

Tortoise and Hare, Modernized

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Characters

Aesop: Old sage, senile

Tortoise: Slow and steady. But smart. (Male voice)

Hare: Speedy. Fast and witty (High pitched voice)

Scene: Empty road. Aesop, Tortoise and Hare appear at some distance and start walking toward road. Aesop is carrying a stump. T and H lag behind, engaged in vigorous discussion.

Hare:

He's going to tell the same old story.

Tortoise:

Boring. But I kinda like it.

H:

Sure you do. You always win

T:

Not always. Sometimes he goes to sleep in the middle of the story.

H:

Yeah, but then nothing happens.

T:

Not much happens when he stays awake.

H:

Let's try to make something happen.

T:

We can't do that. We're just fictional characters.

H:

So is Aesop. By now. How about the confuse-a-cat trick?

T:

He's not a cat. He's a sage.

H:

Confuse-a-sage, then.

T:
Ok, I'm game.

H:
I'm game too, but I don't want to think about that.

Aesop reaches road, places stump, sits. T and H stand in front of him, facing him.
Aesop produces tablet and starts story. Old and shaky voice.

Aesop:
A long time ago, in a land far away, there lived a hare named Speedy. And there was a tortoise named...something.

T:
Slow and Steady.

A:
Oh, yes. Slow and Steady. One day the two of them decided to have a race.

H:
Why did they want to have a race?

A:
Oh, I don't know. Why does anybody decide to have a race?

H:
How should I know? I'm just a rabbit.

T:
You are telling the story Aesop. You are supposed to know these things.

A:
Well, they wanted to have a race so that one of them could win.

H:
But did they want to have the race so that one of them could lose?

A:
No, no. Of course not. Nobody wants to lose.

H:
So only the winner wanted to have the race?

A:
Well-- Maybe so-- No! They both wanted to have the race. You can't have a race with one runner!

T:
But why would the loser want to be in the race?

A: (excited)
Stop! You are confusing me. Let's get on with the story. There was a hare named Speedy. And a tortoise named...

T:
Slow and steady.

A:
And they lined up at the starting line, ready for the race.

(A starting line appears. T & H line up on it.)

Aesop:

And now the tortoise and the hare are ready for the race.

Hare:

But we're not ready. You just showed us the starting line.

Tortoise:

You didn't show us the finish line.

A: (Confused)

Well, it looks just like the starting line.

T:

How do we tell the difference?

A:

The finish line is down the road a ways.

T:

How do we know when we get there?

A: (Irritated)

Oh, I don't know. It is just the finish line.

H:

If we don't know when we finish, we won't know when to stop.

T:

And I won't know when I've won.

H:

And Aesop has to keep on talking and talking and talking...

A:

Well, the race has to finish sometime.

T:

Not as long as you can keep talking.

H:

Or we could just take any line as the finish line.

T: (Stands on Start line)

Like this line here. It could be the finish line.

H:

And save us a lot of running.

A:

No. You can't be at the finish when you start. That would ruin the story.

T:

Make it a different story.

H:

Make it a short story.

A:

It won't work that way. You would both win.

H:

What's wrong with everybody winning?

T:

I don't mind if everybody wins. Makes a bigger celebration.

A: But then it won't have a moral. It is a fable. It has got to have a moral.

H: You mean somebody has to lose to give it a moral?

T: Can't you have a moral when people win?

A: This is a moral about winning. But you can't have winner without a loser.

H: You can't have a winner without a finish line, either.

A: There is a finish line. It's down the road.

T: Waaay down the road.

H: How far?

T: A looong way.

H: How will we know when we get there?

T: (Sadly)
We won't.

A: Yes you will. You'll hear the applause.

(Hare steps back from the starting line. Steps over it again. Applause.)

H: You mean like when we stand on the starting line.

A: Yes. Only louder.

T: Is that all we get out of it? A little applause?

A: Isn't that enough? It used to be enough.

T: That was then.

H: This is now. I'm not sure I mind being the loser if all I lose is applause.

T: And I don't care about winning if all I get is applause.

Hare steps back and forth over the starting line, to more applause.

H: All the more reason to make this the finish line

Tortoise steps across the line. More applause.

T:
I think so too.

A:
And now the tortoise and the hare are lined up at the starting line, which is definitely not the finish line.

H:
Why is it not the finish line?

A:
You can't start a race at the finish line.

T:
Works for me.

H:
And for me.

A:
But it doesn't work for the moral.

H:
You can find a different moral.

A:
Where could I find a different moral?

T:
Where did you find the first one?

A:
I don't know. I don't remember.

T:
Well, where do people usually find morals?

A:
I – I don't know.

H:
And you call yourself a sage? A sage is supposed to know things.

A:
You're confusing me again.

T:
Or maybe you were confused all along and just now noticed it.

A:
Oh I don't know. This sage business is so confusing.

H:
We'll help you. We are ready to race. Just say "GO!"

A:
I don't know. I just don't know. I'm not ready. I can't say "GO!"

T:
Can't say what?

A:
GO!

Both T and H start running back and forth over the start line.

A:

I can't say—

H and T together:

He said Go! Go! Go!

(Applause builds.)

H:

We won!

T:

We won!

A:

But you didn't win anything.

H:

We won the applause.

T:

You said we would get applause at the finish line.

A:

But there isn't any moral. You can have a fable without a moral.

H:

Sure there's a moral.

T and H start back in the direction they came from. A. remains seated.

T:

The race is not to the swiftest.

H:

The race is not to the steadiest.

T:

The race is to the ones who know where they are going.

H:

C'mon, Aesop. Time to get back.

A:

I am confused. Where are we going?

T:

Don't worry. We'll show you. We know where we're going.

H:

Of course, it helps to have an in with the sound effects man.

Loud applause.