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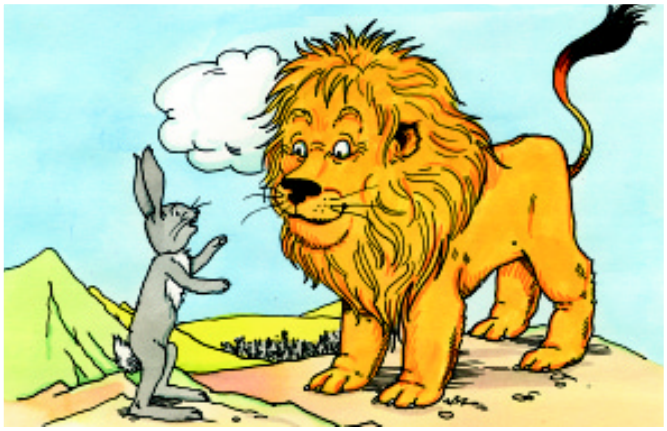

The Natural World

PIRLS

Progress in International Reading Literacy Study

Main Survey 2001

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Hare Heralds the Earthquake

by Rosalind Kerven

There was once a hare who was always worrying. “Oh dear,” he muttered all day long, “oh deary, deary me.”

His greatest worry was that there might be an earthquake. “For if there was,” he said to himself, “whatever would become of me?”

He was feeling particularly anxious about this one morning, when suddenly an enormous fruit fell down from a nearby tree—*CRASH!*—making the whole earth shake.

The hare leaped up.

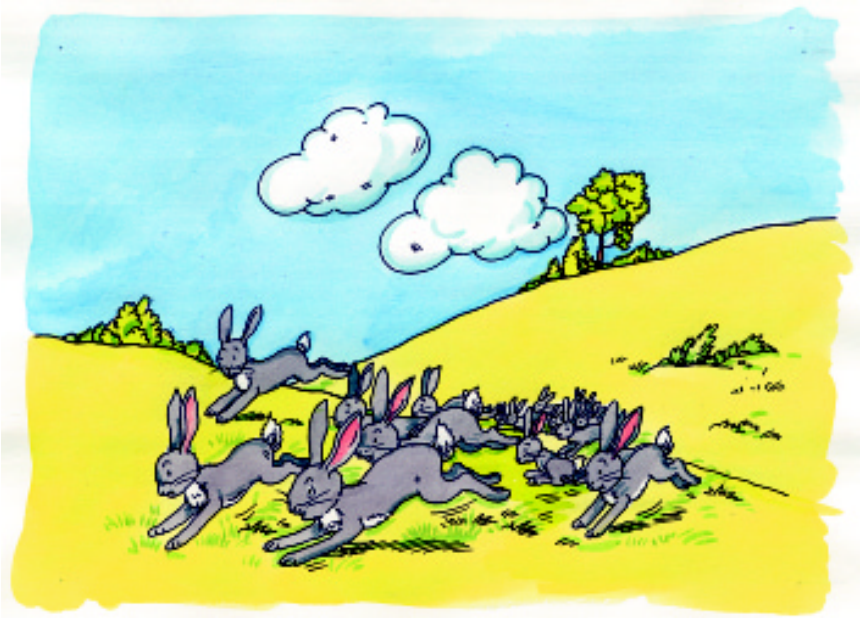
“Earthquake!” he cried.

And with that he raced across the fields to warn his cousins.

“Earthquake! Run for your lives!”

All the hares left the fields and madly followed him.

They raced across the plains, through forests and rivers and into the hills warning more cousins as they went.



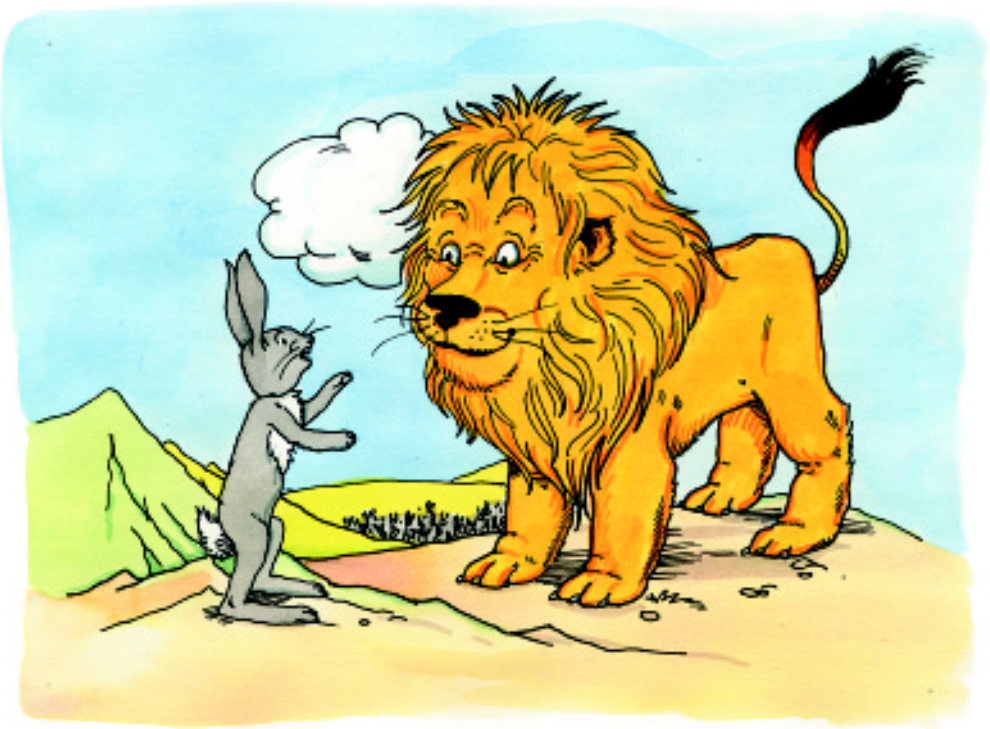
"Earthquake! Run for your lives!"

All the hares left the rivers and plains, the hills and forests and madly followed.

By the time they reached the mountains, ten thousand hares pounded like thunder up the slopes.

Soon they reached the highest peak. The first hare gazed back to see if the earthquake was coming any closer, but all he could see was a great swarm of speeding hares.

Then he looked in front but all he could see was more mountains and valleys and, far in the distance, the shining blue sea.



As he stood there panting, a lion appeared.

"What's happening?" he asked.

"Earthquake, earthquake!" babbled all the hares.

"An earthquake?" asked the lion. "Who has seen it? Who has heard it?"

"Ask him, ask him!" cried all the hares, pointing to the first one.

The lion turned to the hare.

"Please Sir," said the hare shyly, "I was sitting quietly at home when there was a terrible crash and the ground shook and I knew it must be a quake, Sir, so I ran as fast as I could to warn all the others to save their lives."

The lion looked at the hare from his deep, wise eyes.

"My brother, would you be brave enough to show me where this dreadful disaster happened?"

The hare didn't really feel brave enough at all, but he felt he could trust the lion.

So, rather timidly, he led the lion back down the mountains and the hills, across the rivers, plains, forests and fields, until at last they were back at his home.

"This is where I heard it, Sir."

The lion gazed around—and very soon he spotted the enormous fruit which had fallen so noisily from its tree.

He picked it up in his mouth, climbed onto a rock and dropped it back to the ground.

CRASH!

The hare jumped. “Earthquake! Quickly—run away—it’s just happened again!”

But suddenly he realised that the lion was laughing. And then he saw the fruit rocking gently by his feet.

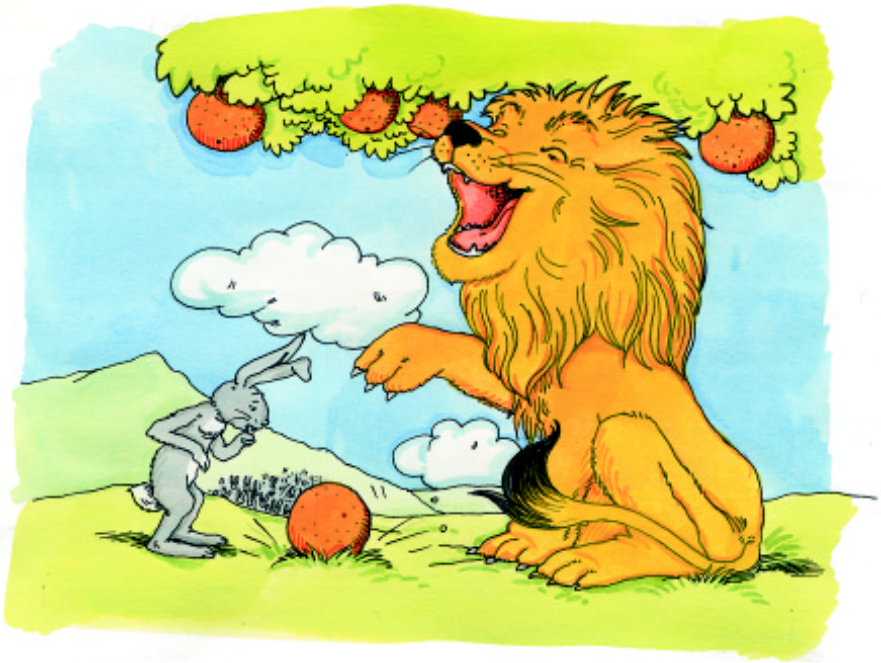
“Oh,” he whispered, “it wasn’t really an earthquake after all, was it?”

“No,” said the lion, “it was not and you had no need to be afraid.”

“What a *silly* hare I’ve been!”

The lion smiled kindly. “Never mind, little brother. All of us—even I—sometimes fear things we cannot understand.”

And with that he padded back to the ten thousand hares that were still waiting on top of the mountain, to tell them that it was now quite safe to go home.



Hare Heralds the Earthquake based on an Indian folk tale. © Rosalind Kerven. First published in *Legends of the Animal World* (Cambridge University Press 1986).

End of Part 1.

Now go to your question booklet.

Nights of the Pufflings

by Bruce McMillan

Every year, black and white birds with orange bills visit the Icelandic island of Heimaey. These birds are called puffins. They are known as "clowns of the sea" because of their bright bills and clumsy movements. Puffins are awkward fliers during takeoffs and landings because they have chunky bodies and short wings.

Halla lives on the island of Heimaey. She searches the sky every day. As she watches from high on a cliff overlooking the sea, she spots her first puffin of the season.

She whispers to herself "Lundi," which means "puffin" in Icelandic.

Soon the sky is speckled with them—puffins, puffins everywhere. They are returning from their winter at sea, returning to Halla's island and the nearby uninhabited islands to lay eggs and raise puffin chicks. These "clowns of the sea" return to the same burrows year after year. It's the only time they come ashore.

Halla and her friends climb over the cliffs to watch the birds. They see pairs tap-tap-tap their beaks together. Each pair they see will soon tend an egg deep inside the cliffs. When the puffin eggs have hatched, the parents will bring fish home to feed their chicks. Each chick will grow into a young puffling. The nights of the pufflings will come when each puffling takes its first flight. Although the nights of the pufflings are still long weeks away, Halla thinks about getting some cardboard boxes ready.

All summer long the adult puffins fish and tend to their chicks. By August, flowers blanket the burrows. With the flowers in full bloom, Halla knows that the wait for the nights of the pufflings is over.

The hidden chicks have grown into young pufflings. Now it's time for Halla and her friends to get out their boxes and torches for the nights of the pufflings. Starting tonight, and for the next two weeks, the pufflings will be leaving for their winter at sea.

In the darkness of the night, the pufflings leave their burrows for their first flight. It's a short, wing-flapping trip from the high cliffs. Most of the birds splash-land safely in the sea below. But some get confused by the village lights – perhaps they think the lights are moonbeams reflecting on the water. Hundreds of the pufflings crash-land in the village every night. Unable to take off from the flat ground, they run around and try to hide.

Halla and her friends will spend each night searching for stranded pufflings that haven't made it to the water. But the village cats and dogs will be searching, too. Even if the cats and dogs don't get them, the pufflings might get run over by cars or trucks. The children must find the stray pufflings first. By ten o'clock the streets of Heimaey are alive with roaming children.

Halla and her friends race to rescue the pufflings. Armed with torches, they wander through the village, searching dark places. Halla spots a puffling. She races after it, grabs it, and puts it safely in a cardboard box.

For two weeks all the children of Heimaey sleep late in the day so they can stay out at night. They rescue thousands of pufflings.

Every night Halla and her friends take the rescued pufflings home. The next day, with the boxes full of pufflings, Halla and her friends go down to the beach.

It's time to set the pufflings free. Halla releases one first. She holds it up so that it will get used to flapping its wings. Then, holding the puffling snugly in her hands, she swings it up in the air and launches it out over the water beyond the surf. The puffling flutters just a short distance before splash-landing safely.

Day after day Halla's pufflings paddle away, until the nights of the pufflings are over for the year. As she watches the last of the pufflings and adult puffins leave for their winter at sea, Halla bids them farewell until next spring. She wishes them a safe journey as she calls out, "Goodbye, goodbye."

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Stop

End of Part 2.
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