

The Tortoise and the Porpoise

By Sarah Hirsch

Tortoise Tom was healthy—
Well that’s how it appeared.
But he was at the doctor’s
‘Cause he was feeling weird.

“I’m feeling kind of hollow,
But kind of heavy too.”
The doctor looked him over.
“I know what’s wrong with you!”

“You need to find a purpose,”
The doctor simply said.
“A *porpoise*?” “Yes, a purpose!
To get you out of bed.”

A *porpoise* was the answer?
Tom didn’t understand.
“I guess it’s worth a try...”
He trudged across the sand.

“I’m not that good at swimming.
It’s way too far to float.”
So Tortoise Tom decided,
“I’ll build myself a boat!”

His neighbor, Beaver Brenda,
Was masterful with wood.
He asked if she could help him.
“Why, certainly I could!”

“But could I ask a favor?
My kids could use a snack.”
So Tom went to the forest
And carried tubers back.

“Thank you for the sailboat!”
“Thank YOU for the food!”
Tom set sail that morning
In quite a chipper mood.

He sailed and sailed for hours
Beneath the blazing sun.
“I haven’t found a porpoise,
And day is almost done!”

“What’s the matter, Tortoise?”
He heard a seagull say.
“I’m growing very sleepy,
And home is far away.”

“Dock your boat beside me!
Attach it to this post.
To thank me, tell a story!
That’s what I’d love the most.”

So Tom made up a story
About a dragonfly
Who pirouettes and tumbles
Across a moonlit sky.

The seagull started snoring
And Tom began to smile.
He hadn’t felt this happy
Or peaceful in a while.

As soon as morning dawned,
Tom went on his way.
Creatures did him favors
All throughout the day.

A clownfish gave directions.
A whale gave sailing help.
He even got a pep talk
From Kate the Clump of Kelp!

Whenever someone helped him,
He tried to pay them back—
By babysitting, singing,
And warding off attack.

He thought that all this kindness
Would leave him very tired,
But Tom felt energetic--
Excited and inspired!

At last, he glimpsed a fin
With something big beneath.
A dolphin? No, a porpoise!
(He knew that by the teeth!)

“Excuse me, ma’am!” he shouted.
“Good day,” the porpoise said.
“I’m looking for a porpoise
To get me out of bed.”

“Get you out of bed?
That’s something I can do!
I used to splash my kids.
I’ll gladly splash you too!”

“It’s nice to have a purpose.”
She wiped a tear away.
Tortoise Tom was silent.
“A *purpose*, did you say?”

“I MADE A BIG MISTAKE!
I heard the doctor wrong!
A *purpose* is the thing
I’ve needed all along!”

Tom was so embarrassed.
“I really should have known.”
He turned his boat around
And headed back, alone.

But then he started thinking
About the last few days...
How he had helped new friends
In all those little ways...

How happiness arises
From kindness, big and small...
Perhaps he had discovered
A *purpose* after all.