



The King With Donkey`s Ears

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The King With Donkey's Ears

English Adaptation by Chông Chong-hwa

Long ago there was a king in the country of Silla named Kyôngmun. He was a very gentle-hearted person, and he was also very clever in his management of state affairs. But there was one thing which was very odd about him; he always wore a turban. He wore it not only on public occasions but also at meals and in bed. Everybody wondered about it but nobody knew the reason, and so they just said:

"It's very unusual that the King always wears a turban, even to bed. I wonder why?"

However, there were two people who knew the reason why the King wore a turban all the time; they were the King himself and a turban maker who was assigned to the job of repairing the king's turban.

One day this turban maker was called before the King and he was asked to unravel the turban. But before he was commissioned he was forced to make a vow. The King said:

"You must never tell others what you see. To speak will endanger your precious life. Is that clear?"

When he was told this, the turban maker wondered:

"What is this secret the King has?"

The turban maker, however, started to unravel the King's turban very carefully. Soon he had to fight to suppress an almost uncontrollable urge to burst into laughter. He saw the King's ears hidden under the turban. The ears were very long and pointed, exactly like those of a donkey's.

The turban maker finished his job, trying to hold back his desire to laugh. He said to himself:

"That was it. That was it. Now I've got it! Now I've got the reason why the king always wears a turban. So that is why the king forced me to take a vow of silence. He is ashamed. He is ashamed of his ears. That's why he

always wears a turban."

The turban maker found it very difficult to suppress the urge to laugh. The harder he tried the harder it became. It would never do to laugh in the king's face.

When he returned home he was very much excited about the secret he had learned. He had the great temptation to shout at everybody, 'The king has donkey's ears.' Yet he thought of the vow he had taken and of his precious life, which restrained him. He had to keep the secret. He could tell never a soul, not even his close friends—not even his family.

Days and months passed, and the secret was still confined within the turban maker's mind. He had to struggle to keep it. The harder he tried the fiercer the struggle became. When he was drunk he found himself, in spite of himself, speaking to his company,

"You see, I've got a terrible and shocking secret."

This remark of course made people very curious.

"What is it? Please tell us what it is."

"You see, our king has ears which..."

The turban maker suddenly remembered the King's order and he had to hold his tongue. He could speak no further. He knew very well that his life was more precious and valuable than telling the secret.

As time passed the turban maker became very restless with his inner struggle to keep the secret. He lost his appetite. The color disappeared from his youthful cheeks and he fell very ill. Then his illness became grave, but nobody knew why. Good care and good medicine no longer did him any good. Doctors saw no hope. And everybody helplessly waited for his death. The turban maker himself had to admit that he was going to die.

"I must die with this secret. I must not let

it go. I made a vow. If I break the promise I have to offer my precious life."

Then suddenly an idea came to him:

"If I am going to die when only I know this secret, and if I die when others know about it, then there is no difference in what way I die. If I am doomed to die why I should not let this terrible, secret out."

As he came to this conclusion he called his wife and children and asked them to take him to the bamboo grove at the back of Dorim Temple, a place far off from the village where the dying man lived.

"Why go to the bamboo grove at Dorim Temple? It is so far away! You are very ill and you must stay in bed."

The dying man insisted:

"Please take me there. This is my last request. I want to go there before I die."

Finally the members of his family acquiesced. After they took him to the bamboo grove they were asked to retreat far from the place.

"Please go far away from this spot. I have something very important to do here."

As soon as they left the grove became very quiet. There only the rustle of the bamboo leaves and the chirping of sparrows. The turban maker looked all around to make sure not a soul was near. Then he shouted with all his might:

"The king has donkey's ears. The king has donkey's ears."

The picture of the king's pointed and long ears loomed up before his mind's eye, and he laughed heartily. He shouted and he laughed:

"The king has donkey's ears. The king has donkey's ears."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha..."

The man felt his heavy heart lighten. His mind became easy. He felt exulted. He shouted and shouted, and he laughed and laughed. His unceasing shouting and laughter exhausted him and he fell to the ground, exhilarated.

When his family returned they found him dead with a happy smile on his face.

After the turban maker died, a rumor spread in the capital city of Silla. People met and whispered to one another:

"Have you been to the bamboo grove at Dorim Temple?"

"No, I have never been there."

"Then you must go there."

"Why?"

"When you get there you will see. Whenever the breeze stirs in the grove you can hear a very strange voice."

"What voice?"

"A very naughty voice."

"Come on, tell me what it is."

"The voice says the king has donkey's ears!"

The Woodcutter and the Fairy

Deep in the mountains there lived a woodcutter and his aged mother. They lived very happily. The woodcutter cultivated a small plot of cleared land for their food needs but devoted most of his time to cutting wood. In summer when it was very hot he enjoyed swimming in the beautiful lake not far from his house. The lake was not very big, but it was very picturesque and its water was crystal clear.

One summer day he was gathering firewood as usual. Suddenly he saw a frightened deer dashing toward him. The deer stopped before him and asked to be hidden somewhere because a hunter was chasing it down. The woodcutter was a very kind person, and so he hid the animal under the heap of firewood he had gathered. A few minutes later a hunter appeared carrying a gun and he asked the woodcutter if

he had seen a deer run by. The woodcutter said he had seen one, and he pointed with his finger to a far-off valley. He said:

"I saw the animal running in that direction. You better hurry if you want to catch sight of it again."

The hunter believed him and thanked him. He soon disappeared up the valley. As soon as the man was gone the deer came out from under the heap of firewood, and said:

"Thank you so much, sir. You saved my life. I was almost killed. I am more than grateful to you. I would like to do something for you."

"What can you do for me?" queried the woodcutter.

"I know you are not married. You need a wife. I'll have you meet a beautiful woman."