

FOLKTALES

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The Shepherd's Mistake



Early every morning, a shepherd took his flock of sheep out in the fields to graze. He would sit by watching - as the sheep lazily munched on fresh grass. After they had eaten, he would round them up and walk back home. Sometimes while watching his flock, he would curl up in a quiet corner and go off to sleep.

One day, the shepherd caught a wolf which had strayed into the field, eyeing his sheep. However, it was some distance away and it made no effort to come nearer. The shepherd at first stood on guard against the wolf, as against an enemy, and kept a strict watch over its movements.

But the wolf did not do anything. When the shepherd herded the sheep and headed home with his flock, the wolf quietly followed them at a distance.

This continued for a while. The shepherd would find the wolf waiting at the edge of the field every morning. But it made not the slightest effort to seize the sheep and would just watch. So, by and by, the shepherd let down his guard a bit. A few days later, he began to actually look forward to the wolf's presence.

The wolf, who generally sat on a large piece of rock, looked like a big sheep dog from afar. The shepherd thought that other wild animals or mischief-makers would be scared of the 'dog's' presence and not harm his flock while it was around.

Now, he began to look upon the wolf as a guardian of his flock. One day, in the middle of grazing his sheep, the shepherd was called back to home urgently. Leaving the sheep entirely in charge of the wolf, he left.

When he came back, what did he find? That the wolf had eaten most of his flock, with only a few sheep wandering about. Carcasses of the dead sheep lay around, everywhere.

The shepherd sat down in shock after witnessing the slaughter. "Serves me right," he moaned to himself, "after all, I entrusted the welfare of my flock to a wolf."

The Desert Creature

This happened thousands of years ago. Life was hard as people had to do all the work by themselves. A large number of people were nomads - they would travel from one place to another in search of food and shelter.

While traveling one day, a man arrived at the edge of a desert. He was walking in the sands, when suddenly, he came across a frightening creature - it had extremely long, thin legs, a giant hump and a long neck. It was this neck that he extended towards the man, who, scared out of his wits, ran away from the spot.

The following day, he met the creature again. It was standing near a lake, drinking water. This time, the man was fascinated at what he saw - the creature putting its long neck into the lake and drinking water continuously.

Then suddenly, aware it was being watched, the giant creature looked up and stared straight into the eyes of the man standing across. But this time, an expanse of water separated the two, and the man did not run away. He stood and watched the animal, which made no effort to come closer.



In the following weeks, the man saw more such creatures, again and again. It seemed they were all over the desert, aimlessly walking about for miles on end. The man

began to observe the creatures very closely. He saw that they were vegetarian. Moreover, despite their huge size, they were remarkably meek and gentle.

And what stamina the creatures had! They could walk the entire length of the desert without being exhausted.

Observing them the man thought - "What if I tame this creature and make it ferry all my stuff? I could then make the desert my home."

So, one day, while one of the creatures was dozing, the man went up to it and put a bridle in its mouth. Then he rode around in it, after placing an enormous amount of load on its back. After a little more time, the man even allowed his child to ride the creature all on his own.

With that, the taming of the camel was complete (for that was who the creature was). And ever since that day, the camel has faithfully lived up to its title of 'Ship of the Desert'.



An Unpleasant Smell

A prosperous money-lender or Seth bought a house located right next door to the house of a tanner. From morning till evening the tanner converted hide into leather by treating it with tannin. From day one the money-lender was put off by the unpleasant smells of the tannery.

So, he visited the tanner's house and offered to buy his house.

"I would love to sell the house if you buy it Seth," said the tanner. He had no intention of doing any such thing but he liked to play pranks. "Give me a week or so to wind up some things, will you?" The seth agreed and went away.

A week later, the overpowering smell coming from the tannery brought the seth to the tanner's doorstep again. "I understand sir," said the tanner with wide-eyed sympathy when the money-lender told him that the smell had reduced his appetite largely. "But my mother is visiting me this week. I can't sell the house as long as she is around.



Please wait for a month, until she goes away."

The seth agreed with great reluctance. He began to wait with bated breath for the guest's departure. In the beginning he counted each day, impatiently waiting for one to finish and the other to begin. After a while though, he found he was no longer all that interested in the month coming to an end. And when the month did end, the seth did not go the tanner's house to ask him to leave. He had simply forgotten about it.

He did not ask the tanner to leave when they met next, either. You see, by then the seth had become accustomed to the tan-yard's smell. "What have you done to drive away that infernal smell?" he asked the tanner. "Have you diluted the solution?"

The tanner smiled and nodded. He had been waiting for the day the seth would get used to the smells from the tannery and stop bothering him. That was why he had asked the seth to wait in the first place.

The Doctor who 'did not' Cure

An old woman had lost her eyesight completely. So she went to a doctor to help her see again and made a bargain with him in the presence of a few witnesses. The bargain was that: if he could cure her, he would be paid handsomely. But if he couldn't, she would not be obliged to pay him anything.

The doctor had a special ointment. When it was applied in the eyes for a certain period of time, it restored the eyesight of anyone who was sightless.

The doctor began to visit his new patient daily to apply the ointment. But knowing that she couldn't see, he started stealing the valuables in her house, one by one. When there was nothing more left to steal, he decided to cure her and demanded his payment.

When the old woman recovered her eyesight, she saw that her valuables had been stolen and guessed that the doctor was the thief. So, saying that she was not cured, she refused to pay him. The doctor was aston-

ished when she refused to pay and he insisted on his fees. But the old woman refused again and the two went to court.

The judge asked the old woman why she refused to pay the doctor. To this she said: "The doctor is telling the truth. I did promise to give him money if I recovered my sight. However, if I remained blind, I was to give him nothing. Now he declares that he has healed me and so I should pay him. But I am still blind."

Everyone in the court looked at the old woman in great surprise. "How can you say a thing like that? Everyone in the courtroom can see that your eyesight has been restored." said the judge sternly.

"Your honor," replied the old woman. "I really can't see. Before I lost the use of my eyes, I had seen a lot of valuable goods in my house. But now, though the doctor swears I am cured of my blindness, I am not able to see a single thing of value in it."

The judge agreed that the old woman was indeed still blind, and let her go without a trial.

The Apple Tree

There was an old apple tree in a farmer's garden. It was so old that it had stopped bearing fruit a long time ago. The only purpose it served was to provide shelter to the sparrows, grasshoppers and squirrels in the neighborhood.

One day, the farmer decided to cut the tree down. He felt it had become completely useless. Besides, he wanted to get some furniture made and what better way to ensure the wood supply from the tree? The wood was still strong.

So, taking a sharp axe in his hand, the farmer struck at the roots of the tree.

At once there was great commotion among the many creatures that inhabited the tree. The grasshoppers, the sparrows and the squirrels came out of their dwelling places and hovered around the farmer. "Please sir," they begged him. "Spare this tree's life. It is our only home."

But the farmer only struck harder at the roots. "We promise to sing to you in the afternoons when you toil away. It would lighten your labors so," entreated the creatures.

But their cries were in vain. The farmer continued his task with single-minded concentration. He was in a hurry to finish off the chopping by afternoon. As he raised his axe one more time, something in the hollow of the tree caught his eye. A bee hive. Upon



looking closer, the farmer found that it was full of honey. He tasted the honey. Ummmm, heavenly.

Suddenly the farmer realized that the tree was not so useless after all. Its hollow was the ideal place for a beehive to rest. And if he took away the honey now, the bees would make more. They would certainly not abandon such an attractive residence.

"Hey you up there," he announced as he threw away the axe. "I'm sparing the life of this tree. You can live in peace now."

The sparrows, grasshoppers and squirrels breathed deep sighs of relief. What a blessing that the farmer had found something of use to him in the tree! After all, it was the only reason the tree was still standing.

River Talk

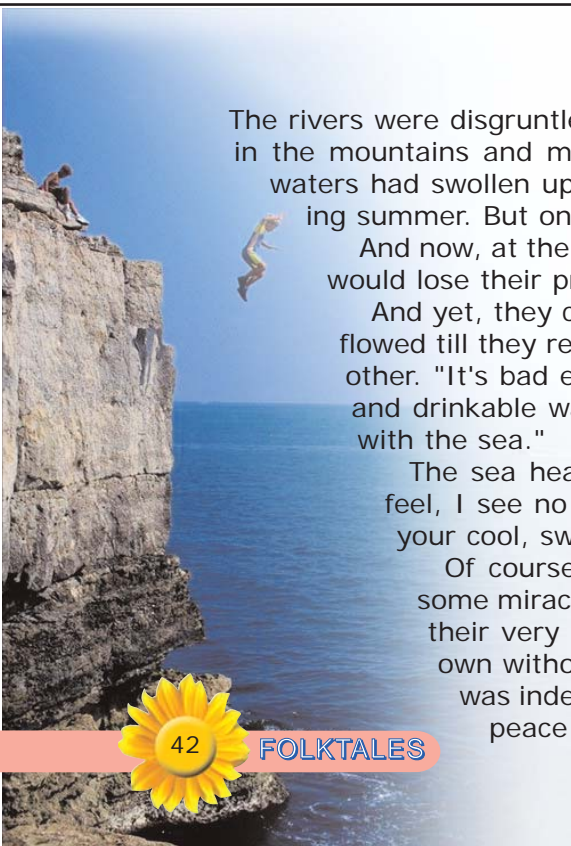
The rivers were disgruntled lot. They had started out as tiny clear streams high up in the mountains and meandered through valleys and plateaus and plains. Their waters had swollen up during monsoons and had then reduced to a trickle during summer. But on the whole, they had flourished.

And now, at the end of their journey, they had to merge with the sea. They would lose their precious freedom forever.

And yet, they couldn't stop themselves from flowing, could they? So they flowed till they reached the sea. "This is too unfair!" they said sadly to each other. "It's bad enough that we have to merge. It is worse that our sweet and drinkable water becomes terribly salty and tasteless when we merge with the sea."

The sea heard the rivers and looked amused, "If that's the way you feel, I see no point why you should join me at all. Go away, and enjoy your cool, sweet waters by yourself."

Of course, there was no way the rivers could do that. Even if by some miracle they could change their course and not flow into the sea, their very survival was at stake. For, very few rivers lasted on their own without uniting with the sea. Most dried up and died. What use was independence if one did not live to enjoy it? So the rivers made peace with their situation and flowed into the sea.



The Mighty

At the edge of a forest, stood a big tree. Its branches spread out majestically and so did its roots. It shielded people from the sun under its shady leaves, and provided shelter to countless birds and other small creatures in its branches. It buzzed with activity all the time.

At the foot of the tree grew a little plant. The plant was willowy and delicate, and tended to keel over at the touch of the slightest breeze.

One day, the two neighbors were having a little chat.

"Well, little one," said the tree to the plant, "Why do you not plant your feet deeply in the ground, and raise your head boldly in the air as I do?"

"I see no need to do so," whispered the plant with a smile. "Actually, I think I may be safer this way."

"Safer!" sneered the tree. "Are you suggesting that you're safer than I am? Do you know how deep my roots are buried, how thick and strong my trunk is? Even if two men hold hands they would not be able to surround my trunk. Who could possibly pluck me by the roots or bow my head to the ground?"

And the tree turned away from the plant in a great huff.

But the tree was to regret its words very soon. One evening a great hurricane arose in the region. It hurled the trees off their roots and almost completely destroyed the forest. It uprooted the neem tree and hurled it away with great force.

When the storm had passed, the villagers living nearby surveyed the damage. Mighty trees that had once almost touched the sky, were now reduced to stumps or worse. The forest was littered with their carcasses.

But there was one exception. The little plant. The plant had been tossed and turned under the fury of the hurricane, and bent completely. But when the hurricane ended, it sighed and stood upright again.

No trace remained of its mighty neighbor though.

The Lion's Share

One day an ass and a fox entered into an agreement with the lion that they would assist each other while hunting for food. They felt that their combined efforts would ensure that none of them would have to starve.



Of course, both the ass and the fox were a little nervous about accompanying the lion in the hunt. But the thought of the game they would acquire with his help, made them salivate. They put the nervousness down to nerves.

It was an excellent hunt. The three had combed the jungle in their search for food. When they came to a clearing by the lakeside, they dispersed. It was decided that the ass would keep an eye out for animals to prey on; when he spotted one, he would go up to the animal and introduce himself. The introductory bray would alert the other two, who were hiding.

The fox would come out at first, growling at the animal. The frightened animal would try to run, the fox would give chase and in trying to avoid him, the animal would run directly in the path of the lion. The lion would then finish the animal off in one swoop.

In the evening, the tired but happy trio assembled in front of the lion's den with their large booty. The lion ordered the ass to allot to each of the three partners, his due portion in the treaty.

The ass was very happy. He felt that, by asking him, the lion had bestowed a great honor on him. Very carefully, he divided the spoil into three equal shares. "Sirs, I have done the needful. I modestly request the two of you to take your shares," he said.

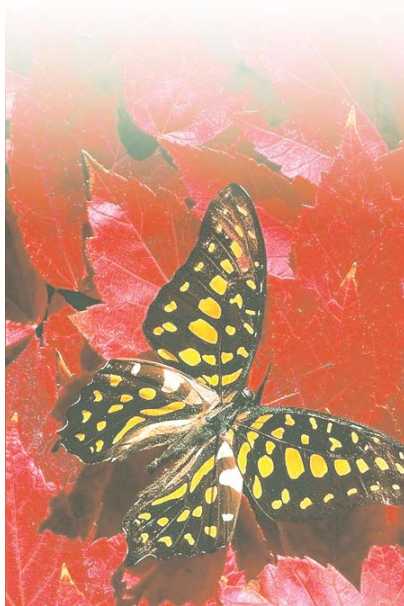
The lion stared at the shares for a minute. "Oh! So you think each one of us deserves an equal share. You think that your feeble attempts to chat with the game compares with my efforts to kill them," he said and jumped on the ass. He killed the ass in one second.

Then he told the terrified fox to make the division. The fox accumulated all that they had killed into one large heap and left to him the smallest possible share. The rest he requested the lion to have.

"Who has taught you, my dear fellow, the art of division? You are perfect to a fraction," said the lion, pleased as punch. "I learned it from the ass sir, by witnessing his fate," replied the fox. He made up his mind never to take a lion as partner in any future venture.

Appearances are Deceptive

One day Bina the ant was scurrying about in search of food. Summer was almost over and autumn was approaching. Soon it would be winter and food would be difficult to find. Bina knew it was necessary to stock as much as possible so that her ant colony could have



enough to eat during the difficult months ahead.

She had collected quite a bit already. Now she was on the lookout for bits of sweetmeats that younger members of her colony loved to munch on after their meal. Darting to and fro between trees and shrubs, Bina suddenly smelt the sweet aroma of pastry. She quickly went around the bush and there she saw it - a large bit of pastry with a whole raisin in it!

Just then she looked up and saw something hanging from the leaf of a bush. Looking closer, she saw that it was a tiny tail. It seemed to be all wrapped up in something, as if bandaged.

Bina did not know it, but the 'thing' was a chrysalis, the pupa of a butterfly.

"Oh you poor thing," exclaimed Bina. She had no idea what a chrysalis was. "What a sad fate you have! I can run anywhere I wish, climb trees or go over mountains. And look at you, you are trapped in your shell. All you can do is move your tail around a bit."

But there was no answer from the chrysalis. So Bina

went on, "Even ant children can run around and do as much as we can. They are free, you are all bound up and can't even move. What a life you must have." And she walked away with her piece of pastry.

A few days later, Bina came that way again hoping to find more pastry or biscuit lying around. It was unusually hot that day and she was sweating. Suddenly, a cloud seemed to come over her and she felt a soft cool breeze. She looked up. What did she see this time?

Why, one of the most beautiful butterflies she had ever laid eyes on! Light blue spotted with light pink and yellow dots. How beautiful and how lucky to be able to fly around free, thought Bina, as she stared at the beauty.

"Look at me," said Sundri the butterfly. "I am your much-pitied friend. You boasted of being able to run around and climb mountains. But now try to get me to listen." And with a graceful flap of her wings, Sundari flew away. Like a soft sigh of the breeze...

The donkey monkeys around

Gopu the donkey was happily going munch munch on an extremely green patch of grass right in the heart of the meadow. So intent was Gopu on eating, that he did not hear anyone approaching until he looked up and gave an involuntary shiver. For standing right in front of him, was Shikari, the wolf.

Gopu began to limp and make a lot of ooh aah noises while doing so. Shikari watched him in silence for a while and then asked what was wrong.

"I trod upon a sharp thorn while passing through a hedge. It is causing me so much pain," Gopu added. "Please, take it out for me."

"And why would I do that?" asked Shikari who thought to himself: hee hee, the donkey is so foolish. Here I am trying to think of a way to eat him up, and there he, wants me to remove a thorn from his foot.

"It is for your benefit that I'm telling you

to take it out, sir," said Gopu earnestly. "That thorn is long and sharp. When you eat me, it is sure to get stuck in your throat."

Shikari then agreed to remove the thorn. So Gopu lifted his foot up for Shikari, who brought his face close to the foot to peer deep into it.

This was the opportunity Gopu was waiting for. With all his might, he kicked Shikari in the mouth and galloped away.

"I should have known," moaned Shikari after he had finished reeling from the force of the kick. He had also lost a few teeth. "Why did I ever attempt the art of healing, when all I have been taught is the trade of a butcher?" He thought as he 'limped' away from the meadow.



The Leap

One day a newly married couple threw a party. Among those who attended, was a man who claimed to be a seasoned traveler. He was an interesting-looking man with a weather beaten face. So, by his appearance, he did look like a well-traveled person.

But once he started talking, there was no stopping him. He bragged to anyone who would listen, about his exploits in countries across the world.

He spoke of many wonderful and heroic feats he had accomplished. "I was an acrobat, a magician, a lion-trainer and even a hunter," he announced in a booming voice.

"I've fought with a tiger, shot an elephant...it's amazing the things I've done," he boasted.

"But friends," and here he lowered his voice for effect, "...it's what I've done in Samarqand that beats everything else."

"What did you do in Samarqand?" asked someone.

The man, who was waiting for that question, immediately launched into a long drawn-out yarn.

"There were two buildings facing each

other, each at least 50 feet high. That's five storeys high. They were 10 meters apart from each other," he said. "Guess what I had to do?"

There was pin drop silence in the audience. "You didn't!" exclaimed someone.

"I did indeed," boasted the traveler. "I jumped from the end of one building to the end of the other. It's the highest flying leap ever recorded. Such a large crowd had gathered to watch. Why, people talk about it even now in Samarqand."

"Give us something to talk about too," said the host suddenly. "Why don't

you show us how you did it? Try leaping between our house and the one facing us. They're barely five meters apart. Come friends, let's go up to the terrace," he added.

The traveler agreed, "Yes, that would be a good idea. I haven't done a good leap in years" And he started to walk with the others. Then he stopped. "First I have to visit the bathroom, though. May I?" he asked the host. And he sprinted off to the toilet.

Needless to say, that was the last time anyone saw the traveler in those parts again.



The Palm Reader

Hari Prasad was the most sought-after man in the marketplace. A palmist rumored to be the best in the area; he lived-off people's hands as he was believed to possess superior qualities of prediction.

All he had to do was stare at the faint little criss-crossing lines on someone's palm for a little while and bingo, the client would listen astounded, as the palmist laid his life history bare before him.

The client would return home somewhat dazed by what he thought were the amazing powers of the astrologer. Few realised that Hari Prasad had actually said very little that was not a generalisation. Later it might strike some that they had been taken for a ride. But by then it was too late, they had already paid him his fees.

It was hard to believe Hari Prasad could lie. He had the look of someone very grave and authoritative. So people still queued up to have their palms examined and hear a few surprisingly accurate observations about



their life - to be followed by a whole lot of nonsense. This was courtesy a few discreet enquiries made during the palm-reading session.

One day, in the middle of one such session, the neighbour's boy came running to Hari Prasad's shop: "Chacha (uncle), come home immediately. Someone broke into your house and stole all the valuables," he said.

At this, Hari Prasad leapt to his feet and began to run very fast. As he ran home, everyone in the vicinity watched him with surprise.

"Hey, he should not be running so fast," said someone, "surely he knew this was going to happen."

"How on earth could he have known that?" asked another person. "Do you think the thief served him a special notice that he was going to be robbed?"

"No," said the first man. "But how could Hari Prasad, the man who foretells everyone else's fortune, not have foreseen his own? And that too, a theft in his own house?"



The Groomed Horse

Chetak was the most attractive horse in the neighborhood. His proud owner, Ram Singh, never lost an opportunity to show him off to his friends and neighbors.

"Here he is, my pride and joy," he would exclaim in a dramatic way as he opened the door to the young stallion's stable. And Chetak would come out galloping, his shiny brown coat and light brown mane glistening in the sun.

Ram Singh would then ride him across the farm, for the benefit of the admiring crowd. His attractiveness apart, Chetak was swift, too. Riding him was like, "flying through air," his owner often said eloquently.

One day Ram Singh hired a new groom for Chetak. The groom, Baloo, was acknowledged to be a good one. Horses under his care always ended up looking far better than they did before. Sure enough, Chetak was no exception to the rule.

Early every morning, Baloo would arrive and go about his task with great concentration. He would begin by washing the stallion, then brushing his coat again and again, until it shone. Hours passed by, with Baloo engaged in this way.



So why wasn't Chetak happy? Ram Singh began to notice that his spirited stallion was somewhat subdued lately. It was his habit the minute stable doors were opened, to be out in a flash, going round and round the farm...carefree, wild. But lately, he was just lazing about, and had even to be coaxed at times, to run.

"What's happening?", thought the worried owner.

He found out a few days later. Every day, he would arrange for a huge sackful of good quality oats for Chetak's meal. His instructions were that Chetak be fed at least thrice. But one day he stumbled upon sackful of oats hidden in an unused tank inside the shed.

It was a part of what should have been Chetak's meal, now waiting to be sold for a tidy sum by Baloo. He had been keeping some aside from Chetak's meal, everyday.

An unrepentant Baloo refused to admit he was guilty when Ram Singh confronted him later in the day. "I am a great groom," he boasted. "I brush Chetak's coat, rub oil on him and make him look so good. Have you ever seen him looking better than this before?"

"I employed you to keep him in good condition," Ram Singh thundered. "And that means keeping him well-fed first and foremost. Without that, you could have been grooming him for all the world and it wouldn't have made any difference," and saying this, he dismissed the groom from service immediately.

The Travellers

In a temple city in south India, lived a group of young merchants who wanted to become rich. They had often heard about traders who had amassed a great deal of wealth in the course of their travels across the world.

So, one fine day, the merchants set out on a long journey in quest of riches and engaged in trade.

Unfortunately though, they did not become as rich as they had thought they would. Worse, they had spent more money on their travels than they had earned in the course of their trade - and that was galling. All this made them very impatient.

One day, when they were in a seaside town, their eyes fell on a large ship at a dis-

tance.

"When we become rich, we shall buy a ship just like that one," they said excitedly. They waited to see it enter

the harbor. As the ship neared it lost its grand dimensions and started looking more like a small boat.

They were crestfallen. But they waited.

When the boat reached the shore the merchants discovered that it was only a bunch of logs tied together to make a raft. They were terribly disappointed.

Finally they understood. Just as they had wasted a lot of time on fruitless speculation about the "ship", their expectations of getting rich also had been without any real basis. Crestfallen they decided to return home.



The Lion Cub

The mama animals and birds of the jungle were having an argument of sorts. Actually, it was a game of showmanship, regarding their little ones. They were trying to find out which one of them had the largest litter.

"I do," said Mama Deer, and proudly displayed her brood of four sweet little deer.

"No, no...look at mine. See how sharp their teeth are!" exclaimed Mama Jackal whose six cubs bared their fangs. All the animals who had assembled backed off a little, but Mama Jackal assured everyone they were only grinning.

"See how many I've got," chirped Mama Sparrow, sitting high up on the branch of a pretty tree. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine...hee hee." And the little birdies put out their heads and tweeted.

"Your record is no patch on mine," purred Mama Cat, whose litter of kittens was so large, it looked like a little army. "No one's is," she added.



"Sure, but your babies are too insignificant to count," drawled someone else. The next second everyone joined in and there was complete chaos as everyone shouted louder to get heard.

"Let's go to Mama Lion," said someone and everyone agreed. So the animals trooped into the den of the Queen of the Forest. She was basking in the sun and looked very majestic as the mama animals approached her. They told her about their dispute and requested her help.

"We all have so many offspring, but we can't be sure about who has the largest brood," they said to Mama Lion. "What about you?" they asked.

"Me?" she laughed. "I have just one," and she pointed to the frisky little cub running about her.

"Only one! That's all?" exclaimed the animals.

"Yes," said the proud mother "...and he's going to be King of the Forest some day. So tell me friends, what use is a large brood to me?"

The mama animals were forced to agree that in the long run the lion cub would matter more than all of their little ones put together.

Abdullah's Gold

Abdullah was one of the richest men in town, but you could easily mistake him for a beggar. It was his theory that since there were so many people out to rob a rich man, it was safe to pretend to be poor. And so he did.

But he really didn't have to pretend. Stingy to the core he found it very easy to be poor. So what if people sniggered and children called out, "Kanjoos! Kanjoos!" (miser, miser), whenever he passed by in his worn-out clothes. Abdullah became more and more content with his growing pile of money as the years went by.

One day, he bought a huge lump of gold with all the money he had amassed. He dug a hole in the ground near an unused well and buried the gold there. He was sure that no thief would be able to find that place. With this happy thought, Abdullah checked on his treasure daily.

But can you really keep a hiding place hidden if you looked at it every day? Before



long, the town was whispering about Abdullah's mysterious visits to the unused well in the dead of the night. It wasn't long before a curious soul discovered the gold, let out a yell of joy and ran away with the miser's treasure.

Naturally, on his next visit, Abdullah found the hole empty. He began howling with grief and soon a crowd had assembled. They watched him grieve the way people mourn the loss of a dear one.

Finally, a neighbor came forward and asked him to stop it. "You want your gold? Just pick up a heavy stone and drop it in the hole. Pretend it is the gold you lost."

"How can you make fun of me at a time like this," wailed the stricken man.

"I'm not making fun of you, friend!" said the wise neighbor. "How did you use the gold while it was here, except gaze at it every day? You could do the same with a stone."

Abdullah was silenced.





Tail-cut!

Every morning the fox strutted through the forest pretending to be king of the jungle. He would bully an animal here, chase another there and show a third one his fangs. He was an utter nuisance.

One morning while chasing a hare, he got caught in a trap.

Actually, it was his tail that got trapped. He pulled and pulled and huffed and puffed, but couldn't get free. The tail stayed in the trap.

Now the fox was very proud of his bushy tail, which he always kept in a good condition. So he avoided pulling too hard lest something happened to it.

"Why did it have to be my tail?" he groaned and pulled a little again.

Suddenly he heard voices - human voices. The trappers were coming to claim their victim. The fox made one great effort to free his tail. A searing pain followed and then he was free. He ran all the way to his lair, without looking back even once.

Only then did he realize the truth. His tail was missing. Most of it at any rate. The bushiest, glossiest part of it.

The fox felt terribly depressed. Then he

felt a deep sense of shame. What would he tell the other foxes? He could already see their sly knowing smiles. Oh, the misery of it!

Then his calculating mind took over. He would persuade them that being tail-less was a good thing.

That evening, at the foxes' meeting by the riverside, everyone watched astonished as the tail-less one sauntered in nonchalantly and proceeded to lecture everyone on the virtues of moving around without a tail.

"Friends, being tail-less is so much more fun," he exclaimed and twirled once for effect. "And advantageous. Look at the weight of the thing - wears one down all the time. Prevents us from running like the mare."

"Err...the mare has a tail too," someone in the crowd pointed out.

"Hardly the same," said the tail-less fox, carried away by the force of his own argument. "The mare's tail is thin, not weighty like ours. Think how heavy our tails get after a swim. That's why I got rid of it. It's soooo useless. Now I feel free. Really, all of you should go in for a tail-cut too," he added.

"Shut up, will you!" growled another fox. "We know you lost your tail in the trap. I had the honor of seeing you flee from the hunters. And I've brought along a memento." Saying so he dangled the vain creature's severed tail before everyone.

The assembly howled with laughter as the tail-less fox slunk away.

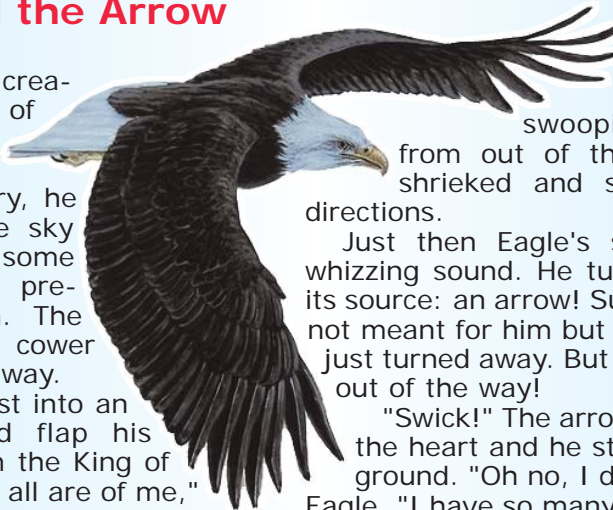
The Eagle and the Arrow

Eagle was a strange creature. He got his fun out of teasing and frightening the little birds. Even when he was not hungry, he would soar through the sky and swoop down on some unsuspecting birds and pretend to prey on them. The poor little birds would cower with fear and try to fly away.

Eagle would then burst into an ear-piercing laugh and flap his wings disdainfully. "I am the King of the sky! How scared you all are of me," he would exclaim.

The birds did not like Eagle and they all thought he was very mean, for the other eagles swooped down on the smaller birds only when they were hungry.

Once it so happened that a



flock of pigeons was flying in the sky and Eagle decided to scare them. He came swooping down on them from out of the blue. The pigeons shrieked and scattered in different directions.

Just then Eagle's sharp ears caught a whizzing sound. He turned around and saw its source: an arrow! Sure that the arrow was not meant for him but for the pigeons, Eagle just turned away. But the pigeons had flown out of the way!

"Swick!" The arrow struck Eagle right in the heart and he started fluttering to the ground. "Oh no, I don't want to die," said Eagle, "I have so many years more to live..." But he was losing his blood very fast. He fell to the ground with a thud and with dying eyes looked at the killer arrow.

It was decorated with one of his own feathers! "Oh God, no!" said Eagle, as he died.



The Favour

There lived a wolf called Lalu in the Himalayan forests. Lalu was very mean and selfish. He thought only about himself and none of the other animals liked him.

The rest of the wolf pack also avoided meeting him. At most, they would say a polite 'Hello' and then go their own way. After all, when they were hungry, Lalu never offered to share his meal. So the wolves avoided him, as they did not want to be impolite.

One day, Lalu was very hungry and went out hunting. After roaming around for nearly an hour, he found a wild hen and greedily tore it to pieces. Suddenly, a small bone got stuck in his throat.

Lalu coughed and coughed and his face went red with all that coughing. He tried to get the bone out, but in vain. He ran up and down groaning and moaning, seeking something to relieve his pain.

Then it became difficult for him to breathe. He pleaded with all the other animals to help him get the bone out. "Help! Someone please help me get this bone out..." said Lalu. But no one stepped forward.



He even offered them a reward for removing the bone. "Oh Pleeeeeease. I can't breathe. I would give anything if you would take it out!" he said. But still no one helped him - because he was so mean.

Then at last mother crane, Rani, took pity on the wolf and offered to help him. But she was unsure - would Lalu really give her anything? All Rani wanted to ask him was to be a better wolf.

But she decided that she should just do it. So Rani told Lalu to lie on his side and open his jaws as wide as he could. She put her long neck down his throat and "Pluck!!", her beak had loosened the bone. And slowly, she pulled the bone out.

"Ah, ah!! That's better," said Lalu, taking long deep breaths. "Will you kindly give me the reward you promised?" asked Rani.

Lalu grinned wide, showing all his teeth. He said, "Be content. You have put your head inside a wolf's mouth and taken it out again safely; that ought to be reward enough for you."

Poor Rani was very disappointed, while the other animals looked at Lalu angrily.

But did Lalu understand or care?

The Boy and the Wolf

A boy was standing on the roof of his house, looking down at the valley below. His house was the last of a row of houses. Beyond it stretched a dark and menacing jungle. Although he had been living in the valley all his life, the boy had never stepped inside the jungle. He had heard that it was full of wild animals that ate up any human they came across.

He could see the forest from his window. At night he heard all sorts of noises coming from it -- noises that penetrated the closed window and reached the boy's frightened ears. He was scared of the jungle, and of all the creatures that roamed in it.

But that was at night. In the morning, the boy felt differently. Standing on the roof of his house, he surveyed the jungle majestically. All he could see were the tops of green trees and they were hardly scary. I could go there anytime, the boy thought to himself.

Suddenly, he caught sight of a gray wolf passing by right under his nose. He looked at it fearfully. Actually, it didn't look that big, from where the boy was standing. It looked like the black dog that his neighbors had. He felt very brave knowing fully well that the wolf could not reach him.

"You ugly beast, how dare you come near my house? Get away or I will set my dogs on you," he screamed.

"I was just passing by," said the wolf in quiet tones. He knew he was in enemy territory and he didn't want any trouble.

"Passing by, huh?" thundered the boy. "How dare you use my area as a thoroughfare, you evil animal? Get off right now," and he waved a stick that was lying around.

"Curse away," said the wolf to the boy. "It is easy to be brave from a safe distance." And he growled so loud that the boy ran cowering inside.

Dream Palace

Once upon a time, Krishnadeva Rai, who ruled over the Vijayanagar kingdom, dreamt of a beautiful palace. It was made of glittering stones and floated in the air. The palace had everything that one could ever wish for. And it could be lit up with a thousand lights or made to disappear into the darkness by merely wishing so.

The king woke up with a start. But he could not forget the dream palace. So, one day, he summoned all his courtiers and told them about it. The courtiers made all the right noises and sang praises of the king and his beautiful dream.

Then the king made a public announcement: "If someone can make such a palace for me, I will give him a hundred thousand gold coins!"

That stopped the courtier's mid-sentence. Their mouths fell open. "Is the king mad? Whoever heard of a palace floating in air," they thought.

But no one had the courage to say so. Many of king's well-wishers told him that such a palace can only exist in one's mind. But he would not listen, of course. He insisted that it could be built. He also threatened his courtiers with dire consequences if they did not produce someone who could make the dream come true.

The courtiers were worried. And the senior counsel of the state requested Tenali Rama to do something.

A few days later, a very old man tottered into the king's court. He was crying for justice.

Krishnadeva Rai asked: "Old man, what's the problem? Tell me without fear and I shall see that justice is done."

"I've been looted, Your Majesty," wailed the old man. "All my savings are gone. I have nothing left."

"Who looted you?", thundered the king. "You name him and I'll have him hanged immediately!"

"Your Majesty! If you don't take it as a personal affront, I will tell you. But you must assure that you won't punish me," mumbled the old man.

"Yes, yes, I promise," replied the king impatiently.

"It's you sir," said the old man.

"How dare you...", began the king, but then he remembered his promise and sat back.

"Your Majesty! Last night, I'd dreamt that you'd come with your entourage of ministers and commanders and looted my entire life's savings - five thousand gold coins!", said the old man.

"You are a fool!" roared the king. "How can you pretend that your dream is reality? Dreams are not true!"

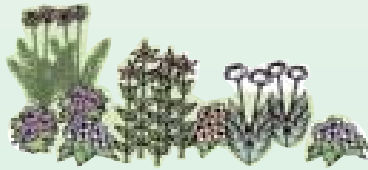
"But they are, Your Majesty! If your dream of a palace hanging in air can come true, why can't my dream come true?"

And before the king could fully comprehend what the old man was driving at, the man tore off his beard and hair and stood before the king. It was none other than Tenali Rama!

Bowing low before the amazed king, Tenali Rama said: "Your Majesty! This was the only way of convincing you about the absurdity of your wish."

"You're right," agreed the king and burst into laughter "Tenali! You are really very shrewd!", he added.





The Instructor

A young man wanted to learn the art of sword fighting. He went to the greatest instructor in the land and said, "Please give me admission and teach me sword fighting."

The instructor gladly accepted him a student and said, "Young man you can stay with me and learn this art."

In the days that followed the instructor gave him many odd chores to perform. The chores were sweeping the floors, cutting vegetables, cooking and the like. But there was no mention of the sword or the art of fighting with it.

The young man got desperate, approached the instructor and said, "Great teacher kindly begin my lessons." The instructor agreed.

The next day when the young man was cooking, the instructor came from behind and hit him with a wooden sword and vanished. The young man was taken by surprise. The next day too the same thing happened. The young man now started preparing himself mentally to counter any such surprise attack.

Next time when the instructor came to attack him, the young man was able to dodge the blow of the sword. He was very happy with his performance. He asked the instructor, "Now have I learnt the art of defending myself?" The instructor did not respond to his question and walked away.

Such surprise attacks became common and the young man got more and more skillful in countering the attacks well.

One day the young man saw the instructor engaged seriously in a task and a sudden desire crept into his head. He thought, "Now let me catch the instructor unawares and attack him."

He took the wooden sword and attacked the instructor without a sound from behind.

But lo! The instructor was fully prepared for it. He took a shield lying near, turned around and defended himself most skillfully.

Realization struck the young man that moment. He thought, "How great is this instructor. Today I have learnt the real secret of sword fighting. He has taught me that swinging the sword and learning the opponent's moves are not the essentials of sword fighting. What is important is to read what goes on in the opponent's mind and to counter his movement and his thoughts too."

The young man continued to take instructions in all humbleness and with newer insights trained well to become a great sword fighter of his country.

What's for Dinner!

A little hen lived at the edge of a forest colony. She lived all by herself and did all her work on her own. Early in the morning she hunted around for worms in the forest; in the day she cleaned up the house; then she cooked, ate and spent the rest of her time in peace. In short, hers was a happy life.

Close by lived a middle-aged fox with his old mother. And, as you can imagine, if the fox was a little elderly, mother fox was quite definitely ancient.

One day the fox and his mother had nothing to eat at home. He had been too lazy to go hunting for food for a few days and now he wondered how best to get hold of some food without too much exertion. All of a sudden he remembered the hen.

Now the neighborhood in which the fox and the hen lived, most of the animals adhered to the rule that neighbors should not hunt each other for food. If you belonged to another colony, it was okay. But not if you were part of the same neighborhood. It was believed to upset neighborly equations. So far, the fox had not much need for disobeying the injunction, either.

But lately, with more and more cutting of trees, the forest had begun to recede, and with it the animals too, had begun to disappear. It was much harder to hunt and the fox was a lazy fellow.

So he announced to his mother "I have a plan to catch that irritating hen. I will catch her and put her inside this sack. Place a pot on fire and add water. We will boil her for dinner tonight".

Saying so, he crept up to the house of the hen.

The hen came out to pick up sticks for the fire and left the door open while doing so. The fox slipped in while her back was turned. She did not see him. He hid behind the door. As soon as the hen came in with her wood, she shut the door with a bang.

She didn't see the fox sitting with his big fluffy tail on the floor. Imagine her shock when the fox crept up from behind her, then suddenly caught her. He forced her into the sack and tied up its mouth.

With a happy smile on his face, he began to walk to his den.

So happy was he at the prospect of eating the hen that he paid no heed to the movements inside the sack. The hen had meanwhile taken out her sharp little knife from her pocket. She cut a hole in the bag and jumped out promptly.

But immediately she picked up a great big stone and dropped it in the bag.

When the fox reached his den, he was literally salivating in anticipation. "Mother, mother, is the water boiling on the pot? For I have got a whole hen to boil in it."

"Yes it is boiling hot. Just right for the hen," replied the mother.

Then the fox held the bag over the boiling water. Pl...lloppppp fell the stone. Its heaviness made the water jump out of the pot. Splashing straight into the bodies of the fox and his mother. And killing them both in the process.

After that the little hen did not find anyone bothering her in her little house in the forest.



Modesty Pays

There once lived a proud driver in Qi, a state in China. He was the driver of the Prime Minister of the state. One day the Prime Minister happened to drive through the street where the driver lived with his wife. Some neighbor's saw him drive the Prime Minister and were excited.

One of the neighbors ran to the driver's home and said to driver's wife-"Quick! See who is driving the Prime Minister? Your husband."

The wife ran out to see her husband drive the chariot of the Prime Minister. She saw her husband drive past her with his head held high up in the air, arrogant and proud.

When the driver returned home that evening, his wife did not speak to him.

He asked her, "Why are you unhappy?"

She said, "I want to divorce you."

The driver got the shock of his life. He said, "Why, Why do you want to divorce me?"

She replied, "Look at the Prime Minister, he sat with great modesty in the chariot. You are but his driver, yet you are so arrogant, that is why I want to leave you."

The driver realized his mistake. He understood that the better a person get, more humble should he be to gain respect. From

that day onwards, he became more humble.

The Prime minister noticed the change in him.

He asked the driver, "Why have you changed your manner of behavior?"

The driver replied, "My wife admonished me, and I think she is right."

The Prime Minister admired his change in attitude, took him to the king and said, "Your Honor, my driver is a man of virtue, he has the courage to correct his own mistakes."

Recognizing it, the king said, "Good! He should be given an official post."

The driver was made an officer. He discharged his duties with great modesty, and lived happily ever after.



Qui Jun and the Arrogant Monk

There once lived a monk called Shan, in a village in China. He had earned a great name for himself. But he was very arrogant.

Qui Jun heard of his arrogance and wanted to teach the monk a lesson. He went to meet Shan who neither greeted him nor acknowledged his presence.

Just then a servant of the monk came with a message: "The son of an army officer is here to see you."

The monk said, "I will go and greet him."

Shan welcomed the son of the army officer with respect.

After the army officer's son had departed Qui Jun asked Shan the reason for his dou-



ble-faced behavior. "Why is it that you greeted the army officer's son so respectfully, yet behaved so arrogantly towards me?"

Shan the Monk had a quick reply: "Please don't get me wrong. For me greeting means not greeting and not greeting means greeting."

Qui Jun understood the monk's mischief and hit him hard on his head with his stick.

"According to your logic, beating you means not beating and not beating you means beating. Therefore, I have to give you a beating," said Qui Jun.

Shan immediately realized the folly of his actions and started showing respect to everyone he met, irrespective of their status.

A Tale of Two Sons

A businessman had two sons. While he showered the younger son with affection and gifts, he neglected the older son shamelessly. It was completely baffling and no one knew why he did it. While the older son could do nothing right, the younger one could do nothing wrong.

When the boys grew up, they were asked to manage the father's business. But there was a world of difference in the management practices the father expected his boys to follow. The elder son was initiated into the nitty-gritty of the business.

From morning till late in the evening, he was on his toes, trying to figure out how the business ran. His father was a hard taskmaster, who pushed him relentlessly so that he would give the business all he got. Within a few years, he was able to master the ropes of the business and even expand it.

What about the younger son? He had had the luxury of a higher education. He didn't have much to do except have a good time at his father's expense. After some years his father felt obliged to hand the younger son his share of business. He was confident that his favorite son would be a brilliant success. If the elder son could be a successful businessman without the benefit of higher edu-



cation, surely the younger one, who was more gifted, would do much better.

Within a few years, the results of his decision became evident. Uninterested in business, the younger son kept up his spending spree and thus went bankrupt.

But, the elder son's far smaller share of business had expanded and he had proved himself to be a good decision maker.

Ashamed at the turn of events the father met the elder son and ranted against the younger one.

"What a scoundrel that boy has turned out to be. I gave him everything he wanted, and he ruined it all !

How could I have possibly known that he would turn out like this? A pleasure-loving, incompetent wastrel," he wailed.

The elder son, who was listening to all this quietly, suddenly announced his plan to set up an independent venture. "I want to strike out on my own," he said.

"Why?", asked the dumbfounded father who was hoping to start afresh with the elder son at the helm of affairs.

"I blame one person for the way my brother has turned out, and it's not him. You can't blame children for the faults of their parents, can you?", asked the elder son. And then he left his father's house.

The Elephant's Nose

There was a time, when the elephant's nose was no bigger than a boot that he could wriggle from side to side. But an elephant's child changed all that.

He was a curious fellow who asked ever so many questions.

He asked the ostrich why her tail feathers grew just so.

He asked the giraffe what made his skin spotty.

He asked the hippo why his eyes were red, and the baboon why melons tasted as they did.

"What does a crocodile have for dinner?" he asked one day.

"Shushh" said all the animals in a scared voice.

But he would not shushh.

By and by he met the Kolokolo bird. She told him where he could find an answer.

"Go to the grey, green, greasy Limpopo river," said she.

So off he went, carrying a load of bananas and sugarcane and melons. He'd be hungry on the way, you see.

After a week of trudging and budging he reached where he had to reach.

At the edge of the river he stepped on what he thought was a log of wood. It winked one eye.

"Excuse me, but have you seen a crocodile in these parts?" asked the elephant's child politely.

The creature winked the other eye and half lifted his tail out of the mud.

"I am the crocodile," he said.

The elephant's child grew excited and kneeled down.

"I have been looking for you all these



Forgive and Forget?

Amar and Alok, two friends, set up a business venture together. Both invested a lot of money in the business and spent all their time trying to promote it.

For a few years everything seemed to be working out fine. Then Alok wanted to diversify. He persuaded Amar to invest their profits in another venture. Amar wasn't so sure - what if the venture failed? - but agreed after much persuasion by his friend.

The two went ahead with the venture. Unfortunately, the new business did fail. They incurred very heavy losses. So they poured in all the money they had made till then to keep the business from sinking. But it was no use. Their venture was still destined to doom.

Within the space of a few years the two friends had gone from riches to rags.

Amar, who had been persuaded to throw in his money, could never forget that the idea to invest came from Alok. He couldn't forgive his friend's lack of judgment, for he had never doubted it once. He was deeply shocked.

After a few days, the shock turned to fury. He was sure his friend had betrayed him. So he was determined to take revenge. One day, he went quietly to Alok's house and set it afire. There was nobody inside the house so no deaths occurred. But everything was burnt to a cinder. Alok was left with nothing.



While running out of the house after setting it on fire, Amar had been spotted by Alok who was returning home. But he could never prove the fact. He too, burned with rage. And decided to take revenge his way.

He set up a business on his own and made some money with it. And then he began systematically to destroy the business of the man who was his friend once. There were so many ways to do it - a few calls to the clients his friend had, a few nasty rumors.

Because he was in a better position than Amar, he could do a lot of damage too. The other tried to follow his example but couldn't - he was in too weak a position.

It happened that in a few months Amar lost everything else too. He went to Alok's house one day. "Let's stop this madness," he said. "We've hurt each other enough."

"I don't particularly enjoy taking revenge either," agreed the other. "But you asked for it".

"I was only reacting to what you did. Your judgment cost me my entire life's saving. But maybe it's possible to put all of this behind and become friends again?"

"No", said Alok, who had lost his house. "You'll never forget what happened to your money and I'll never forget what happened to my house. There's really no way we could become friends again. For while people might learn to forgive after a while, they can never forget the wrongs done to them."

days," he said. "Will you please tell me what you have for dinner."

SPLATH! Went the crocodile's tail back into the oozy mud.

"Come nearer little one, come nearer and I'll whisper," said the crocodile.

The elephant's child put his head down close to the crocodile's musky tusky mouth.

And the crocodile caught him by his little nose.

The elephant's child knew he was in BIG trouble. He sat back on his haunches. And he pulled and pulled.

The crocodile splashed in the water and pulled and pulled.

They both pulled and pulled. And the ele-



phant's nose kept stretching and stretching. At last the crocodile let go.

Bfuddudd!! Fell the elephant, right on his big broad back.

He looked at his nose. He could not see where it ended! It was loooong! So long, he could swish it around. But it hurt him awfully.

So he wrapped the nose in cool banana leaves and waited for it to shrink.

He waited and waited. But nothing happened. He could still swish it all around.

And so it remains to this day.

LoooooonG!

Silence is Golden



A Chinese student once went to his teacher and asked him a question: "Sir, is there any good in talking a lot?"

The teacher replied: "Toads and frogs croak night and day, but no one pays any attention to them. But the cock crows at a certain time of night and wakes up everyone."

"This proves that no good is achieved by talking a lot. What is important is to say the right thing at the right time."

Preparing for Winter

Autumn was coming to an end. All the insects and animals were working very hard to stock their larders with enough food to last them the winter. They all knew that winter time would be tough - it would be cold and food would be scarce. As it would get dark really soon, it would be difficult to go looking for food.

Therefore, everyone was working hard, all except Mr. Grasshopper. He loved autumn. Autumn was a time when the leaves changed colour. It was all so so pretty. The trees seemed to be on fire with red, yellow and orange leaves, which then fell off and covered the ground. There was a pleasant breeze too.

Mr Grasshopper spent his days playing. He jumped from leaf to leaf and from one fallen twig to another. What he liked best was the way the leaves bounced when he jumped off them, and how the leaf he landed on swayed with his weight. "Yooo eeeeeee. Life is lovely, the world is beautiful, I want to play forever..." he sang.

Just then little Miss Ant happened to pass by. She was dragging a heavy grain of rice behind her. "Oowf. This is so heavy. I wish I could get some help with this. I should have asked my brother to come along to help me," she was muttering. "Oh, do you need help?" asked Mr Grasshopper.

"Yes, sir. Would you give me a hand? My ant hill is just a few trees away, but this is so heavy," replied the ant happily. "Now. First

you come and play with me for some time, then I shall gladly help you. What are you toiling for anyway? Autumn is so beautiful, you too should enjoy the weather while you can," the grasshopper said.

"No, Mr. Grasshopper. You too must start collecting your food for the winter. Otherwise it will be tough as there won't be anything to eat," said the concerned ant.

"Nothing doing. I will go out and find all the food I want when I am hungry. Right now it is time to play and have a party," the silly grasshopper replied. So Miss Ant just shook her head and went on - "Huff, puff, huff, puff."

Then winter came. It was so cold that the ants didn't dare to come out. But their tummies were full and they were warm and happy. Actually, everyone was warm and happy, except for Mr. Grasshopper. He was cold and hungry. As he went hunting for food only when it was less cold than usual, he got very little to eat and soon became weak with hunger.

"Oh, why did I spend my days playing? I should have listened to the ant..." he thought with regret.

