



# *The Tale of the Water Nymph*

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Magic

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## Tale of the Water Nymph

When I was a young girl, aged nine, my beloved grandmother, on my mother's side, paid us a surprise visit. After a delicious dinner of stovies an' mash – my favourite – I was sent tae bed.

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Giggling, I coorie doon as my Grammy tucks me in. Pointing towards my big book of faery tales, I put my hands together in pretend prayer, in hopes she'll read me a story.

Making a big thing of considering, Grammy cups her chin in her hand, an' looking at the ceiling, she pretends tae think about it.

Trying tae hold in my laughter, an' spluttering, I chuckle.

Leaning close, an' lowering her voice, Grandmother whispers that she has a secret tale tae tell me.

My Grammy always told the best stories, so wanting tae hear what she has tae say, my ears prick up, an' agog at the thought of being told a secret tale, I sit up quickly, readying myself.

Smiling, Grammy gives me a squeeze an', as she always does, she tells me she loves me more than life itself.

Patting an' pulling at my pillows, she arranges them behind my back tae make sure I'm comfortable.

"I love you tae Grammy!" I cry. Excitement mounting, I try my best tae hold doon the giggles fluttering around

my belly. Smoothing doon my bed cover wi' my hands, I slide my fingers together intae a basket an' sit them on my lap tae show I'm ready tae hear the secret tale.

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Eyeing the door, Grandmother listens for a moment an' grinning she asks, "Well, are ye ready for the 'Tale of the Water Nymph' my darling?"

Wondering what a water nymph looks like, I'm just about tae ask, but it seems Grammy has 'the gift' as she's able tae read my thoughts.

Her blue eyes glaze over an' talking tae a spot oan the wall, she says, "The water nymph was a spirit or sprite. The people of the Hernish glen said her name was Naomi. She was rumoured tae have magical powers an' it was believed she lived oan the wee, mist covered, island in the centre of Loch Hernish." Turning tae look at me again, she smiles an' in explanation, she adds, "Loch Hernish was in the middle of my hame in the village of Hernishloch." A faraway look in her eye once more, her smile slipping, she sighs.

Supposing she's thinking fondly of her childhood hame, I wait as patiently as I can for her tae continue; itchy feet moving back an' forth beneath the covers.

Grandmother is silent a few moments longer, then her face lights up an' her eyes shine as she says, "My sweet darling lassie, you would have loved it there in Hernishloch. The days were long an' warm an' the land was alive wi' aw forms of friendly creatures. Animals, wee an' big, scampered freely over the lush green spaces of oor peaceful glen. Magnificent hills surrounded the valley an' oor people were truly happy there."

Eager tae hear more, I grin an' nod.

"The glen was surrounded by a forest of tall, stout pine trees an' I always felt safe wherever I went," she said.

I'm just about tae tell Grammy that her glen sounds wonderful when I notice that her expression has changed. Her kind green eyes have grown darker an' they grow darker still, until they shine almost black as coal.

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Feeling like a dark cloud is passing over us an' certain this must be the case, I raise my eyes tae the ceiling tae check. Seeing nothing, I shake my head an' glancing back at Grammy I notice a look of horror oan her pale face. Cowering, I draw back intae my pillow. Grasping my covers, I drag them half-way up my face, an' peeking oot from between my fingers, I watch her.

Face softening an' sighing, she leans forward an' gently, she kisses me on the cheek. Speaking again, the soft

tone of her voice, is like a lilting lullaby, which causes me tae relax. Releasing my hold on the quilt I slump back again intae my soft pillow.

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“Slender an’ beautiful,” Grammy says Naomi was. “With long flowing hair, the colour of ebony. Entwined in an’ oot wi’ gossamer threads of pure gold; dotted aboot wi’ diamonds an’ rubies, which glimmer an’ glisten in the light of the evening sun.”

Delighted, I gasp as I think of the beautiful water nymph an’ smiling now, I look at my Grandmother; longing tae hear more.

Grammy flashes the most wonderful smile at me, then she says, “When the water sprite moved through the trees on the island, it was like water flowing over pebbles in a stream. Her tresses shimmered like a million stars doon her back, shining like a black velvet night sky.”

Happiness overflowing, I giggle an’ my mouth opens wide in delight.

Leaning close, Grammy gently lifts my jaw from below tae close it, then she tells me the sultry siren’s face was white as pure alabaster. She says it had neither blemish, nor flush tae disturb its pale perfection.”

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Breathless wi’ excitement, an’ anxious tae know more, I gushed, “What colour were her eyes Grammy? What was she wearing Grammy? Was her dress beautiful?”

Trying to contain her grin, her voice softer still, Grandmother replies, “Her eyes were the deepest, sapphire blue I’d ever seen. Huge almond-shaped eyes, full of sparkle an’ sadness. Her long trailing goon was fine, as fine as the softest thistle-doon, wrought through wi’ silver like a shimmering full moon.”

Eyes wide again, I gasp aloud, my fingers excitedly grasping back an’ forth against my cover as she continues.

“The village people had often spoke of the water sprite an’ it was widely believed she was a magical faery, who knew aw that was, aw that ever had been, an’ aw that ever would be. They greatly feared her mysterious powers.”

Sitting bolt upright, my’ fingers grabbing hold of my cover, I stare at Grandmother.

“According tae some, things began to change when the beautiful nymph was spied, sitting on the wee island in

the middle of the loch by a young lassie.”

“How did they know it was a lassie? Who saw her?” I ask.

Sighing, Grammy shrugs an’ she sounds sad when she says, “I don’t know! Somebody must have seen her there that night I suppose.”

Anxious tae know what happened next, I nod as though I understand an’ eyes wide wi’ anticipation I wait.

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“No’ long after that night a disease spread through-oot the glen,” says Grammy, her bottom lip trembling a wee bit. Pausing, she swallows, then she continues. “Almost aw the livestock died an’ a blight ruined most of the crops.” Tears shine in her blue eyes, an’ she bites her lip, as she remembers. “A lot of the deer an’ most of the other wildlife in the land died tae. The beasties that didn’t die abandoned the glen, seeking new hames far away, but...” Tapering off, she goes silent.

I catch her attention once more, by tugging at her sleeve.

“A lot of the villagers died of a mysterious illness an’ the people who were spared went hungry, becoming weak an’ ill fae lack of provisions.”

Shocked an’ no wishing tae hear any more, I cover my ears wi’ my hauns.

Concern flashing across Grammy’s kind face, she touches me gently on the head, an’ voice gentle, she asks, “Dae ye want me tae stop noo, my wee pet?”

Terrified, but needing tae know more, I swallow, an’ shaking my head, I plead, “Naw Grammy, go on, tell me more!”

“Ye sure?” she asks, then noticing my nod, she continues. “Well...when the water fae the stream, that fed the loch, became fetid an’ foul an’ undrinkable, the people feared for their lives. Abandoning their hooses an’ aw their possessions a lot of them fled the land, leaving bonny Hernishloch tae the spirits.”

A thought coming intae my mind suddenly, I gasp an’ turning, voice quivering, I ask, “Grammy was it you who was the young lassie who first saw the beautiful water nymph?”

Silent for a few moments, Grammy sighs, then she nods, an' 'that look' is on her face again. "Aye lassie. I was nine an' I was collecting brambles so my mother could make a pie"

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"That's my age Grammy!" I cry, excited to think of my Grandmother ever being the same age as me'.

Nodding, Grammy says, "Aye I know pet, but somehow, I lost my way. I wandered aff the path an' I happened upon a clearing I'd never seen before. It led doon tae the water's edge an' spying movement an' thinking it would be a fish I waited."

"Was it a fish Grammy?" I ask, but she disny seem tae hear me.

"As I watched the rippling water, I saw the sprite slip oot the dark loch," says my Grandmother. "The beautiful creature, settled doon oan the grass on the island. As she basked in the warmth of the late sun, I couldny take my eyes aff her, an' slowly she pulled a golden comb through her long dark hair."

Shivering suddenly, I pull my cover up around me.

Side-glancing me, Grammy says, "Sensing my presence, the water nymph turned to where I watched through overhanging branches, that dripped into the black water. She cast her glittering eyes upon me. My feet were rooted tae the pebbled ground, like petrified stones. No' able tae speak or move a muscle, I stared back intae her aquamarine eyes."

Gasping, I splutter, "D did s she say anything tae you Grammy?"

No' really answering my question, Grammy, looks at the wall again an' says, "She begins tae sing a song an' the sound was soothing. It pulsed through my head an' doon my body an' I felt a strong desire tae move towards it."

"How come ye didny run away Grammy? I cry, my voice rising.

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Glancing around, Grammy smiles, then replies, "I tried tae fight it lassie, I really did, but I wisny strong enough. One foot then the other edging forward an' withoot me really being aware of it, I moved towards the edge of the water. "

Eyes wide, I wait, holding my breath.

"A noise caught the sprite's attention an' she turned her eyes away fae me for a moment. The music stoapped

an' instantly the spell was broken. “

The breath I'd been holding, escapes all at once, an' relieved that Grammy managed tae escaped, I clap my hands together in my excitement.

Speaking quicker, Grammy continues. “I fled; running in my terror as fast as my wee feet would allow over the slippery stones.” Slowing, she glances at me an' raising her brows, she says, “But, being an inquisitive an' headstrong lassie, I stopped an' tip-toeing back along the path, an' hid behind the shrubbery, watching.”

Rolling my eyes, I groan, “Aw Grammy, whit did ye dae that fur?!”

Ignoring my question, Grammy says, “There was a laddie standing oan the other side of the bank an' he wisny moving; he was frozen, just like I'd been. I could see the water nymph's bright eyes gleaming through the gloaming. She began tae sing her beautiful song again an' no' wishing tae hear it an' fall under her spell, I stuck my fingers in my ears. “

Proud of her quick thinking, I cry, “Aw, well done Grammy!”

Eyes flicking towards me, she shakes her head sadly, then she says, “I could still hear it though. It was so beautiful it fetched tears tae my eyes an' it forced me tae my knees. Huddling doon oan the ground, my body shook an' for some reason, I began tae greet; tears streaming doon my face. “

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Leaning over I put an arm 'roun' my Grandmother, hugging her tightly.

Cheeks flushing, Grammy says, “I looked again, an' the young man was beginning tae disrobe. Taking aff first his shirt, then his breeks, he was soon bare as the day the Lord God made him. Startled at the sight, I turned away.

I couldn't help myself, the thought of my Grandmother looking at a naked laddie, made me giggle, but the look she gives me, causes me tae cease immediately.

Sliding her eyes off me and pursing her lips, she says, “Glancing back at the nymph on the island, I listened tae her seductive song for moments or maybe it was longer. Drawing my eyes away, I scanned the water, looking for the laddie. Noticing him swimming towards the island, I wanted tae shout tae warn him.”

“Did ye Grammy...did ye warn the laddie?” I ask, my breath coming faster.

Shaking her head, she looks sad again. “Naw, I was feart she would hear me an’ cast another spell over me, so I didny say a thing!”

My mouth formed a silent ‘O’ an’ disappointed, I frown, then nodding, I wait tae hear more.

“Reaching the island, the laddie clambered oot. Still singing her mysterious melody, the water sprite took him by hand. She led him back intae the cold water an’ straight away both disappeared under.”

I gasp again an’ Grammy glances at me, her face suddenly auld an’ care-worn.

“I wait for what seemed like an age, but they didny come back oot the dark water. Tears blinding me again, I turned away an’ without looking back, I ran faster than the wind, ‘til I was safely back hame.”

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Grammy’s tear-filled eyes are enormous in her white face an’ I don’t know what tae say tae comfort her, so I don’t say anything.

Taking my hands in hers she says, “You see lassie. my faither went oot for a walk an’ he disappeared the very next night. Terrified for oor safety, my distressed mother stole us away under cover of dark tae a new village far away.”

Throwing my arms around Grammy I hold on tight an’ holding me tighter, she kisses the top of my head an’ she tells me, that fae that night tae this, she hisny shared the story wi’ another living soul for fear the faery would hear her words an’ take revenge. I glance up at her through my tears, an’ she tells me, nobody, no’ even her ain mother or my mother knew she had seen the water nymph when she was a wee lassie. Feart at the sudden realisation that she will someday be taken from me, I tighten my hold oan my Grandmother.

Pushing me aff a wee bit, she looks intae my eyes, an’ she says, “After we left the glen there were rumours abounding for years that people passing through oor abandoned village could hear haunting tunes doon near the water’s edge. “

Hands in fists noo, I cry, “Aw naw!”

Frowning an' nodding, Grammy continues. "Rumour had it, that any who harkened tae the haunting tunes were always lured tae their deaths beneath the dark waters of the loch. "

Covering my eyes, I gasp.

Placing a hand on my head, Grammy softly says, "Lassie, I've never returned tae the spot in the woods where I first saw her for fear of what might befall me if the sprite spied me again."

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Heart racing, I stare at Grammy.

"My wee darling, I've often heard the same haunting strains of music carried oan the winds fae far away in the years that have followed. I believe in my heart she's singing her song tae try tae lure me back tae the glen. I think she's still angry that I got away."

Tears filling my eyes, my throat tightening, I'm unable tae speak, but nodding, I try tae show her I understood.

Taking my hands in hers once more, she says, "My petal, that's why I came here tonight. I love ye my wee sweetheart an' I had tae tell ye what happened in case we never meet again! But mind noo!" she adds, her mouth a tight line, "Don't ever tell another living soul about this!"

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Nodding as a promise, my tears flow freely, blinding me. My mind racing, my thoughts feel like fog suffocating me. My imagination conjures up an image of the mysterious an' beautiful water nymph. I can easily visualise the lady of the loch sitting oan the water's edge; her sparkling, sapphire eyes glittering in the moonlight. I think of how sweet her smile must be as she pulls the golden comb through her long tumbling tresses. I swear I really can hear the seductive voice singing her siren's song and squeezing my eyes shut I slip below my covers into an abyss.

Opening my eyes again, pulling myself up, I gaze around the room. Noticing my Grammy is gone, I cry oot for her. Hugging my knees tae my chest, I tremble, feeling a pull at the depths of my soul.

The End...

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