

Translated by J. K. Mabin

Romeo and Julie

An extraordinary friendship will prove that true love can overcome all obstacles, and even its own demise.

Tortoises and hares are totally different, and they have always antagonized one another. Their mutual dislike and hostility has been well documented since ancient times in the fables of the great storyteller Aesop.

Julie Tortoise met Romeo Hare one morning while he was skipping and hopping near the ruins of a monastery where she lived with her Granny and other tortoises. She was taking her morning shower under the waterfall when he appeared right in front of her. He had blue ears and a backpack and he was playing the harmonica. Julie meant to be hospitable and invited him to share her breakfast of fresh clover. But soon their differences became apparent. Julie was too slow and Romeo too fast. He began to move around the stones in her path because he wanted to make it easier for her to walk faster, but she tried to stop him: "Don't!" she cried, "the stones don't like to be disturbed like that; it makes them scared and confused!"

"Tortoises are weird and live in a dream world," Romeo Hare thought.

"Hares are chaotic and noisy," Julie Tortoise thought.

Julie and Romeo were different in everything. But soon they became inseparable and tried to smooth out their differences. Julie tried to perform small jumps and Romeo tried to crawl slowly on the ground so he could be side by side with his Little Julie, as he affectionately called her. Together they gazed at the sun setting over the sea and had endless discussions trying to decide whether the moon set behind or inside the ocean.

They loved each other more every day, and they taught each other many things. Julie learned to play music with a single blade of grass. Romeo learned all about miraculous herbs, especially about one that could make him so small he could slip inside Julie's shell and they would sleep holding each other. Their friendship was wonderful and seemed destined to last forever.

Unfortunately it all came to an end on the day of the helicopter.

The helicopter was red and hovered above their heads noisily as it scattered brochures advertising dream journeys to Peru.

Romeo Hare remembered he had always nursed a secret passion for faraway journeys; he was certain that he was meant to see the world.

So the very next morning he bade Julie farewell, and with two or three long leaps, he vanished.

Julie was very sad. She withdrew in her shell and stayed inside for a few days; she did not move and did not speak to anybody. But as the days went by, she began to remember everything Romeo had taught her. So one evening after sunset she came out again and began to play music, just like Romeo had shown her. The other tortoises joined in. Slowly, one of the orange squares onto her shell turned blue! Romeo had left his indelible mark on her.

When Mitsos the Hedgehog saw that, he did not hesitate at all. He went straight to her and told her: "I'd like to play with you. I'd like us to listen to the music of the moon together." He tried to show Julie and her Granny how to play on the seesaw and taught them many other games besides.

Julie's great friendship with the hare had prepared the little tortoise - and her old Granny as well - to meet new people, make new friends and learn all sorts of wonderful new games and dances.