

The Serpent and the Eagle

A serpent had succeeded in surprising an eagle and had wrapped himself around the eagle's neck. The eagle could reach the serpent neither with beak nor claws. Far into the sky he soared, trying to shake off his enemy. But the serpent's hold only tightened, and slowly the eagle sank back to earth, gasping for breath. A countryman chanced to see the unequal combat. In pity for the noble eagle, he rushed up and soon had loosened the coiling serpent and freed the eagle. The serpent was furious. He had no chance to bite the watchful countryman. Instead, he struck at the drinking horn hanging at the countryman's belt and let the poison of his fangs fly into it. The countryman now went on toward home. Becoming thirsty on the way, he filled his horn at a spring and was about to drink. There was a sudden rush of great wings. Sweeping down, the eagle seized the poisoned horn from out of his savior's hands and flew away with it to hide it where it could never be found.

Moral: An act of kindness is well repaid.

The Two Pots

Two pots, one of brass and the other of clay, stood together on the hearthstone. One day, the brass pot proposed to the earthen pot that they go out into the world together. But the earthen pot excused himself, saying that it would be wiser for him to stay in the corner by the fire. "It would take so little to break me," he said. "You know how fragile I am. The least shock is sure to shatter me!"

"Don't let that keep you at home," urged the brass pot. "I shall take very good care of you. If we should happen to meet anything hard, I will step between and save you." So the earthen pot at last consented, and the two set out side by side, jolting along on three stubby legs first to this side, then to that, bumping into each other at every step. The earthen pot could not survive that sort of companionship very long. They had not gone ten paces before the earthen pot cracked; at the next jolt, he flew into a thousand pieces.

Moral: Friends can accidentally hurt one another.

The Belly and the Members

One day it occurred to the members of the body that they were doing all the work while the belly had all the food. So they held a meeting and decided to strike until the belly consented to its proper share of the work. The hands refused to take the food, the mouth refused to receive it, and the teeth had no work to do. After a day or two, the members began to find that they themselves were in poor condition: The hands could hardly move, the mouth was parched and dry, and the legs were unable to support the rest. Thus they found that even the belly was doing necessary work for the body, and they all must work together or the body will go to pieces.

Moral: When members of a team withdraw support, everyone suffers.

The Wolf and the Crane

A wolf had been feasting too greedily and a bone had gotten stuck crosswise in his throat. He could get it neither up nor down, and of course, he could not eat a thing. Naturally, that was an awful state of affairs for a greedy wolf. So away he hurried to the crane. He was sure that she, with her long neck and bill, would easily be able to reach the bone and pull it out. "I will reward you very handsomely," said the wolf, "if you pull that bone out for me." The crane, as you can imagine, was very uneasy about putting her head in a wolf's throat. But she was trusting in nature, so she did what the wolf asked her to do. When the wolf felt that the bone was gone, he started to walk away.

"But what about my reward?" called the crane anxiously.

"What?" snarled the wolf, whirling around. "Haven't you got it? Isn't it enough that I let you take your head out of my mouth without snapping it off?"

Moral: Nobody should expect a reward for serving the untrustworthy.

The Dove and the Ant

An ant went to the bank of a river to quench its thirst and was carried away by the rush of the stream, nearly drowning. A dove, sitting on a tree overhanging the water, plucked a leaf and let it fall into the stream close to the ant. The ant climbed onto it and floated in safety to the bank. Shortly afterward, a bird hunter came and stood under the tree and laid his trap for the dove, which sat in the branches. The ant, perceiving his design, stung the hunter in the foot. In pain, the bird hunter threw down the twigs, and the noise made the dove take wing.

Moral: A grateful heart will find an opportunity to show appreciation.