

Constellation Fable

By Josh Smith

Scorpio scurried beneath the feet of Leo, an Ape harassed The Virgin, and a behemoth of a Shark devoured Pisces and leapt from the sea onto dry land, where he sank his teeth into The Hunter.

A Crocodile – whom The Hunter had previously been stalking – crept from his hiding place in the brush. Seeking his rescuer, he found a massive creature of the sea stretched out before him glistening in the sunlight, The Hunter’s blood trickling from his wide, jagged grin.

“What are you doing here on dry land, Fish?”

“I am no mere fish. I am Shark, king of the seas and future ruler of the solid grounds.”

“I see,” said The Crocodile, “but how do you propose to stay alive in a place so unfriendly to your aquatic body?”

“I have spent many years swimming your shores, I have hauled myself upon your sandy beaches and learned to flip myself back to sea. I have adapted myself to both the salty waters of the world at large, and the muddy waters of your rivers, and now I shall adapt myself to your arid clime.”

“I am impressed, Shark.” The Crocodile took a few paces backward. “But I wonder, how is your mobility on this rough terrain?” The Shark made serpentine movements through the grass, inching forward.

“I am still slow, but I expect to become stronger and faster with time.”

“Well, Shark, for saving me from The Hunter, I offer you my assistance – if you will have it. I see you are powerful and strong-willed, but I believe that with my guidance, you shall rule the dry lands sooner than you had hoped.” The Shark pondered The Crocodile’s proposal and realized he could benefit from the knowledge of a beast familiar with both land and sea.

“When shall we begin?”

“As soon as you are prepared to cross a brief stretch of land that leads to another flowing river.”

“That depends, Crocodile. Is it not so far as to dry out my skin or wither my gills?”

“Not far at all. In fact, it is just beyond the undergrowth. If you are not content with the water that lies there, we can return and try another route at another time.” The Shark agreed, slithered back into the water from which he emerged to refresh his body, shot out again and they were on their way.

What a strange and fearsome sight they were to the few brave creatures that crept close enough to witness their travel. One curious lemur lost its life to the jaws of the eager Shark.

“I believe I am acquiring a taste for these land animals, Crocodile.”

“Oh, there are much more satisfying creatures than these. Once you are ready, we shall hunt great beasts together!”

“Already I grow stronger here, but I believe I may need to reach water soon. How much farther, friend?”

“It is just ahead, at the end of this brush. You seem to be proceeding well across this mud, through these hindering branches.”

“Soon I will be as fast on land as I am in the sea.”

“That will be a magnificent sight indeed, Shark. I have seen your kind in their natural surroundings and I believe you are the fastest.”

“It is true, Crocodile. We Sharks have no rivals in all the waters of the world, and soon I will attain the same status here on land! But I must ask again, how much farther does this field stretch? My gills ache for water.”

“It is not far, Shark. We are very close indeed. Wait!”

“What is it?”

“Do not move, do not make a sound!” They paused in the shrubbery and The Crocodile whispered, “Listen. We are so close you can hear the water.” The Shark focused his tiny aquatic ears but heard nothing but the squawking of birds.

“I hear nothing, Crocodile. I must train my hearing to be as keen as yours.”

“We will work on that as well. Don’t speak, focus on the sounds and soon you will hear that familiar rush of flowing water.” As they continued their slow trek, The Shark struggled to remain quiet but soon found himself overwhelmed with pain.

“Crocodile, when will we be at this river? Again and again you have told me that we are near, but the soil seems to grow more and more baked with every inch.”

The Crocodile paused, “We are here, Shark. See for yourself.” The Shark bounded through the brushwood and onto a dried up riverbed. Furious, he thrashed around to confront The Crocodile, who called back as he hurried away.

“I apologize, Shark, but you must understand that I already have enough rivals – none of whom travel both land and sea as well as I do.”