

The Friendship of the Tortoise and the Eagle

It was not often that the tortoise and the eagle met, for the one spent his days in the clouds and the other in the under-bush. However, when the eagle heard what a warm-hearted little fellow the tortoise was, he went to pay a call on him.

The tortoise family showed such pleasure in his company and fed him so lavishly that the eagle returned again and again, while every time as he flew away he laughed, "Ha, ha! I can enjoy the hospitality of the tortoise on the ground but he can never reach my eyrie in the tree-top!"

The eagle's frequent visits, his selfishness and ingratitude became the talk of the forest animals.

The eagle and the frog were never on speaking terms, for the eagle was accustomed to swooping down to carry a frog home for supper.

So the frog called from the stream bank, "Friend tortoise, give me beans and I will give you wisdom." After enjoying the bowl of beans the frog said, "Friend tortoise, the eagle is abusing your kindness, for after every visit he flies away laughing, 'Ha ha! I can enjoy the hospitality of the tortoise on the ground but he can never enjoy mine, for my eyrie is in the tree-tops.' Next time the eagle visits you, say, 'Give me a gourd, and I will send food to your wife and children too'."

The eagle brought a gourd, enjoyed a feast, and as he left he called back, "I will call later for the present for my wife."

The eagle flew away laughing to himself as usual, "Ha ha! I have enjoyed the tortoise's food, but he can never come to my eyrie to taste of mine."

The frog arrived and said, "Now, tortoise, get into the gourd. Your wife will cover you over with fresh food and the eagle will carry you to his home in the treetops."

Presently the eagle returned. The tortoise's wife told him, "My husband is away but he left this gourd filled with food for your family."

The eagle flew away with the gourd, little suspecting that the tortoise was inside.

The tortoise could hear every word as he laughed, "Ha! ha! I share the tortoise's food but he can never visit my eyrie to share mine."

As the gourd was emptied out onto the eagle's eyrie, the tortoise crawled from it and said, "Friend eagle, you have so often visited my home that I thought it would be nice to enjoy the hospitality of yours."

The eagle was furious. "I will peck the flesh from your bones," he said. But he only hurt his beak against the tortoise's hard back.

"I see what sort of friendship you offer me," said the tortoise, "when you threaten to tear me limb from limb." He continued, "Under the circumstances, please take me home, for our pact of friendship is at an end."

"Take you home, indeed!" shrieked the eagle. "I will fling you to the ground and you will be smashed to bits in your fall." The tortoise bit hold of the eagle's leg.

"Let me go, let go of my leg, let go of my leg," groaned the great bird.

"I will gladly do so when you set me down at my own home," said the tortoise, and he tightened his hold on the eagle's leg.

The eagle flew high into the clouds and darted down with the speed of an arrow. He shook his leg. He turned and twirled, but it was to no purpose. He could not rid himself of the tortoise until he set him down safely in his own home.

As the eagle flew away the tortoise called after him, "Friendship requires the contribution of two parties. I welcome you and you welcome me. Since, however, you have chosen to make a mockery of it, laughing at me for my hospitality, you need not call again."