

The Tale of Mr. Diligent and Mr. Grumbler

By Andrew James Stevens

Long ago a ship set sail to foreign islands. The ship had just two passengers, Mr. Diligent and Mr. Grumbler. Halfway through their voyage, the two passengers saw something rising out of the sea. It was the figure of a woman, but the weirdest thing was that the woman was riding a giant squid! She was dressed in a long purple robe and a very pointy purple hat. The passengers, who both stood rooted to the spot on the deck, assumed she was a witch. They were right, for she was none other than the Wise and Wicked Witch of the West Sea. The witch dismounted the giant squid and flew onto the deck.

“If you would like to cross my territory, you must first pass a test.” The witch said this while pulling out of her robe a purple wand. “I am going to strand you on an island, and you must work together to get off the island. But beware, if you complain five times, the earth will swallow you whole. If you get off the island, I will grant you safe passage through my territory.” Then the witch raised her wand and the whole ship disappeared.

When the two men woke up they were stranded on an island just as the witch had said. There was no sign of their ship. There were no other inhabitants, not even animals. The only sound was the sea splashing against the sand. There were no birds chirping, no wolves howling, and no people talking. The first man, Mr. Diligent, got up immediately and started walking inland, where there was a forest.

Mr. Grumbler got up and said, “I can’t believe it. We’re stuck on an island with no supplies. That wicked witch will make us die on this island!” As soon as he finished speaking, a bell rang.

“The witch warned us not to complain,” said Mr. Diligent. “We must make a boat to get off this island. But first we must find food.”

“But there is no food on this annoying island,” complained Mr. Grumbler.

Again, a bell rang.

“If you complain three more times, the earth will swallow you,” warned Mr. Diligent, “so I wouldn’t complain again if I were you.” Then Mr. Diligent set to work. He made a fishing rod out of a branch and some string he found. Then he caught some fish and made a fire. He cooked the fish so he and Mr. Grumbler could eat. He did all this while Mr. Grumbler just sat on the beach, relaxing.

While they were eating, Mr. Grumbler said, "This fish tastes disgusting. It's so slimy."

For the third time a bell rang.

"Every time you complain a bell rings," said Mr. Diligent. "You must not complain."

When they were done eating, Mr. Diligent set to work again. First, he made an axe out of a stone and a stick. Then he cut down a tree and cut the log into pieces for a raft. Again, Mr. Grumbler did not help but relaxed on the beach.

"I'm bored," he grumbled. "When can we get off this island?"

Yet again a bell rang.

Mr. Diligent kept on toiling. He made a raft with the pieces of wood he had cut. Then he pushed the raft to the shore. "Get on," Mr. Diligent said to Mr. Grumbler. "We must get off this island."

"I don't want to go on another voyage," Mr. Grumbler whined. "I'll get seasick!"

For the fifth and final time the bell rang, and suddenly the ground shook and Mr. Grumbler plunged into the hole that opened up at his feet, never to be seen again.

As for Mr. Diligent, he got back to his ship and the witch let him pass through her territory unharmed. He continued his expedition and lived a happy, productive life.