

## The Old Man and the Three Young Men

As an old man was planting a tree, three young men came along and began to make sport of him, saying, "It shows your foolishness to be planting a tree at your age. The tree cannot bear fruit for many years, while you must very soon die. What is the use of your wasting your time in providing pleasure for others to share long after you are dead?"

The old man stopped in his labor and replied, "Others before me provided for my happiness, and it is my duty to provide for those who shall come after me. As for life, who is sure of it for a day? You may all die before me." The old man's words came true; one of the young men went on a voyage at sea and was drowned, another went to war and was shot, and the third fell from a tree and broke his neck.

**Moral:** We should plan for those who come after us.

## The Donkey Carrying Salt

A merchant, driving his donkey homeward from the seashore with a heavy load of salt, came to a river crossed by a shallow ford. They had crossed this river many times before without accident, but this time, the donkey slipped and fell when halfway over. When the merchant at last got him to his feet, much of the salt had melted away. Delighted to find how much lighter his burden had become, the donkey finished the journey very gayly. The next day, the merchant went for another load of salt. On the way home, the donkey, remembering what had happened at the ford, purposely let himself fall into the water and again got rid of most of his burden. The angry merchant immediately turned about and drove the donkey back to the seashore, where he loaded him with two great baskets of sponges. At the ford, the donkey again tumbled over, but when he had scrambled to his feet, his load was ten times heavier than before.

**Moral:** The same methods will not suit all circumstances.

## The Donkey and His Driver

A donkey was being driven along a road leading down the mountain side when he suddenly took it into his silly head to choose his own path. He could see his stall at the foot of the mountain and to him, the quickest way down seemed to be over the edge of the nearest cliff. Just as he was about to leap over, his master caught him by the tail and tried to pull him back, but the stubborn donkey would not yield and pulled with all his might. "Very well," said his master, "go your way, you willful beast, and see where it leads you." With that, he let go, and the foolish donkey tumbled head over heels down the mountain side.

**Moral:** Those who will not listen to reason are on the road to misfortune.

## The Lion and the Gnat

“Away with you, vile insect!” said a lion angrily to a gnat that was buzzing around his head.

But the gnat was not in the least disturbed. “Do you think,” he said spitefully to the lion, “that I am afraid of you because they call you king?” The next instant, he flew at the lion and stung him sharply on the nose. Mad with rage, the lion struck fiercely at the gnat but only succeeded in tearing himself with his claws. Again and again the gnat stung the lion, who now was roaring terribly. At last, worn out with rage and covered with wounds that his own teeth and claws had made, the lion gave up the fight. The gnat buzzed away to tell the whole world about his victory but instead, he flew straight into a spider’s web. And there, he who had defeated the king of beasts came to a miserable end, the prey of a little spider.

**Moral:** Sometimes it’s wise to fear the smallest of our enemies.

## The Bat and the Weasels

A bat blundered into the nest of a weasel, who ran up to catch and eat him. The bat begged for his life, but the weasel would not listen. “You are a mouse,” he said, “and I am a sworn enemy of mice. Every mouse I catch, I am going to eat!”

“But I am not a mouse!” cried the bat. “Look at my wings. Can mice fly? Why, I am only a bird! Please let me go!” The weasel had to admit that the bat was not a mouse, so he let him go.

But a few days later, the foolish bat went blindly into the nest of another weasel. This weasel happened to be a bitter enemy of birds, and he soon had the bat under his claws, ready to eat him. “You are a bird,” he said, “and I am going to eat you!”

“What?” cried the bat. “I, a bird! Why, all birds have feathers! I am nothing but a mouse. ‘Down with all cats’ is my motto!” And so the bat escaped with his life a second time.

**Moral:** Different circumstances require different responses.