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THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE

Once upon a time, in a forest full of tall trees, flowers of many colors, and soft dirt paths, there was a very fast hare who felt proud of running faster than all the other animals. She loved to hop through the bushes, run across the meadow, and kick up dust with her paws. Every time she passed by another animal, she smiled with a proud air and said that no one in the forest could catch her.

The hare was not only fast, but also very talkative. She always found a way to brag. If she saw a deer, she said she ran better than him. If she saw a squirrel, she said she jumped farther. And if she found the tortoise walking slowly along the path, she never missed the chance to make fun of her.

—Tortoise, tortoise —said the hare, laughing— why do you walk so slowly? I think a dry leaf could get there before you.

The tortoise lifted her head calmly and looked at the hare without getting angry. She was quiet, patient, and did not like to argue. She walked slowly, yes, but she always kept moving forward without stopping.

One day, while several animals were resting under the shade of a big tree, the hare made fun of the tortoise again in front of everyone.

—I do not understand how you can take so long to get anywhere —said the hare between laughs—. If I wanted to, I could run around the whole forest before you even reached the stream.

Some animals laughed softly, but others stayed quiet, because they knew the tortoise had a kind heart.

Then the tortoise took a deep breath and answered in a calm voice:

—It is true that you run very fast. But I do not stop. I always keep going.

The hare let out a loud laugh.

—You keep up with me? Never!

The tortoise looked at her calmly and said something that surprised everyone:

—Then let us have a race.

The animals opened their eyes wide. The deer stopped chewing leaves. The squirrel stayed still on a branch. Even the little birds made less noise, as if they also wanted to listen better.

—A race? —asked the hare, almost unable to believe it—. You against me?

—Yes —answered the tortoise—. You and me.

The hare began to laugh so hard that she could hardly speak.

—This will be the easiest race in the world! I accept.

Very soon, all the animals in the forest began talking about the challenge. The fox offered to mark the starting line. The deer took charge of marking the finish line beside a big rock near the pond. The birds carried the news from tree to tree, and the animals gathered to see what would happen.

The next morning, the forest woke fresh and bright. The sun peeked through the branches, and a gentle breeze moved the leaves. The tortoise arrived early at the starting point. She walked without hurry, with her head held high and her eyes fixed on the path. The hare appeared a little later, very confident, stretching her legs and smiling as if the race had already been won.

—Remember to watch closely —the hare said to the tortoise— because as soon as the race begins, all you will see is the dust I leave behind.

The tortoise did not answer. She simply took her place.

The fox raised a branch and said:

—Ready!

Everyone fell silent.

—Set!

The hare moved her paws with excitement.

—Go!

As soon as she heard the signal, the hare shot off like an arrow. She ran so fast that in a few seconds she was already far away.

The tortoise, on the other hand, took her first step, then her second, and then one more. She moved slowly, but without stopping.

The hare looked back and saw that the tortoise had barely moved a little.

—This is too easy —she thought, amused—. I do not need to hurry.

She kept running for a while until she reached a part of the path where there was tender grass and the cool shade of a big tree. Then she looked back again and could no longer see the tortoise.

—Poor tortoise —she said with a smile—. It will take her a very long time to get here. I have plenty of time.

Since the day was pleasant and the place was comfortable, the hare decided to rest for a moment.

—I will sit down for a little while —she said to herself—. Then I will run to the finish line and still win.

She settled under the tree, closed her eyes, and without noticing it, fell fast asleep.

Meanwhile, the tortoise kept moving forward. Step by step. Without rushing. Without looking to the sides. Without thinking about how far away the finish line was. She simply kept going.

Some animals cheered her on from the path.

—Very good, tortoise! —shouted the squirrel.

—Keep going! —sang the birds.

The tortoise smiled gently, but she did not stop to talk. She continued walking with patience.

After a long while, she reached the tree where the hare was sleeping. She saw her lying there, peaceful, with her ears drooping and a sleepy smile on her face. The tortoise said nothing. She did not make fun of her either. She simply kept moving forward.

The sun climbed higher in the sky and then slowly began to lower. The forest filled with the sound of leaves and birdsong. The tortoise kept going. Always forward.

Little by little, she reached the final stretch. Many animals were already gathered near the finish line, watching with excitement.

—The tortoise is almost there! —said the deer.

—I cannot believe it! —cried the fox.

—Come on, tortoise, just a little more! —all the animals shouted.

At that very moment, the hare opened her eyes with a start. She blinked several times, confused, and suddenly remembered the race.

—The race! —she shouted, jumping in fright.

She stood up at once and looked down the path. Far ahead, she saw the tortoise very close to the finish line.

—That cannot be! —she cried in alarm.

Then the hare ran with all her strength. She jumped over stones, crossed the path, and rushed past flowers and bushes at full speed. She had never run so fast. But it was already too late.

The tortoise took a few more steps, reached the big rock beside the pond, and crossed the finish line.

All the animals began to clap, sing, and celebrate.

—The tortoise won!

—Bravo!

—She did it!

The tortoise took a deep breath and lifted her head with a calm smile. She had reached the end without stopping.

A moment later, the hare arrived, out of breath and full of surprise. She looked at the tortoise, then at the others, and finally lowered her ears in shame.

For the first time, the hare had no words to brag.

The tortoise came closer calmly. She was not angry, and she did not want to humiliate her. She simply looked at her kindly.

—You are very fast —said the tortoise—. But sometimes being too sure of yourself can also make you lose.

The hare lowered her head.

—I made fun of you —she admitted—. I thought you could never beat me. I believed the race was won before it even started.

The tortoise answered gently:

—The one who runs fastest does not always win. Sometimes the one who keeps going without giving up is the one who reaches the end.

The hare stayed thinking about those words. She understood that she had been proud and careless. From that day on, she stopped making fun of the other animals. She was still fast, of course, but she learned to be more humble.

And the tortoise kept walking through the forest as always, step by step, calm and steady. Now all the animals looked at her with admiration, because she had shown that patience, effort, and perseverance can take you very far.

From then on, in that forest, the story of the hare and the tortoise was remembered for a long time. And every time someone wanted to give up or thought they could not achieve something, they remembered that race and repeated a great lesson:

the one who moves forward with constancy, even slowly, can go very far.

THE END

