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The Rabbit Under the Sea

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 1039 words

There was great trouble in the kingdom under the waves. Every creature with fins and a tail was worried, because the king of the fishes had a terrible pain in his mouth. He had been swimming near his palace one morning when he spotted something dangling in the water that looked delicious. He gulped it down, and then he discovered that it was a fishhook. The line snapped when he jerked away, but the hook stayed fast in his throat, and now he had a fever.

The wisest creatures in the ocean were called to the palace, from the gudgeon and the crab to the biggest whale. They bent their heads together and wagged their fins and argued all day long. The most learned of them all was the turtle, who was known as Doctor Turtle. He felt the king's pulse and peered down his throat, and then he announced his decision. "Nothing but a poultice made of a rabbit's eyes will loosen that hook," he said solemnly.

"But where shall we find a rabbit?" asked the other doctors. "Rabbits live on land." The turtle said that he would fetch one himself. Rabbits could not swim, he explained, so the rabbit would have to be invited, and that meant a clever invitation. Off he crawled to the seashore, and soon he was puffing up the beach toward the hills. There, at the edge of the forest, a rabbit was out for a morning stroll, with his long ears swaying in the breeze.

The turtle climbed a long way up the slope, panting and wiping the sand from his claws. "Good morning, Brother Rabbit," he said politely. "It is a hot day." The rabbit returned the greeting and began to boast about his homeland. "Do you not think Korea is the finest country in the world?" he said. "Look at the mountains, and the rivers, and the forests, and the flowers!" The turtle let him talk for a while, but he was thinking about the poor king.

"They are very beautiful," said the turtle at last, "but they are nothing next to the world under the sea. There are mountains and valleys down there, with trees of silver and gold and gardens of flowers in every color you can imagine. There is music and dancing and every kind of delicious food." The rabbit pricked up his ears. He had never heard of such things. "Our king has sent me to invite you as a guest," the turtle went on. "Hop on my back and I will carry you."

The rabbit hopped on without a moment's thought. Down the beach they went and into the water, and then down, down, down below the blue waves, with the rabbit gripping the edge of the turtle's shell. At last they came to the palace of the king of the fishes, and everything was exactly as the turtle had promised. There were glowing gems and swaying plants of orange and purple and green, and the whole palace glittered like a jewel box. The rabbit stared and stared.

The turtle introduced him to the princes and princesses of the sea, who showed him the treasures of the palace. But while the rabbit was admiring them, he overheard some soldiers whispering. They said that the rabbit had been brought here so that his eyes could be made into medicine for the king. The rabbit's heart gave a leap, and his whiskers trembled. He was a long way from land, deep under the water, and nobody would help him. But he was a quick thinker, and he said nothing at all.

Before long, the royal officers came to the rabbit and bowed politely. "Honored guest," they said, "the king is very ill, and the doctors say that your eyes alone can heal him. May we ask you for them?" The rabbit did not shiver, and he did not run. He put on the saddest and most sorrowful face he could manage. "My dear friends," he said, "I would give them to you gladly. I would give you anything, to help a king in pain."

"But I am afraid there is a small difficulty," the rabbit went on. "These eyes in my head are not my real eyes. They are only crystal. Rabbits take out their ordinary eyes before they visit the seashore, because salt water is bad for them. I buried mine in the sand on the beach, and I wear crystal ones in dusty or wet weather. It is a pity, because the real ones are the only ones that would work as medicine." The officers looked at one another in dismay.

Their faces fell. How could they carry such news to the king? The rabbit looked just as sorry as they did. "Do not be sad," he said kindly. "Take me back to the beach, and I will dig up my own eyes and bring them straight back, in time for the poultice. I would hate to keep the king waiting." The officers hurried to the doctors to tell them what the rabbit had said, and after a short, nervous talk, the doctors agreed that this was the only way.

So the rabbit climbed onto the turtle's back again, and up they went through the water, past the glittering gardens, and into the daylight, and onto the beach. The rabbit jumped off in a single bound. He did not stop to dig in the sand. He shot across the beach, bounded up the hill, and was among the trees before the turtle had time to turn around. For a moment, all the turtle could see was the little white tail, bobbing away between the trunks, and then that was gone too.

The turtle stood on the sand with his mouth open. Then he sank down on the shore and wept, for he knew that he had been outwitted, and he had no idea how he could tell the king. But the rabbit was safe in his own green forest, laughing quietly. He lay down in the long grass with his two good eyes wide open, looking up at the sky, and he decided that the mountains and rivers of Korea were beautiful enough for him.

Questions

1. What was wrong with the king of the fishes?

A. A fishhook was stuck in his throat
B. He was lost
C. He had no crown

2. How did Doctor Turtle get the rabbit to come?

A. He told him about a wonderful world under the sea
B. He asked the rabbit to be a doctor
C. He carried him off in his sleep

3. Why did the rabbit say his eyes were made of crystal?

A. It was true
B. He needed a way to get back to land
C. He wanted to impress the princes

4. What did the rabbit do as soon as he reached the beach?

A. He dug in the sand
B. He thanked the turtle
C. He ran into the forest

5. In this story, to be outwitted means to be

A. beaten by someone's cleverness
B. carried far away
C. left behind in the dark

Words to know

poultice: warm healing pad
dangling: hanging loosely
solemnly: in a serious way
outwitted: beaten by cleverness
dismay: shock and worry

Answer key: The Rabbit Under the Sea

1. A. A fishhook was stuck in his throat
2. A. He told him about a wonderful world under the sea
3. B. He needed a way to get back to land
4. C. He ran into the forest
5. A. beaten by someone's cleverness