Name: _____ Date: _____

Arion and the Dolphin

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 1168 words

Long ago in Greece there lived a famous singer named Arion, who played the lyre better than any musician in the world. He lived in the city of Corinth, in the palace of its king, whose name was Periander. The king never grew tired of listening to him. Arion composed marvelous songs and taught them to whole choirs of singers, and the people of Corinth declared that nobody had ever heard music quite like his.

One spring Arion decided that he would like to see more of the world. He sailed across the sea to the faraway lands of Italy and Sicily, where he played his lyre and sang in the market squares of the towns. Everywhere he went, crowds gathered to listen. They paid him with coins and rings and golden cups, and after a time Arion had collected a great deal of treasure. At last he grew homesick for Corinth and for his friend the king.

Arion walked down to the harbor at the town of Taras to look for a ship. He did not have to think long about which one to choose. Of all the sailors in the world, he trusted the men of Corinth best, because Corinth was his own home. He hired a Corinthian ship with a Corinthian crew. He carried his lyre, his gleaming singing robe and his heavy bag of gold on board, and he watched the harbor shrink behind them as the ship sailed out onto the open sea.

For several days the voyage went smoothly. The sails were full and the waves were gentle. But the sailors had noticed Arion's heavy bag, and they began to whisper together at the back of the ship. Every time he passed, they glanced at it hungrily. Then one evening Arion overheard a few of their words, and he realized, with a cold feeling in his stomach, that the crew he had trusted so much was planning to take his gold.

Arion went straight to the sailors and spoke to them politely. "Take my gold," he said. "Take every coin of it, if you will only let me sail home safely." But the sailors shook their heads. They were afraid that Arion would tell the king what they had done. "You cannot stay on this ship," they told him sternly. "If you want to leave it, you must jump into the sea, and you must do it now."

Arion looked at the deep gray water, and then he looked at the sailors, who were not going to change their minds. He thought hard for a moment, and then he had an idea. "Very well," he said calmly. "But I am a singer, and a singer should not leave a stage without a song. Let me put on my robe and stand on the deck and sing once more. When the song is over, I will jump."

The sailors looked at one another in delight. They had never expected such a chance. "The finest singer in the whole world," they whispered, "is going to sing for us on our own ship!" They were so pleased that they hurried away from the back of the ship and settled themselves

in the middle of the deck. Arion put on his splendid robe, picked up his lyre and stood at the stern with the wind in his hair. Then he began to sing.

He sang a clear, ringing song, and it rose above the creaking of the ropes and the slap of the waves. The sailors sat as still as stones. Even the steersman forgot to look at the sea. When the last note faded over the water, Arion did not wait for anyone to speak. He stepped up to the side of the ship and leaped into the waves, just as he was, in his glittering robe, with his lyre held tightly in his arms.

The sailors laughed, and the ship sailed on toward Corinth. They felt sure that they would never see the singer again. But something was waiting for Arion under the waves. As he sank, a dolphin swam up beneath him. Dolphins are quick and strong, and this one slid under Arion and lifted him until his head was out of the water. Arion held on tightly to its back. "Thank you, my friend," he gasped. "I did not expect help from you."

The dolphin swam and swam. It carried Arion over the waves, past island after island, with his robe floating out behind him like a bright flag. The Greeks who told this story said that the dolphin must have heard the music from below the water, and perhaps that is true. At last the dolphin reached the land of Greece, at a place called Cape Tainaron, and it set Arion gently down on the shore before it swam away.

Arion was cold and tired, but he was alive, and he still had his lyre. He wrung out his robe, put it back on, and set out on foot for Corinth. When he reached the city, he walked straight up to the palace and told King Periander everything. He told him about the gold, the greedy sailors, the last song and the dolphin that had carried him safely out of the sea.

King Periander listened with astonishment. It was a hard story to believe. A man carried home on a dolphin's back! "Stay here in the palace," the king said kindly. "Do not go out where anyone can see you, and I will find out the truth." So Arion waited in a quiet room, and the king sent word to the harbor to watch for the ship that was coming from Taras.

Before long the ship sailed in. The king sent for the sailors and asked them, as if he were only curious, whether they had any news of Arion. "Oh yes, Your Majesty," they answered. "We left him in Italy. He was doing very well in the town of Taras, and the crowds were cheering him." The sailors smiled at one another, for they believed no one in the world could prove them wrong.

Then the door of the hall swung open, and in walked Arion. He was wearing the very robe he had worn on the ship, and he had his lyre in his hands. The sailors stared at him. Their mouths opened and shut again, but not a single word came out. The singer they had left in the sea was standing in front of them, alive and well, and they could not think of anything to say.

The people of Corinth never forgot it. They said it was one of the greatest wonders of the age. At Cape Tainaron the Greeks set up a small bronze statue of a man riding on a dolphin, so

that everyone who passed would remember Arion. And that, the Greeks said, is how a singer's last song brought a dolphin to him, and how the sea carried him safely home again.

Questions

1. Why did Arion hire a ship from Corinth?

A. It was the cheapest ship in the harbor
B. He trusted the men of Corinth most
C. The king had told him to

2. What did Arion ask the sailors to let him do before he jumped?

A. Sing one last song
B. Say goodbye to the king
C. Count his gold

3. What carried Arion safely to shore?

A. A fishing boat
B. A dolphin
C. A big wave

4. The king asked the sailors about Arion. Why did he ask?

A. He wanted to see whether they would tell the truth
B. He wanted to hire them
C. He had forgotten Arion's name

5. Arion's treasure is in a bag on the ship. What is treasure?

A. A kind of old song
B. Gold and other valuable things
C. The back of a ship

Words to know

lyre: small harp
voyage: sea trip
stern: back of ship
treasure: gold and jewels
harbor: ship port

Answer key: Arion and the Dolphin

1. B. He trusted the men of Corinth most
2. A. Sing one last song
3. B. A dolphin
4. A. He wanted to see whether they would tell the truth
5. B. Gold and other valuable things