

The Tortoise and the Hare

one of AESOP'S fables as told in an anonymous poem (4th-6th century)
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

Original Greek

Ποιδῶν χελώνης λαγωδὸς κατεγέλλα.
Ἡ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ταῦτα γελῶσα ἔφη·
«Ἐγὼ τὸν ταχυδρόμον σε ἐκνικήσω.»
Ο δὲ ἔφησε· «Τοῦτο οὐκ ἀληθεύεις;
ὅμως ἔριζε καὶ γνώσῃ μου τοὺς πόδας.
— Τίς δὲ τὸν ὅρον ἀποτάξει, ἀντέφη,
καὶ τὰ τῆς νίκης τις ἡμῖν ἐπιδώσει;»
Τὸ δὲ φρόνιμον τῶν ζωνῷ, ἡ ἀλώπηξ
συνετάξατο τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὸ τέλος,
ἄμα δείξασα τὸν δρόμον καὶ τὸν τόπον.
Ἡ οὖν χελώνη μηδ' ὄλως κατοκοῦσα
εὐθὺς ὁδεύουσα' εἰς τὸν ὅρον ἀνῆλθεν.
Ο δὲ λαγωδὸς ποσὶ θαρρῶν ἐφύπνου·
μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐξαναστὰς τῆς κοιτῆς
δρομαῖος ἦκεν εἰς τὸν τόπον τοῦ ὅρου,
ὅστις καὶ εὗρε τὴν χελώνην ύπνοῦσαν.
Ο μῆθος δηλοῖ ὅτι πολλαὶ φύσεις ἀνθρώπων
εἰσὶν εὐφυεῖς, ἀλλ' ἐκ ράθυμιας καὶ ὄκνου
ἀπόλλυνται· ἐκ δὲ σπουδῆς καὶ μακροθυμίας
πολλοὶ περιεγένοντο τῆς φύσεως.

English Translation

The hare had called the tortoise slow
And laughed, but she laughed back.
She said, “Despite how fast you go,
I'll win on the race track.”

The hare declared, “That won't come true,
You'll see when we are done!
But who says where we're racing to,
And who will say who's won?”

The fox, who was their wisest friend,
Arranged for them a place,
Set the beginning and the end,
And showed them where to race.

The tortoise did not hesitate;
Of that she showed no sign.
The tortoise kept on going straight
On to the finish line.

The hare, who trusts his speedy pace,
Goes off to sleep at first.
And waking late, he sprints the race
All in a top-speed burst.

But at the finish line he found
What made his eyes go wide:
There was the tortoise sleeping sound,
First on the winning side.

Delayed too long, a useful skill
That could succeed will fail.
But patient effort often will
Continue and prevail.

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Greek text from: Emile Chambray, *Aesop's fables*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1925-1926, 2 vol.
Fable variant 353.2 (Chambray's 1925-1926 edition), a variant of fable 352 (in Chambray's renumbered 1927 edition).
Chambray suggests the 6th century for the verse recension containing this fable variant (Emile Chambray, *Ésope: Fables*,
Paris, 1927, iii), whereas Perry suggests the 4th-5th century (Ben Edwin Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, Harvard UP,
1965, xvii, note 2).