

FOLK TALES
from
CHINA



Second Series

Folk Tales from China

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FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS
PEKING 1958

Illustrations by
Mi Ku

Printed in the People's Republic of China

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The Fish-Seller and the “One-Eyed Yak”

(A Tibetan Story)

— Long, long ago, there was once a king in Tibet who had a great weakness for fish — even to the point of not being able to eat any meal unless there was a dish of fish in it! Then it so happened that there was a very bad drought. ^{干旱} The rivers were almost dry and fish became scarcer ^{不足} and scarcer. Finally there was no fish to be had at all. The king could hardly make himself swallow any food, so notices were posted up everywhere that “whoever can bring fish to the palace can get whatever he wants for reward.” The news spread and one day a man brought some imported salt fish which he wanted to present to the king. He arrived at the palace and the guard at the gate stopped him.

“Hey, you peasant, there! Stop! Where d’you think you’re going?”

"I...I...I want to see the king."

"What for?"

"Well, I...I have some fish which I brought back from abroad to present to him."

"Fish! He'll certainly get a handsome reward!" thought the guard. Aloud he said, "That's all right. You may leave it here. I'll see that it gets sent in for you."

"No, I want to take it in myself."

"Will you sell it to me? I'll pay you high for it."

"No! I'll not do that! I've come to present it to the king myself."

The guard was unable to persuade him. "You'll have to give me half of the reward you get from the king, then," he said. "I shan't let you in otherwise."



“All right. I'll give you half.”

“You'll swear to that? You're not trying to cheat me?” said the guard, suspiciously.

“Yes, I swear it.”

So the guard let him into the palace. He took a few steps through the door and then turned back. “Hey, soldier,” he said, “I don't know your name. How can I share my reward with you?”

“They call me ‘One-Eyed Yak.’ Everyone knows me,” replied the guard.

The king was delighted to have some fish again, and told his household to ask what the peasant wanted as a reward.

“I want to be flogged a thousand strokes,” the peasant answered.

When the king heard this he couldn't help laughing. “What? Is he a fool? Why ever does he wish to be flogged?” He sent for him in person and heard him say it again. At such insistence the king agreed, but told his men to flog him very lightly.

So he was put down on the floor and flogged very lightly. When he had received five hundred strokes he immediately stood up and said, “Enough. I've had my part.” Everyone was very surprised and thought him more queer than ever. “Who should get the rest, then?” they asked. So the man told all that had happened to the king and finished by saying, “So you see, that guard has to have the

rest." The king was very angry and ordered One-Eyed Yak to be brought in immediately.

One-Eyed Yak was happily planning what he would do with the reward, so he was very pleased when the king sent for him. But directly he saw how stern the king looked he was terrified. The king ordered him to be flogged heavily. Then he told him, "This is your half of the reward you demanded."

Although the guard was feeling such severe pain that he could hardly stand he still had to thank the man who gave him half his "reward." But he said in his mind, "Oh heavens! This is too big a reward for me!"

白鷺
The Boastful Tortoise

(A Tibetan Story)

Once there were two ^{白鷺} egrets and a little tortoise who lived by a lake and became fast friends. They played together all day long, sunning themselves on the sand and swimming in the lake. They were very happy and would never be parted for a single day.

But that year there was a drought. In the whole five months from March till August, not a single drop of rain fell! All the rivers were dried up, and the land ^{大裂如} cracked into fissures. ^{裂开} Of course the little lake could not escape the same fate. Day by day the water became less and less. The three friends did not know what to do, and sighed all day. One day the two egrets took to the air to see how things were, and came back in the evening saying:

“Brother Tortoise, everyone is moving to the Heavenly Lake, even the moles. ^已 I think we had better move too. If we stay here we shall die of hunger and thirst.”

The tortoise shut his little eyes, as small as green beans, and wept. "Oh, you can fly or hurry as fast as you want, and get to the Heavenly Lake. But I can neither fly nor walk fast. Within three days men will be able to pick up my empty shell! I would never have thought that you would leave me behind, when we have been friends for so long. . . ."

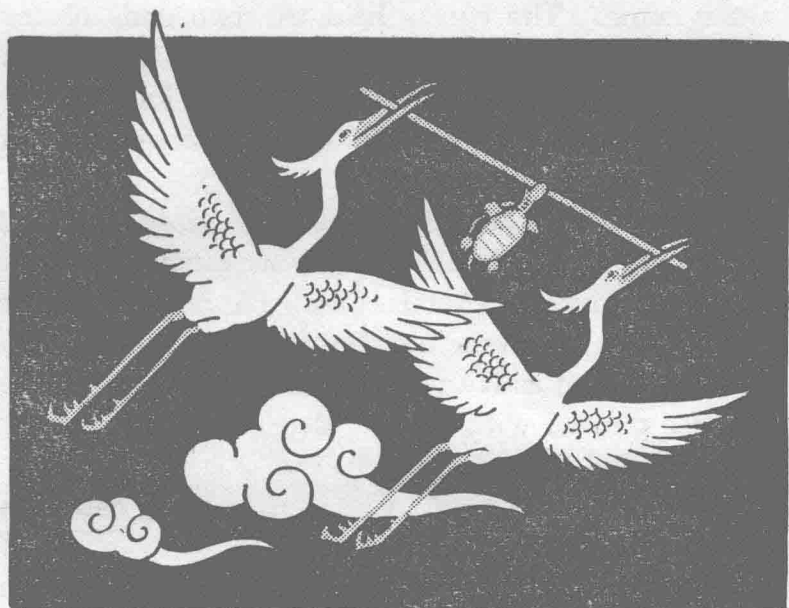
The tortoise wept so pitiably that the egrets, unable to hold their own tears back, did not have the heart to leave him behind. So they decided to stay back themselves for the time being. Perhaps, after all, the rain would come in a few days!

But the weather promised no change. Clear stars dotted the sky at night and the sun beat down mercilessly by day. The little lake was nearly dry. The egrets said again they thought they must go. The tortoise knew that he could not insist on staying any longer so he pleaded with them, saying, "We have been friends for so long! Can't you think of a way to take me along?"

They put their heads together. After some time the egrets said, "Brother Tortoise, we have a plan, but we are not sure whether it will work. . . ."

The tortoise couldn't wait for them to finish but interrupted eagerly, "What is it? What is it?"

"We'll hold two ends of a stick in our beaks, and you can hang on to the middle. Then we can fly,



carrying you between us. What do you think of the idea?"

The little tortoise was so happy that he nearly hopped. "Yes, yes! That's a fine idea! Let's start at once!"

The egrets were very pleased, too, but they had to give him a warning. "You must be very careful not to open your mouth on the way."

"Of course not. I'll keep it tight shut, even if someone tries to prize it open with a knife."

So they had their last dinner, a specially sumptuous one, and early next morning said good-bye to

their home. The egrets held the two ends of the stick and the tortoise gripped the middle in his jaws. They flew and flew and flew, over dark forests, glittering snow-covered mountains, temples with golden tiles and vast grasslands. . . .

Down on the earth, some people, painfully trying to irrigate their fields, pointed to them and said:

“Look, what a clever tortoise! He holds the stick in his jaws and lets the egrets carry him.” The egrets went on as if they had heard nothing, but the tortoise glowed with pride. Everyone was praising him, ha, ha!

They flew on and on. Children, herding cattle on the mountain, shouted at them.

“Look, how clever the egrets are! They carry the tortoise to the very sky.” The egrets paid no attention to it but concentrated on flying, but the tortoise felt very hurt.

“Stupid fools! Saying that it was the egrets who carried me! Why, to all intents it was *I* who thought out this plan! I must let them know which of us is the cleverer.” So with all his might he began to shout at them, “Hi. . . .”

But as soon as he opened his mouth, he fell head downward and tail up, straight towards a big black stone.

The Chachatatutu and the Phoenix

(A Tibetan Story)

The chachatatutu is the smallest and ugliest of all the birds, while the most beautiful and noblest is the phoenix.

Once upon a time a chachatatutu laid three eggs in her nest in the grass. But every day, while she was out, a pika, who lived in a hole near by, trotted up to eat the eggs. Two had already gone. The poor chachatatutu was very upset and flew off to the phoenix, to lay an accusation against the pika.

“Oh, Phoenix, queen of all birds!” said she, very sadly. “See how unfortunate I am! A wicked pika has eaten two of the three eggs I laid. I’ve lost two lovely babies already, so I come to ask you to avenge my wrongs.”

The phoenix couldn’t be bothered with a little chachatatutu no bigger than a thumb, and said testily, “Don’t you know I’m very busy? How can you