

The Fairy Tree

Long, long ago, on an island in the sea, lived a family of seven sisters. The oldest girl ruled the household, and her sisters obeyed her commands. Flora, the youngest sister, was sent to the forest each day to gather wood for the kitchen fire.

Near the edge of the forest was a cave under some rocks. A stream of water fell over the rocks into a basin in the cave.

This was a delightfully cool spot, and Flora often rested here on her way home after gathering wood in the forest. She would lie on the mossy bank of the stream for hours and dream.

One morning as Flora ran along the grassy path that led to the cave, she saw a little fish in the stream. Its scales flashed all the colors of the rainbow.

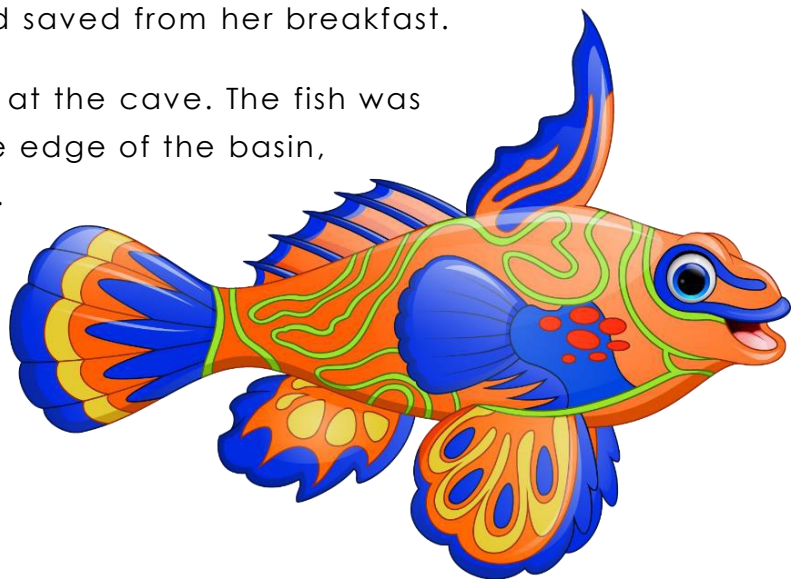
"I am going to keep the fish for a pet," said the girl to herself. "I will call him Rainbow."

So she caught the pretty fish and put him into the basin in the cave.

The next day Flora went to the forest for wood. She carried some crumbs of bread which she had saved from her breakfast.

On the way home she stopped at the cave. The fish was waiting for her. He came to the edge of the basin, and she fed the crumbs to him.

How delighted the girl was! She had been so lonely, and now she had a friend!



Every morning, instead of eating the bread which her sister gave to her, Flora would save it and feed the crumbs to her pet. The fish would leap to catch them.

“Here are some crumbs, Rainbow,” she would say. “This is all today, but I will come again tomorrow.”

Then she would sing a little song.

Flora began to grow thin, and her sisters wondered what could be the matter.

One day the oldest sister followed her to the cave and saw her feed the crumbs of bread to the fish.

While Flora was away in the forest, the oldest sister caught the fish, carried him home and baked him for supper. The bones were buried under the kitchen fire.

The next morning, Flora went to the cave as usual, but no fish was there. She sang her little song, and he still did not come.

“Rainbow cannot be dead,” she said, “for I do not see him in the water.”

Then Flora hastened home. She threw herself upon her bed and was soon fast asleep.

The following morning, a rooster flew up to Flora’s window and crowed,

“Cock-a-doodle-doodle-doo!

The bones of Rainbow wait for you,

Under the kitchen fire, too.”

Flora arose at once and went downstairs. There, under the kitchen fire, she found the bones of her pet.



She wept as she gathered the bones and placed them in a box.

She went to the forest and buried the box near the cave.

Then Flora sat down on a mossy bank near the cave and sang this song:

“Rainbow, Rainbow, hear my cry,

My great wish do not deny.

If you can't come back to me,

Pray, O pray, become a tree!”

As the last words of the song echoed through the cave, there sprang up a wonderful Fairy Tree beside the girl.



Its trunk was of ivory. Its leaves were of silver fringed with pearls. Its flowers were gold, and its fruit gems from which sparkled the bright colors of the rainbow.

One day the summer breeze carried a leaf from the Fairy Tree across the sea to another island. It fell at the feet of the king.

He picked up the wonderful leaf and said, “I shall never rest until I find the tree from which this leaf came.”

The king set sail with his attendants. He soon landed on the island where the seven sisters lived.

As the king and his men were marching through the forest, they found the Fairy Tree growing at the entrance to the cave.

The king tried to pick some of the leaves, but he could not. Then he heard the sweet voice of a girl. She was singing,

“Rainbow, Rainbow, speak to me!

Bend your branches, Fairy Tree!”

And Flora came tripping along the grassy path that led to the cave.

The king said, "Fair maiden, if you can pick a leaf or a flower from this tree, you shall be my queen."

As Flora reached to pick a flower, the tree bowed low, and every leaf trembled with delight.

The maiden at once presented the flower to the king. As he took the flower, the king exclaimed,

"To you belongs the Fairy Tree;

Pray be my bride and rule with me."

Flora thought she must be dreaming, but they were married the next day beneath the branches of the Fairy Tree.



Questions:

1. Why do you think Flora was so lonely at the start of the story?

2. What does Flora's treatment of the fish tell us about her as a person?

3. What does the word **basin** mean in the sentence, "She caught the pretty fish and put him into the **basin** in the cave"?

4. How does the author let us know the Fairy Tree is so special?
