

Secrets of the Seashell

by RV Staff Writer J.C.

Caitlyn stepped into the warm, wet sand and wiggled her toes. The white, foamy waves raced over her feet and up her legs and then pulled back again. Caitlyn was on vacation with her family, and she loved playing in the ocean water. It was so clear that she could practically see the bottom and the little fish that swam nearby but dashed away when she tried to get closer.

“Ouch!” said the girl, as her foot stepped on something hard. She looked down. At the bottom of the ocean was a large shell. Caitlyn bent down to pick it up. It was a pretty pink conch shell with points and curves and an opening that looked like a horn. She held it up to her ear, hoping to hear the whooshing sound for which they were known. Instead, she heard something quite different.

“Hey kid! How are you doing? Want to hear a joke?”

Caitlyn nearly dropped the shell. Holding it back up to her head, she tried again.

“What’s the most musical part of a fish?” the shell asked.

“I – I don’t know,” Caitlyn whispered.

“Their scales! Ha, ha!” laughed the shell. Caitlyn looked around to see if anyone was looking at her. They weren’t.

“That’s, uh, funny,” she replied. She didn’t really know what to think.

“I’m just getting warmed up, kid! Why don’t oysters share their pearls?” It seemed to be waiting for a reply.

“Uh, I’m not sure?” Caitlyn said. Was she dreaming?

The shell answered its own joke. “Because they’re shellfish! Ha, ha!”

Caitlyn had to laugh. Okay, that was sort of funny.

“Kid, why don’t fish play basketball?” the shell asked.

Caitlyn started to relax and enjoy herself. “I don’t know, why don’t you tell me?”

The shell answered, “Because they are afraid of the net! Ha, ha!”

The girl giggled. On and on the conch shell went, being silly and making jokes. Caitlyn sat in the shallow water and listened for an hour. When her mother called to her, saying it was time to go, the

girl laid the shell gently on the ocean floor. She promised to come back the next day. And she did.

For the rest of the week, Caitlyn would walk into the shallow water and sit with the shell held against her ear. (“What do sea monsters eat? Fish and ships! Ha, ha!”) She smiled and chuckled as it whispered corny jokes and didn’t care if people walking by on the beach gave her funny looks.

“What did the ocean say to the beach?” the shell asked. “Nothing; it just waved! Ha, ha!” On the last day of her vacation, Caitlyn decided she couldn’t leave the shell behind.

“You’re coming home with me,” she said to the pretty shell. She thought it would be happy. It wasn’t.

“My home is in the ocean,” it replied, without any laughter in its voice. But Caitlyn couldn’t bear to go home without it. She promised to take good care of it, and wrapped it up carefully in her suitcase.

When she got home, she took it out and held it to her ear.

Silence.

She tried getting it wet, even putting it in the bathtub with her. Still nothing; no sound at all.

Years went by. The shell never spoke to Caitlyn again.

Ten years later, Caitlyn was now an adult, planning a vacation of her own. As she packed her bags, she remembered the shell from long ago. She found it on the back of a bookshelf, dusty and dry. Caitlyn wrapped it and put it in her suitcase.

When she arrived back at the beach, the first thing she did was take the shell down to the ocean waves. “I’m sorry,” she whispered. Gently, she lowered it back under the water, settling it safely on the bottom, and walked away.

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Mohammed stepped into the warm, wet sand and wiggled his toes. The white, foamy waves raced over his feet and up his legs and then pulled back again. Mohammed was on vacation with his family, and he loved playing in the ocean.

“Ouch!” said the boy, as his foot stepped on something hard. He bent down and picked up a pretty pink conch shell. He held it up to his ear.

“Hey kid! How are you doing? Want to hear a joke?”

Questions

1. Why did the conch shell stop talking to Caitlyn?
2. Why does Caitlyn apologize to the shell?
3. This story uses a figure of speech called a pun. A pun uses a word in a joke that sounds similar to another logical one but has a different meaning in order to create humor. One pun used in the story is the use of *shellfish* in the punchline "Because they're shellfish!" instead of the similarly sounding "selfish." Find another pun in the story and explain it.
4. Is there a moral to this story? What do you think it is?