

What Happened to the Reptiles

Prem lived in a village. Last year something terrible happened there. The people of the village went mad. They started fighting with one another. Many houses were burnt. Many people were killed. So Prem ran away from his village. He ran a long time and finally reached Pambupatti. He saw some villagers standing near the well. He ran to them. Before he could say anything, he fainted.

When he opened his eyes, he found himself with an old man. Soon other villagers also came to him. They were all very kind. Prem said to the old man that he had never seen such a village in his life. His village was very different. At all other villages, he had seen people fighting in the name of religion or language. At Pambapatti, people lived in peace and cared for each other's welfare. Thus Pambapatti was different from any other village. At this the old man told Prem a story. He said that Prem should tell that story in his own village when he reached there. At this Prem protested. He was determined not to return to his village. The behaviour of his villagers made him burn with shame. The old man, however, told his story.

It happened a long, long time ago. Children lived in caves with their parents. As for animals, there were only reptiles. Every month the reptiles of Pambupatti had a big meeting. The president of these meetings was Makara, the biggest crocodile of the forest. Since it was the strongest, every reptile agreed with what he said.

Now one day Makara sent a letter to tortoises. He asked them not to come to the next meeting. A tortoise named Ahistay was very angry at it. Yet none of the tortoises had the courage to attend the meeting. Before the meeting Makara polished his teeth red so that they sparkled. At the meeting he said that the forest didn't need tortoises. When some reptile tried to show his disagreement, Makara shouted to silence him. He said that the tortoises were stupid and slow. They are stupid enough to carry their houses on their back. Then he announced that he had given tortoises one week to leave the forest.

So the tortoises had to go. At first, all the animals were sad. But soon thereafter they were happy because there was now more food, more water and more space for them. After a few days, a smell of rot began to fill the forest.

A month passed by. Now it was the turn of the snakes to be ordered out. Again, for a while the animals were happy because they had now no fear of a snake bite. A few days passed and the animals found that there were too many rats about them. After all, there were no snakes to eat them. The rats ate up the eggs of lizards and crocodiles. They chewed up even Makara's own nest of eggs.

Then Makara had another idea. He asked every animal except the crocodiles to leave the forest. Now all kinds of awful things began to happen. The rats became bolder and now there were too many frogs as well. With the lizards gone, there were now millions of insects bigger and nastier than ever. It was a bad time for crocodiles. They could not understand what had happened to their happy forest home.

Then the crocodiles understood the real problem. They were no longer so afraid of Makara. They sent urgent messages for the tortoises, snakes and lizards to come back to Pambupatti. It was a great day when all of them came back. In two months, the forest was back to normal.

Now Prem decided to return to his village and tell the story to his villagers. Some of them may laugh. Yet they may remember one day and understand that each of us has a place in the world. So for the welfare of his village, Prem wants to tell the story of reptiles to the people of his village.