

THE TORTOISE AND THE GEESE

A FABLE OF BIDPAI

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A Tortoise and two Geese lived together in a pond for many years. At last there came a drought and dried up the pond. Then the Geese said to one another,—

“We must seek a new home quickly, for we cannot live without water. Let us say farewell to the Tortoise and start at once.”

When the Tortoise heard that they were going, he trembled with fear, and besought them by their friendship not to desert him.

“Alas,” the Geese replied, “there is no help for it. If we stay here, we shall all three die, and we cannot take you with us, for you cannot fly.”

Still the Tortoise begged so hard not to be left behind that the Geese finally said,—

“Dear Friend, if you will promise not to speak a word on the journey, we will take you with us. But know beforehand, that if you open your mouth to say one single word, you will be in instant danger of losing your life.”

“Have no fear,” replied the Tortoise, “but that I will be silent until you give me leave to speak again. I would rather never open my mouth again than be left to die alone here in the dried-up pond.”

So the Geese brought a stout stick and bade the Tortoise grasp it firmly in the middle by his mouth. Then they took hold of either end and flew off with him.

They had gone several miles in safety, when their course lay over a village. As the country people saw this curious sight of a Tortoise being carried by two Geese, they began to laugh and cry out,—

“Oh, did you ever see such a funny sight in all your life!” And they laughed loud and long.

The Tortoise grew more and more indignant. At last he could stand their jeering no longer. “You stupid...” he snapped, but before he could say more he had fallen to the ground and was dashed to pieces.

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