



Aesop's Fables

34. THE EAGLE AND THE TORTOISE

By Kate Stonham

In a tumbledown cottage deep in the countryside lived Old Mrs Mumbles. Every morning, she opened the kitchen door... and threw the remains of last night's dinner onto the grass.

'Three, two, one...bet I get there first!' cried Racy Rabbit.

All the animals that lived in the garden charged towards the food - all except Tod the very slow tortoise.

'Wait for me!' he croaked. But it was no good - Racy Rabbit, Fox and the birds were greedily tucking into vegetable peelings and left over stew...and by the time Tod arrived, there was nothing left.

'It's not fair!' he moaned. 'I've only got short little legs and my shell is really heavy. I'm so slow I always get there last.'

'Never mind, Tod,' squeaked his friend, Milly Mouse. 'Look, I've saved you a nice piece of lettuce.'

As Tod chomped away, he spotted a great Eagle soaring on the light breeze way up high.

'I wish I could fly like that eagle,' he sighed. 'Just imagine how fast and free I would be!'

The next day, Tod poked his head from his shell - and nearly jumped out of it in surprise. For the Eagle was standing on the grass, looking right at him.

'Us eagles have very good eyesight you know', she said in a rather raspy voice. 'I read your lips yesterday. And I have come to grant you your wish. I shall teach you to fly in the sky.'

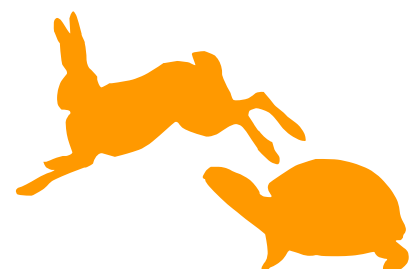
'Oh! Thank you, Eagle!' cried Tod. 'I'll give you anything you want in return.'

'Anything?' asked the Eagle with a glint in her eye.

'Yes, anything,' replied Tod.

Tod gasped with excitement as the Eagle carried him high into the sky. Mountains and oceans and forests and castles were spread out below as far as he could see.

'I can fly!' cried Tod with delight.





‘Now, there’s just the small matter of my payment,’ said the Eagle. ‘I’m rather partial to small, cuddly creatures for my tea. So I’d like that little mouse you were talking too.’

‘What?! But you can’t eat Milly - she’s my best friend,’ protested Tod.

‘But you promised to give me whatever I wanted,’ said the Eagle.

‘Er, yes I know - but not Milly. Please!’ pleaded Tod.

There was a horrible silence. Todd shivered in the cold wind and looked down. It was an awfully long way to the ground...

‘Very well then,’ said the Eagle. ‘You wanted to fly - so let’s see how you manage by yourself.’ And with that, she shook Tod off her back.

‘Heeeeeeeelp!’ cried Tod as he fell through the air. ‘You forgot to tell me how to do it!’

‘It’s easy, just flap!’ cried the now distant Eagle.

Tod flapped and flapped his little legs, but it was no use. Down he dropped like a very heavy stone.

‘I don’t think I like flying after all...’ he gasped. ‘I’d much rather be back on the ground. The problem is, the ground’s getting very close. Very fast!’

As the garden rushed up to meet him, Tod shut his eyes...then ever so slowly...opened them again...

He had landed in a giant pile of lettuce leaves. ‘We thought we’d give you a soft landing just in case your flying lesson went horribly wrong,’ giggled Racy Rabbit.

‘Lucky for you, Old Mrs Mumbles had a big party last night, and threw out loads of left-overs!’ added Milly.

That night, the animals celebrated with a feast. ‘Thanks for saving my life, guys,’ said Tod as he chomped on lettuce. ‘You know, I much prefer being slow and steady to flying all fast and whizzy. I even like my shell a bit more.’

He pulled his little friend under his shell, and they munched to their hearts’ content till the sun came out again.