

The Demon with a Girl in its Heart

There once was a village beset by a Demon everyone called DARK CLOUD. When Dark Cloud moved into the forest nearby, a darkness came to the whole valley that took away all fun. No one felt joy when they woke up in the morning. No one wore orange or pink or yellow clothes. Everyone stopped joking and playing games and singing while they worked in the fields and the houses. All the religious people could talk about was fear of the future and the political leaders pointed fingers at each other more than serving the people.

Everyone tried to hex the demon. Warriors who went into the forest to kill the demon never returned. Everyone hated the demon. Work got harder. Food had no taste. Everyone started to believe that war was inevitable.

One day, an elder woman with great waves of silver hair showed up asking if there was a demon nearby. When the people said yes, they asked her as if in one voice, "What can we do?"

"You have to find a child who is not ticklish," she said. "And send him or her alone to meet the demon in the forest. This child will have to get the answer to three questions, then return to us all waiting here."

All the village children gathered in the town square. One by one, each was tested. Every single one was ticklish. What despair they all felt! Would they be cursed forever? Finally, a shy boy who'd been far off near the old rock face herding his family's goats, came running like a goat himself, fearful he'd be punished for being late. As soon as he caught his breath, he was tickle tested. To everyone's astonishment, his only reaction was embarrassment that everyone was staring at him.

This subsided the moment he saw the Silver Haired Woman. Her kindness felt like a nest of safety. However dangerous it seemed, he knew if he followed her instructions carefully, he would help everyone in the village including his goats.

The boy set out into the forest. The further he walked, the darker it became until, as if in the dead of night, he saw a house floating inside a dark cloud. As he stepped through the gate, a swarm of tiny butterflies encircled him from the tip of his toes to above his crown, caressing their delicate wings against his skin.

He continued forward, as the Silver Haired Woman had instructed, and knocked on the door. To his surprise, a woman answered who was nearly identical to the Silver Haired Woman except, instead of great waves, her hair was like a tangled mountain.

"Ahhh," she said, waving him in. "You have made it past the flying giggle wiggles. You are a rare child indeed."

Her room was full of toys and joke books and children's stories and musical instruments and photo albums. It seemed a magical playland yet everything was covered in dust emanating clouds of gray and black smoke as if just burnt by a fire.

"You have three questions to ask me?"

"Yes, ma'am. I do"

"Go ahead," she said. "What is the first?"

He paused and took a long exhale as he'd been told to do. Then, as clearly and slowly as he possibly could, he asked the first question:

"What do you want from us?"

"Ahh, very good question my little goat child. I want to take all your joy and happiness and have it all for myself. Now, what is your second question?"

He again paused and took a long exhale and felt a wave of calmness. Then, as clearly and slowly as he possibly could, he asked the second question:

"What do you need?"

At this, she stopped and he could see she was listening to something inside herself, right inside her heart. He thought he could even hear it, as if it moved her lips.

"I want to have fun! Of course! I want to play and dance in the grass!"

Then, just as quickly, her scowl returned. "Now, the third question! Be quick Goat Child!" She flashed irritation and urgency and he almost stammered to shout it out.

But he found in his heart another pause and another long exhale and another wave of calm. Then, as clearly and slowly as he possibly could, he asked the third question:

"How will you feel when you can play and dance in the grass?"

She made a big sigh. She was taken by surprise. It was all so obvious.

"Ahhh, I will be the happiest person in the world. I will be free. I will remember LOVE!"

She looked him in the eyes and sighed again, amazed it seemed to have spoken this out loud. Then quickly, her scowl took over her face. "OK, you goat boy. You got what you came for. Now get out of here. Go!"

Quickly, he turned. The door opened as if by magic and the gwiggle wiggle butterflies flew him to the gate. He walked and leapt like a goat all the way back to the village, discovering as the dark cloud lessened that it was only just afternoon. The villagers waited still in the square. He walked up to the Wavy Silvered Haired Woman with gentleness in her eyes, and reported all that he had learned.

“Now,” she said to all who were gathered, “Come with me.”

She led a march to the oldest house in the town which had been turned into a museum long ago. Down hallways and corridors she came to a door no one remembered and took out a key. Inside was a great covered heap of who-knows-what. In one sweeping motion, she pulled back the hulking covering cloth to reveal an orchestra of old instruments— gongs and mallets and bells and wooden flutes. Then everyone carried the instruments back to the square.

“It is time to play,” she said.

One by one, from the oldest to the youngest, the villagers began to play. Their hands and hearts remembered music their minds had long buried or never knew. A few notes flowed into a sweeping harmony.

Soon, they could feel Dark Cloud approach. The village got darker and darker till they felt it was night. But they continued to play.

The song became a nectar swirling in the dark cloud air. Every tone was an offering to their dark guest. They said, “This is for you Dark Cloud. This is all the joy and all the fun and all the love we can imagine and it is for you.”

Every one played and played till tears filled their eyes and a deep grieving tone reverberated as if the earth itself was sobbing. There, out of the cloud, lying on the ground was a huge monster, dark and disgusting and moaning.

They kept playing. Before their eyes, this dark monster became the Tangle Silver Haired Woman the boy had seen, the mirror image of the lady with silver waves.

Suddenly, out of her heart a little rainbow emerged, stretching upwards towards the sky. This rainbow turned into a little girl who danced and did cartwheels in the grass. The music, in a flash, perfectly on cue, turned joyful. Songs emerged from everyone’s lips. This seemed to be the happiest girl in all the world.

She giggled as she danced towards the forest and finally vanished into the air, shimmering like dew in the sun.

The music stopped. The Tangled Silver Haired Woman on the ground stood up.

“My goodness,” she said. “My goodness. Now where is Mimi? Where is my sister?”

The Wavy Silver Haired Woman walked towards her and the two hugged each other for a long, long time.”

“Sister Riri, I have missed you so.”

“Oh goodness Mimi. We simply must teach these people all the songs so this does not happen again.”

“Wonderful, wonderful Dear Riri. But first, let’s get you a cup of tea.”

And with that, everyone, laughing and singing and playing their instruments, gathered in the Great Hall for tea.