



The Talking Turtle

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Indian

Intermediate

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A great many years ago there was a king who talked too much. His name was Badahur, and from his beautiful palace he ruled many millions of people.

There was also a turtle who was even fonder of talking than the King, and he lived in a pond in the King's garden.

But for all the King was so great and so rich, his people did not respect him because he talked and talked about everything under the sun. He had a sort of prime-minister whose name was Hazar, and he was expected to say foolish things, of course, but the King seemed to want to say them all.

When the King drove through the streets in his golden chariot with footmen running before and behind, even the beggars by the roadside would say, "There goes one who cannot hold his tongue."

"Don't tell your secrets to Badahur," they would go on. "He says more foolish things in a day than Hazar will ever say in his life. He talks and talks, and no one else has a chance to speak where he is."

All this used to trouble Hazar, for he knew what the people thought of their king. He used to lie awake at night thinking how he could cure the King of his talkativeness, but he could settle upon no plan, for the more he thought the more difficult the matter seemed.

But the turtle was even worse than the King in the matter of talking. He talked to the fishes, the parrots, the

monkeys, and the birds all day long, until they were tired of the very sound of his voice.

The fishes, as they lay under the bank used to say to each other, "He is a mischief-maker. He tells the cranes where our hiding-places are, and then they drag us out with their long bills and eat us."

He told Mirbah, the King-parrot, what the monkeys said about his tail, and that started such a quarrel between the parrots and the monkeys that it never will be patched up.

"When the King takes the court away to the summer palace, let us hope that some one will invite the turtle to make a long visit elsewhere," said the humming-birds. "He is a horrid gossip, even worse than Hazar."

By and by the hot days came and the King and his court went to their beautiful summer palace away up on the slopes of the mountains. No one asked the turtle to go anywhere and he was left in the pond.

One day Hazar, who had stayed in the city to finish up some business before joining the King, was walking in the garden near the pond and saw two wild ducks alight on the ground near where the turtle was basking in the sun.

As soon as the turtle saw the ducks he began to talk to them. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"There is a place called the Golden Cave up in the mountains where we used to live, and we are going back there," replied the wild ducks.

"I should think that would be a very nice place," said the turtle. "Is there a pond in the Golden Cave?"

"No. But we have lakes and rivers, plenty of them, and they are very much better than such a pond as you have here. If you will come with us you can see for yourself."

Something of this kind was just what the turtle wished, for he was tired of living in the pond in the King's garden. His tongue had made him so many enemies that things were unpleasant for him there.

"But I do not see how I can go with you to the Golden Cave," he said to the wild ducks. "If I could fly it would be an easy thing to do."

"If you would like to go, we will take you," said the ducks. "We will take the two ends of a stick in our bills, and you can hold on to the middle by your mouth. Just don't let go of it, and you will be all right."

“Oh, that will be easy for me to do,” replied the turtle.

“Indeed it won’t,” said Hazar to himself from behind the trees, where he was watching the ducks and the turtle; “you would have to hold your tongue, and that is something you could never do since you were born.”

Hazar finished up the business he had on hand and then joined the King in his summer palace up in the hills and as soon as they found a stick which would bear the weight of the turtle, the ducks flew up into the air with the turtle between them.

How the fishes did laugh as they looked at the turtle hanging from the stick by his mouth. “Don’t come back again, Talking Turtle,” they called after him. “We can get along very well without you.”

“I don’t intend to come back! Keep your old pond to yourselves!” was what the turtle wanted to say in reply, but he did not dare to, because if he opened his mouth to speak he would tumble right back into the pond again.

So they flew on and on over the cities and villages and fields, and every time they stopped, the ducks cautioned the turtle to hold his tongue or he would be killed.

Then one day as they were flying over a field, a woman who was working there called out, “Two wild ducks are carrying a turtle along on a stick!”

This made the turtle so angry that he wanted to say, “You miserable woman, what is it to you?” but he controlled himself, although he bit the stick half way through in his rage.

After a while the ducks and the turtle came to the mountains and flew directly over King Badahur’s summer palace. Some boys in the town below threw sticks at the ducks and called out to them, “Drop that fat old turtle. We’ll make soup of him!”

This made the turtle so angry that he could no longer keep silence. He started to say, “Soup! You shall be made into soup yourselves, miserable children,” but as he opened his mouth to utter the first word, he let go of the stick and crashed down into the courtyard of the palace, where the King and a number of his courtiers were walking. Hazar ran to pick him up, but he was quite dead!

“What do you think of this?” asked the King of Hazar. “Did the turtle drop from the sky as a warning to us?”

“He was being carried through the air by two wild ducks,” replied Hazar. “With your Majesty’s permission I will

tell you what I know about him.” And then he told the King what he had heard and seen in the palace garden.

After Hazar had finished his story, the King was silent for a long time and then he said, “This disaster happened to the turtle because he could not hold his tongue.”

Hazar bowed and the King was silent again. “It strikes me, Hazar,” he said at last, “that at times I talk too much.”

All the courtiers looked at Hazar, expecting him to deny that the King could talk too much, or to say that it was a pleasure to listen to anything the King had to say, but Hazar did nothing of the kind. He quietly said, as he looked the King straight in the face, “Happy is the kingdom where the king knows his own faults!”

“Happy is the king who has such a faithful counsellor as yourself, Hazar,” responded the King. “To remind us of the fate of this turtle, we will have a golden one set up in the palace.”

So a golden turtle was made and set up in one of the great halls of the palace, and whenever the King saw it he was reminded of the fate of the talkative turtle. He learned wisdom and discretion and how to keep silent when it was necessary, and instead of despising him, his subjects came to love and respect him.

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