

## The Two Fishermen

Compère Tigercat always felt that one day he would be lucky at the goat races, and because of this he always tried not to miss the races which took place periodically on the long stretch of Manzanilla Beach. The beach was a really good place for the races. It was extremely wide, and very, very long, so everyone – the racing goats and the spectators – could be comfortable. Tigercat enjoyed himself and could only have been happier on these occasions if he had won a large sum of money.

Often enough he would talk the matter over with his wife, who had heard her husband express these hopes so often that she had ceased to believe it could ever happen. Well, one day it did! Compère Tigercat came home with his pockets bulging with money he had won, beaming with pride and joy at his achievement.

He put the money in his usual “safe” place, a pan under a loose floor board of his house, and every day or so would take it out just to look at it and feel good. He soon tired of this pastime though, and began to think that there was not much use in having so much money lying around when it could easily be working for him and increasing. He began to think of what he could do with the money that would bring a sure, quick return.

After much consideration he decided to buy a boat. He had always fancied himself as a fisherman and he reasoned that this was a golden opportunity to set him-

self up in business. He bought a boat with oars, and an anchor, a seine<sup>1</sup>, fishing tackle, hooks, lines, a big basket for holding the fish, a bucket for baling water out of the boat, and a number of other items which he was sure would prove useful.

At last everything was ready and he sat down to plan his first fishing trip. He soon realised that he would need an assistant on his trip and he promptly decided to ask Compère Rabbit to go along with him.

Compère Rabbit accepted with pleasure. He liked fishing, and thought that doing it from a boat on the sea instead of throwing a line out from the land was a considerable improvement. He also looked forward to bringing home a number of fish for his family.

Finally the wonderful day came when the two fishermen set off. Compère Rabbit rowed while Compère Tigercat lay in the bows exclaiming at the softness of the breeze against his cheek and the salty tang<sup>2</sup> of the sea. He admired and exclaimed over the boat from the bow to the stern and down to the anchor. Compère Rabbit listened and noticed that Tigercat did not lift a hand to help with the rowing, but he reasoned that after all it was Tigercat's boat, and although he would have liked some assistance with the rowing he didn't mind too much. And, besides, he was enjoying the sea and the gentle breezes, too.

Soon they were a long way out from the land and were approaching a group of small islands called the Five Islands. Tigercat busied himself and took his bearings. He checked out one point of land against the other

<sup>1</sup>a seine = a fishing net    <sup>2</sup>a tang = a sharp smell or flavour



and decided on the area in which he wanted to fish. Compère Rabbit didn't really understand what he was doing but he pretended to, for, after all, he had no intention of letting Compère Tigercat know that this was the first time he had ever gone fishing in a boat.

Once the area was decided upon, they wasted no time in throwing out their anchor, baiting their several hooks, and casting lines. Soon the fish were nibbling and in a short space of time Tigercat was reeling in a line at the end of which wriggled a beautiful Red Snapper.

Tigercat was extremely happy. He wanted to measure the fish but there was no rule available.

"He's a beautiful fellow, eh Rabbit?"

"Yes, yes," said Rabbit. "I only hope I can catch one half as good as that and I'll be satisfied."

"Yes. Well, we shall see, we shall see," Tigercat said.

Soon Rabbit got a nibble and pulled hard. His fish was not as big as Tigercat's but good enough. Then the fish started biting like mad. It was as though they had had nothing to eat for days, and the plump sardines wriggling on the fishermen's hooks were extremely tempting. Tigercat and Rabbit were reeling in fish more rapidly than they ever thought possible.

Tigercat could hardly contain himself.

"Look at my fish!" he exclaimed. "Look at my beautiful fish! So many fish. So many. They're marvellous, absolutely beautiful. I told you. I told you I was a good fisherman. You see, there's the proof, Rabbit, there's the proof!"

Tigercat was in transports of joy. Rabbit listened and





said nothing. He heard Tigercat's "My fish" and would have preferred "Our fish," but he was always one to hold his own counsel, so he said nothing. Instead he started pulling in his line with the look of a man who had had a successful day's fishing and was tired. He really was tired too. His arms ached from rowing and casting and pulling, and he had a sneaking<sup>1</sup> suspicion that Tigercat did not intend to help with the rowing on the return trip.

But Compère Tigercat was not satisfied. He couldn't leave all those fish in the ocean uncaught. He wanted to use his seine and pull them all in but Rabbit pointed out that the water was far too deep for only two of them to manage so great a task.

Compère Tigercat was forced to agree with this reasoning but he still wanted to fish some more, so Compère Rabbit obliged and threw out his line again. The fish were still biting as eagerly as ever and it was a long time before Compère Tigercat grudgingly agreed that they had caught enough. He tried counting the fish, but was forever having to start over again because he was continually distracted by the length or width or plumpness of a particular fish and left off counting to admire. Compère Rabbit was quite fed up with him, but still he said nothing. It had been an excellent day's fishing and he was eagerly looking forward to receiving his share of the catch.

He was a bit concerned because Tigercat kept saying, "my fish", "my fish", but reasoned to himself that his friend was so beside himself with joy that he most pro-

<sup>1</sup>sneaking = secret, underhand, not open

bably didn't realise what he was saying.

He said, "Yes Tigercat, I don't think there's very much left to be caught now. See where the sun is already, and I am willing to bet that we have almost all the fish in this area in this boat. Just look at it. We really have done well."

"I suppose you're right," said Tigercat.

"We have enough for both of us," said Rabbit. "More than enough really."

"Hm-m-m," said Tigercat, and lay back in the bows again. "Hm-m-m."

Compère Tigercat did not help with rowing on the return trip. He lay in the bows, gazing about him every now and again but concentrating on the fish more than anything else.

When they reached the shore he suddenly sprang to life. He helped Rabbit to pull the boat ashore, to remove the fishing tackle and buckets and oars and store them away in an old hut. Then he bustled about to divide the fish.

"You know, this is going to be a very technical business, Compère Rabbit. I've been sitting there in the boat all this time studying how to share these few fish between all of us."

"All of us, Compère Tigercat!" Rabbit said. "Which all of us? I only see two of us. Who else is there, man?"

"How do you mean who else is there, Rabbit? What about the boat, and the seine, and the anchor, and fishing tackle, and those things. They must get their shares as well, you know!"

"But all those things are yours, Tigercat."



"Of course they're mine, but that has nothing to do with it!"

It was at this point that Compère Rabbit suddenly gave up the argument. There was not much point to it anyway.

"Okay, Compère," he said. "Let's see you share for the anchor, and boat, and those things!"

Compère Tigercat started sharing, "Two for me, two for the boat, two for the anchor, two for the seine, two for you, Compère Rabbit.

"Two for me, two for the boat, two for the anchor, two for the seine, two for you, Compère Rabbit . . ."

On and on he went until there was no longer one heap of fish but five heaps. Compère Rabbit looked at his heap and said nothing. True enough it was a decent looking heap but he had rowed and fished all day and in view of what they had caught he had expected more.

"Hm-m-m," he said when Tigercat stopped. "Okay then, Tigercat. Reach home safely with those fish now, eh. I have to hurry on with my batch." And with that he was off.

Compère Tigercat lingered to put all his piles of fish in one basket and settle the basket on his head comfortably before setting off home.

Once out of Tigercat's range of vision Compère Rabbit took off as though a mad bull was chasing him. He was panting but excited when he arrived home with his fish.

"Come on, come on," he called to three of his plump-est sons. "I have a job for you to do and you'd better do it well."

Down the road came Compère Tigercat, lugging<sup>1</sup> his basket and whistling. He had a vision of steamed fish with coo-coo and boiled ochroes and smiled to himself. If he gave Compère Rabbit any thought at all it was only to consider how lucky he had been to be invited to go fishing and how generous he, Tigercat, had been to him.

Suddenly, as he turned a bend in the dirt road he was brought up short by the sight of a plump black and white rabbit lying there.

"Hullo!" Tigercat thought to himself. "Not a bad looking fellow. I wonder what hit him."

But he kept on his way with his basket of fish.

Just the same a few yards down the road around another bend there was another rabbit. Compère Tigercat looked at it.

"Hm-m-m," he said. "Quite a coincidence, another rabbit. This one is not quite as plump as the other, yet . . . Oh well, there's no point in turning back, and one rabbit's no good to my family."

With that he was off again, whistling even more tunelessly than before.

To his great surprise, he had only gone a short distance and covered about two bends in the road when right there in front of him almost barring<sup>2</sup> his path was another plump looking rabbit.

He put down his basket and looked at it.

"Well now," he said. "I've got to consider this. Here's a fine looking fellow, better than the first, I'd say."

He prodded<sup>3</sup> the rabbit with his toe.

<sup>1</sup>to lug = to pull, to drag heavily    <sup>2</sup>to bar = to hinder, to obstruct  
<sup>3</sup>to prod = to poke



"And with a thick coat too."

"One rabbit I can leave alone, two not much different, but three, well that's asking too much. I'll just leave my basket of fish here and go back for those two fellows. I'll put it in the bushes though, and this rabbit with it. One can never tell who will pass."

So saying, he lifted the rabbit by its feet and slung it into the fish basket. In a short while he had hidden the basket in the bushes and set off to pick up the rabbits he had passed, hoping that his luck held and that no-one had come upon them after him.

No sooner was Tigercat safely out of sight than the rabbit in the fish basket suddenly came to life.

"Uh-h," he said. "How dare he throw me on these fresh-smelling fish of his."

"You'd better hurry and help me get this basket out of here," said his father, Compère Rabbit, emerging from the bushes. "Where are your two brothers? Ah, here they come. A good little job, boys," he said, tweaking<sup>1</sup> their ears. "But now we must hurry. Tigercat is no fool and from the time he misses that second rabbit he'll smell a rat. So come on, let's go."

Between them they lifted the fish basket and disappeared in the high bush.

In the meantime Compère Tigercat came to the place where the second rabbit had been. He looked down at the bare spot in the road where the "dead" rabbit had lain and was thoroughly confused.

"Someone must have found it," he said.

And suddenly the certainty of being tricked hit him.

<sup>1</sup>to tweak = to twitch, to pull

He turned around and darted at top speed to his hidden basket of fish but when he got there it was too late. There was no rabbit and no basket of fish, and search as he could there was not a trace to be found of either.

He was sure that Compère Rabbit had tricked him and his first reaction was to dash off to his home and accuse him, but then he thought of how foolish and greedy he'd look when the story was told and decided to say nothing.

He had really been caught by his greed on both counts and there was nothing he could do.

It was a sad, very shamefaced Tigercat who shuffled off home with empty hands to a wife and children waiting for promised fish. Not too far away, the Rabbit household was in high glee and Compère Rabbit was describing in the minutest detail exactly how he had caught that huge, glassy-eyed fellow there!

- 1 Can you give a few reasons of your own why a beach may not always be a good place for goat races?
- 2 You have been told what Tigercat bought with the money he won. You have also been told that he bought "a number of other things which he was sure would prove useful". Can you suggest a few of these?
- 3 Why did Compère Rabbit accept Compère Tigercat's invitation to accompany him on the fishing trip?
- 4 On the fishing trip, how did Compère Tigercat show that he was the boss?



- 5 What do you think of the plan that Rabbit used for getting the fish away from Tigercat? If you were Rabbit, could you have invented a better one?
- 6 Write a few lines on the "Pleasures of Fishing". Mention, too, some of the fish that are caught off your own country.