

## The Trapped Gazelle

Once upon a time, there was a young, very beautiful gazelle living in a forest. She had large shining eyes and a soft, attractive skin. One day, as she was walking, she was caught in a trap which had been put on her way by a hunter. She tried hard to escape, but the ropes were hard and it seemed impossible for her to be able to get rid of that trap on her own. She decided to ask for help, but no other animal was around. She thought that if the hunter came, it would be the end of her life and so she prayed to God for some help from somewhere. Suddenly she caught sight of a fat mouse which was passing there. She became hopeful and called out, asking the mouse for help. The unkind mouse first pretended that she was not hearing the cries of the trapped gazelle, but eventually had to stop and listen to the gazelle who said to her: “We do not know each other and have not been friends before. I knew that I cannot ask you for a favour as a friend. But I hope you will be kind to me and try to tear open these robes from around me before the hunter arrives.”

But the mouse did nothing. The gazelle continued: “If you help me get rid of this trap, I will be at your service as long as I am living. Please hurry up and save me before the hunter comes and takes my life. You do not want me to die, do you?”

This time, too, the mouse did nothing. And the gazelle said to her: “I have been trapped while I have done nothing wrong. How can you let a helpless creature like me get killed for no sin?”

The gazelle continued to ask the mouse for help and even cried, hoping to make the mouse pity her, and even swore that if the mouse helped her be saved, she would do anything for her as long as she was alive.”

This time the mouse said: “I want to help you, but I cannot.”

And started walking away. The gazelle shouted after her: “Wait a minute! At least tell me why you cannot help the one who is caught in a trap for no sin?”

The mouse answered, “I am a small animal, while the hunter is strong and merciless. If he comes and sees that the trap he had laid has been torn open, he will know that I have done that and so he will ruin my house.”

The gazelle answered: “How will he know that you have done that? He may think that a rabbit or some other animal has done that.”

But the mouse hurried away, saying: “My father always advised me to just take care of myself.”

But just when the mouse finished her words, an eagle from above rushed down to her and quickly took the mouse in his claws and flew

away. The gazelle was watching this scene with fear and just then the hunter arrived. The gazelle thought that she could no longer find any help and so would soon be killed. But the hunter said to himself, "What a beautiful gazelle God has created! I could sell it for a good price!" So the hunter untied the ropes and put the lovely gazelle on his shoulders and walked to a market-place to sell her. There a kind man saw the gazelle on the hunter's shoulders and said to himself, "It is not fair that such a fine animal should get killed, especially since gazelles harm nobody."

So, he bought the gazelle from the hunter and immediately let it go, free to somewhere she liked and said to her: "You are free, go where you come from." And the gazelle happily ran into the forest. The hunter was surprised and asked the man why he had freed the gazelle. In reply the man said; "God is Merciful and wants us to be merciful too. He will reward mercy with His Mercy."

And needless to say, the eagle ate the mouse promptly and then took his afternoon rest."

A story from Marzban-nameh (a collection of fables in Persian literature) by Sa'ad ad-Din Varavini