

THE FISHERMAN'S TWO SONS

By a lake in the mountains, there once lived a fisherman, his wife, and their two sons. One evening, when the boys were nearing adulthood, their father told them "My boys, you have both grown into fine young men, and are now old enough to go out into the world to find your own way. But, your mother and I hope that you will both someday return, to comfort us in the twilight of our days." It was not long after, that the two youths took leave of their parents and, early one morning, departed together.

After a while, they came to a fork in the road, and stopped. The eldest then said to his younger brother "It looks like we have now come to the parting of our ways. What do you say to you taking one road, and I the other?"

And, so it was agreed that the elder brother would travel to right, and the younger to the left. But, before they parted, each thrust their knife into the trunk of a great tree which stood at the end of the road home. When, one of them returned, he would know how his brother had fared. If the knife was still bright and clean, its owner was well and happy. But, if it was rusted and red, something terrible had befallen him.

The elder brother travelled on, up hill and down dale, until, one day he came to a great city. As soon as he entered the gates, it was clear to him that he had arrived on a very sad day. Black flags hung from every house, and not a happy face was to be seen amongst any of the townspeople, who were all dressed in black. When he asked the passers-by, a little old man explained to him why the whole city was in mourning. Near the city there was a deep, dark lake, in which there lived a terrible monster. To pacify the beast, they had to feed it two lambs and one maiden, on the same day of every month of the year. Tomorrow was that day, but there was only one unmarried lady left in the town. She was the king's own daughter, and must be fed to the creature in the morning. The only hope would be for a hero to kill the monster, and free the town from its curse. The king had already promised his throne and his daughter's hand in marriage to whoever did so, but, according to the old man, "nobody was that crazy."

The young fisherman wished to learn more and continued to ask the old man more questions. He wanted to know everything about the monster, the princess, and how she would be fed to it. The old man provided all these details. The creature lived in the cold depths of the lake, and came onto land by a chapel on the shore. Inside the chapel, the lambs would be bound and left on the floor, next to the princess who would be kneeling in prayer, awaiting her fate. Once he had heard enough, the young man bade the old one farewell, and set off towards the lake. Maybe he was crazy, but when he returned from the lake, he was seriously thinking "Now, I have a good chance to prove myself."

The next morning found the young man, with his sword at his side and a lance at the ready, hidden behind the chapel by the lake. Inside, he heard the

plaintive cries of the lambs and the princess's trembling voice praying. Everything outside, including him, was deathly silent. Then, he heard it — the slapping and splashing of something heavy moving through the water. Cautiously, he looked out from his hiding place, and saw the great monster approaching the shore. It had many, many sharp teeth in its huge mouth, and very long, and very sharp, claws on its feet. With bated breath and beating heart, he readied himself, and waited. He waited until the creature was no longer in the lake, but not yet on land. Then he charged.

His lance pierced the soft underbelly of the creature, and he fell back, drawing his sword. The creature let out a terrifying cry, and turned on him with open mouth. Before it could swallow him whole, or even close its jaws on his arm, he thrust his sword into its throat. Then it was over for the monster. It fell on its side, with its legs flailing and its tail swiping the shallow water. But it could no longer rise, and after only a few minutes, its corpse lay still on the shore.

The young man then turned away from the shore and went into the chapel. There, he unbound the lambs and helped the princess to her feet, before leading her back to the city to a joyous welcome.

The king was true to his word, and promised both his daughter's hand and his throne to the brave young man. Everybody in the city, and beyond, celebrated their marriage and the coronation. The black flags and mourning clothes were exchanged for bright colours, and the only talk was of the heroic rescue and the happy couple.

For a while, the royal couple lived happily, and, because the young king governed wisely and fairly, everything was peaceful in the city. But, one evening as he dined with his friends and advisors, something caught his eye through the window. There was a single bright light, shining in the middle of the nearby forest. Once he had seen it, his gaze kept returning to it. Puzzled, he asked his guests "what is the meaning of the that light, out there in the forest?"

"Nobody knows, your Majesty" answered a little old man sitting nearby, "but, I can tell you one thing. Of all the men who have gone to find out, none have returned."

"Then," replied the brave young king, rising from the table "I shall personally go out there, now, to find out what that light is." In spite of the protestations of all around him that he now had a wife and a kingdom, and shouldn't put himself in danger, he remained determined. He had his horse saddled, and within the hour, rode off into the forest with his dog running alongside.

As he rode on, the night became darker and the light shining between the trees became even brighter. It led him deeper into the woods, until he came to a great house, standing where the light had been. But the light itself was nowhere to be seen. It had vanished as suddenly and quietly as a candle flame extinguished by a draught.

When the king knocked at the door, a strange little woman came out. She was very old, with many lines on her face, and her head nodded as she walked unsteadily. When he could see her clearly, the king asked her "It is very late, may I stay the night?"

"Please wait a little" answered the old woman politely "I have to first ask my master. If you wish, you can sit here" she continued, pointing to a bench by the door, "while you wait. You must be very tired."

The king was, indeed, very tired from his ride, and quickly dismounted and took a place on the bench, where he played with his dog. Shortly after, the house door opened again and the old woman came out. In a friendly tone, she told the king "You may stay here as long as need be, and will be well cared for." As she spoke, she took a stick from her apron and struck it three times against a rock next to the bench. By the time she had finished speaking, the dog, the horse, and the king, had all been turned to stone.

In the city, the queen, her father, the rest of the court, and — as time went by — all of the townspeople, waited anxiously. With every day which passed, their hopes diminished, and their fears grew. But, every day, the person who never returned was the king himself. When the last hope for his safe return had finally been extinguished, the city once again went into mourning.

Then, one day another young man riding through the forest, came to a fork in the road, where one road led to the city and one to his home. He was the younger son of the old fisherman, and after many adventures of his own, was returning home, well dressed and carrying a fine sword. He dismounted, and approached the great tree where he and his brother had parted ways. His knife was still clean and bright, but his brother's was red and almost rusted through!

No longer thinking of returning home, he mounted his horse and turned onto the road his brother had travelled. He rode on, by day and by night, stopping neither to eat nor sleep, until, one evening, he came to a great city. As soon as he entered the gates, it was clear to him that he had arrived in a very unhappy place. Everything was quiet and not a happy face was to be seen amongst any of the townspeople, who all walked with their heads bowed. When he asked the passers-by, a little old man explained to him why the whole city was in mourning.

"We have lost our brave young king" the old man told him. "He rode off one night into that forest," pointing to the woods on the other side of the city, "where by night a ghost light shines brightly. But, nobody who follows that light ever returns, not even our king."

The young man thanked him, and carried on his way — into the same forest. Whatever misfortune had befallen the king, could have also met his brother. He rode on towards the light, never letting it once out of his sight. Soon, he came to a great house, standing where the light had been. But the light itself was

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"No!" cried the young man angrily, drawing his sword, "I will not wait. Let me search every room and passage in this house, or you shall feel this".

With the blade at her neck, the old woman pleaded for mercy. "In heaven's name, please spare me," she whimpered, "and, I will bring the king back to life." Then she ran back into the house, and returned carrying a long thin twig. With this she struck a stone, by the door, three times. At the first stroke, a dog sprang up from where there had been a rock, and started barking crazily at the other stones. On the second stroke, another rock turned into a magnificent black stallion, and on the final stroke — the king himself appeared.

The king looked his rescuer in the face, smiled, and embraced his, very surprised, younger brother. Together they returned to the city, after which the king sent for their parents, and the townspeople held a great celebration which nobody thought would ever end.