

# The Day of the Turtle

*September 9th 1907*

I shall remember today as long as I live. This morning I slipped away as soon as ever I could. I'd lain awake most of the night wondering how I was going to get my turtle back into the water. But as I made my way down to Rushy Bay, the morning fog lifting off the sea, I had no idea at all how I would do it.



Even as I uncovered him, I still didn't know. I only knew it had to be done. So I talked to him. I was trying to explain it all to him, how he mustn't worry, how I'd find a way, but that I didn't yet know what way. He's got eyes that make you think he understands. Maybe he doesn't, but you never know. I fetched some seawater in my hat and I poured it over him. He seemed to like it, lifting his head into it as I poured. So I did it again and again.

He was weak though. He kept trying to move, trying to dig his flippers into the sand, but he hadn't the strength to do it. His mouth kept opening and shutting as if he was gasping for breath.

Then I had an idea. I scooped out a long deep channel all the way down to the sea. I would wait for the tide to come in as far as it could, and when the time came I would ease him down into the channel and he could wade out to sea. As I dug I told him my plan. When I'd finished I lay down beside him, exhausted, and waited for the tide.

The tide was coming in now, closer all the time. Then there was barely five yards of sand left between the sea and my turtle, and the water was washing up the channel just as I'd planned it. It was now or never.

I told him what he had to do.

'You've got to walk the rest,' I said. 'You want to get back in the sea, you've got to walk, you hear me?'

He tried. He honestly tried. Time and time again he dug the edge of his flippers into the sand, but he just couldn't move himself.

The flippers dug in again, again, but he stayed where he was. I tried pushing him from behind. That didn't work. I tried moving his flippers for him one by one. That didn't work. I slapped his shell. I shouted at him. All he did was swallow once or twice and blink at me. In the end I tried threatening him. I crouched down in front of him.

'All right,' I said. 'All right. You stay here if you like. See if I care. You see those gulls? You know what they're waiting for? If they don't get you, then someone else'll find you and you'll be turtle stew.' I was shouting at him now. I was really shouting at him. 'Turtle stew, do you hear me!' All the while his eyes never left my face, not for a moment. Bullying hadn't worked either. So now I tried begging.

'Please,' I said, 'please.' But his eyes gave me the answer I already knew. He could not move. He hadn't the strength. There was nothing else left to try. From the look in his eyes I think he knew it too.

I looked down at him. He was nudging at the sand with his chin, his mouth opening. He was hungry! I don't know why I hadn't thought of it before. I had no idea at all what turtles eat. So I tried what was nearest first - seaweed of all sorts, sea lettuce, bladderwrack, whatever I could find.

I dangled it in front of his mouth, brushing his nose with it so he could smell it. He looked as if he was going to eat it. He opened his mouth slowly and snapped at it. But then he turned his head away and let it fall to the ground.

'What then?' I asked.

A sudden shadow fell across me. Granny May was standing above me in her hat.

'How long have you been there?' I asked.

'Long enough,' she said and she walked around me to get a better look at the turtle.



'Let's try shrimps,' she said. 'Maybe he'll eat shrimps. We'd better hurry. We don't want anyone else finding him, do we?' And she sent me off home to fetch the shrimping net. I ran all the way there and all the way back.

Granny May is the best shrimper on the island. One sweep through the shallows and she was back, her net jumping with shrimps. She smiled down at my turtle.

She told me to dig out a bowl in the sand, right under the turtle's chin, and then she

shook out her net. He looked mildly interested for a moment and then looked away. It was no good. Granny May was looking out to sea, shielding her eyes against the glare of the sun.

'I wonder,' she murmured. 'I wonder. I shan't be long.' And she was gone, down to the sea.

When she came back, her net was bulging with jellyfish, blue jellyfish. She emptied them into the turtle's sandy bowl. At once he was at them like a vulture, snapping, crunching, swallowing, until there wasn't a tentacle left. 'He's smiling,' she said. 'I think he likes them. I think perhaps he'd like some more.'

'I'll do it,' I said. I picked up the net and rushed off down into the sea. They were not difficult to find. I scooped up twelve big ones in as many minutes. He ate those and then lifted his head, asking for more. We took it in turns after that, Granny May and me, until at last he seemed to have had enough. I crouched down and looked my turtle in the eye.



'Feel better now?' I asked, and I wondered if turtles burp when they've eaten too fast.

He didn't burp, but he did move. The flippers dug deeper. He shifted - just a little at first. And then he was scooping himself slowly forward, inching his way through the sand.

I went loony. I was cavorting up and down like a wild thing, and Granny May was just the same. The two of us whistled and whooped to keep him moving, but we knew soon enough that we didn't need to. Every step he took was stronger, his neck reaching forward purposefully. His flippers were under the water now. He was half walking, half swimming. Then he dipped his snout into the sea and let the water run over his head and down his neck. He was going, and suddenly I didn't want him to. I was alongside him, bending over him.

'You don't have to go,' I said.

'He wants to,' said Granny May. 'He has to.'

He was in deeper water now, and with a few powerful strokes he was gone, cruising out through the turquoise water of the shallows to the deep blue beyond. The last I saw of him he was a dark shadow under the sea making out towards the island of Samson.

This is the longest day I've ever written in my diary and all because of a turtle. My wrist aches.

The Day of the Turtle taken from 'The Wreck of the Zanzibar'  
by Michael Morpurgo published by Mammoth Press, 1995

These questions are about the story *The Day of the Turtle*.

1. *I shall remember today as long as I live.*

What does the first sentence tell us?

|                              |                                     |   |                          |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| that Laura has a good memory | that it was a special day for Laura | that Laura expected to live a long time | that Laura forgets a lot |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------------|---|--------------------------|

1 mark

2. Do you think Laura had seen the turtle before today?

Yes ☐ No ☐

Copy the phrase from the passage (paragraph 1) which makes you think this.

.....

1 mark

3. Put the following steps in the correct order by numbering each line from 1 to 5.

..... She dug a channel  
.....1..... Laura went to the beach early  
..... She lay down exhausted  
..... She told the turtle her plan  
..... She poured water on the turtle

1 mark

4. Why was Laura so exhausted?

.....  
.....

1 mark

5. What did the turtle do that made Laura know he was trying to move?

.....  
.....

1 mark

6. What made Laura think the turtle was hungry?

.....  
.....

1 mark

7. When they offered him jellyfish to eat, the author says that the turtle was

*... like a vulture, snapping, crunching, swallowing...*

What is the effect of these words?

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

2 marks

8. At the beginning of the story Laura was

to help the turtle

1 mark

She felt it was her responsibility to help him back into the water.

9. She talked to him as if he were

and explained what she was doing as if he could understand.

1 mark

She tried several different ways to make him move but began to

10.     more and more desperate  
as each new attempt failed.

1 mark

11. Laura must have felt

1 mark

when Granny May came to help her. Between them they discovered  
that the turtle liked jellyfish.

12. When the turtle

1 mark

did swim out to sea Laura felt

13.

1 mark

that she had saved him but also a little sad to see him go.

14. Laura calls the turtle '**my turtle**' several times in the story even though she does not own him.

Why do you think she does this? Explain your answer as fully as you can, using the story to help you.

*I think Laura says my turtle because?* .....

.....

.....

1 mark

15. Laura described the events of 9th September in her diary.

What could she learn from these events that might help her solve other problems?

Answer as fully as you can using parts of the story to help you.

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.....

3 marks

- 16a. ***The Day of the Turtle*** is presented as a diary.  
In some ways it is like a diary but in some ways it is not.

In what ways do you think **is it** like a diary?

.....

.....

.....

2 marks

- 16b. In what ways do you think **it is not** like a diary?

.....

.....

.....

2 marks

17. How do you think Laura felt **about Granny May**?

Explain as fully as you can.



A large rounded rectangular box with a black border and rounded corners, containing eight horizontal dotted lines for writing.

3 marks