



An Anthology of

AESOP'S



ANIMAL FABLES

Retold & Illustrated
by HELEN WARD



*Unwitting
Wisdom*



THREE *all*
dressed
up

IN WHICH A JACKDAW
"BORROWS"
SOME FEATHERS

SIX

a dinner invitation



IN WHICH A FOX IS A **BAD** HOST AND A **HUNGRY** GUEST



THERE WAS ONCE A VERY FAST HARE

AND A VERY SLOW TORTOISE. The hare liked nothing better than impressing the general population with his speed. "I am the master of being faster," was how he so irritatingly put it.

The general population, on the other hand, liked nothing better than discussing the small size of the hare's brain, and where he kept it while he was hurtling about, and how long it would take a crocodile to eat him if he accidentally ran into the river, and whether or not anyone would try to rescue him. Most admitted to a profound respect for the crocodile's teeth but none for any part of the hare.

The tortoise suffered from the hare more than most. The hare humiliated him at every opportunity, but the tortoise was just too gentle and too slow to retaliate.

Before he could say or do anything, the hare was long gone. So the tortoise decided to challenge the hare to a race. The general population thought this was unusually stupid of the tortoise. The hare thought only how certain he was to win. But the tortoise knew what he was doing, the hare being so very predictable.

The race began and the hare hurtled off into the distance. The tortoise plodded forward, settling his thoughts on higher things. Even when the hare hurtled back and ran a few rings around him, the tortoise felt no need to change his even, patient pace.

With so little to challenge his supremacy, the hare decided to take a short nap. The nap turned into a bit of a doze, the doze into a long snooze... until the hare fell fast into a proper sleep. Meanwhile the tortoise plodded steadily on until he passed the deep-dreaming hare. None of the general population had disturbed him. The tortoise was almost at the finishing post when the hare woke up and shook his thoughts into some sort of order. He remembered he was supposed to be winning something. A RACE?

BUT IT WAS TOO LATE...





THERE WAS ONCE A TORTOISE

whose head was always in the clouds, though the rest of him all too firmly hugged the earth. THE TORTOISE DREAMED, as no other tortoise had dreamed,
OF FLYING.

Swallows scooted low across the grassland, rich blue darts of squealing, aggravating speed, each flit and turn filling the tortoise with envy. Butterflies flapped like damp handkerchiefs in the shimmering heat of the afternoon. Even the earthbound ants grew wings and flew. IT WAS UNFAIR.

Dragonflies rattled and reversed over pools, and damselflies, bright turquoise hyphens, hovered among the bulrushes.

Bats flew and fished the evening skies, airy mice on shivering parchment wings. Even seeds from brainless, thoughtless rooted plants were lifted into aimless flight on the slightest breeze. Every flying thing conspired to make the tortoise angry, unfairly treated by nature, so wingless, so solid, so very keen to leave the ground.

He wanted just for once to look down on the earth and to enjoy the vast freedom of the high thin air where the eagle circled, master of the sky. So it was to the eagle that the tortoise went. He asked the eagle ever so politely for lessons in the glorious art of flying. The eagle did not laugh at this.

“When you grow wings, my little pebble,” he said. “You are as solid as the earth you walk upon.” But the tortoise still insisted he was born to fly. “Close cousin of a rock,” said the eagle, “you are as airworthy as a stone.” And he added not unkindly, “You are a tortoise and therefore aerodynamically suited to a slow life on the ground.” The tortoise was not deterred. “All I need is a little help. Once I’m free of the earth I can flap my legs.”

After months of relentless pestering the tortoise, so thoroughly convinced of his flying ability and so desperate for a chance, touched the eagle’s heart. If determination could keep a creature airborne, this one might yet fly.

And so the eagle took the tortoise up into the high thin air where his dreams had always flown, and there the eagle launched him into the clear sky and left him to the whim of GRAVITY AND THE WIND...

