

**Max and Jax**  
**By Micah Sterrett**

Once upon a time in a far off land lived a rich woman who had two sons. The older of these sons was named Max. He was a proud creature who cared for no one but himself; however, since he was very handsome and well-spoken a great many people cared for him, especially the young ladies of the district. His brother, Jax, who was inferior to him in not only age but also countenance and manners, was looked upon with scorn by all in the neighborhood. They called him, "That great oaf," behind his back and some even dared to insult him to his face. In these acts, however the people were very foolish, for even though Jax was ugly and ill-mannered deep down inside he had a kind heart and would do a good deed for almost anyone.

Now the mother of Max and Jax was very old and one day she died. Her will was found and opened and it was discovered that she had left her great estate and all her wealth to Max, bequeathing only one penny to her younger son. Max gloated over his brother, Jax, and immediately kicked him out of the house saying, "Get out you lousy beggar I will care for you no longer."

Having been driven from the place that had been his residence since childhood, Jax, wandered the streets of the nearby town, aimlessly looking for food and shelter. He got a job as a grave digger and was able, with the meager wages that he earned to keep himself from dying of starvation, but he still had no house and was forced to sleep in the doorways of the town houses. Every time that Max went through town he saw the impoverished state of his brother, and yet he turned up his nose and acted like nothing was wrong so great was the malice he had in his heart.

On a very cold and snowy night in the dead of winter a stranger rode into the town and down the high street. He rode past Jax, who was sleeping outside the house of the parson, and stopped to look and the beggar, who was shivering with cold. The stranger, who was wearing a long dark cloak that covered his entire body, including his face, took pity on Jax. He said, "Come with me." And he took the shivering grave digger, placed him on the horse, and rode to the inn. There he bought Jax a warm meal and gave him some dry clothes. After the beggar had warmed himself by the fire for quite some time, the stranger, still hooded and cloaked, began asking him questions about his life. Jax told the man about the wrong that his brother had perpetrated against him and about how he was

to digging holes for the bodies of the dead. The stranger seemed to be quite overcome by this tale and for a moment after it was told he said nothing. Finally he said to Jax, "Follow me and he led him into the back room of the inn.

As soon as they were out of the sight of the others in the inn the stranger pulled off his cloak and Jax almost fainted from the shock of what he saw. From the crown of his head to his waist the stranger looked like any ordinary man, but from his waist down he had the hindquarters of a leopard and his finger nails were six inches long. "My name is Dagolastor," said the stranger. "When I was young I murdered a young man because he accidentally killed my favorite watchdog. The brother of this man cast a spell on me that made me as you see me. He swore that the enchantment would never lift until I helped a person innocently wronged gain revenge.

Your story has interested me and now I wish to find this evil brother of yours and deal with him in order that I might be freed from this curse." This time it was Jax who was astonished and for a moment he had no words to say. However, when the full realization of what the monster had just said hit him he began to plead for his brother and said that he would rather stay in his current position than see harm come to that individual. But Dagolastor would not be dissuaded and despite the pleading of Jax he strode from the room to ask where was the rich estate where one might find a certain person named Max. Jax stayed the whole night at the inn, in a room provided for him by Dagolastor, and dared not think about what was going on outside in the snow up by the estate of his brother.

Early the next morning he was awakened by the landlord banging on his door and telling him that he was wanted at the house of the lawyer, Sepenius. Thither he went with much haste groaning all the while. However, when he arrived he forgot about being tired for Mr. Sepenius look like he had seen a ghost and told Jax in a tremulous voice that his brother's estate and money were now his. Furthermore he seemed very eager to help Jax in any way possible something that had never before been communicated to the younger brother.

Jax went to the estate and searched it over in hope that he might find traces of Dagolastor or his brother, but none were to be found. The house staff, however, were most willing to help him and, just like Sepenius, looked like they had beheld a terrifying vision.

For a while nothing was seen of the Leopard-man or of Max the brother of Jax. Jax mourned the loss of his childhood companion deeply. He made a very good master of the estate and was always generous to the poor. People in the neighborhood no longer laughed at him or called him names. Instead they praised him and he was widely viewed as one of the best men in the country. Jax married, had five children, and for some years lived very happily. But one fact always troubled him and it was that he didn't know what happened to his brother Max on the night when Dagolastor was in town.

About twenty years later, one fine spring day, two men strode into town and up to the estate of Jax. A servant opened the door and showed the two foreigners in the sitting room. Jax was informed that he had two visitors and he went to greet them. When he walked into the room he had to exercise extreme self-control in order not to call out, for there sitting on the couch was his very own brother Max and next to him a vaguely familiar figure. Both Max and his companion rose as their host entered and for a moment they all stood in stunned silence. Then both brothers ran into each other's arms and held the other tightly, sobbing for joy. When they broke apart, their eyes both turned to the second stranger, who had been watching the proceedings with a smile on his face, and then Jax recognized him as a transformed Dagolastor.

There is no describing the joy that all three men felt or expressed in the following minutes as the story was told and each learned a new part of it. Apparently Dagolastor had fought and overcome Max. He then sold the older brother as a slave to a merchant and almost as soon as this act was done he returned to manly shape. Now, Dagolastor could have left Max in captivity, but instead after fifteen years he bought him back and set him free. During his period of slavery Max had realized how badly he had treated his brother and he repented, something he now made known with many tears to a forgiving brother. It had taken five years for Dagolastor and Max to journey from that distant country to the residence of Jax but now they had arrived and the happiness was worth all the pain and toil.

Jax immediately invited the two to live with him and they gladly accepted for they had no home. The two brothers and their friend lived together happily to the end of their days and never again arose the sentiments which had originated their separation.