

Stories in a Nutshell

*A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by
Heather Forest*

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

<u>The Sack: A Sufi Story from the Middle East</u>	4
<u>The Purse of Gold: A Jewish Folktale</u>	4
<u>The Stolen Ax: A Chinese Taoist Tale by Lieh Tzu</u>	5
<u>The Gift of a Cow Tail Switch: A Folktale from West Africa</u>	5
<u>The Fir Tree and the Bramble: An Aesop's Fable</u>	6
<u>The Lion and the Rabbit: A Fable from India</u>	6
<u>You Don't Know: Eastern European Anecdote</u>	7
<u>The Boatman: A Sufi Story from the Middle East</u>	7
<u>The Banquet: A Sufi Story from the Middle East</u>	8
<u>Fate: A Hebrew Folktale</u>	8
<u>New Shoes: A Chinese Taoist Tale by Han Fei</u>	9
<u>A Flock of Birds: A Tale from India</u>	9
<u>The Golden Touch: Greek Myth</u>	10
<u>The Talkative Turtle: A Tale from India</u>	10
<u>Cooking By Candle: A Sufi Tale from the Middle East</u>	11
<u>Wild Goose: A Folktale from China</u>	11
<u>The Strawberry: A Zen Story from Japan</u>	12
<u>The Skull: A Tale from West Africa</u>	12
<u>The Fighting Rooster: A Taoist Tale from China by Chuang Tzu</u>	13
<u>Ten Jugs of Wine: A Tale from Japan</u>	13
<u>Visits of Kings: A Folktale from the Middle East</u>	14
<u>The Monkey and the Pea: A Tale from India</u>	14
<u>The Gnat and the Bull: An Aesop's Fable</u>	15
<u>A Big Quiet House: An Eastern European Folktale</u>	15
<u>The Tale of Echo: A Greek Myth</u>	16

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

<u>The Smuggler: A Sufi Tale from the Middle East</u>	16
<u>The Honeybee's Sting: A Tale from Ancient Greece</u>	17
<u>The Tale of Bausis and Philemon: Greek Myth</u>	17
<u>Anansi Goes Fishing: A Folktale from West Africa</u>	18
<u>The Traveler and the Nut Tree: A Tale from India</u>	18
<u>Cat Woman: A Tale from Ancient Greece</u>	19
<u>The Sunflower: A Tale from Ancient Greece</u>	19
<u>Three Fish: A Tale from India</u>	20
<u>Why Turtles Live in Water: A Tale from West Africa</u>	20
<u>One Good Meal Deserves Another: A Tale from West Africa</u>	21
<u>Who Is King of the Forest? A Tale from India</u>	21

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

The Sack

A Sufi Story from the Middle East

Mula came upon a frowning man walking along the road to town. "What's wrong?" he asked.

The man held up a tattered bag and moaned, "All that I own in this wide world barely fills this miserable, wretched sack."

"Too bad," said Mula, and with that, he snatched the bag from the man's hands and ran down the road with it.

Having lost everything, the man burst into tears and, more miserable than before, continued walking. Meanwhile, Mula quickly ran around the bend and placed the man's sack in the middle of the road where he would have to come upon it.

When the man saw his bag sitting in the road before him, he laughed with joy, and shouted, "My sack! I thought I'd lost you!"

Watching through the bushes, Mula chuckled. "Well, that's one way to make someone happy!"

The Purse of Gold

A Jewish Folktale

A beggar found a leather purse that someone had dropped in the marketplace. Opening it, he discovered that it contained 100 pieces of gold. Then he heard a merchant shout, "A reward! A reward to the one who finds my leather purse!"

Being an honest man, the beggar came forward and handed the purse to the merchant saying, "Here is your purse. May I have the reward now?"

"Reward?" scoffed the merchant, greedily counting his gold. "Why the purse I dropped had 200 pieces of gold in it. You've already stolen more than the reward! Go away or I'll tell the police."

"I'm an honest man," said the beggar defiantly. "Let us take this matter to the court."

In court the judge patiently listened to both sides of the story and said, "I believe you both. Justice is possible! Merchant, you stated that the purse you lost contained 200 pieces of gold. Well, that's a considerable cost. But, the purse this beggar found had only 100 pieces of gold. Therefore, it couldn't be the one you lost."

And, with that, the judge gave the purse and all the gold to the beggar.

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

The Stolen Ax

A Taoist Tale from China by Lieh Tzu

A woodcutter went out one morning to cut some firewood and discovered that his favorite ax was missing. He couldn't find it anywhere. Then he noticed his neighbor's son standing near the woodshed. The woodcutter thought, "Aha! That boy must have stolen my ax. I see how he lurks about the shed, shifting uneasily from foot to foot, greedy hands stuffed in his pockets, a guilty look on his face. I can't prove it, but he **MUST** have stolen my ax."

A few days later the woodcutter was surprised and happy to come upon the ax under a pile of firewood. "I remember now," he said, "Just where I'd left it!"

The next time he saw his neighbor's son, the woodcutter looked intently at the boy, scrutinizing him from head to toe. How odd, he thought, somehow this boy has lost his guilty look . . .

The Gift of a Cow Tail Switch

A West African Tale

A great warrior did not return from the hunt. His family gave him up for dead, all except his youngest child who each day would ask, "Where is my father? Where is my father?"

The child's older brothers, who were magicians, finally went forth to find him. They came upon his broken spear and a pile of bones. The first son assembled the bones into a skeleton; the second son put flesh upon the bones; the third son breathed life into the flesh.

The warrior arose and walked into the village where there was great celebration. He said, "I will give a fine gift to the one who has brought me back to life."

Each one of his sons cried out, "Give it to me, for I have done the most."

"I will give the gift to my youngest child," said the warrior, "for it is this child who saved my life. A man is never truly dead until he is forgotten!"

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

The Fir Tree and the Bramble

An Aesop's Fable

Deep in a lush, green forest, a tall fir tree stood beside a twisted, thorny bramble. One day it grandly said to the thorny bush, "Bush, if you had one wish in all this wide world, wouldn't you rather be a tall, straight fir tree like me?"

"No," said the twisted bush, "Just like you, I'm proud of what I am. Besides, I wouldn't take the gamble. When the woodcutter comes to cut tall, straight firs, wouldn't you rather be a bramble?"

The Lion and the Rabbit

A Fable from India

The animals of the forest made a bargain with a ferocious lion who killed for pleasure. It was agreed that one animal each day would willingly come to the ferocious lion's den to be his supper and, in turn, the lion would never hunt again. The first to go to the lion's den was a timid rabbit, who went slowly.

"Why are you late?" the lion roared when the rabbit arrived.

"I'm late because of the **other** lion," said the rabbit.

"In **my** jungle? Take me to this other lion."

The rabbit led the lion to a deep well and told him to look in. The lion saw his own reflection in the water and roared! The sound of his roar bounced right back at him as an echo.

"I alone am king of this jungle," he roared again.

His echo answered him, "I alone am king of this jungle."

With that, the lion became so enraged, he charged into the deep well with a great splash! The lion attacked his own reflection and was never heard from again.

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

You Don't Know

An Eastern European Tale

A pious old man would each day cross the village green and go into the temple to pray. A soldier watched him do this day after day. One morning, in an ill temper, the soldier stopped the old man and said, "Where do you think you're going?"

"I don't know," replied the old man.

"What do you mean, you don't know?!" said the soldier. "Everyday I see you walk out of your house at this time, cross the village green and go into the temple to pray! Answer me! Where are you going?"

Again the old man replied, "I don't know."

With that, the soldier grabbed him by the scruff of the neck, took him to the jail and pushed him into a cell. Just as the soldier was turning the key, the old man looked at the jail and said, "See! You don't know!"

The Boatman

A Sufi Story from the Middle East

A scholar asked a boatman to row him across the river. The journey was long and slow. The scholar was bored. "Boatman," he called out, "Let's have a conversation." Suggesting a topic of special interest to himself, he asked, "Have you ever studied phonetics or grammar?"

"No," said the boatman, "I've no use for those tools."

"Too bad," said the scholar, "You've wasted half your life. It's useful to know the rules."

Later, as the rickety boat crashed into a rock in the middle of the river, the boatman turned to the scholar and said, "Pardon my humble mind that to you must seem dim, but, wise man, tell me, have you ever learned to swim?"

"No," said the scholar, "I've never learned. I've immersed myself in thinking."

"In that case," said the boatman, "you've wasted all your life. Alas, the boat is sinking."

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

The Banquet

A Sufi Story from the Middle East

A poor man dressed in rags came to the palace to attend the banquet. Out of courtesy he was admitted but, because of his tattered clothing, he was seated at the very end of the banquet table. By the time the platters arrived at his seat, there was no food left on them.

So he left the banquet, returning several hours later dressed in robes and jewels he had borrowed from a wealthy friend. This time he was brought immediately to the head of the table and, with great ceremony, food was brought to his seat first.

"Oh, what delicious food I see being served upon my plate." He rubbed one spoonful into his clothes for every one he ate.

A nobleman beside him, grimacing at the mess, inquired, "Sir, why are you rubbing food into your fine clothes?"

"Oh," he replied with a chuckle, "Pardon me if my robes now look the worst. But it was these clothes that brought me all this food. It's only fair that they be fed first!"

Fate

A Hebrew Folktale

King Solomon's servant came breathlessly into the court, "Please! Let me borrow your fastest horse!" he said to the King. "I must be in a town ten miles south of here by nightfall!"

"Why?" asked King Solomon.

"Because," said his shuddering servant, "I just met Death in the garden! Death looked me in the face! I know for certain I'm to be taken and I don't want to be around when Death comes to claim me!"

"Very well," said King Solomon. "My fastest horse has hoofs like wings. TAKE HIM." Then Solomon walked into the garden. He saw Death sitting there with a perplexed look on its face. "What's wrong?" asked King Solomon.

Death replied, "Tonight I'm supposed to claim the life of your servant whom I just now saw in your garden. But I'm supposed to claim him in a town ten miles south of here! Unless he had a horse with hooves like wings, I don't see how he could get there by nightfall . . ."

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

New Shoes

A Taoist Tale from China by Han Fei

A man needed a new pair of shoes. Before he went to the marketplace, he drew a detailed picture of his feet on a piece of paper, carefully measured them, and wrote down all their dimensions. Then, he set off on foot for the shoe store. Arriving later that day at the bazaar, he unhappily discovered that he had forgotten to bring the paper with his measurements on it! He turned around and walked back home to get it. It was sunset by the time he returned to the market, and all the shops were closed. He explained his situation to one of the shopkeepers who had already packed away all his wares.

"Foolish man!" said the merchant. "You could have trusted your feet and tried the shoes on in the store! Why did you go home to get your diagrams?"

The man blushed, "I guess I trusted my measurements more . . ."

A Flock of Birds

A Folktale from India

There was once a flock of birds peacefully pecking seeds under a tree. A hunter came along and threw a heavy net over them. He said, "Aha! Now I have my dinner!"

All at once the birds began to flap their wings. Up, up they rose into the air, taking the net with them. They came down on the tree and, as the net snagged in the tree's branches, the birds flew out from under it to freedom.

The hunter looked on in amazement, scratched his head and muttered, "As long as those birds cooperate with one another like that, I'll never be able to capture them! Each one of those birds is so frail and yet, together they can lift the net."

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

The Golden Touch

A Tale from Ancient Greece

There was once a king named Midas who did a good deed for a Satyr and was granted a wish by the God of wine, Dionysus. For his wish, Midas asked that whatever he touched would turn to gold. Although Dionysus tried to dissuade him, Midas insisted that the wish was an excellent one, and it was granted!

Excitedly, Midas went about touching all sorts of things, turning them into gold.

Soon Midas became hungry. He picked up a piece of food, but he couldn't eat it, for it had turned to gold in his hand! "I'll starve," moaned Midas, "Perhaps this was not such a good wish after all!"

Midas' beloved daughter, seeing his dismay, threw her arms about him to comfort him, and she too turned to gold! "The golden touch is no blessing," cried Midas. He went to the river and wept. The sand of that river turned as yellow as "fool's gold" for it is there, they say, that King Midas washed away the curse of the golden touch with his own tears.

The Talkative Turtle

A Tale from India

A talkative turtle overheard two hunters say that they were planning to catch turtles the very next day. When the hunters left, the turtle asked two cranes to help him escape. "Beautiful white birds," he said, "if you hold a long stick between your beaks, I'll close my mouth tightly in the middle of it, and then you can fly up and carry me to safety."

"Good idea," said the cranes. "But, for the plan to succeed, you will have to keep your mouth closed tightly on the stick and you must not say a word!" The turtle agreed and biting on the middle of a stick held in the beaks of two birds, off he was carried.

When the birds were high in the air with the turtle dangling down from the stick, some people on the ground looked up at the strange sight in the sky and said, "What clever birds! They figured out how to carry a turtle!"

The proud, talkative turtle cried out, "It was my idea!" and fell tumbling down to earth.

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

Cooking by Candle

A Sufi Tale from the Middle East

Mula bet some friends he could survive a night on an icy mountain with nothing to warm him. Taking only a book and a candle for some light, he sat through the frigid night. When he came down to claim his winnings, his friends asked, "Did you take anything up there with you to keep warm?"

"No," said Mula, "just a small candle to read by."

"Aha!" they exclaimed, "Then you lose!"

A week later he invited these same friends to a feast. They waited and waited for food. "Dinner's not ready," said Mula, "Come and see why!"

In the kitchen they saw a huge pot of water under which a small candle was burning. Mula said, "Does this remind you of our bet? I've been trying to heat this pot of water over this candle since yesterday and it's not warm yet!"

Wild Goose

A Tale from China

Two hunters saw a wild goose fly overhead. As one of the hunters placed an arrow in his bow and aimed it at the goose, he said, "That goose will make a fine stew."

"Stew!" said the other. "It would be far better to roast it."

"Stewed!" said the first, putting down his arrow.

"Roasted!" replied the other.

The argument went on. "Let's ask our clan leader to decide the best way to cook that goose." The leader settled the argument by suggesting that when they caught the goose, half should be stewed and half should be roasted. In that way, everyone's needs would be met.

Pleased, the two hunters went out to shoot the wild goose, but by that time, the goose was safely long gone . . .

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

The Strawberry

A Zen Tale from Japan

There was once a man who was being chased by a ferocious tiger across a field. At the edge of the field there was a cliff. In order to escape the jaws of the tiger, the man caught hold of a vine and swung himself over the edge of the cliff. Dangling down, he saw, to his dismay, there were more tigers on the ground below him! And, furthermore, two little mice were gnawing on the vine to which he clung. He knew that at any moment he would fall to certain death. That's when he noticed a wild strawberry growing on the cliff wall. Clutching the vine with one hand, he plucked the strawberry with the other and put it in his mouth.

He never before realized how sweet a strawberry could taste.

The Skull

A Tale from West Africa

A hunter came upon a huge tree with a whitened skull at its base. The skull spoke and said, "Beyond a certain hill is a field of calabashes. Take them to your hungry village, but do not tell anyone how you obtained them."

"How did you come to be here?" asked the hunter.

"My mouth killed me," said the skull.

The hunter returned to the village with the calabashes and immediately told everyone, "A talking skull showed me a field of food!" The Chief called him a liar.

"Then come with me! I'll prove what I say is true. When they arrived at the tree, the hunter spoke to the skull but it remained silent. The hunter was put to death on the spot for lying.

In time, two whitened skulls sat beneath the tree. The first turned to the second and said, "See, in death we meet again, my kin. It's true a mouth can do you in!"

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

The Fighting Rooster

A Taoist Tale by Chuang Tzu

There once was a man who wanted his fighting rooster to be more ferocious. He took the rooster to a trainer. In a few weeks' time he returned and saw that his rooster didn't squawk as loudly.

"Not ready yet," said the trainer. Two weeks later he saw that his rooster barely raised his neck feathers and wings.

"Not ready yet," said the trainer. Another week passed. His rooster looked as tame and docile as a chick.

"You've ruined my fine fighting bird!" screamed the man at the trainer.

"Not at all," the trainer replied, "See how calm and secure he is, how serenely strong he stands today. The other fighting birds take one look at him and they all run away!"

Ten Jugs of Wine

A Tale from Japan

Ten old men decided to celebrate the New Year with a big crock of hot sake wine. Since none of them could provide for all, they each agreed to bring one jug of wine for the large heating bowl. On the way to his wine cellar, each old man thought, "My wine is too valuable to share! No one will know. It'll never show. It'll still be fine. I'll bring a jug of water instead of the wine."

And so when they gathered with the jugs they brought, all ten old men poured the contents of their jugs ceremoniously into the big bowl and then looked sheepishly at one another as they heated and poured hot water for all.

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

Visits of Kings

A Tale from the Middle East

The Imperial Majesty visited a small teahouse one morning. He called for an omelet. With great ceremony he was flattered and served the omelet on the crude tableware of the teahouse. The owner apologized over and over for the common cloth on the table and the simple furniture. "Not at all up to the standards of a king!" he said.

"It's fine," the king reassured him. "How much do I owe for the omelet?"

"For you, Sire, the omelet will be 1,000 pieces of gold."

"Whoa!" The king raised an eyebrow. "Eggs must be expensive around here. Is that because they are scarce?"

"It's not the eggs which are scarce around here, Your Majesty," said the shopkeeper, "It is the visits of kings!"

The Monkey and the Pea

A Tale from India

The King of Benares was out on a hunting trip with his wise counselor. They stopped to feed their horses some peas. Suddenly a young monkey darted down a tree and scooped a huge handful of peas out of the feeding trough. Halfway back up the tree one pea fell from the monkey's furry hands and, in a desperate attempt to catch it, the monkey dropped all the peas he was carrying.

Peas scattered on the ground and the horses ate them. The monkey climbed back up the tree empty-handed and sat sadly on a branch. The King and his wise counselor watched this episode with amusement. The counselor chuckled, "Great King, when far too greedy you be, remember that monkey and the pea."

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

The Gnat and the Bull

An Aesop's Fable

A huge bull stood grazing in the field. A tiny gnat buzzed about its ear and finally landed on one of his huge horns. After a while, the little gnat said loudly, "Dear bull, pardon me if I have disturbed your peaceful afternoon with the weight of my body on your horns. I offer you one thousand apologies for I never meant to inconvenience you with my presence at all . . . I wouldn't want you to think I didn't care about your solitude and comfort."

The bull replied, "Little gnat, thank you for the grandiose apology you felt such great need to share. But you think too highly of yourself. I didn't even notice you were there!"

A Big Quiet House

A Yiddish Folktale from Eastern Europe

There was once a man who wished his small, noisy house was larger and quieter. He went to the wise old woman of the town and explained his need. She said, "I can solve your problem. Just do as I say."

The man agreed.

"If you have a chicken, some sheep, a horse, and a cow," she said, "bring them into the house with you."

"That's a silly thing to do," thought the old man. But he did it anyway. Now his house was already small, and with all those animals in it, there was no room at all. He returned to the old woman and cried, "I need more room! The animals are so noisy I can't think!"

"Take all those animals out of your dwelling," she replied.

When he had put all the animals comfortably back in the barn, the man went into his house. To his amazement, it suddenly looked remarkably bigger! Without the animals inside, his house was now quiet too!

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

The Tale of Echo

A Greek Myth

Hera, the Queen of Mt. Olympus, cast a spell over her servant Echo for talking too much. As a punishment, Echo could henceforth only repeat what someone else said.

Poor Echo! She was in love with handsome Narcissus, and yearned to tell him so! One day Echo saw Narcissus admiring himself in a clear pond. Looking at his reflection, he vainly said to the face in the water, "I love you."

Echo repeated, "I love you," and meant it. But Narcissus thought it was his reflection that spoke and stood gazing at himself until he died and Hermes led him away to the Land of the Dead. Echo pined for him till she, too, faded away. All that was left of her was her voice that can still be heard in certain hollow places, senselessly repeating the words of others.

The Smuggler

A Tale from the Middle East

A clever smuggler came to the border with a donkey. The donkey's back was heavily laden with straw. The official at the border was suspicious and pulled apart the man's bundles till there was straw all around, but not a valuable thing in the straw was found. "But I'm certain you're smuggling something," the official said, as the man crossed the border.

Now each day for ten years the man came to the border with a donkey. Although the official searched and searched the straw bundles on the donkey's back, he never could find anything valuable hidden in them.

Many years later, after the official had retired, he happened to meet that same smuggler in a marketplace and said, "Please tell me, I beg you. Tell me, what were you smuggling? Tell me, if you can."

"Donkeys," said the man.

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

The Honeybee's Sting

A Tale from Ancient Greece

Zeus, the King of Mount. Olympus, was giving out gifts to beasts and birds and insects one day. To his surprise, the little honeybee came before his throne and said, "Of all the gifts you could give to me, only one will do. I'd like the power to inflict great pain whenever I choose to."

"What an awful wish!" said great Zeus, "I will grant it. I hereby give you a sharp sting. But, I'm sure you'll use this weapon carefully in times of anger and strife. You'll only get to use it once, for using it will cost you your life."

And to this day, the little honeybee dies after it stings.

The Tale of Bausis & Philemon

A Tale from Greece

Zeus, the king of Mount. Olympus, came down to visit the country folk disguised as a beggar. People turned him away until he came to the house of a poor elderly couple, Bausis and Philemon. Bausis and Philemon shared their simple meal of bread and wine with their guest. Oddly enough, the wine jug never emptied and there was more bread after each slice was cut. It was then that Bausis and Philemon realized that this was no ordinary visitor, but a god from Mount Olympus.

They bowed low and apologized for the simple food they had to offer. Zeus replied, "When you have shared your best, there is never a need to apologize."

In return for their generosity, Zeus granted them their only wish: to remain together always. and so when Bausis and Philemon died, an oak and a linden tree grew with their trunks entwined around each other, on the spot where the couple was buried.

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

Anansi Goes Fishing

A Tale from West Africa

Foolish Anansi thought he could trick a fisherman into doing his work for him. "Let's go fishing," he suggested.

"Very well," said the fisherman, who was clever and quite wise to Anansi's tricks. "I'll make the nets and you can get tired for me."

"Wait," said Anansi, "I'll make the nets and you can get tired for me!" Anansi made nets as his friend pretended to be tired. They caught four fish.

The fisherman said, "Anansi, you take these. I'll take tomorrow's catch. It might be bigger."

Greedily imagining the next day's catch, Anansi said, "No, you take these and I'll take tomorrow's fish."

But the next day, the nets were rotting away and no fish were caught. The fisherman said, "Anansi, take these rotten nets to market. You can sell them for much money."

When Anansi shouted, "Rotten nets for sale!" in the marketplace, people beat him with sticks.

"Some partner you are," Anansi said to the fisherman as he rubbed his bruises. "I took the beatings. At least you could have taken the pain."

Anansi never tried to trick the fisherman again!

The Traveler & the Nut Tree

A Tale from India

A traveler who stopped to rest under a nut tree noticed a huge pumpkin growing on a thin vine.

"How foolish are the ways of nature," the traveler muttered. "If things were as they should be, this big, strong tree would hold the large pumpkins, and the spindly vine would hold the nuts. Now if I made the world, that is how I'd have done it!"

At that moment, from high up in the tree, a small nut fell and hit him squarely on the head. Startled, he looked up into the branches and thought, "Forgive my arrogance! If it were a big pumpkin that fell out of the tree onto my head, it most certainly would have killed me!"

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

Cat Woman

A Tale from Greece

There was once a man who had a beautiful cat. She was so loving that one day he wished out loud, "Dear Cat, if you were only a woman, I'd marry you!"

Aphrodite, the goddess of love, heard his wish and changed the cat into a beautiful woman. The man and the cat woman were married and lived quite happily together until one night . . .

The beautiful woman was sitting on her bed and into the room came a mouse. She crouched on her hands and knees, pounced on the mouse, and began to eat it, much to her husband's alarm!

Aphrodite looked down from the clouds and, seeing this, turned the woman back into a cat. Aphrodite chuckled, "I can change the outer appearance of a creature, but to truly make a difference, I guess I must change its inner character first!"

The Sunflower

A Tale from Ancient Greece

Clytie was a sea nymph who wore beautiful green gowns woven of seaweed. Her long, golden hair floated about her at the bottom of the sea. One day a mermaid sang her a song about a golden light above the water. Clytie wanted to see it!

She swam to the surface and climbed onto the shore. She saw the golden light described in the song. . . It was the sun! She stood happily gazing at it all day. When she at last turned to the water, she saw her reflection. Her golden hair had become yellow petals; her green gown had become leaves. Her tiny feet had become roots. She had become a sunflower, a small image of the sun she loved.

To this day, the sunflowers turn on their stems all through the day so that they can gaze upon the sun as it travels the sky.

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

Three Fish

A Tale from India

Three fish lived in a pond. One was named Plan Ahead, another was Think Fast, and the third was named Wait and See. One day they heard a fisherman say that he was going to cast his net in their pond the next day.

Plan Ahead said, "I'm swimming down the river tonight!"

Think Fast said, "I'm sure I'll come up with a plan."

Wait and See lazily said, "I just can't think about it now!"

When the fisherman cast his nets, Plan Ahead was long gone. But Think Fast and Wait and See were caught!

Think Fast quickly rolled his belly up and pretended to be dead. "Oh, this fish is no good!" said the fisherman, and threw him safely back into the water. But, Wait and See ended up in the fish market.

That is why they say, "In times of danger, when the net is cast, plan ahead or plan to think fast!"

Why Turtles Live In Water

A Tale from West Africa

Turtles used to live on the land, they say, until the time a clever turtle was caught by some hunters. They brought him to their village and placed the turtle before the Chief, who said, "How shall we cook him?"

"You'll have to kill me first," said the turtle, "and take me out of this shell."

"We'll break your shell with sticks," they said. "That'll never work," said the turtle, "Why don't you throw me in the water and drown me?!"

"Excellent idea," said the Chief. They took the turtle to the river and threw him into the water to drown him.

They were congratulating themselves on their success in drowning the turtle, when two little green eyes poked up in the water and the laughing turtle said, "Don't get those cooking pots out too fast, foolish people! As he swam away he said, "I think I'll spend most of my time from now on, safely in the water."

It has been that way ever since!

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

One Good Meal Deserves Another

A Tale from West Africa

Anansi the Spider hated to share! When Turtle came to his house at mealtime, he said, "I can't give you food until you've washed your dusty feet!"

Turtle licked his lips when he saw the big plate of steaming food, but politely walked to the stream to wash. When he returned, the plate was empty. "Good meal," Anansi said, patting his full stomach.

"One good meal deserves another!" said Turtle. "Come to my house for dinner tomorrow." Turtle fixed a fine dinner at the bottom of the river. "Come on down and eat!" he said.

Anansi filled his jacket pockets with stones so that he would be weighted down enough to stay at the river's bottom and eat. "It's impolite to wear a jacket to dinner!" Turtle said, "Take it off!"

But when greedy Anansi took off his jacket, he floated back up to the surface of the water and hungrily watched Turtle eat his fill!

Who Is King Of the Forest?

A Tale from India

When Tiger jumped on Fox, Fox cried out, "How dare you attack the King of the Jungle!"

Tiger looked at him in amazement, "Nonsense! You are not King!"

"Certainly I am," replied Fox, "All the animals run from me in terror! If you want proof, come with me." Fox went into the forest with Tiger at his heels. When they came to a herd of deer, the deer saw Tiger behind Fox and ran in all directions.

They came to a group of monkeys. The monkeys saw Tiger behind Fox and they fled. Fox turned to Tiger and said, "Do you need more proof than that? See how the animals flee at the very sight of me?!"

"I'm surprised, but I've seen it with my own eyes. Forgive me for attacking you, Great King." Tiger bowed low and with great ceremony he let Fox go.

Stories in a Nutshell

A Collection of Concise Folktale Plots Retold by Heather Forest

© 2008 Heather Forest

ABOUT the AUTHOR

Heather Forest

For the past thirty years, Heather Forest has shared her repertoire of world tales told in an interweave of original music and the spoken and sung word with audiences of all ages in theatres, schools, literature conferences, and storytelling festivals throughout the United States and abroad. An award winning author and recording artist, she has published seven children's picture books, two folktale anthologies, eight audio recordings of storytelling and a popular educational web site Story Arts Online <http://www.storyarts.org>. Ms. Forest is a recipient of the Circle of Excellence Award presented by the National Storytelling Network, U.S.A., and is an adjunct professor of Oral Tradition at Southern Connecticut State University. She holds a masters degree in Storytelling and a Ph.D. in Leadership and Change. Her storytelling has been featured at the National Storytelling Festival, Tennessee, The Museum of Modern Art, N.Y., the Discovery Theatre at the Smithsonian Institute, Washington D.C., the Sidmouth International Folk Festival, England, Tales of Graz, Austria and at the Glistening Waters Storytelling Festival, New Zealand.