



Aesop's Fables

33. THE HERON AND THE FISH

By Tony Payne

The Heron walked like a king along the grassy river bank. The otter curtsied as the Heron passed. The water vole bent his knee as the Heron passed. The kingfisher bowed so low as the Heron passed that she turned completely upside down on the branch she was clinging to.

But the otter was not being polite. The water vole was not being reverent. The kingfisher was not being respectful. They were making fun of the Heron, though he didn't know it. They thought he had far too good an opinion of himself. They laughed at him behind his back.

Heron is only a bird. They are not Princes or Prime Ministers, Presidents or pop-stars. They are definitely not kings, even if they walk like kings on grassy river banks. In other words, they are nothing special. They just think they are. They parade along in a very high-minded fashion with their noses in the air.

Or they would do if they had noses.

They have long beaks instead. Everything about the Heron is long: he has a long beak, long neck, long body and long legs. The Heron has especially long legs.

And although the Heron walks along the grassy river bank on his especially long legs, he only stands on one of them, so he has a spare.

There is one good thing to be said of herons: they have great patience. When fishing he can stand quite still for hours waiting for their supper.

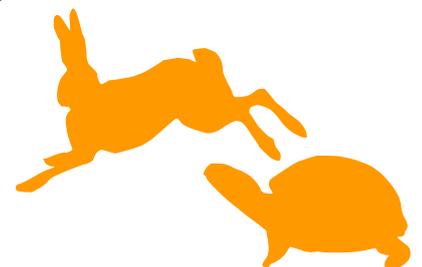
He was quite snappy if the otter and the water vole and the kingfisher were there before him because they made such a kerfuffle.

They were always doing things, these lesser creatures. They chattered. They swam. They dug holes in the river bank. They did high dives and low belly-flops; all splashy, noisy, annoying things!

They played games, when all he wanted was peace and quiet.

Then one day he came to the river later than usual. The others had already finished for the day. The otter was curled up on the grassy bank. The water vole was cleaning his fur. The kingfisher was pecking at something in his feathers.

'At last,' thought the heron. 'I shall have the river to myself.'





He waded out to his favourite spot of clear water, pulled up his spare leg so that he was standing on only one, and began being patient.

It didn't take long for a minnow to swim by. The Heron watched it go past.

'You missed a fish, oh great one,' said the otter.

'It wasn't worth my attention,' said the Heron.

Then a stickleback swam by, and kept swimming by and the Heron still didn't move.

'You missed a nice little snack there, majesty,' said the water vole.

'Nice for you,' said the Heron. 'Little for me.'

Other fish swam by, each larger than the one before, but the Heron gave them hardly a glance.

Then a very fine perch came by, a prize fit for a king - but not for a heron.

'You missed a big one there, Highness,' said the kingfisher.

'Only a salmon is good enough for me!' claimed the Heron. But not another fish came by that day; not a minnow, not a stickleback, and especially not a perch.

The Heron could have eaten his fill if he'd been satisfied with what was on offer. Instead he went hungry...except for one tiny snail.

So, don't be too hard to please or you might end up with nothing.