**How Chameleon Became a Teacher**

A Folktale from Benin, Africa

Once upon a time, Crocodile and Chameleon were friends. Crocodile was very fond of sunbathing. He loved to come out of the water and lie on the sand in bright sunshine. Whenever Crocodile came out of the water, Chameleon would come out of the bush and climb up a tree nearby. Soon they were talking happily and laughing loudly. Sometimes they lay very close to each other whispering, shaking their heads and nodding. They were always deep in thought and discussion. They were very good friends.

One day Crocodile invited Chameleon to dinner. “Come to my house at the bottom of the lake,” he said, “and my family will give you a delicious meal. We’ll have fun together afterwards. When you see me rise to the surface, jump into the lake and I will take you to my house.” They agreed on a day and a time, Chameleon thanked Crocodile, and they said goodbye to each other.

On the day they had agreed to meet, Chameleon went to the shore of the lake carrying a stick of wood. While Chameleon waited, Crocodile gathered his wife and children together in their house at the bottom of the lake. He said to them, “This is our lucky day! My friend Chameleon is coming to see us! He will be our special meal! I cannot tell you what a delicacy he will be! Chameleon meat is so tasty.”

Crocodile then went out to meet his friend. There was a great splashing on the surface of the lake as he came to the shore. His gigantic mouth was wide open. To test his friend, Chameleon threw his stick into the water. Believing that Chameleon had dived into the lake, Crocodile rushed forward and closed his enormous mouth over the stick.

Chameleon was shaking, trembling in terror. His heart was racing furiously. Chameleon fled from the shore and quickly climbed the closest tree. Then, blending in with the color of the leaves, he cried, “What would have happened to me if I had not thrown my stick into the lake to test my friend! Thank goodness I did not jump into the lake to meet Crocodile. I would have ended up in the bottom of the lake. Take note, oh World! Caution is the mother of safety!

And so it was that Chameleon became a teacher of prudence and wisdom. He walks very slowly and carefully, he thinks long and hard before putting a foot forward, and he takes on the local color wherever he happens to be.