

The Tortoise and the Hare

It was pitch black inside the snake. Never could the hare forget the ordeal he experienced today. Surrounded by grotesque and slimy fluid with incredulously pungent smell, he thought that he was at death's doorstep. Despite experiencing through such atrocious misfortune, he still managed to live on. Never ever would he join a race like this again.

'Wouldn't it be interesting to let my miraculous creations race against each other in pairs? Animals all possess distinct attributes, enabling them to play various roles in the ecosystem. If they can cooperate in pairs and appreciate merits of one another, wouldn't the world be more harmonious?' These thoughts suddenly struck God 'I shall immediately hold a race, encouraging all animals on land to join.'

'Hello, creatures on land!' The thunderous voice rang inside every animal's head. 'I am your Lord. I will hold a race tomorrow. I will randomly arrange the participants in pairs and let you race against each other in pairs. The pair of winners can enjoy any rewards they wish. Gather at the Grand Grassland before sunrise if you want to join. Don't miss this one-in-a-lifetime event!'

The aura of jubilation and exuberance spread immediately after God's announcement. Birds chirped with sheer elation. Antelopes bounced with ecstasy. Leopards roared as if they were displaying their power and determination to win. Almost all animals were delighted of the great news. So did the hare. With his utmost resolution to win, he leapt swiftly towards the Grand Grassland. Having arrived at the Grand Grassland before dawn, he immediately dug a burrow near the only oak tree in the grassland. He could not help beaming every time when he imagined being victorious in the race. 'Hope that I could pair up with the leopard. Then victory will be ours,' the hare thought. With countless glittering and shimmering stars on the black canvas, the mind of the hare could not even come to rest. Anxiety and jubilation both occupied his mind. Even the relatively dim stars dazzled him and interrupted his sleep. His attempt of calming himself failed utterly. His eyes opened wide throughout the night.

Time flew. Faint light from the emerging red sun pierced the darkness, brightening up the sky gradually. Even the hare found the fact that he didn't sleep through the night unfathomable. Yet he was glad that he was not late for the race. Despite not having any sleep for the whole night, he was as exuberant and vital as usual. With the sun emerging from the horizon, more and more creatures awake, filling the Grand Grassland with joyous noise. Birds and grasshoppers chirped. Zebras and horses whinnied. Frogs croaked as loudly as usual.

Yet, antelopes stopped bouncing. Foxes and wolves stopped loping around. Horses ceased trotting around. Amid the euphoric noise in the Grand Grassland, one could easily notice the tension among the creatures with sheer tenacity to win.

'Hi, everyone!' The deafening noise of God boomed in every animal's mind again. 'I am sure that everyone wants to join the race. But only one representative of each species can join.' Impatient and brutal wolves immediately fought against and bit each other to seize the precious chance. The sharp teeth pierce

through the skin of each wolf. Incredulously strong jaw strength of wolves even torn the bones asunder. God continued, 'Only the first eight creatures coming to the only oak tree in this Grassland are able to join the race.' Of course, those badly injured wolves could not even stand with their four limbs. It was so fortunate for the hare that he was right next to the oak tree. The fastest antelope leapt so swiftly that one might have mistaken her as a flash of light. A tiny lark took flight and landed on the oak tree with no one noticing her. A horse galloped briskly and arrived at the oak tree. A snake slithered promptly. Zebra also galloped briskly and became the sixth animal that arrived at the oak tree. A deer arrived at the oak tree just after the zebra. A leopard leapt as swiftly as he could, yet he could not manage to leap when he has leapt for a few miles due to his inadequate stamina. Other animals hurried towards the oak tree, but God's thunderous voice boomed in every animal's head again. 'The first eight animals have arrived at the oak tree already.'

The announcement of God left every creature in bewilderment. The Hare could only see seven contestants including himself. Not until he bumped into something hard did he realize a tortoise was crawling right beneath him 'What, a tortoise?' Peter the hare exclaimed, not being able to believe what he saw. Shocked, the animals that could not arrive at the oak tree could not believe that they were defeated by a tortoise. 'Hope that I will not be paired with the slow tortoise,' the hare thought. 'Without further ado, I shall announce the combination of the contestants. Antelope and zebra. Lark and snake. Horse and deer. And finally, hare and tortoise.' The hare could not believe what he had heard. Jaws dropped, the hare could hardly manage to hop. Other pairs cheered with sheer elation and prepared readily for the race, leaving the despondent and flabbergasted hare behind. The tortoise merely crawled slowly away from the hare aloofly. 'Why bother vying with them? It is blatant that we are the losers. There is no chance for us to prevail,' the hare grumbled. 'Moving slowly does not necessarily mean that we won't win the race!' protested the tortoise. 'Not moving does equate with losing the race though.' The booming voice of God interrupted their quarrel. 'The starting line is here and the finishing line is at the river in the middle of the Grand Grassland. Ready, get, set, GO!' The groups of animals immediately dashed towards the river after the commencement.

With the river located, hundred miles away from the starting point, Peter the Hare was daunted while the tortoise kept plodding towards the river. The lark flew with ease, dreaming about the imminent victory and countless rewards. Viewing high up from the sky, those agile and exuberant creatures merely resembled slow moving ants. 'How would they be able to beat me?' The lark thought with sheer vanity. The lark landed on the riverbank within a minute effortlessly, waiting for her partner's arrival. She tweeted with jubilation, celebrating her victory. Nevertheless, she was unaware of an approaching eagle. The sharp eyes of eagle aimed at the tiny lark. He folded his wings and darted towards the lark like an arrow. Sharp talons pierced through the lark. The eagle torn the lark asunder with his keen beak. The yellowish grass was dyed red. 'It was so unfortunate that one of our contestants, the lark, was eaten by the eagle. The snake will no longer be considered as a contestant at the same time,' God announced. 'What?' The snake hissed in disbelief. 'If I cannot enjoy a feast of meat, at least I have to fill my grumbling and empty stomach first.' Eyes of snake and the hare's met. The intimidating and devilish eyes of the ravenous snake made the hare terrible. The snake slithered towards the hare swiftly and opened his enormous mouth with horrendous fangs. As keen as the hare wanted to escape from the imminent

nightmare, he failed to move his feeble legs. Within a second, the snake has already wrapped around the hare. Being squeezed tightly, the hare lost consciousness. The vicious snake swallowed Peter the Hare at once. 'How fulfilling it is!' hissed the snake sinisterly.

It was pitch black inside the stomach of Snake. Surrounded by grotesque and slimy fluid with unbelievably pungent smell, the hare awoke, thinking that he was at the doorstep of death. The hare endeavoured to open the mouth of the sinister snake. Nonetheless his efforts were in vain. His feeble limb could hardly make the upper jaw which was as heavy as the weight of a gigantic elephant. Despondent, the hare soon yielded to his fate, giving up making any attempt to escape from the snake, let alone expecting the tortoise to save him.

After a while, he heard mumbling yet incensed voice, grumbling 'How dare you swallow up my partner. You have to pay the price for it!' 'Is it tortoise?' the hare thought, 'His attempt of rescuing me will only be futile. How is he able to save me from this torment,' the hare was imagining about the tortoise being swallowed and staying with him together in this obnoxious place. However, the mouth of the snake did not open as he expected. The body of the snake did not move as he expected. Thump! All of a sudden, the hollow tulip behind, the hare collapsed. Peter the Hare immediately tried to open the jaws of the snake. The upper jaw was no longer heavy. It will like lifting a feather. Having seen his partner emerging from the fainted snake, the worries of tortoise were eased completely.

'I should never judge your ability merely by your speed. I am the one who is inferior to you. I initially even thought that you would leave me behind. I should never give up so easily.' The hare apologized sincerely to the tortoise, 'Hardly can I express my gratitude towards you with mere words.' 'Never mind,' the tortoise replied, 'We should move on and finish the race. Tenacity cooperation and wisdom are the keys to success. Can you see the deer and the horse, the zebra and the antelope resting near the bush? They have not even been moving for this long period of time you stayed in the stomach of snake as they were too exhausted. We can catch up them if we preserve our stamina. With me being squeezed inside my shell, you can even push me, saving your time waiting for me.' 'What a great idea!' the hare exclaimed.

The hare and the tortoise embarked on the arduous journey. Under the scorching summer heat, sweats dripped like shower from the body, allowing the revolting and slimy fluid in the snake's stomach to flow away. Though the long journey was taxing, the hare was relieved and relaxed that no more predators would hunt them. Having their stamina preserved, they managed to approach the riverbank with remarkable perseverance. The incredulously long distance which seemed to be an impossible mission was no longer daunting. Right at the moment when they thought that their victory was imminent, they heard the antelope and the zebra, the deer and the horse galloping briskly. Both the tortoise and the hare gasped in disbelief. Hardly could the hare and the tortoise keep abreast of them, let alone winning the race if they preceded the hare and the tortoise.

As the sound of galloping became louder and louder, the pulse of the hare raced and the tortoise experienced a surge in adrenaline. When they saw the short body of the antelope, they found the solution to their problem. The hare threw the tortoise towards the riverbank with all his might. With a remarkably high momentum, the tortoise successfully and safely landed on the riverbank. The hare instantaneously

hopped onto the springing antelope, grabbing onto her body as tightly as feasible. The leaping antelope instantly sensed the abnormal weight on her back. She ceased leaping and endeavoured to get rid of the hare, shaking as violently as she could. At the same time, the horse and the deer were galloping as fast as lightning. With such speed, the hare's opponent surely intimidated the hare. The tortoise yelled to the horse, 'Let go! Let her throw you to here!' Realizing that the violent shaking of the antelope was an efficacious tool, the hare instantly let go at the right moment, allowing himself to be thrown towards the riverbank by the antelope. Having landed on the riverbank successfully seconds before the arrival of the exuberant and vigorous horse and the deer, the hare and the tortoise prevailed by a narrow margin.

'What shall I reward you?' God asked. 'Being rescued by my friends, the tortoise, was already the greatest reward I've ever had,' replied the hare. 'Winning the race with the hare was also the greatest reward I've ever had,' smiled the tortoise.

Never ever would the hare join a race like this again. But he would treasure the benevolence of the tortoise forever.

The story has conveyed innumerable messages, including never be conceited when being victorious, stepping out of our comfort zone to embark on a worthwhile and rewarding journey, never judge a book by its cover, the importance of cooperation and lending a helping hand to others. Yet, the most crucial message that the story wants to convey is that we should always keep striving.

Had the tortoise not been pertinacious to rescue the hare, the hare would not have escaped from the vicious snake. Had the tortoise and the hare not kept striving, they would not have finished the race. Had the remaining groups of creatures not been perseverant, they would not have chased after the tortoise and the hare who were in front of them hundred miles away. Their tenacity is one of the most vital keys to success.