

MAN: Eat me!

ALLIGATOR: (*Nodding.*) Eat thee.

MAN: Me?

ALLIGATOR: (*Nodding.*) Thee.

MAN: Thou didst promise to be my friend.

ALLIGATOR: I was only fooling thee.

MAN: But I helped thee out of trouble.

ALLIGATOR: No matter—I mean to eat thee.

MAN: Is that the way to repay a favor—by doing a wrong?

ALLIGATOR: *(Nodding.)* That's the way of all the animals.

MAN: Thou art surely mistaken—not all the animals—

ALLIGATOR: *(Interrupting.)* There's not one of them remembers a favor or a friend when hungry.

MAN: I cannot think that! Suppose we ask the first animal that comes to drink?

ALLIGATOR: Ask any of them—I know what they will say.

(Enter the Wolf. He comes down the bank to drink.)

MAN: Wolf, I would question thee.

WOLF: *(Gruffly.)* Well?

MAN: How dost thou repay the one who doth thee a favor?

WOLF: *(Gruffly, as before.)* By doing him a wrong. *(The Wolf drinks and goes.)*

ALLIGATOR: Ha, ha, ha! Just what I said! Now I shall eat thee forthwith!

MAN: I can't believe that every animal would so answer.

ALLIGATOR: I don't intend waiting for thee to find out.

MAN: I pray thee wait till the next animal comes to drink!

ALLIGATOR: *(Impatiently.)* Have I not told thee of my hunger?

MAN: Listen! Some animal comes through the forest now.

(Enter the Leopard. He comes down to drink.)

MAN: Leopard, I would question thee.

LEOPARD: *(Curtly.)* Well?

MAN: How dost thou repay the one who doth thee a favor?

LEOPARD: (*Curtly, as before.*) By doing him a wrong. (*He drinks and goes.*)

ALLIGATOR: Ha, ha, ha! It is just as I said! I will now eat thee forthwith!

MAN: I pray thee—

ALLIGATOR: (*Interrupting.*) It is now all over with thee!

MAN: (*Calling.*) Help! Help!

(*Enter the Rabbit.*)

RABBIT: A word with thee, Ally dear!

ALLIGATOR: I shall be busy for a few minutes, Brother Rabbit.

RABBIT: (*Going down bank quickly.*) Who is this thou art about to dine upon? Why, 't is the Man!

MAN: How dost thou repay a favor, Brother Rabbit?

RABBIT: Why dost thou ask?

MAN: I found the Alligator in my garden this morning. He had destroyed my plants, my fruits, and—

ALLIGATOR: (*Interrupting.*) I was blown in by the cyclone last night.

MAN: He said he had been hurt and begged me to help him to the river. He promised me his friendship if I would do so.

ALLIGATOR: Ha, ha, ha! I told him I'd show him where to find the biggest fish.

RABBIT: And now thou wilt not?

ALLIGATOR: But I will. He'll find it after he is *inside* of me. Ha, ha!

RABBIT: Ha, ha! A good joke!

ALLIGATOR: I told him I'd carry him across the river. I didn't explain he'd go *inside*. Ha, ha!

RABBIT: What a joker thou art, Ally dear! (*He turns to the Man.*) But how didst thou get him here?

MAN: I carried him in this small net.

RABBIT: (*Looking surprised.*) Thou art trying to fool me!

MAN: No, Brother Rabbit, it is quite true.

ALLIGATOR: (*Nodding.*) Yes, it is true.

RABBIT: But, Ally, try as thou mightst, thou couldst not so much as get thy head into that net.

ALLIGATOR: But I tell thee I did!

RABBIT: Ha, ha, ha! That's too funny!

ALLIGATOR: (*Angrily.*) I do not like thy manners, young man.

RABBIT: But it's such a joke! Ho, ho, ho!

ALLIGATOR: Cease thy laughing or I shall eat thee some day!

RABBIT: I laugh because I must laugh! Ha, ha, ho, ho!

ALLIGATOR: Thou wilt not believe it, eh?

RABBIT: Well, not unless I see it.

MAN: We can prove it to thee, Brother Rabbit.

RABBIT: Oh, that's good too! Ha, ha, ho!

ALLIGATOR: Dost thou think we cannot?

RABBIT: Of course thou canst not! If thou couldst, thou wouldst.

ALLIGATOR: And we will! Get thy net ready, Man.

MAN: But how? Thou art holding my leg.

ALLIGATOR: (*Freeing the Man; turning to the Rabbit.*) We'll show thee just how it was done, young man.

RABBIT: Seeing is believing.

(*The Man brings his net; opens it.*)

ALLIGATOR: See! I put my legs under—so! Then I fold my arms—so! Now I roll myself up and up and up. And now I am in—all in!

RABBIT: As I live—thou art! Well, seeing is believing. But how couldst thou remain within the net? It is quite open.

ALLIGATOR: Tie it up, Man. Show him exactly how we did it.

MAN: (*Tying net.*) I tied it tight—like this, Brother Rabbit.

RABBIT: Is it quite tight?

ALLIGATOR: Let him try the knot, Man.

RABBIT: (*Trying knot.*) Most truly, it is tight. (*Turning to the Alligator.*) Thou dost look as if thou couldst not move, Ally dear.

ALLIGATOR: Of a surety—I cannot.

RABBIT: Well, Brother Man, now that thou hast him, don't be foolish enough to let him go. Get thy big stick and beat him to death.

ALLIGATOR: (*Surprised.*) Eh?

MAN: (*Not heeding the Alligator.*) That is just what I will do, that I will! Thanks to thee for helping me, Brother Rabbit.

ALLIGATOR: Have pity!

RABBIT: (*Not heeding the Alligator.*) No thanks are necessary, Brother Man. I haven't forgotten the good turnips thou didst give me last winter when the ground was covered with snow. Some of us know how to return favor for favor.