



The Adventures of a Fisherman's Son

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Brazilian

Intermediate

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Long ago, there was a man and woman who lived in a little mud hut under the palm trees on the river bank. They had so many children they did not know what to do. The little hut was altogether too crowded. The man had to work early and late to find food enough to feed so many. One day the seventh son said to his father, “O, father, I found a little puppy yesterday when I was playing on the bank of the river. Please let me bring it home to keep. I have always wanted one.”

The father consented sadly. He did not know how to find food for the children, and an extra puppy to feed seemed an added burden. He went to the river bank to fish that day with a heavy heart. He cast his net in vain. He did not catch a single fish. He cast his net from the other side with no better luck. He did not catch even one little piabinha.

Suddenly he heard a voice which seemed to come from the river bed itself, it was so deep. This is what it said: “If you will give me whatever new you find in your house when you go home I will give you fisherman’s luck. You will catch all the fish you wish.”

The man remembered the request which his seventh son had made that morning. “The new thing I’ll find in my house when I get home will be that puppy,” said the man to himself. “This will be a splendid way to get rid of

the puppy which I did not want to keep anyway.”

Accordingly the man consented to the request which came from the strange voice in the depths of the river.

“You must seal this covenant with your blood,” said the voice.

The man cut his finger a tiny bit with his sharp knife and squeezed a few drops of blood from the wound into the river. “If you break this vow the curse of the river giant will be upon you and your children for ever and ever,” said the deep voice solemnly.

The fisherman cast his net where the river giant commanded, and immediately it was so full of fish that the man could hardly draw it out of the water. Three times he drew out his net, so full that it was in danger of breaking. “Truly this was a fortunate bit of business,” said the man. “Here I have fish enough to feed my family and all I can sell in addition.”

As the fisherman approached his house with his enormous catch of fish one of the children came running to meet him. “O father, guess what we have at our house which we did not have when you went away,” said the child.

“A new puppy,” replied her father.

“O no, father,” replied the child. “You have not guessed right at all. It is a new baby brother.”

The poor fisherman burst into tears. “What shall I do! What shall I do!” he sobbed. “I dare not break my vow to the river giant.”

The fisherman’s wife was heartbroken when she heard about the business which her husband had transacted with the river giant. However she could think of no way to escape from keeping the contract which he had made. She kissed the tiny babe good-bye and gave it her blessing. Then the fisherman took it down to the river bank and threw it into the river at the exact spot from which the deep voice had come.

There in the depths of the river the river giant was waiting to receive the new born babe. He took the little one into his palace of gold and silver and mother-of-pearl with ornaments of diamonds, and there the baby received excellent care.

Time passed and the little boy grew into a big boy. At last he was fifteen years old and a handsome lad indeed, tall and straight, with eyes which were dark and deep like the river itself, and hair as dark as the shades in the

depths of the river. All his life he had been surrounded with every luxury, but he had never seen a single person. He had never seen even the river giant. All he knew of him was his deep voice which gave orders in the palace.

One day the voice of the river giant said, "I have to go away on a long journey. I will leave with you all the keys to all the doors in the palace, but do not meddle with anything. If you do you must forfeit your life."

Many days passed and the lad did not hear the voice of the river giant. He missed its sound in the palace. It was very still and very lonely. At last at the end of fifteen days he took one of the keys which the river giant had left and opened the door which it fitted. The door led into a room in the palace where the boy had never been. Inside the room was a huge lion. The lion was fat and well nourished, but there was nothing for it to eat except hay. The boy did not meddle with anything and shut the door.

Another fifteen days passed by, and again the lad took one of the keys. He opened another door in the palace which he had never entered. Inside the room he found three horses, one black, one white, and one chestnut. There was nothing in the room for the horses to eat except meat, but in spite of it they were fat and well nourished. The boy did not touch anything and when he went out he shut the door.

At the end of another fifteen days all alone without even the voice of the river giant for company, the lad tried another key in another door. This room opened into a room full of armour. There were daggers and knives and swords and muskets and all sorts of armour which the boy had never seen and did not know anything about. He was very much interested in what he saw, but he did not meddle with anything.

The next day he opened the room again where the horses were kept. This time one of the horses,—the black one,—spoke to him and said, "We like hay to eat very much better than this meat which was left to us by mistake. The lion must have our hay. Please give this meat to the lion and bring us back our hay. If you will do this as I ask I'll serve you for ever and ever."

The boy took the meat to the lion. The lion was very much pleased to exchange the hay for it. The lad then took the hay to the horses. All at once he remembered how he had been told not to meddle with anything. This had been meddling. The boy burst into tears. "I shall lose my life as the punishment for this deed," he sobbed.

The horses listened in amazement. "I got you into this trouble," said the black horse. "Now I'll get you out. Just trust me to find a way out."

The black horse advised the boy to take some extra clothes and a sword and musket and mount upon his back. "I have lived here in the depths of the river so long that my speed is greater than that of the river itself," said the horse. "If there was any doubt of it before, now that I have had some hay once more I am sure I can run faster than any river in the world."

It was true. When the river giant came back home and found that the boy had meddled he ran as fast as he could in pursuit of the lad. The black horse safely and surely carried the lad beyond his reach.

The black horse and his rider travelled on and on until finally they came to a kingdom which was ruled over by a king who had three beautiful daughters. The lad at once applied for a position in the service of this king. "I do not know what you can do," said the king. "You have such soft white hands. Perhaps you may serve to carry bouquets of flowers from my garden every morning to my three daughters."

The lad had eyes which were dark and deep like the depths of the river, and when he carried bouquets of flowers from the garden to the king's daughters the youngest princess fell in love with him at once. Her two sisters laughed at her. "I don't care what you say," said the youngest princess. "He is far handsomer than any of the princes who have ever sung of love beneath our balcony."

That very night two princes from neighbouring kingdoms came to sing in the palace garden beneath the balcony of the three princesses. The two oldest daughters of the king were proud and haughty, but the youngest princess had love in her heart and love in her eyes. For this reason she was one whom all the princes admired most.

The lad from the river listened to their songs. "I wish I looked like these two princes and knew songs like theirs," said he. Just then he caught sight of his own reflection in the fountain in the garden. He saw that he looked quite as well as they. "I too will sing a song before the balcony of the princesses," he decided.

He did not know that he could sing, but in truth his voice had in it all the music of the rushing of the river. When he sang even the two rival musicians stopped to listen to his song. The two older princesses did not know who was singing, but the youngest princess recognized him at once.

The next day a great tournament took place. The lad from the river had never seen a tournament, but after he had watched it for a moment he decided to enter. He went to get the black horse which had carried him out of the depths of the river and the arms he had brought with him from the palace of the river giant. With such a horse and such arms he carried off all the honours of the tournament. Every one at the tournament wondered who the strange cavalheiro could be. No one recognized him except the youngest princess. She knew who it was the moment she saw him and gave him her ribbon to wear.

The next day all the cavalheiros who had taken part in the tournament set out to slay the wild beast which often came out of the jungle to attack the city. It was the lad from the river who killed the beast, as all the cavalheiros knew. When they returned to the palace with the news that the beast had been slain, the king said, "Tomorrow night we will hold the greatest festa which this palace has ever witnessed. Tomorrow let all the cavalheiros who are here assembled go forth to hunt for birds to grace our table."

The next day the cavalheiros went out to hunt the birds, and it was the lad from the river who succeeded in slaying the birds. None of the other cavalheiros were at all successful. The two neighbouring princes who were suitors for the hand of the youngest princess made a contract. "We cannot let this stranger carry off all the honours," said one to the other. "You say that you killed the beast, and I will say that it was I who killed the birds."

That night at the festa one prince stood up before the king and told his story of slaying the beast, and the other prince stood up and told how he had killed the birds. The other cavalheiros knew that it was false, but when they looked around for the cavalheiro who had done the valiant deeds they could not find him. The lad from the river had on his old clothes which he wore as a servant in the garden and stood at the lower part of the banquet hall among the servants.

When the king had heard the stories of the two princes he was greatly pleased with what they had done. "The one who killed the beast shall have a princess for a bride," said he, "and the one who killed the birds he too shall have a princess for his bride."

The youngest princess saw the lad from the river standing among the servants and smiled into his eyes. The lad came and threw himself before the king. "O my king," said he, "these stories to which you have listened are false, as all these assembled cavalheiros will prove. It is I who killed the beast and all the birds. I claim a princess as my bride."

All the assembled cavalheiros recognized the lad in spite of his changed appearance in his gardening clothes. "Viva!" they shouted. "He speaks the truth. He is the valiant one of us who killed the beast and the birds. To him belongs the reward."

The youngest princess had a heart filled with joy. The wedding feast was celebrated the very next day. The river giant found out about it and sent a necklace of pearls and diamonds as a wedding gift to the bride of the lad whom he had brought up in his palace. The fisherman and his wife, however, never knew the great good fortune which had come to their son.

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