

The Father, the Daughter, and the Beast Boy

A Fairy Tale

A long time ago in a lighthouse on a tiny spit of land there lived a lighthouse keeper and his daughter. Although the father was a good man, he was grieving, because he had lost his wife to illness.

The girl remembered her mother and father singing evening prayers which put her to sleep, along with the moan of the ocean wind and the pound of the surf. Since his wife's death, however, the father had ceased all singing.

The daughter, though a mere child, had the gift of dreams through which she learned how to help her father, cooking his meals, and mending his clothes. The only other resident at the lighthouse was a mouse whom the girl called "Migo." The tiny creature followed the girl everywhere and stayed with her at night as she slept.

Their spit of land was called the Gray Jut because it was shrouded with clouds for months at a time. After the mother's death, the sun never seemed to shine at all, and a perpetual gloom settled there.

So it became for the father as well. Two years passed, and the father fell into a deep despondency, spending all his time praying by a small stone altar, lighting candles on it, and gazing at a drawing of his deceased wife. His body became withered, and his eyes turned dark as the ocean during a winter storm. He rarely spoke. The daughter re-sewed his clothes to accommodate his shrinking frame.

One morning, the daughter found that the altar and her father were gone. This greatly troubled the child, for he always bid her goodbye before going to the village down the shore. Her anxiety increased that evening when her father failed to return. She spent the night with only Migo for company, and nothing to do except worry about her father.

The girl remained awake long into the night, but when she finally fell asleep, she began to dream. In her dream she walked for many days, and at the end of her journey she met a crone. She told the old woman about her father's grief, the altar, and how he had disappeared. The old woman closed her eyes, sighed, and shook her head. "Your father has left for the Shadow Abbey," she said. "But the abbey is no more than ruins in a glen, always blanketed with fog. It is said that if someone goes there and builds the right altar, lights candles in the proper way, and says the correct prayer, then they can reclaim their lost beloved."

"Is it true?" asked the girl.

"Of those who have gone to reclaim their beloved, none have ever returned."

"Oh, this is terrible!" said the daughter. "What can I do?"

"There is nothing you can do, child," said the old woman. "The Abbey is deep in the forest."

The girl knew the sea well, but the forest was a strange and forbidding place, filled with strange creatures.

The old woman went on. "The most dangerous thing in the forest is the Beast Boy."

"The Beast Boy?"

"A wild imp with powers. You are alone in the world now, so stay away from him."

“But I have to find my father,” said the girl. “How do I get to these ruins so I can bring him home?”

“You must follow the westerly path for three days, and the way is treacherous. You should forget your father, child. He is gone.”

But the crone in the dream could not dissuade the daughter from looking for her father. The next morning the girl left the lighthouse carrying a satchel packed with bread and water.

The first day went well enough. She followed the path and the sun’s rays through the trees, and as long as she walked swiftly, she could ignore the frightening noises. As the sun set, however, the calls of the forest creatures became louder. Terrified, she climbed a tree and settled into its wide boughs. She was afraid that animals might find her, or that she would fall out of the tree in her sleep. Even worse, she could not hear the moan of the ocean wind and the pound of the surf. In spite of her terrors, she eventually managed to drift off to sleep.

In her dreams Migo came to her. The tiny creature assured her she was going the right way, and that she would find her father.

The next morning, feeling groggy but determined, she ate a piece of bread, drank a few sips of water, and continued on her way. She had not gone far when she heard a gust of wind running past her. It seemed to settle behind an old oak, from which came a scraping sound.

The girl, careful to stay hidden in the brush, advanced and peered around the tree. There, she spied a boy, just about her age, reclining, and whittling on a stick. He had several of these sticks hanging from a belt. He put the stick to his mouth and began to play. The music was as beautiful as the song of a sandpiper, except it was mysterious and entrancing. The girl remembered the

warning from her dream, but this boy appeared to be harmless. She emerged from the brush and revealed herself. The boy stopped playing and looked at her.

His hair hung like ropes about his head, making him look like a wild animal, but his eyes were green as the tender leaves of a spring fern. His cheeks were round and pink, and his mouth was shaped into a repressed grin, as if he were about to do some mischief. The girl looked at him, fascinated, and finally asked “Are you the Beast Boy of the forest?”

The boy jumped to his feet. He threw his head back and laughed, a sound that echoed through the trees. The girl could not help but giggle herself. “You are the Beast Boy of the forest! I just know it.” Then she had an idea, and she fixed her gaze at the boy. “I’m looking for my father. He’s lost in these woods. Can you help me find him?”

The Beast Boy put his face up to the girl and sniffed. Then he took a flute from his belt and began to play. A breeze swirled around them and blew to places far and wide. The Beast Boy sniffed the air, and took off running to the west, beckoning for the girl to follow.

The Beast Boy danced and ran through the forest, playing his flute as he went. In response, creatures appeared: dryads, fauns, and other forest spirits, most of whom were no bigger than the girl herself. They appeared in whirling circles dancing to the Beast Boy’s music. Before the girl knew what was happening, one of the circles caught her up, and she too, became part of their dance.

The day went by in a spinning blur, with dancing, running, and laughing. The girl had never felt so alive and full of energy. Enraptured, she wanted to go on forever that way, dancing with the forest spirits. She forgot everything except the dancing and the Beast Boy. She forgot the lighthouse and the sea. She forgot her father.

As day turned to dusk, the girl could barely keep her eyes open. She drifted off to sleep while the Beast Boy played lullabies.

In her dreams she continued dancing with the forest spirits. Migo came to her once again, but this time he held up his tiny arms and spoke in fierce squeaks. The girl strained to understand, but the music was overwhelming. Migo was trying to call her away. He was trying to tell her something important. He was trying to warn her...

The girl was hungry when she woke the next morning, and her satchel had been torn away. Her arms and legs were covered with scratches from the brush. She tried to remember her dream, but the Beast Boy began to play his flute, and his music swept away her cares. The forest spirits took her up in their circles, and the girl danced with abandon, just like the previous day.

The procession was so merry that the girl barely noticed when they arrived at ruins in a glen, blanketed with fog. "What is this place?" thought the girl, "And who is that pitiable-looking man hunched over that pile of rocks?" She took little note that her own group of dancers was drawing closer and closer.

Dryads held the girl's hands tight as their circle tore through the altar and missed the man by no more than the breadth of a minnow. Stones went flying through the air. "No! Please!" cried out the man, his words filled with agony.

The circles were spinning faster and faster, but as the father's voice entered his daughter's ears, the enchantment broke. The girl knew exactly who she was, and her mind became clear as a summer's day.

"Papa!" cried out the daughter as she split from her circle, but her father was crawling through the grass searching for the drawing of his wife. The Beast Boy and the forest spirits danced with

increasing chaos. The girl had found her father, but the pulsing throng made it impossible to help him.

“Beast Boy!” cried the girl, but he continued to dance and play his flute. As she called and ran, her anger grew, and her steps quickened. She anticipated his turning with a small group of dancers, and with a determined leap, she collided into his chest and threw him to the ground.

The Beast Boy looked up at the girl as she hovered over him, his eyebrows high on his forehead in surprise.

“Beast Boy, stop!” said the girl. She got off of him, planted her feet wide on the ground and balled her tiny hands into fists.

“Go home!” she said. “I don’t need you anymore.”

The Beast Boy scratched the back of his head. Then he got to his feet, broke into a grin, and bowed. He took a flute from his belt and blew a new note, calling all the forest spirits to himself. Away they danced, and in a moment, the glen felt as if the spirits had never been there at all.

As the father clutched the drawing of his wife, his daughter saw the altar stones strewn about and was filled with a burning remorse. She set the stones back up as best she could. Then she took up a piece of flint by the altar to light the candles. But everything was wet, so the flint would not spark. “Light!” she said as she struck the flint again and again. “Light!” Her voice was ragged with desperation, but the candles would not light.

Two strong hands on her shoulders interrupted her. “Don’t cry. Please don’t cry.”

It was her father, crouching at her side. His eyes reached down to her. “It’s me, my daughter. I’m better now.” He wiped the tears from her face. “Thank you for coming after me.”

“Oh Papa!” The girl flung herself into his arms.

At that moment, the two heard a piercing note from the Beast Boy’s flute, a sound which split the air and cleared the fog. The sky turned from gray to blue and the sun’s rays touched the father and daughter, warming them, strengthening them. The daughter pulled back and saw that the color had returned to her father’s face. Not only was he himself again, but the sun had restored him to full health.

“Oh Papa!” The girl cried out once more.

The father and the daughter returned to the lighthouse, but the girl had a new secret. The Beast Boy had dropped his flute when she threw him down. So whenever the sky became gloomy for too long, the daughter would blow a long high note from the Beast Boy’s flute, and the sun would shine once again.

And every night, the father would sing their evening prayers just as the daughter remembered, except this time she would sing with him. Migo would stay at the girl’s side as she fell asleep to the moan of the ocean wind, and the pound of the surf.

The End