

# The Tortoise and the Hare

one of AEsOP'S fables as told in an anonymous poem (4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> century)  
translated by ADAM F MCCUNE

## Original Greek

Ποδῶν χελώνης λαγῶδες κατεγέλα.  
Ἥ δὲ πρὸς αὐτὸν ταῦτα γελῶσα ἔφη·  
« Ἐγὼ τὸν ταχυδρόμον σε ἐνικῆσω. »  
Ὁ δὲ ἔφησε· « Τοῦτο οὐκ ἀληθεύεις·  
ὅμως ἔριξε καὶ γνώση μου τοὺς πόδας.  
– Τίς δὲ τὸν ὄρον ἀποτάξει, ἀντέφη,  
καὶ τὰ τῆς νίκης τίς ἡμῖν ἐπιδώσει ; »  
Τὸ δὲ φρόνιμον τῶν ζωνῶ, ἡ ἀλώπηξ  
συνετάξατο τὴν ἀρχὴν καὶ τὸ τέλος,  
ἅμα δεῖξασα τὸν δρόμον καὶ τὸν τόπον.  
Ἥ οὖν χελώνη μηδ' ὄλως κατοκνοῦσα  
εὐθὺς ὀδεύουσ' εἰς τὸν ὄρον ἀνῆλθεν.  
Ὁ δὲ λαγῶδες ποσὶ θαρρῶν ἐφύπνου·  
μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα ἐξαναστάς τῆς κοίτης  
δρομαῖος ἦεν εἰς τὸν τόπον τοῦ ὄρου,  
ὅστις καὶ εὔρε τὴν χελώνην ὑπνοῦσαν.  
Ὁ μῦθος δηλοῖ ὅτι πολλὰ φύσεις ἀνθρώπων  
εἰσὶν εὐφυεῖς, ἀλλ' ἐκ ῥαθυμίας καὶ ὄκνου  
ἀπόλλυνται· ἐκ δὲ σπουδῆς καὶ μακροθυμίας  
πολλοὶ περιεγέροντο 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 Chambry, *Aesopi fabulae*, Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1925-1926, 2 vol.

Fable variant 353.2 (Chambry’s 1925-1926 edition), a variant of fable 352 (in Chambry’s renumbered 1927 edition).  
Chambry suggests the 6<sup>th</sup> century for the verse recension containing this fable variant (Emile Chambry, *Ésope: Fables*, Paris, 1927, lii), whereas Perry suggests the 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century (Ben Edwin Perry, *Babrius and Phaedrus: Fables*, Harvard UP, 1965, xvii, note 2).