

# *The Billy Goat and the King*

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Indian

---

*Intermediate*

*7 min read*

Once there lived a certain king who understood the language of all birds and beasts and insects. This knowledge had of course been given him by a fairy godmother; but it was rather a troublesome present, for he knew that if he were ever to reveal anything he had thus learned he would turn into a stone. How he managed to avoid doing so long before this story opens I cannot say, but he had safely grown up to manhood, and married a wife, and was as happy as monarchs generally are.

This king, I must tell you, was a Hindu; and when a Hindu eats his food he has a nice little place on the ground freshly plastered with mud, and he sits in the middle of it with very few clothes on — which is quite a different way from ours.

Well, one day the king was eating his dinner in just such a nice, clean, mud-plastered spot, and his wife was sitting opposite to wait upon him and keep him company. As he ate he dropped some grains of rice upon the ground, and a little ant, who was running about seeking a living, seized upon one of the grains and bore it off towards his hole. Just outside the king's circle this ant met another ant, and the king heard the second one say:

'Oh, dear friend, do give me that grain of rice, and get another one for yourself. You see my boots are so dirty that, if I were to go upon the king's eating place, I should defile it, and I can't do that, it would be so very rude.'

But the owner of the grain of rice only replied:

'If you want rice go and get it. No one will notice your dirty boots; and you don't suppose that I am going to carry rice for all our kindred?'

Then the king laughed.

The queen looked at herself up and down, but she could not see or feel anything in her appearance to make the king laugh, so she said:

'What are you laughing at?'

'Did I laugh?' replied the king.

'Of course you did,' retorted the queen; 'and if you think that I am ridiculous I wish you would say so, instead of behaving in that stupid way! What are you laughing at?'

'I'm not laughing at anything,' answered the king.

'Very well, but you did laugh, and I want to know why.'

'Well, I'm afraid I can't tell you,' said the king.

'You must tell me,' replied the queen impatiently. 'If you laugh when there's nothing to laugh at you must be ill or mad. What is the matter?'

Still the king refused to say, and still the queen declared that she must and would know. For days the quarrel went on, and the queen gave her husband no rest, until at last the poor man was almost out of his wits, and thought that, as life had become for him hardly worth living while this went on, he might as well tell her the secret and take the consequences.

'But,' thought he, 'if I am to become a stone, I am not going to lie, if I can help it, on some dusty highway, to be kicked here and there by man and beast, flung at dogs, be used as the plaything of naughty children, and become generally restless and miserable. I will be a stone at the bottom of the cool river, and roll gently about there until I find some secure resting-place where I can stay for ever.'

So he told his wife that if she would ride with him to the middle of the river he would tell her what he had laughed at. She thought he was joking, and laughingly agreed; their horses were ordered and they set out.

On the way they came to a fine well beneath the shade of some lofty, wide-spreading trees, and the king proposed that they should get off and rest a little, drink some of the cool water, and then pass on. To this the queen consented; so they dismounted and sat down in the shade by the well-side to rest.

It happened that an old goat and his wife were browsing in the neighbourhood, and, as the king and queen sat there, the nanny goat came to the well's brink and peering over saw some lovely green leaves that sprang in tender shoots out of the side of the well.

'Oh !' cried she to her husband, 'come quickly and look. Here are some leaves which make my mouth water; come and get them for me !'

Then the billy goat sauntered up and looked over, and after that he eyed his wife a little crossly.

'You expect me to get you those leaves, do you ? I suppose you don't consider how in the world I am to reach them ? You don't seem to think at all; if you did you would know that if I tried to reach those leaves I should fall into the well and be drowned !'

'Oh,' cried the nanny goat, 'why should you fall in ? Do try and get them !'

'I am not going to be so silly,' replied the billy goat.

But the nanny goat still wept and entreated.

'Look here,' said her husband, 'there are plenty of fools in the world, but I am not one of them. This silly king here, because he can't cure his wife of asking questions, is going to throw his life away. But I know how to cure you of your follies, and I'm going to.'

And with that he butted the nanny goat so severely that in two minutes she was submissively feeding somewhere else, and had made up her mind that the leaves in the well were not worth having.

Then the king, who had understood every word, laughed once more.

The queen looked at him suspiciously, but the king got up and walked across to where she sat.

‘Are you still determined to find out what I was laughing at the other day?’ he asked.

‘Quite,’ answered the queen angrily.

‘Because,’ said the king, tapping his leg with his riding whip, ‘I’ve made up my mind not to tell you, and moreover, I have made up my mind to stop you mentioning the subject any more.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked the queen nervously.

‘Well,’ replied the king, ‘I notice that if that goat is displeased with his wife, he just butts her, and that seems to settle the question —’

‘Do you mean to say you would beat me?’ cried the queen.

‘I should be extremely sorry to have to do so,’ replied the king; ‘but I have to persuade you to go home quietly, and to ask no more silly questions when I say I cannot answer them. Of course, if you will persist, why ——’

And the queen went home, and so did the king; and it is said that they are both happier and wiser than ever before.

Read more fairy tales on [Fairytalez.com](http://Fairytalez.com)