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Die goldene Schildkröte

The Golden Tortoise

Picture Book | Recommended age: 4+ | ISBN: 978-3-7891-2101-2 | Pages: 32

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A fairy-tale parable by one of Germany's best loved and most successful children's authors, Paul Maar. With magical illustrations by Eva Muggenthaler.

Princess Bea's favourite pet is Rosemarie, the tortoise, who has a beautiful golden shell. One day the cat tells Rosemarie that there is some writing on the shell, and from that moment on, she can't rest. She **MUST** find out what it says. But none of the other animals can tell her, because they can't read. Only when she is dropped from the sky is the mystery finally solved.

Secret clues and animals, coupled with the frisson of getting lost and finding your way back home: it's a potent mixture which is guaranteed to appeal to all child readers.

Destined to become another Paul Maar classic.

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Beatrice Aurora Christine Anna-Louise Battenberg was a princess.

Princesses always have especially long names. However, the King her father felt it was a terrible waste of time having to call out all her names when he wanted to see her, and so he shortened it to Bea. (Sign: court painter)

Princess Bea had four pets. A parrot who could shout “Ping-pong, ping-pong!”, a poodle, and an African jumping mouse.

But her favourite pet was her tortoise, which she had named Rosemarie. Rosemarie had a golden shell. The court painter had painted it gold, and since then her shell had shone with a wonderfully royal sheen.

Rosemarie was very proud of her golden back. She particularly liked to plod out of the palace when the sun was shining.

Then she would lie down in the courtyard and enjoy watching the golden reflections of her back flashing in the palace windows.

One day, as she plodded into the courtyard, she met Lily the cat. Lily asked: “What’s the writing on your back?”

“There’s no writing on my back,” said Rosemarie. “It’s the gold shining in the sun.”

“I know you’ve been painted gold,” said the cat. “But somebody’s written something in the gold paint.”

“Written something?” asked Rosemarie, and tried in vain to twist her head round far enough to look at her back. “Well, what does it say?”

“No idea,” said the cat. “Do you think we cats can read?”

“Then I’d better go and ask the poodle,” said Rosemarie. She plodded to the royal kennel and asked the poodle: “Can you please tell me what’s written on my back?” Of course the poodle couldn’t read either, but he was very conceited and didn’t want to admit it. So he said: “I’d really like to read it out for you, but the gold is so bright in the sunlight that it’s blinding me.”

“I can’t wait till the sun sets,” said Rosemarie. “I’d better go and ask the horses. There won’t be any blinding sunlight in the stables.”

“And the horses can see your shell better from above,” said the poodle. “Because they’re taller than me.”

“You don’t have to tell me how tall horses are, you old smartypants,” said Rosemarie.

Rosemarie plodded to the royal stables.

But she was out of luck there as well. She asked one horse after another: “Can you please tell me what’s written on my back?” This took a long time, because there were eighteen horses in the royal stable. But none of them could help the tortoise because although they knew everything about riding, they knew nothing about writing.

So what could Rosemarie do now? She might have said: “Who cares what’s written on my back?” But she *did* care. She really, *really* wanted to know.

“Then I’d better go and ask the pigs,” she said to herself, and plodded all the way to the royal pigsty.

The pigs were standing next to one another, noisily munching and crunching the food from their trough.

“Hello, pigs! Can you please tell me what’s written on my back?” asked Rosemarie.

The pigs pretended not to hear her – or maybe they really didn’t hear her. The piggy-gobble noise was deafeningly loud. “Can anyone please tell me what’s written on my back?” Rosemarie shouted again.

The pigs simply went on gobbling.

“All right, then, don’t tell me!” said Rosemarie angrily, and plodded back out of the pigsty. “Silly sows and porky pigs!” she grumbled. “All they can think of is food. No sense of beauty.”

Right next to the pigsty she met a rat and asked him the same question she’d asked everyone else: “Can you please tell me what’s written on my back?”

“Is that real gold?” asked the rat.

“Of course! What a silly question!” said Rosemarie.

The rat took no notice. “If somebody scraped your back,” he said, “he could scratch off some of that gold, couldn’t he?”

“And gold is precious, isn’t it?” he asked.

“Extremely precious,” replied the tortoise. “But that’s not important now. I want to know what’s written on my back!”

“Be careful not to scratch my back!” said Rosemarie.

“But at least you’ll let me....Aaaargh!” The rat turned like lightning, jumped off Rosemarie’s back, and ran away, screaming: “Look out! An eagle!” And then he disappeared into a rat hole.

Rosemarie quickly pulled her head and legs in under the shell, but that didn’t bother the eagle in the least. With his long sharp talons he seized the tortoise and flew up into the sky.

Rosemarie knew what was coming. The bird would fly higher and higher, and would then drop her. When she crashed down to earth, her shell would break, and the nasty bird would eat her. This was terrible! And she still hadn't found out what was written on her back!

Now the eagle let go of the tortoise.

Rosemarie fell down...

and down...

and down...

and landed on something lovely and soft.

By chance, Bea had just come out of the palace, had seen her tortoise falling from the sky, and had calmly caught her favourite pet in her arms.

"Thank you for saving me, Bea!" gasped Rosemarie. She was still breathless with fear.

"Happy to help," said Bea with a laugh. "Where have you been? I've been looking everywhere for you!"

Roswitha replied: "I've been visiting all the animals because I wanted to know what's written on my back. I asked the cat, the dog, all the horses, the pigs and even a rat. Have you any idea who else I could ask?"

"Yes, you should ask *me*! Because I'm the one who wrote on your back!"

"*You* wrote on my back?" asked Rosemarie. "Then please can you tell me what you wrote?"

"I wrote: *If this tortoise gets lost, please return her to Bea.*"

"I see," said Rosemarie, nodding. "Return me to Bea."

"And as you can see," said Bea with a happy smile, "that's exactly what happened."