



## THE MAGIC SANDALS

Long ago, there was a prosperous nation called the Incas. Their dwellings, built with care and precision, have lasted to this day, withstanding every war and natural disaster this world had to endure.

The Incas were very educated people who spent most of their time coming up with various peculiar games. They lived high up in the mountains, in places inaccessible to others, and their houses were scattered across a very broad area. Because mail didn't exist back then, special messengers had to maintain the connection between settlements, delivering messages from one town to another. These messengers were well-respected in their community because they were fast and reliable. Once they received a message, they ran to pass the scroll to the nearest messenger. They exchanged messages at agreed locations and this way they were able to deliver them in a remarkably short time even across a very long distance.

One of these messengers was called Hualachi. He was known for his bravery and wisdom and for his loyalty to his master. Hualachi couldn't stand to see someone suffer. Sometimes he failed to deliver his messages because whenever he saw someone who needed help, he forgot all about his duties and stopped to help. The other messengers were thus forced to waste their time waiting for

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him. This was Hualachi's weakness, but the king liked him nonetheless, for once the good messenger had helped him as well.

One day, the king called for Hualachi to entrust him with an especially important message for his general who was away fighting enemies at the border. It contained the latest orders for his soldiers. The king insisted that Hualachi mustn't stop under any circumstances until the message was promptly delivered.

Hualachi promised, but as he was running, he heard a desperate cry coming from a ravine by the path. He looked down and saw an old woman who must have tripped over the edge. He abandoned his mission and climbed down to help her.

He tied together two thick branches and filled the space between them with vines and palm leaves. Then he laid the injured lady on his improvised stretcher and dragged her all the way up to the forest path. Once there, he lifted her up and carried her on his back to her nearby house. He tended to her injuries, determined to take care of her until she was able to stand on her own feet. He forgot all about the message he was supposed to deliver to the general.

Many days passed before he finally found the letter folded up in his pocket. His heart stopped when he remembered how important it was. He sprang to his feet and ran to the border as fast as his legs would carry him. As he was running, he met another messenger walking in the opposite direction.

"You can stop running, the war is over. Here's the message I'm carrying to the king," said the other messenger.

"Have we lost?" asked Hualachi in terror, afraid that his negligence had caused a great disaster.

"No. We've won. When you went astray to help the old woman, someone saw you and reported you to the king, who sent another messenger instead."

Hearing the news, Hualachi returned to the city. He was ashamed and remorseful. He went to the king, told him what had happened and asked him for forgiveness, but the king was furious and released Hualachi from his service. Hualachi packed his things and set out to travel the land. He roamed the world, until one day he found an old temple. He got down on his knees and cried for forgiveness.

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A powerful voice from the sky suddenly spoke to him: “Your king misses you too. Return to the city and ask him to take you back. He will gladly accept. You made a mistake as a messenger, but only because you wanted to help someone. That’s why you have long been forgiven.”

“And what if I fail him again?” asked Hualachi.

“Look down on the ground,” roared the powerful voice.

Hualachi looked down and saw a pair of sandals next to his feet.

“Put these sandals on and think of a place where you want to be. You shall find yourself standing there in a heartbeat,” boomed the voice again. “With these, nothing you come across can keep you from your duties.”

Hualachi put on the sandals, wishing to be back in the city. In that very moment, he appeared exactly where he wanted and hurried to the king. The king was happy to see him asking for his old job. Hualachi promised he would never again fail to deliver a message and that he would be the king’s fastest messenger. The king had mercy on him, and the very next day, to put Hualachi’s words to test, he organised a race of the fastest messengers in the entire country.

In the morning, the race commenced with a bang. Everyone rushed to the other side of the empire, striving to be the first to deliver the message. When the competitors scattered across the nearby forest, Hualachi secretly put on his magic sandals, making a wish to be at the place of delivery.

Next thing he knew, he was standing on the other side of the realm. He was the first to deliver his message and on his way home, he met many surprised messengers who still hadn’t reached their destination. Hualachi, who returned to the king long before everyone else, was named the chief of all messengers. No messenger had ever been as fast as Hualachi, not before him nor after. He delivered his messages incredibly fast and thus had a lot of free time left, spending it helping all the suffering people and animals he met along the road.