

7. The Rabbit's Liver

Long ago, the Dragon King, who lives under the Southern Sea, was very sick. His doctors told him that the only thing that would cure his illness was the liver of a rabbit. So the Dragon King called all of his advisers together and he asked who would go up to the world of the land to look for the liver of a rabbit. The whales, the fishes, the squids, the lobsters—all of the Dragon King's minions—were very quiet because they were all afraid of going to the surface. Finally, the humble turtle volunteered, and so it was he who went in search of the rabbit.

The turtle swam from the bottom of the Southern Sea to the world of the land. He came up to a sandy beach, where he found a furry white animal hopping by on its hind legs.

“Excuse me, dear sir,” said the turtle, “but might you be a rabbit.”

“Why, yes, I am,” answered the rabbit. “Why do you ask?”

“I have been sent by His Majesty, the Dragon King. He has sent me to invite a creature of your description to come and be his guest in his wonderful palace under the sea.”

“I would love to visit,” said the rabbit. “But I can't swim. And doesn't the water get into your eyes and your mouth? How would I breathe down there?”

“Oh, do not worry,” said the turtle. “I will take you down on my back. And you will get accustomed to the water. In no time at all, you will be able to breathe it just like air.”

So the rabbit accepted the invitation. He sat on the turtle's back and they swam down into the Southern Sea. Of course, the rabbit was excited to see all of the magnificent sights: shimmering forests of waving green fronds, valleys and gorges of stone, schools of luminous fishes that glowed in all the colors of the rainbow. And the rabbit was amazed that he could magically breathe underwater.

But when they reached the Dragon palace and stood before the King, it didn't take long for the rabbit to learn that he had been tricked.

“I regret that I must eat your liver to regain my health,” said the Dragon King. “I give you my thanks now before my doctors take you away.”

At first the rabbit was terribly scared, but he was clever, and he thought quickly. “Your Majesty,” he said, bowing humbly, “I would like nothing better than to be the one who cures you. But

I'm afraid my liver is a very valuable organ, and so I do not travel with it. If I had only known you would be needing it, I would have brought it with me. But at the moment it is safely hidden in a secret place in the forest. Please, Your Majesty, if you will have the turtle take me back to the surface, I will gladly return with my liver. It will be an honor to sacrifice myself for you."

The Dragon King was very impressed by the rabbit's devotion, and so he gave him permission to return to the world of land to get his liver. The turtle took the rabbit back to the beach where he had found him.

"Thank you for the ride," said the rabbit, and he quickly hopped off the turtle's back. "Hey, turtle," he called when he was safely on the beach, "you don't really believe I keep my liver hidden in the forest, do you?"

"What?" said the turtle. "You mean, you lied to us?"

"Did you think I was really going to let your stupid Dragon King cut me open and take my liver? Ha!" And the clever rabbit hopped off into the forest.

Source

"Korean Folk Tales; in the old, old days,
when tigers smoked tobacco pipes"

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