



The Knight of the Fish

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Humor, Magic, Retold Fairy Tales

In a far away kingdom, many years ago, there lived a young man named Ralph. He was a nice enough guy, but always very unlucky. He tried his hardest to earn enough money to support himself and his mother, but it was always a struggle. He wasn't a tradesman, you see, which means he didn't have a steady job. He had to hire himself out to do odd jobs for the people of his village of Pasadena...no, not the Pasadena you're thinking of. This was a different Pasadena. Just one of those weird coincidences that crop up from time to time.

Now, one day, Ralph was out in the lake fishing in the hopes of catching enough fish to sell in the market or, at the very least, enough to feed himself and his mother. But after hours and hours of sitting on the shore and casting his line, he hadn't had so much as half a nibble. He was just about to give up and go home when he heard a piteous moan from behind him. Turning around he saw a dwarf with his very long beard snagged on a tree root.

"Help me!" cried the dwarf in a comically high-pitched voice. "My very long beard is snagged on a tree root!"

"Yeah, I heard that somewhere," said Ralph, and he very carefully disentangled the dwarf's beard from the tree root.

"Because you have helped me, I will do something for you." The dwarf gave Ralph a slightly shiny stone and he would have said more, but then the dwarf heard a strange sound nearby and, thinking it was a wolf, ran away screaming, without even telling Ralph about the magic stone.

"Um...thank you!" called Ralph after the fleeing dwarf (the sound he had heard, by the way, was a squirrel, not a wolf, which might sound kind of silly, but if you recall this is the same dwarf that grew a very long beard and

didn't think to look where he was walking). Then he put the stone in his pocket and sat back down with his fishing rod. Still he didn't catch anything, so finally, in desperation, he said out loud, "I wish I could catch something!"

Well, before his encounter with the dwarf, a statement like that would have been pointless. But now he had the Slightly Shiny Stone which granted any wish that Ralph made. And before he knew what was happening, the fellow had landed a simply enormous fish. Bigger than Ralph himself. He would be able to feed the entire village with a fish this size!

Of course, once you catch a giant fish, you still have to carry that giant fish back home, and that was quite a chore with a fish this size. "I wish the fish could carry me instead," said Ralph, without thinking. Sure enough, the fish began to move as though it were still alive. It slid underneath Ralph's legs and began hopping toward Pasadena, bearing Ralph on its back like a rider on a horse.

It was about this time that Ralph began to suspect that the stone just might be magic.

Our scene now changes, rather abruptly, to the bedroom of Princess Viola. The poor girl was eighteen years old and she had never laughed in her life. You see, her mother, the late queen, had literally died laughing (technically she choked because she was eating while laughing, but you get the idea) so the King had decided to ban laughter from the castle, so that it could never happen again.

But, after all, what's the point of living if you're never going to laugh? Now, too late, the King realized that his daughter was alive and healthy...but that's all she was. Without laughter, she was little more than an empty shell. But by now, she had gone so long without laughing that she simply didn't know how. All the best jesters, fools, comedians and smart alecks in the kingdom were sent for, but none of them could make her crack a smile. Finally, the king issued a proclamation:

ANY MAN WHO IS ABLE
TO MAKE MY DAUGHTER,
PRINCESS VIOLA, SNICKER,
CHORTLE, GIGGLE, GUFFAW,
TITTER, CHUCKLE, SPLIT HER
SIDES OR OTHERWISE
VOCALLY EXPRESS THE

FEELING OF JOY AND/OR
DELIGHT (i.e., “to laugh”), WILL
BE AWARDED 50 MILLION GOLD
GRINKLES AND VIOLA’S HAND
IN MARRIAGE.

Love n’ kisses,
The King

And so it was that, on this particular day, Viola was leaning out her bedroom window, wondering if she would ever be happy in her entire life, when she saw something unusual in the streets below. At first glance, it appeared to be a man riding a giant fish. On closer examination, it was a man riding a giant fish. It was, by a very wide margin, the most ridiculous thing Viola had ever seen.

So she laughed!

The King heard his daughter’s laughter and ran to her room immediately...well, not immediately. I mean, think about it, he’d never heard his daughter’s laughter before so, for a few minutes, he didn’t actually know what it was. But, yeah, once he figured that out, he was off like a shot.

“What happened?” he said when he arrived at his daughter’s door. Viola was literally Rolling On The Floor Laughing Out Loud (hmmm, I wonder if there’s a shorter way to say that?) but she pointed out the window. Her father saw the man riding the fish and, of course, he laughed, too.

But not for long.

Because once the joy of hearing his daughter laugh for the first time had worn off, the King realized that, by his own proclamation, not only did he have to give this (ugh!) commoner fifty million gold grinkles, but he had to let her marry his daughter! It had seemed like a good idea at the time, but now he was beginning to wonder if riding a fish really qualified this guy to be his son-in-law.

“And you’re sure you want to marry him?” the king had asked. “I mean, Prince Wendell is a nice guy, and you two could—”

“I don’t care! Prince Wendell didn’t make me happy for the first time in my entire life. I don’t care how many princes, kings, earls, dukes, or whatever you throw at me. I will marry no one but my Knight of the Fish.

Besides, you promised that whoever made me laugh would marry me.”

Seeing that he was stuck, the King tried to get used to the idea and he invited Ralph and his mother over for dinner and to spend the night. Ralph and Viola were crazy about each other, Ralph’s mother was very proud of her son finally having some good luck in his life, but the King was still less than thrilled about the whole thing. These people were incredibly common. The way they ate, the way they dressed, the way they talked. And their manners! No refinement, no sophistication...

No way!

So, after dinner, the King went to see his prime minister, his closest advisor, and said, “I cannot go back on my word, but I cannot allow my daughter to marry this so-called ‘Knight of the Fish.’ So, I’m leaving it up to you. Stop this wedding from taking place. Do whatever you have to do, just get me out of this!”

Well, in the future, the King would wish that he had chosen his words more carefully. For the way in which the prime minister decided to stop the wedding was to try and kill Ralph! The guards snuck into the guest room where he was sleeping that night, tied him up and threw him in a barrel, which they sealed tightly and threw into the sea.

Ralph, known by his close friends and relations to be a heavy sleeper, didn’t wake up at any point during this episode. In fact, he stayed asleep for a surprisingly long time, dreaming of taking a nice hot bath which began to overflow and fill the entire house and then the water turned ice cold and that’s when he woke up and realized he was about to drown. And this might have been a very, very unhappy ending to our story, had it not been for the fact that Ralph had resolved to keep the Slightly Shiny Stone on his person at all times.

“I wish this barrel was a boat!” he said as water began to leak in through the staves. The barrel grew and grew until it was a sloop...a clipper? A schooner? I don’t know, it was like a really big boat is the point here. “I wish this boat would take me back to Pasadena!” And the next thing he knew, Ralph was going home in style.

The next morning, when Ralph was discovered to be missing, Viola was devastated. A search was organized at once, but there was no sign of the peasant. The King was pleased.

“Well done,” he said to his prime minister. “You got rid of him! What did you do? Bribe him? Give him twice as much money to leave?”

“No, I locked him in a barrel and threw him in the sea.”

“You did what?!?”

“What? You told me to get rid of him.”

“Yeah, but I didn’t mean to kill him! I didn’t think he was good enough for my daughter, but I certainly didn’t want him to die! What is the matter with you?!?”

“In my defense, sire, your instructions were a little vague.”

But soon, Ralph’s ship pulled in to port and he returned triumphant. The King was forced to come clean about the whole thing. He was deeply ashamed for what he had done and he fell to his knees and begged Ralph and Viola to forgive him. Being nice people, they did (Ralph even gave the King the boat he had wished for as a gift), and the wedding took place that very day.

As for the prime minister, the King wanted to lock him in the dungeon for the rest of his life, but his daughter asked that he be merciful. So the prime minister only spent one year of his life in the dungeon, after which he actually started dating Ralph’s mother, which made things pretty awkward at dinner parties.

“So, how did you two meet?”

“Funny story! I tried to murder her son.”

Not exactly “meet cute” is it?

Sorry, I’m getting off topic here. The point is that everyone lived happily ever after.

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