Name: _____ Date: _____

The Christmas Cuckoo

Reading level 7 (3rd grade) · 392 words

Two brothers lived at the edge of a moor. Their names were Scrub and Spare. They mended shoes together.

They owned one hut and one little work bench. They shared everything inside it. They never once quarrelled.

One winter a new cobbler opened a shop nearby. His shop had two bright windows. Nobody came to the brothers.

That season turned wet and bitterly cold. The barley failed in the field. The cabbages failed as well.

By Christmas only one barley loaf was left. They had no firewood at all. The little hut was freezing.

Behind the hut lay an old tree root. It was nearly as hard as stone. "Let us burn it," said Spare.

They dragged it inside and rolled it onto the hearth. The fire slowly took hold. The hut grew warm at last.

Then a small voice called out of the root. "Cuckoo, cuckoo!" A large bird flew out of a hole.

"I slept inside that root all summer," said the cuckoo. "Your fire woke me. May I stay until spring?"

Spare gave the bird bread and water. He made it a warm hollow in the thatch. It stayed the whole winter.

When spring arrived, the cuckoo said goodbye. "I travel very far," it said. "Ask for a gift and I will bring it."

"Two trees grow at the world's end," said the cuckoo. "The first has leaves of beaten gold."

"The other one is green. People call it the merry tree. A single leaf gives a cheerful heart."

Scrub remembered the bitter winter. "Bring me a gold leaf," he said. Spare asked for a green one instead.

Every first of April the cuckoo returned. It carried one gold leaf and one green leaf. It took a slice of bread.

Scrub sold his golden leaves one by one. He bought a shop and a cottage. He married a girl called Fairfeather.

Spare remained in the old hut with his cabbages. But people came and sat beside his door. He was cheerful company.

Year after year the gold was spent. Scrub owned more things than before. He was not one bit happier.

One April he walked back across the moor. "Cuckoo," he said, "bring me a green leaf this time."

Now the bird brings three green leaves every spring. The brothers mend shoes together again. Roses grow over the hut.

Questions

1. Why did the brothers burn the old tree root?

A. It was in the way
B. They had no other wood
C. The cuckoo asked them to

2. What woke the cuckoo?

A. Their fire
B. The snow
C. A song

3. What did Spare ask the cuckoo to bring?

A. Gold
B. Bread
C. A green leaf

4. What does "merry" mean in this story?

A. Rich
B. Happy and bright
C. Very old

5. What does the story teach?

A. A cheerful heart is worth more than gold
B. Gold is the thing to ask for
C. Never share your food

Words to know

moor: open wild land
cobbler: shoe mender
thatch: straw roof
merry: happy and bright

Answer key: The Christmas Cuckoo

1. B. They had no other wood
2. A. Their fire
3. C. A green leaf
4. B. Happy and bright
5. A. A cheerful heart is worth more than gold