Ririro

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Why the elephant has small eyes

Ririro, Unknown writer

When Ambo was King of Calabar, the Elephant was not only a very big animal, but he had eyes in proportion to his bulk. In those days men and animals were friends, and all mixed together freely. King Ambo used to hold big parties every now and then, and the Elephant always ate more than any one else, though the Hippo did his best too. And although he was very fat, he was not as big as the Elephant and couldn't compete.

As the Elephant ate so much at these feasts, the Tortoise, who was small and very cunning, made up his mind to put a stop to the Elephant eating more than a fair share of the food provided. He, therefore, placed some dry kernels and shrimps, of which the Elephant was very fond, in his bag, and went to the Elephant’s house in the afternoon.

When the Tortoise arrived the Elephant told him to sit down, so he made himself comfortable, closed one eye and took one palm kernel and a shrimp out of his bag and started to eat. When the Elephant saw the Tortoise eating, he felt hungry too and he said: “You seem to have some good food there; what are you eating?”

The Tortoise replied that the food was sweet but was rather painful, as he was eating one of his eyes! And he lifted up his head, showing one eye closed. The Elephant said, “If the food is so good, take out one of my eyes and give me the same food.”

The Tortoise, who was waiting for this, knowing how greedy the Elephant was, said, “I cannot reach your eye, you are so big.” So the Elephant took the Tortoise in his trunk and lifted him up, and with one quick scoop he had the Elephant’s eye out. The Elephant trumpeted with pain, but the Tortoise gave him some of the dried kernels and shrimps, and they so pleased the Elephant that he soon forgot the pain.

Soon the Elephant said, “That food is so sweet I must have some more;” but the Tortoise told him that before he could have any the other eye must come out. To this the Elephant agreed, and soon the Elephant was blind. The Elephant then began to make a great noise, and started pulling trees down and doing much damage, calling out for the Tortoise. The Tortoise had slid down the Elephant’s trunk to the ground, and hid himself.



The next morning when the Elephant heard the people passing, he asked them what the time was, and the Bush Buck, who was nearest, shouted out, “The sun is now up, and I am going to market to get some yams and fresh leaves for my food.”

Then the Elephant realized that the Tortoise had deceived him, and began to ask all the passers-by to lend him a pair of eyes, as he could not see, but every one refused, as they wanted their eyes themselves. At last the Worm grovelled past, and seeing the big Elephant, greeted him in his humble way. He was much surprised when the King of the Forest returned his salutation, and very much flattered also.

The Elephant said, “Look here, Worm, I have lost my eyes. Will you lend me yours for a few days? I will return them next market-day.”

The Worm was so flattered at being noticed by the Elephant that he gladly consented, and took his eyes out—which, as every one knows, were very small—and gave them to the Elephant. When the Elephant had put the Worm’s eyes into his own large eye-sockets, the flesh immediately closed round them so tightly that when the market-day arrived it was impossible for the Elephant to get them out again to return to the Worm; and although the Worm repeatedly asked the Elephant to return his eyes, the Elephant always pretended not to hear, and sometimes used to say in a very loud voice, “If there are any Worms about, they had better get out of my way, as they are so small I cannot see them, and if I tread on them they will be squashed.”

Ever since then the Worms have been blind, and for the same reason Elephants have such small eyes, quite out of proportion to the size of their huge bodies!

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