

## The mock turtle

One day, in Wonderland, Alice met a gryphon. The gryphon was just waking up from an afternoon snooze when Alice happened upon him.

"A girl," the gryphon noted, giving Alice a casual glance as she approached. He puffed out his feathers. Alice observed how the gryphon's attention was set on a lonely-looking creature lying on the edge of rock nearby.

"That creature looks remarkably like a turtle," she thought, then "he looks so sad," she said out loud. "What's his sorrow?" Alice gazed into the turtle's teary eyes.

"Oi! Mockers," called the Gryphon. "This young girl here might like to hear your story."

"Mockers?" Alice queried. "That's a strange name for a turtle."

The Gryphon frowned and shook his lion-like head. "He's not a real turtle. He's the Mock Turtle."

The Mock Turtle looked up and in a deep hollow tone said, "Sit down, both of you and don't speak until I have finished."

The Mock Turtle took a deep breath and began. "When I was little, I went to school in the sea. The master was an old turtle. We used to call him 'Tortoise'."

"Why did you call him tortoise when he wasn't one?" Alice asked.

The Mock Turtle stared at Alice in utter astonishment. "We called him 'Tortoise' because he taught us."

The Gryphon tutted and shook his head at Alice. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself for asking such a simple question." Alice felt very stupid.

"Drive on, Mockers, my old fellow!" chivvied the Gryphon. "Don't be all day about it."

The Mock Turtle continued his story. "Yes we went to school in the sea every day."

"I've been to a day school," said Alice, "but I don't go every day."

"Our school had extras," said the Mock Turtle proudly. "We studied washing..."

"Washing!" exclaimed Alice.

"And arithmetic, ambition, distraction, uglification and derision," the Mock Turtle continued.

"I've never heard of uglification," said Alice indignantly. "It isn't a subject."

"You you do know what to beautify means, don't you?" asked the Mock Turtle.

"Yes," said Alice, doubtfully.

"Then if you don't know what to uglify is, you're a simpleton," said the Gryphon.

Alice did not feel encouraged to ask any more questions. As for the Gryphon, the whole topic of school was bringing back many memories.

"I hadn't the time to study so many subjects," he told Alice sadly. "I went to the classical master though." The Gryphon paused for a moment to reflect on his old teacher. "What an old crab he was."

"And how many hours a day did you do lessons?" asked Alice, keen to learn more.

"Ten hours the first day," said the Mock Turtle, "nine the next, eight the next and so on."

"What a curious plan!" exclaimed Alice.

"That's the reason they're called lessons," the Gryphon remarked, "because they lessen from day to day."

Alice listened to the Mock Turtle's story for some time. She learned how to dance a Lobster Quadrille and many more things about life under the sea. And if you would like to know more, you can. Just open your mind and open a book called *Alice in Wonderland*.

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