

The Fairy's Present

Once upon a time, there was a little boy who liked nothing more than listening to stories about fairies.

"Oh! Mother," he would often say, "I would be overjoyed to find one of those fairies who make such lovely presents!"

"My child," his mother would reply, "people encountered fairies back in the days of yore, but no one sees them anymore now."

"If I could find just one, I would be very happy," he would say.

The child grew up, and, when he became a man, he received an order to leave for military service. The day of his departure, his mother said to him:

"On the road you're taking, there is a forest that you must travel through. Try not to linger or spend the night in there, for it is full of brigands and thieves."

"Don't be afraid, Mother," replied the boy, embracing her. "I will obey you."

He went on the road, but, as everything was new to him, he did not rush along and took pleasure in seeing the villages and the countryside that he passed through. When he arrived at the edge of the forest, it was late and night was beginning to fall.

"Oh, my God," he said to himself. "My mother had advised me to pass through the forest before nighttime; what will I do if I'm attacked by brigands?"

He picked up his pace and walked through the forest, which was two miles wide. When he reached the middle, he saw a poor, old, good woman sprawled on the ground, unconscious.

"If I stop to help her," he thought, "the night will catch me by surprise; if I leave her, that would be cowardice. There's no way around it; I'm going to see if I can help her."

He went up to her and poured a bit of water that he had in his drinking gourd on her face. She opened her eyes and said to him:

"Oh! My little Pierre, I knew that you had a good heart. I have known you for a long time."

She got up, and, instantly, from the old woman that she was, she became young and beautiful, and she was dressed like a *grande dame*.

"I don't know who you are," the young boy said. "How do you know my name?"

"Do you no longer remember, when your mother would tell you fairy tales, you had wanted very much to see fairies? I am a fairy, and my name is Truitonne.

For remembering me, I shall grant you a gift; ask for anything you want, and your wish shall be granted.”

“Well,” he replied after thinking for a bit, “I would like to be invisible.”

“If you want to be invisible,” the fairy said, “you only have to wish to become so, and no one will see you, but be careful not to abuse this gift.”

The beautiful lady disappeared, and Little Pierre continued down the route. Soon after, he saw brigands appear; they came from all sides, and one could compare the sight to an anthill. He wished to become invisible, and he passed right through the middle of them, without having been seen.

He arrived at the regiment, and, because he was a good boy, he was loved by his comrades and his officers. Soon, the army left to go to war, and, one day, it found itself in a difficult position. The general said:

“If someone could see how the enemy is preparing for an ambush, we could attack them from their weak side, and we would be victorious. But how could we discover their plans without being killed?”

Little Pierre went to find his commander and said to him:

“If you would like, I will go to the town and I will learn how their army is made up.”

“No,” the commander replied. “You’ll be killed. Stay here; you are too good a soldier for me to want to lose.”

“If you want to let me, I will go,” said Little Pierre.

“Go, my boy, since it was your idea, but I would prefer for you to remain here.”

When Little Pierre left for the road, all of his friends came to say goodbye to him and to shake his hand, thinking that he would certainly not return.

“Goodbye,” they cried.

Before arriving at the enemies’ fortress, he wished to become invisible. He passed between the enemy troops without being perceived, and he heard them rejoice that they had killed all of the French soldiers. He took a tour of the ramparts, and saw a weak spot. When he had noticed it, he said:

“I have never gone to the town. I would like to visit it.”

He began to walk in the middle of the streets, and he saw that everyone was gathering at the town square. He went with the others, and saw a large shed onto which two French prisoners were attached. They were about to burn them, and the people danced with joy around them.

Little Pierre had brought his saber with him. He drew it, and began to attack the enemies to his left and right, and, because they could not see him, they did not

know where the attacks were coming from. He went to the shed, cut the ropes that were attaching the two Frenchmen, and said to them:

“Try to save yourselves.”

They were shocked to hear him speaking, because they could not see him, but they began to run as fast as they could, and Little Pierre left the village and returned to his regiment. As he became visible again, his commander saw him and said to him:

“Oh! Look at you, my little Pierre. I am so happy to see you.”

“Lead me to the general,” he replied. “I found the enemy’s weak point.”

He told the general what he had seen and offered to conduct the attack.

“Oh!” said the general. “If we succeed thanks to you, I will make you a colonel right away.”

At eleven o’ clock at night, the regiment began to march to attack. At two hours in the morning, the enemy was in retreat and the town was captured.

Little Pierre did not want to be a colonel, but he was well compensated, and he returned to his parents’ house, where they lived comfortably for the rest of their days.

Told in 1880 by Anne-Marie Durand from Plévenon, age 34.
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Translated by Michelle Collins.