Name: _____ Date: _____

Arion's Last Song

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 720 words

Corinth was a rich city in Greece. Its king, Periander, loved music. His favorite musician was a man named Arion, who sang to the lyre. When Arion performed, the whole palace fell silent. People said that no voice had ever been so sweet.

Arion grew curious about faraway places. He boarded a boat and sailed to Italy and then to Sicily. In the towns there, he sang for all who would listen. Crowds pressed close. They rewarded him with coins, rings and golden cups. In time, he owned more treasure than he could easily carry.

Then homesickness caught him. He longed for the king's palace and for the streets of Corinth. At the port of Taras, he looked for a ship to take him back. He chose a crew from Corinth. Men from his own city, he thought, must be honest. So he stepped aboard with his lyre, his glittering robe and a bag heavy with gold.

The first days at sea were calm and pleasant. Soon, though, Arion noticed that the sailors kept staring at his bag. They muttered together near the stern and stopped talking whenever he came close. At last, one night, he heard enough. They meant to have his gold for themselves.

He faced them boldly. "Keep the gold," he said. "Every piece of it is yours, if you let me reach home." The sailors would not agree. They feared that he would tell the king. "You must go over the side into the sea," they ordered. "Do it today."

Arion studied the gray water, and then the stubborn faces around him. An idea came to him. "I am a singer," he said, "and a singer likes to end with music. Allow me to dress in my robe and sing a final song. When the last note is finished, I will go into the sea."

The sailors were delighted. The most famous singer in the world would sing for them, on their own deck! They gathered near the mast and sat down, grinning at each other. Arion put on his robe, which glittered in the light. He picked up his lyre. Then he walked to the stern.

His voice rang over the water, strong and clear. Nobody on the ship moved. Even the steersman let go of his thoughts about the weather. When the last note ended, Arion climbed up onto the rail. He dived into the sea, holding his lyre to his chest.

Behind him, the sailors chuckled and turned the ship toward home. They were certain the singer was gone. But a dolphin had heard the music. It rose from the deep and slid beneath Arion. It lifted him until he could breathe. He clung to its back, amazed, and the two began to travel.

Across the open water they went, past one island after another. The dolphin was as fast as an arrow. Arion's robe streamed behind him. The Greeks who told this tale thought the music had reached the creature below. At Cape Tainaron, on the Greek coast, the dolphin set him on the sand.

Cold and tired, Arion wrung out his robe. He tucked his lyre under his arm and walked all the way to Corinth. He went straight to Periander's palace. He told the king the whole story, from the greedy crew to the dolphin. The king frowned, for it sounded like a dream.

"Stay out of sight," Periander said, "and I shall learn the truth." He put Arion in a quiet room. Then he sent messengers to watch the harbor. Before long, the ship from Taras came into port. The king called the sailors to the palace. He asked politely if they had news of the famous singer.

"He was in Italy when we left," said the sailors. "The people there adored him." They exchanged pleased looks. Nobody, they thought, would ever know better. At that moment the doors opened. Arion strode in wearing his robe, carrying his lyre. The sailors turned pale, and not one of them could speak.

In Corinth, the story was told again and again. The Greeks said that a little statue of a rider on a dolphin, made of bronze, stood at Cape Tainaron. Travelers could see it there. It reminded them that a last song once brought a helper out of the sea.

Questions

1. Why did Arion choose a ship from Corinth?

A. It was the cheapest
B. He thought men from his own city were honest
C. The king ordered it

2. What did the sailors want?

A. Arion's lyre
B. Arion's robe
C. Arion's gold

3. What did Arion do when the song was over?

A. He hid below deck
B. He sang again
C. He dived into the sea

4. Why did the king ask the sailors about Arion before they saw him?

A. He had forgotten who Arion was
B. He wanted to hear whether they would tell the truth
C. He wanted to hire them

5. The crowds rewarded Arion with coins. What does rewarded mean?

A. Paid him
B. Chased him
C. Taught him

Words to know

lyre: small harp
treasure: gold and jewels
steersman: ship's driver
rewarded: paid
stubborn: not giving in

Answer key: Arion's Last Song

1. B. He thought men from his own city were honest
2. C. Arion's gold
3. C. He dived into the sea
4. B. He wanted to hear whether they would tell the truth
5. A. Paid him