



# *The Turtle and His Bride*

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books  
Native American north American

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*Intermediate*  
*10 min read*

There was once a turtle who lived among a great many people of different kinds, in a large camp near a big river which was born right up amongst the snows, and flowed straight away south till it reached a sea where the water was always hot.

There were many other turtles in the camp, and this turtle was kind and pleasant to them all, but he did not care for any of them very much, and felt rather lonely.

At last he built himself a hut, and filled it with skins for seats, and made it as comfortable as any hut for miles round; and when it was quite finished he looked about among the young women to see which of them he should ask to be his wife.

It took him some time to make up his mind, for no turtle likes being hurried, but at length he found one girl who seemed prettier and more industrious than the rest, and one day he entered her home, and said: 'Will you marry me?'

The young woman was so surprised at this question that she dropped the beaded slipper she was making, and stared at the turtle. She felt inclined to laugh—the idea was so absurd; but she was kind-hearted and polite, so she looked as grave as she could, and answered:

‘But how are you going to provide for a family? Why, when the camp moves, you will not even be able to keep up with the rest!’

‘I can keep up with the best of them,’ replied the turtle, tossing his head. But though he was very much offended he did not let the girl see it, and begged and, prayed her so hard to marry him that, at last, she consented, very unwillingly.

‘You will have to wait till the spring, though,’ she said; ‘I must make a great many slippers and dresses for myself, as I shall not have much time afterwards.’

This did not please the turtle; but he knew it was no use talking, so all he answered was:

‘I shall go to war and take some captives, and I shall be away several months. And when I return I shall expect you to be ready to marry me.’

So he went back to his hut, and at once set about his preparations. The first thing he did was to call all his relations together, and ask them if they would come with him and make war on the people of a neighbouring village. The turtles, who were tired of doing nothing, agreed at once, and next day the whole tribe left the camp. The girl was standing at the door of her hut as they passed, and laughed out loud—they moved so slowly. Her lover, who was marching at the head, grew very angry at this, and cried out:

‘In four days from now you will be weeping instead of laughing, because there will be hundreds of miles between you and me.’

‘In four days,’ replied the girl—who only promised to marry him in order to get rid of him—‘in four days you will hardly be out of sight.’

‘Oh, I did not mean four days, but four YEARS,’ answered the turtle, hastily; ‘whatever happens I shall be back by then.’

The army marched on, till one day, when they felt as if they must have got half round the earth, though they were scarcely four miles from the camp, they found a large tree lying across their path. They looked at it with dismay, and the oldest among them put their heads together to see what was to be done.

‘Can’t we manage to get past by the top?’ asked one.

‘Why, it would take us YEARS,’ exclaimed another. ‘Just look at all those tall green branches, spreading in every direction. If once we got entangled in THEM, we should never get out again!’

‘Well then, let us go round by the bottom,’ said a third.

‘How are we to do that, when the roots have made a deep hole, and above that is a high bank?’ replied a fourth.

‘No; the only way I can think of, is to burn a large hole in the trunk.’ And this they did, but the trunk was very thick, and would not burn through.

‘It is no use, we must give it up,’ they agreed at last. ‘After all, nobody need ever know! We have been away such a long while that we might easily have had all sorts of adventures.’ And so the whole company turned homewards again.

They took even longer to go back than they had to come, for they were tired and footsore with their journey. When they drew near the camp they plucked up their courage, and began to sing a war-song. At this the villagers came flocking to see what spoils the turtles had won, but, as they approached, each turtle seized some one by the wrist, exclaiming: ‘You are our spoils; you are our prisoners!’

‘Now that I have got you I will keep you,’ said the leader, who had happened to seize his betrothed.

Everybody was naturally very angry at this behaviour, and the girl most of all, and in her secret heart she determined to have her revenge. But, just at present, the turtles were too strong, so the prisoners had to put on their smartest slippers and their brightest clothes, and dance a war dance while the turtles sang. They danced so long that it seemed as if they would never stop, till the turtle who was leading the singing suddenly broke into a loud chant:

Whoever comes here, will die, will die!

At this all the dancers grew so frightened that they burst through the ring of their captors, and ran back to the village, the turtles following—very slowly. On the way the chief turtle met a man, who said to him:

‘That woman who was to have been your wife has married another man!’

‘Is that true?’ said the turtle. ‘Then I must see him.’

But as soon as the villager was out of sight the turtle stopped, and taking a bundle containing fringes and ornaments from his back, he hung them about him, so that they rattled as he walked. When he was quite close to the hut where the woman lived, he cried out:

‘Here I am to claim the woman who promised to be my wife.’

‘Oh, here is the turtle,’ whispered the husband hurriedly; ‘what is to be done now?’

‘Leave that to me; I will manage him,’ replied the wife, and at that moment the turtle came in, and seized her by the wrist. ‘Come with me,’ he said sternly.

‘You broke your promise,’ answered she. ‘You said you would be back soon, and it is more than a year since you went! How was I to know that you were alive?’

At her words the husband took courage, and spoke hastily:

‘Yes, you promised you would go to war and bring back some prisoners, and you have not done it.’

‘I DID go, and made many prisoners,’ retorted the turtle angrily, drawing out his knife. ‘Look here, if she won’t be MY wife, she sha’n’t be YOURS. I will cut her in two; and you shall have one half, and I the other.’

‘But half a woman is no use to me,’ answered the man. ‘If you want her so much you had better take her.’ And the turtle, followed by his relations, carried her off to his own hut.

Now the woman saw she would gain nothing by being sulky, so she pretended to be very glad to have got rid of her husband; but all the while she was trying to invent a plan to deliver herself from the turtle. At length she

remembered that one of her friends had a large iron pot, and when the turtle had gone to his room to put away his fringes, she ran over to her neighbour's and brought it back. Then she filled it with water and hung it over the fire to boil. It was just beginning to bubble and hiss when the turtle entered.

'What are you doing there?' asked he, for he was always afraid of things that he did not understand.

'Just warming some water,' she answered. 'Do you know how to swim?'

'Yes, of course I do. What a question! But what does it matter to you?' said the turtle, more suspicious than ever.

'Oh, I only thought that after your long journey you might like to wash. The roads are so muddy, after the winter's rains. I could rub your shell for you till it was bright and shining again.'

'Well, I AM rather muddy. If one is fighting, you know, one cannot stop to pick one's way. I should certainly be more comfortable if my back was washed.'

The woman did not wait for him to change his mind. She caught him up by his shell and popped him straight into the pot, where he sank to the bottom, and died instantly.

The other turtles, who were standing at the door, saw their leader disappear, and felt it was their duty as soldiers to follow him; and, springing into the pot, died too. All but one young turtle, who, frightened at not seeing any of his friends come out again, went as fast as he could to a clump of bushes, and from there made his way to the river. His only thought was to get away as far as possible from that dreadful hut; so he let the river carry him where it was going itself, and at last, one day, he found himself in the warm sea, where, if he is not dead, you may meet him still.

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