



The Wolf-Prince

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Portuguese

Advanced
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In the North of Portugal there are many sequestered spots where the enchanted Moors and the wizards meet when it is full moon. These places are generally situated among high rocks on the precipitous sides of the hills overlooking rivers; and when the wind is very boisterous their terrible screams and incantations can be distinctly heard by the peasantry inhabiting the neighbouring villages.

On such occasions the father of the family sets fire to a wisp of straw, and with it makes the sign of the cross around his house, which prevents these evil spirits from approaching. The other members of the family place a few extra lights before the image of the Virgin; and the horse-shoe nailed to the door completes the safety of the house.

But it will so happen that sometimes an enchanted Moor, with more cunning than honesty, will get through one of the windows on the birth of a child, and will brand the infant with the crescent on his shoulder or arm, in which case it is well known that the child, on certain nights, will be changed into a wolf.

The enchanted Moors have their castles and palaces under the ground or beneath the rivers, and they wander about the earth, seeing but not seen; for they died unbaptized, and have, therefore, no rest in the grave.

They seem to have given preference to the North of Portugal, where they are held in great fear by the ignorant peasantry; and it has been observed that all such of the natives as have left their homes to study at the universities, on their return have never been visited by the enchanted Moors, as it is well known that they have

a great respect for learning. In fact, one of the kings has said that until all his subjects were educated they would never get rid of the enchanted Moors and wizards.

In a village called Darque, on the banks of the Lima, there lived a farmer whose goodness and ignorance were only equalled by those of his wife. They were both young and robust, and were sufficiently well off to afford the luxury of beef once or twice a month. Their clothes were home-spun, and their hearts were homely. Beyond their landlord's grounds they had never stepped; but as he owned nearly the whole village, it is very evident that they knew something of this world of ours. They were both born and married on the estate, as their parents had been before them, and they were contented because they had never mixed with the world.

One day, when the farmer came home to have his midday meal of broth and maize bread, he found his wife in bed with a newborn baby boy by her side, and he was so pleased that he spent his hour of rest looking at the child, so that his meal remained untasted on the table.

Kissing his wife and infant, and bidding her beware of evil eyes, he hurried out of the house back to his work; and so great was his joy at being a father that he did not feel hungry.

He was digging potatoes, and in his excitement had sent his hoe through some of them, which, however, he did not notice until he happened to strike one that was so hard that the steel of his hoe flashed.

Thinking it was a pebble, he stooped to pick it up, but was surprised to see that it was no longer there.

However, he went on working, when he struck another hard potato, and his hoe again flashed.

"Ah," said he, "the evil one has been sowing this field with stones, as he did in the days of good Saint Euphemia, our patroness." Saying which, he drew out the small crucifix from under his shirt, and the flinty potato disappeared; but he noticed that one of its eyes moved.

He thought no more of this untoward event, and went on hoeing until sunset, when, with the other labourers, he shouldered his hoe and prepared to go home.

Never had the distance seemed so great; but at last he found himself by his wife's bedside. She told him that while he was absent an old woman had called, asking for something to eat, and that as she seemed to have met with some accident, because there was blood running down her face, she invited her in, and told her she might eat what her husband had left untasted.

Sitting down at the table, the old woman commenced eating without asking a blessing on the food; and when she had finished she approached the bed, and, looking at the infant, she muttered some words and left the house hurriedly.

The husband and wife were very much afraid that the old woman was a witch; but as the child went on growing and seemed well they gradually forgot their visitor.

The infant was baptized, and was named John; and when he was old enough he was sent out to work to help his parents. All the labourers noticed that John could get through more work than any man, he was so strong and active; but he was very silent.

The remarkable strength of the boy got to be so spoken about in the village that at last the wise woman, who was always consulted, said that there was no doubt but that John was a wolf-child; and this having come to the ears of his parents, his body was carefully examined, and the mark of the crescent was found under his arm.

Nothing now remained to be done but to take John to the great wise woman of Arifana, and have him disenchanting.

The day had arrived for the parents to take John with them to Arifana, but when they looked for him he could nowhere be found. They searched everywhere—down the well, in the river, in the forest—and made inquiries at all the villages, but in vain; John had disappeared.

Weeks went by without any sign of him; and the winter having set in, the wolves, through hunger, had become more undaunted in their attacks on the flocks and herds. The farmer, afraid of firing at them, lest he might shoot his son, had laid a trap; and one morning, to his delight, he saw that a very large wolf had been caught, which one of his fellow-labourers was cudgelling. Fearing it might be the lost wolf-child, he hastened to the spot, and prevented the wolf receiving more blows; but it was too late, apparently, to save the creature's life, for it lay motionless on the ground as if dead. Hurrying off for the wise woman of the village, she returned with him; and, close to the head of the wolf, she gathered some branches of the common pine-tree, and lighting

them, as some were green and others dry, a volume of smoke arose like a tower, reaching to the top of a hill where lived some notorious enchanted Moors and wizards; so that between the wolf and the said Moors the distance was covered by a tunnel of smoke and fire. Then the wise woman intoned the following words, closing her eyes, and bidding the rest do so until she should tell them they might open them:—

“Spirit of the mighty wind
That across the desert howls,
Help us here to unbind
All the spells of dreaded ghouls;
Through the path of smoke and fire
Rising to the wizards’ mound,
Bid the cursèd mark retire
From this creature on the ground;
Bid him take his shape again,
Free him from the Crescent’s power,
May the holy Cross remain
On his temple from this hour.”

She now made the sign of the Cross over the head of the wolf, and continued:—

“River, winding to the west,
Stay thy rippling current, stay,
Jordan’s stream thy tide has blest,
Help us wash this stain away;
Bear it to the ocean wide,
Back to Saracenic shore.
Those who washed in thee have died
But to live for evermore.”

Then she sprinkled a few drops over the fire, which caused a larger amount of smoke, and exclaimed—

“Hie thee, spirit, up through smoke,
Quenched by water and by fire;
Hie thee far from Christian folk,

To the wizard's home retire.
Open wide your eyelids now,
All the smoke has curled away;
'Neath the peaceful olive bough
Let us go, and let us pray."

Then they all rose, and the wolf was no longer there. The fire had burned itself out, and the stream was again running. In slow procession they went to the olive grotto, headed by the wise woman; and, after praying, they returned to the house, where they found, to their delight, John fast asleep in his bed; but his arms showed signs of bruises which had been caused by the cudgelling he had received when he was caught in the trap.

There were great rejoicings that day in the village of Darque; and no one was better pleased than John at having regained his proper shape.

He was never known to join in the inhuman sport of hunting wolves for pleasure, because, as he said, although they may not be wolf-children, they do but obey an instinct which was given them; and to be kind-hearted is to obey a precept which was given us. And, owing to the introduction into Portugal of the Book in which this commandment is to be found, wolf-children have become scarcer, and the people wiser.

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