



## It is Not Our Problem

*Myanmar, Thailand, Iran, Armenia*

The king and his prime minister were looking at the city from a palace window. It was the beginning of summer and the prosperous city, envy of the neighbouring kingdoms, looked majestic from the height of the palace. Both leaders observed the life in the street while they delighted their palates with a platter of puffed rice and honey.

While following the passage of a girl down the street, the king leaned over the windowsill and dropped a bead of honey. The prime minister was about to call the servants to come and clean the sill, when the king stopped him with a gesture.

‘Do not worry. It’s just a drop of honey. It is not our problem. The servants will clean it later.’

The prime minister was intrigued by that drop of honey, and watched it slide little by little down the windowsill until it fell into the street.

As soon as the drop of honey fell on the sidewalk, a fly hurried to settle on it to feast, without noticing the presence of a gecko, which had been watching it for a few minutes and now had the occasion to pounce on it at last.

The quick movement of the gecko caught the attention of a cat, who jumped down on the gecko and caught it between his claws. But the jump of the cat did not go unnoticed by a dog, who accompanied his owner in her evening shopping in the market. Suddenly, a hubbub of barking and meowing broke the peace of the summer evening.

Seeing the uproar in the street, the prime minister raised his hand to fetch the assistant to send someone to stop the fight. but the hand of the king lowered his arm.

‘Relax,’ the king said in an affable tone. ‘Do not meddle in the affairs of the market. We must not interfere. It is not our problem.’

The owner of the cat appeared and kicked the dog, trying to get him away from the cat. Seeing this, the owner of the dog, started kicking the owner of the cat. The commotion of animal and human voices caught the attention of all the neighbours and passers-by, who gathered around to see what was happening. There were those who sided with the owner of the cat and there were those who agreed with the owner of the dog, and the disputes between spectators heated up to the point of some coming to blows. Until eventually, more than a hundred people were beating each other in the street.

The king, anticipating the worry of the prime minister, said:

‘Forget it. It is not our problem. Look, here we have more rice with honey. Eat and enjoy the view of the city at sunset.’

The police arrived to try to stop the huge quarrel but, the rioters turned against them. More policemen came and the friends of the rioters also joined the fight. When twilight descended, the tumult had become a chain of street riots that spread throughout the city.

‘I know what you’re thinking,’ the king said to the prime minister, who had a livid face. ‘But do not worry. It is not our problem. The army will take care of everything.’

However, the arrival of the soldiers only turned the street riots into a civil war. During the early hours of the morning, the king and the prime minister watched in horror from the window as the city burned.

When dawn arrived, an angry mob set fire to the royal palace and the king and the prime minister had to flee the city.

As they made their way out of the city in a carriage, escorted by the guard of the monarch, the king whispered to his prime minister, his eyes clouded with tears:

‘Maybe I was wrong ... Maybe the drop of honey was a problem for us after all.’ □

Adapted by Grian A. Cutanda (2018).

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## Comments

This adaptation is based on the versions by Htin Aung and Trager (1968), Pearman (1998) and Margaret MacDonald (2005). However, there are two other similar adaptations of Farsi (Persian) (Heathfield, 2013) and Armenian origin. These two versions are very similar to each other, although the Armenian one is better known through the poem by Hovhannes Tumanyan (1869-1923), also entitled ‘A drop of honey’ (1909). It is said that the poem is based on a medieval Armenian fable, and has become so popular in the country that it has ended up becoming a proverb: ‘You are making a drop of honey out of it.’ There are also two films based on this same story, one Armenian, 12 minutes (1968) and another Russian, 72 minutes (1982).

## Sources

Heathfield, D. (2013). The drop of honey. Retrieved from <http://worldstories.org.uk/stories/the-drop-of-honey/english/>.

Htin Aung, M. & Trager, H. G. (1968). A kingdom lost for a drop of honey. In *A Kingdom Lost for a Drop of Honey*, pp. 28-30. New York: Parent's Magazine Press.

MacDonald, M. R. (2005). Not our problem. In *Peace Tales: World Folktales to Talk About*, pp. 18-20. Little Rock: August House.

Pearmain, E. (ed.) (1998). The drop of honey. In *Doorways to the Soul*. New York: Pilgrim Press.

*Associated text of the Earth Charter*

Preamble: The Challenges Ahead.- Our environmental, economic, political, social, and spiritual challenges are interconnected, and together we can forge inclusive solutions.

