

Compère Lapin Looks for Wisdom

*This story is based on a folk tale from
St Lucia and the Commonwealth of Dominica*

One day Compère Lapin went to see God and said, 'You're the wisest of them all! If only I could be wise like you!'

'No one can be wise like me,' said God.

'That's just not fair!' said Compère Lapin. 'Keeping all that wisdom for yourself is just GREEDY!'

Well, God thought about what Compère Lapin said. God liked to be fair and he certainly wasn't greedy.

'Very well,' God said. 'If you can pass some tests then I will give you some wisdom!'

Compère Lapin was intrigued, 'What are these tests?' he asked.

'There are three impossible tasks,' said God. 'If you can do these three tasks, I will give you some wisdom. First, bring me the scales of the greatest, biggest sea fish. Second, bring me milk from a wild cow. Third, bring me two teeth from the mouth of a living crocodile.'

Now, Compère Lapin wasn't one to be beaten and, although the tasks that God had set him seemed to be impossible, he was ready to take on the challenge.

'Very well,' said Compère Lapin. 'I will bring you the scales of the greatest, biggest sea fish, and I will bring you milk from a wild cow, and I will bring you two teeth from the mouth of a living crocodile.'

Compère Lapin had no idea how he was going to get those things and bring them to God. He went home to think up a plan.

Compère Lapin liked to play his drum when he had a problem. Tapping a rhythm on his drum always helped him to relax. His children liked to listen to him play too, as they liked to dance. So as Compère Lapin played his drum, his children danced.

Suddenly an idea came to him. Compère Lapin ran out of his house, still carrying his drum, and ran all the way to the edge of the sea. Once there, he began to play his drum, making rhythms that called all the fish in the sea

to come up and dance. At first little fish appeared, popping their heads out of the water one by one. They came out of the water and danced all around Compère Lapin, but he was far from satisfied.

'This music is for the great big sea fish,' said Compère Lapin. 'Surely there are bigger fish than you in the sea?'

'Play louder!' said the little fish. 'The bigger fish are lower down in the sea so they cannot hear you!'

So Compère Lapin played his drum even louder and more rhythmically than before. Larger fish popped their heads out of the water and then they too came out of the water and danced all around him. But still Compère Lapin wasn't satisfied.

'This music is for the great big sea fish,' said Compère Lapin. 'Surely there are bigger fish than you in the sea? Where is the greatest, biggest fish of all?'

'Play louder!' said the larger fish. 'The great big fish is lower down in the sea so he cannot hear you!'

So Compère Lapin played his drum even louder and more rhythmically than before. At last, the greatest, biggest fish of all popped his head out of the water. Compère Lapin was overwhelmed by its great size. The greatest, biggest fish of all did not dance and he would not come out of the water. He simply watched.

Compère Lapin called out to the greatest, biggest fish of all: 'Great One, come and play the drum while I dance!' And the greatest, biggest fish of all came out of the water

and played Compère Lapin's drum while he danced. After a while Compère Lapin stopped dancing and said, 'Now I will play the drum while you dance!'

And so Compère Lapin played the drum while the greatest, biggest fish of them all danced. Then Compère Lapin said, 'I am tired. I will lie down and take a rest while you watch over me,' and Compère Lapin lay down and rested and the greatest, biggest fish of all watched over him. After a while Compère Lapin said, 'Now you rest and lie down and I will watch over you.' And the greatest, biggest fish of all lay down.

As soon as he did so, Compère Lapin knocked unconscious the greatest, biggest fish of them all, and removed his scales. Compère Lapin took the scales and presented them to God.

'Fine,' said God. 'You have two more tasks. Now go into the woods and bring me milk from a wild cow.'

Compère Lapin had no idea how he was going to get milk from a wild cow.

But he went home and picked up a small gourd to carry the milk, and set off to the woods. He wandered around, trying to think of a way to get the milk until he stumbled on a large softwood tree and suddenly had an idea.

Compère Lapin climbed to the top of the tree and, once at the top, he began to call for a wild cow. 'Wild cow! Wild cow! Come and get me if you can, wild cow!'

Everyone in the forest knew that wild cows were not to be messed with.

'Who is calling me in such a disrespectful way?' called a wild cow.

'It's me, Compère Lapin, you weak, pathetic wild cow!'

The wild cow followed the sound of Compère Lapin's voice and charged into the centre of the forest. She looked for Compère Lapin but couldn't see him anywhere.

'Where are you? I can't see you!' she said.

'I'm up here in this tree!' said Compère Lapin.

'You had better come down here so I can mash you up!' said the wild cow.

'Mash me up?' laughed Compère Lapin. 'I've heard that you've lost all your strength and you couldn't even hurt a tiny little fly!'

'That's a lie!' said the wild cow. 'I am the strongest beast in the woods!'

'You are so weak!' laughed Compère Lapin from his great height in the tree. 'You couldn't even knock this tree down!'

'Oh yes I can!' said the wild cow.

'Let me see you do it then,' goaded Compère Lapin.

The wild cow couldn't wait to show Compère Lapin that she could knock down the tree. She put her head down and charged, horns first. But, because the bark of the tree was soft, her horns went deep into the trunk and stuck fast.

'I'm stuck!' she said. 'My horns are stuck in the tree!'

'Are you sure?' asked Compère Lapin.

'Yes, I'm certain,' said the wild cow, trying to move her head.

'Well, if you're sure then I'll come down,' said Compère Lapin.

When Compère Lapin got down from the top of the tree, he took the milk from the wild cow. When his small gourd was full of milk he presented it to God.

'Fine,' said God. 'You now have only one more task to complete. But this task is truly impossible. There is no way you can bring me two teeth from the mouth of a living crocodile!'

Compère Lapin had no idea how he was going to complete this third and final task, but he knew if he did then God would give him wisdom. He needed to find a way to get the two teeth from a living crocodile.

He went home to think and while he was bathing Compère Lapin had a brilliant idea. He asked his wife to bring him all the soap in the house and then when she had done this he marched over to a trail that he knew Compère Crocodile used on the hill that led to the river. Compère Lapin spread soap on the trail from Compère Crocodile's house at the top of the hill all the way to the bottom of the hill, and at the bottom of the hill he placed a large rock. Then he called out: 'Compère Crocodile! Compère

Crocodile! Come quickly! At the bottom of the trail there is a dead rabbit to eat! And then he lay down near the rock and pretended to be dead.

Just as he had expected, Compère Crocodile came out of his house and saw Compère Lapin lying down at the bottom of the hill. He immediately started down the hill to eat Compère Lapin but as he did so he began to slip on the soap. He slipped faster and faster until he crashed into the large rock. When his big jaw hit the rock two teeth were knocked out and Compère Lapin jumped up and caught the teeth. He brought them to God and God was amazed.

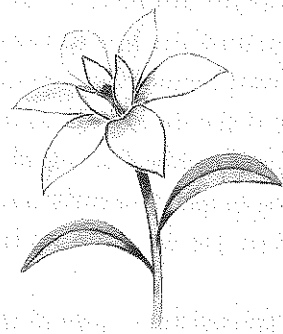
'You brought me the scales from the greatest, biggest sea fish, milk from a wild cow, and two teeth from the mouth of a living crocodile!' said God.

'That's right,' said Compère Lapin. 'I brought you the three impossible things you asked for and you promised me wisdom in return.'

God pondered on what Compère Lapin had said.

'It required great wisdom for you to get these three impossible things,' said God. 'You already have wisdom!'

Compère Lapin thought about what God had said. It was true: while he had been looking for wisdom, he hadn't realized that he had used wisdom to complete the three impossible tasks and had what he was looking for all along!



The Spirit of the Rock

This story is based on a Carib legend from the Commonwealth of Dominica

Long, long ago there lived a Carib woman called Martha. Martha's husband, Joe, was a cruel, horrible man and he treated Martha badly.

Every morning when the cock crowed, Joe would shout at the top of his voice, 'Martha! Martha! Wake up and do your chores!'

Martha would wake up and shout back, 'Stop ordering me about! I am not your servant, I am your wife!'

And Joe would laugh and shake his head. 'That's right, you are my wife and I am your husband, so you must do as I say!'