

Fairy Tales and Fables

By V. A. Jeffrey

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Preface

I have always loved fairy tales, folk tales, fables and parables. It doesn't matter what part of the world they come from, I love them all. They are some of my favorite kinds of stories and so that love has spurred me to write a few of my own. Perhaps you might see many similarities between these tales that I've written and the old tales of long ago but the stories in this book are indeed tales that I have made up. In fact, the first one, *The Cowboy and the Pebbles*, was written when I was in high school.

For those who have read three of these tales already, I incorporated three of these into this larger book. The first three that I wrote, I put in a micro fiction work titled *3 Fables*. I decided to write a few more and put the collection together in a larger book. I enjoy these kinds of stories so much because they often teach a lesson - fables and parables in particular. Usually we think of them as stories for children because, of course, we as adults have much to teach children about how the world works and how to behave in society but these kinds of tales have much to teach adults as well. In any case, the foremost job of any story is to entertain the reader and I do hope that you find the following six tales, most of all, entertaining.

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The Cowboy And The Pebbles

A cowboy was riding through the mountains on his horse. One day while riding he happened to come by a small stream. There was an old man sitting by the stream. As the cowboy was passing, he greeted the old man, intending to continue on his way. The old man called to him.

“Get down off your horse and come by the stream. Pick up some pebbles. They will bring you good fortune.” He said.

“What would I want with pebbles, old man?” The cowboy asked.

“By having these pebbles you will become happy and sad.” The old man answered. The cowboy laughed, thinking the old man foolish but he obliged him and got down from his horse and picked up a few pebbles from the stream. The old man smiled and waved goodbye to him as he mounted his horse and rode away.

Now, it was a few days later when the cowboy was taking his cattle out to graze when he pondered on the old man's words. He remembered the pebbles he picked from the stream and fished them out of his pocket. To his surprise, the pebbles were gone but what remained in place were glittering diamonds. This made the cowboy very happy. While the cattle were grazing, he quickly rode up to the stream but to his great disappointment it was not there. The stream, the bed of pebbles and the old man were all gone. This made the cowboy sad. He was sad because he only picked up two pebbles.

The Vegetable Patch

In a wood there lived a little rabbit and his mother. Now there were many warrens of rabbits in the wood and they all lived in a small community near a big tree beneath tall bushes. The oldest and sagest rabbit was named Ol' Bramble. Many of the young rabbits bowed their heads and said nice words to Ol' Bramble's face but none of them ever listened to Ol' Bramble.

Now the young rabbits started going down to the old vegetable patch to eat and play. The old vegetable patch had gained a reputation years ago of being a very bad place for rabbits. Many of the older rabbits, and especially Ol' Bramble, would always say to never go down there for it used to be a hiding place for foxes looking for rabbits to eat. Rabbits would go down there and never come back. However, the younger rabbits started going there again because foxes had not been seen down there for many years. The little rabbit didn't like going there even though all of his friends started going there to eat and play.

“Why don't you ever come to the patch? It's the best place in the whole wood!” Said Fluffytail.

“But my mother said it's a dangerous place. We shouldn't go there.” Said the little rabbit.

“Don't be a mama's boy! It's not dangerous anymore!” Said Brownie.

“Right! There haven't been foxes down there for years.” Said Fluffytail.

“But how do you know?” Asked the little rabbit.

“If foxes came there we would have caught their scent. Foxes don't come around there any more! Don't be dumb!” Said Brownie.

“Aren't you coming with us?” Asked Fluffytail.

“I don't know.”

“Oh come on! Don't be a coward!” Taunted Brownie.

“All right. I'll come down.” He said after much goading and teasing from them. He went with his friends down to the old patch and there before him was the biggest smorgasbord of vegetables and berries he had ever seen! Luscious vegetables and fruit as far as the eye could see. They ate and ate and frolicked till dusk in the patch. But the little rabbit wondered how all those rows and tangles of vegetables had gotten there. They hadn't been there before. He thought it strange and when he went home he asked his mother about it.

“Oh no! Little one, please do not go there again! There is a reason why we do not go near that place! Just because foxes don't go down there now does not mean they won't come back. All those young rabbits going down to the patch may be caught unaware and too fat bellied and full of food to escape if the foxes come back. We have plenty enough to eat here in the wood. There is no need to go down there and find yourself in trouble. Ol' Bramble could tell you some stories about the old vegetable patch, none of them pleasant.” So he went to speak to Ol' Bramble.

“Went down to that old vegetable patch, did you? Child, stay away. It's a trap. Vegetables that luscious and good to eat and in such great variety do not get there all by themselves. Something is wrong there. We don't want to hear of you disappearing. That would break your mother's heart.” Said Ol' Bramble.

So the little rabbit decided resolutely that he would not go back. But when he met with his friends the next day, they goaded and teased him again when he said that he wouldn't go back to the patch.

“Ol' Bramble said there's a good reason why we should stay away. There's something strange about it all.”

“Strange about what? The only thing strange is that you want to pass up such a feast! Ol' Bramble is so old he wouldn't know what a good carrot was if it fell on his fat ol' head!” Said Fluffytail.

“Yeah! He's so old he's ancient. Ol' Bramble talks nonsense about the past but the past doesn't matter! Things are different now. He should mind his own business and if you are such a scared rabbit that you won't have any fun with us then you can stay here and hop around your mother's tail!” Said Brownie.

“Baby rabbit, baby rabbit!” They teased him. Many of the other young rabbits joined in and laughed. Then they all went down to the vegetable patch to have a good time.

One day the little rabbit was taking a nap and suddenly he and his mother woke up to the sound of harsh voices and dogs and much rustling in the distance. Something strange was happening but no one dared to come outside their rabbit holes until the commotion stopped. After a while, the noises died down and the little rabbit followed his mother outside to the big tree. Many mother and father rabbits were frantically weeping and hopping around.

“What's wrong, mother? Why are they crying?” Asked the little rabbit.

“Something very bad, I'm sure of it.” She said worriedly. They both went back inside their rabbit hole. Just then, Ol' Bramble came in to see about them.

“Men came and found the rabbits eating there. The vegetable patch was a trap! They caught them in nets and took away every rabbit found in the patch!”

“Oh no! What will happen to them? What will happen to my friends?” Asked the little rabbit.

“The same thing that happens when foxes get hold of rabbits. They will be skinned and put into stews.” Ol' Bramble said sadly. Little rabbit began to cry.

“I know, son. It's a terrible thing to see such things happen to those whom you call friends. But these things happen when young rabbits do not listen to their elders. I remember when the foxes used to lie in wait and catch rabbits down there. Simply because the foxes left did not mean it was safe to go there.”

“But almost everyone would go down there and nothing ever happened. That's why they thought it was safe.” The little rabbit said.

“True, my child. But just because many rabbits are doing something does not mean it is beneficial or right. It merely means that the world is full of foolish rabbits.”

The Lady In The Forest

There once lived a great hunter who would go hunting deep into the forest with his band of men and his many hounds. Almost every day he would go hunting. The hunter's prowess with the bow and arrow was renowned and his skill with the knife and ax was great. Of all these things he was supremely proud. No creature in the forest was safe when he came riding through. He and his men and hounds would ride down and kill any creature in their path and hunt out many others, besides. Stag, doe, bear, badger, fox, hawk, fawn, cub or birdling; it mattered not.

A saying rose in the land that when the great hunter took his men riding that not even the gods were safe. Such a wake of carnage was wrought that streams and rivers ran red with blood. The animals became so afraid that they began to cry out for relief from the slaughter. Even the trees cried out in anguish as the slaughter was so great it demanded many trees to be cut down for the cooking fires.

After much meat was roasted in the fires and the hunter and his men had their fill they would feed the hounds and much meat was left to spoil and rot as if it were of no consequence. The forest began to stink from the rotting carcasses. Finally, it became a stink in the nose of the Lady of the forest and she woke from her slumber and turned her face to hear the cries of the creatures and trees of the forest, near and far. Winter came and the snows fell and the forest fell silent, free through the whole of winter from the hunting parties. Then spring came. Trees and plants bloomed and blossomed and many young animals were born. When the last snowflake had melted and the ground became warm, once again, the great hunter and his hunting band came riding through, killing everything they saw for feast and sport.

One day, after they sat down to feast and have a good time a voice called out to the great hunter.

“Oh grand hunter! Great is your skill with the bow and arrow and magnificent is your prowess in wielding the ax, but you have slaughtered without care and have taken what is not your share. Shall you empty the woods just for a feast? I tell you, do not come riding and slaughtering like you have done through my forest again. If you come back with your men and your hounds you shall not return.” The voice came from a tall figure of a woman far off, hidden in the shadows of the trees, cloaked and hooded.

“Who are you?” The hunter demanded proudly.

“I am the Lady of the forest.” Answered the voice.

“I do not know any lady of the forest! Where were you when I came riding out before? Be gone, woman!” He commanded. Then he laughed and all his men laughed and jeered with him and the hounds bayed.

“Better still, bring her to me! We shall make sport of her yet!” They laughed and went to chase after the woman but she disappeared. When they did not find her they went back to eating and drinking.

The next day, again they went hunting and making a great spoil of carcasses. They set to cutting down many trees to make the roasting fires and then sat down to have a feast. Once again the Lady appeared and she said: “Oh hunter! I see that you have not heeded my warning! I did not give you leave to come riding and hunting through my forest! You slaughter without cause and take what is not your share. Will you empty the forests for a feast? If you come back for a third time, you will not return.” At this the hunter became angry.

“Be gone, woman, or I shall hunt you down and feed you to my hounds!” At that, he loosed an arrow to strike the woman down but she disappeared. Seven days passed and again the hunter and his men came riding. They killed even more animals than before. When they had collected a great spoil they set about making the cooking fires again.

“Have you men no wisdom? Why all this slaughter when you do not even eat half of what you kill? Leave now and you shall escape with your lives! If you do not, a mighty spoil you shall all

become for me!” Said the Lady. The hunter became enraged and commanded his hounds to be set on her at once. Clad in gray and green and hidden in shadow they did not see her. When the hounds came baying and dashing towards her, suddenly she straightened herself up and threw off her cloak. Standing before them was a great ogress, tall and broad as an oak tree, naked and in a great fury! One by one she snatched up the hounds, opened up her fearsome jaws full of many terrible fangs and ate the hounds until there were no more. The men's horses became spooked and they all ran away. When she saw that the horses had run off, she heaved her breasts over her shoulders and went tearing after the band of men.

Through the deep forest they all ran as fast as they could, but one by one she caught them and ate them until there was only the great hunter left. Now the great hunter was a very fast runner and he ran swift as a river, over hills, through glades and vale, through creeks and across a river, with the ogress right on his heels roaring with rage. She chased him all that day and all that night and when she had gotten close enough she tore three strips of flesh from his back and ate them.

“Flesh as sweet as yours is better than any meat! If I catch you hunting in the forests again I shall eat you up!” She roared. Finally the hunter reached the edge of the woods, tired, frightened and bleeding and he ran far away, over the fields and farmlands and all the way back to his house.

The ogress saw that she had reached the edge of the forest and she stopped and watched him flee, for she had no wish to leave her home.

Ever since then the tale spread far and wide that there was a lady in the dark forest who watched over all and punished those who showed no regard for the forest or its creatures. As for the hunter, he never came back to the forest to hunt. He sent his servants to hunt and always with one command: never take more than is necessary for the household.

The Face In The Mirror

Long ago in a valley there was an idyllic town and in that town there lived a little girl. She came from a very wealthy merchant family. The little girl was spoiled rotten for her mother and father spared no expense for her every whim and comfort.

Now, there were many towns over the mountains in other valleys but she was the prettiest girl to be found anywhere and whenever people saw her they always remarked on her great beauty.

One day while riding along in her father's carriage in the woods they came upon an old woman sitting on a rock. She called out to the carriage for alms, for she was destitute and in sore straits. The father ignored the old woman and the little girl, upon seeing how ugly the woman was, spat on her and threw a stone at her head, killing the old woman. Her father, upon seeing what his child had done became afraid and threw the woman's body over a cliff and bade his coachman to keep silent on pain of death.

The little girl terrorized her parents and beat and tormented her maidservants every day. She grew into a most beautiful young woman and as her beauty increased, so did her vanity. One of her favorite pastimes was staring at herself in a great silver mirror with gold carvings that her mother had given her. She was vain, proud and cruel, yet she had many suitors in the town and also from far away who courted her.

One day, a young woman moved into the town who had been orphaned when she was a girl. She was the same age as the town beauty and as people saw her they noted that she was just as beautiful. Soon the renowned beauty of the new girl was on everyone's lips. This enraged the town beauty but she just had to see for herself whether the new girl was truly more beautiful than she was. She demanded that her mother and father invite the new girl to the next harvest dance as her honored guest.

The harvest gathering was a custom the town held for many years each fall. The wealthiest families in the town always hosted the dance afterward at their home. So it was this year as well. While her mother and father made lavish preparations for the meals that would be served, she had dressmakers from near and far gathered to herself and spared no expense on the new dress she would wear to the dance. On the night of the dance, the great hall of the family home bustled with townspeople, great and small, from all over the mountains and once again, the town beauty wore the finest dress and jewels. She was a sight of glittering loveliness, captivating everyone at the dance, until the new girl arrived. While her dress was modest and she only wore a silk ribbon tied around her neck, she was a vision of loveliness that rivaled the other. Many of the young men that had courted the town beauty now looked upon the other girl and wanted to dance with her instead. When the wicked girl had seen for herself how lovely the other girl was, her heart became black with rage but she concealed her hatred and befriended her. It was then that she decided she would kill the other girl. She bided her time, seeking a good opportunity.

The opportunity came many days later when she had invited the girl on an outing in her horse and buggy. She lied and told her that they were going on a trip into the wood to pick mushrooms and that they would also secretly meet two handsome young men who wished to see them. The forest was full of mists and the climb was high, but she finally brought the girl to a lonely place within a large ring of mushrooms in the woods.

"Come," she beckoned the girl over to a cliff overlooking the forest beneath. "look at the clouds below! Look how high we have climbed!" She said. The other girl got out of the buggy to take a look and as soon as she neared the edge of the cliff the wicked girl pushed her off. Knowing that she had no family or money and that she was of no account, the wicked girl thought that no one would miss her. Satisfied with what she had done, she went home.

One year later, she was betrothed to a lord and was delighted that she would soon become a lady. As she and her mother made wedding preparations one day, she heard a crow outside making a terrible

racket. Day after day the crow's racket grew louder and louder.

“Alms! Alms!” It shouted and disturbed her to no end.

”Do not let the thing disturb you, child. It is only a silly bird.” Her mother said. But she feared that it was an omen and she would not rest until the crow was silent. She threw rocks at the crow but it continued its racket. She tried to shoot it down with a bow and arrow but she could not catch it. She demanded the hired musicians to play music to drown the crow out. When they had failed to drown out its noise she beat them savagely and broke their instruments. The crow continued its cackling until she thought she would go mad.

Then, on the day before her wedding, it stopped and finally she thought she would have peace. She gazed at her beautiful face in the great silver mirror as one of her servants brushed her long, lustrous hair. But that night when she was sleeping in her bed the crow flew through her bedroom window, cackling loudly and waking her. She tried to wake her maidservant to make her kill it but the maidservant was in a deep sleep and did not wake. So, the crow spoke.

“My lady, even now you can turn back from your evil way.”

“Get out or I will break your neck and have you baked in a pie!”

“I have seen a vision. It will go ill with you if you continue in your wickedness.” The crow said. The woman reached for a fire poker to strike the bird. The bird flew up and perched itself on top of the silver mirror.

“Well then, here is my wedding gift to you, my lady. You threw a stone at me once and thought to kill me. I then gave you another chance to redeem yourself but then you pushed me off a cliff. You are full of vanity and cruelty. When everyone looks upon your beauty they see a vision of loveliness but I see the ugly beast inside. When you marry tomorrow, your husband will see nothing but your unsurpassed beauty but I tell you now that whenever you look into a mirror or any reflection of yours, you will see nothing but the hideous beast you truly are, staring back at you! Until you change your heart you will never look upon your own loveliness again, my lady.” With that, the crow flew off into the night.

The Pear Tree

Long ago there lived twin sisters in a hovel on a hill underneath a pear tree. One day, a rich young merchant was passing by on his way into town and saw one of the sisters outside gathering flowers. He saw that she was very beautiful and wished to know her. Each day when he passed by he would see her working industriously; washing, gardening or sweeping the step. So one day, as usual he came by and saw her picking pears from the tree and asked her to come away with him.

“I cannot, sir,” she said, “for I will go away with no man who is not my husband.” The young man pleaded with her but she refused. This did not cool his ardor but made him love her even more.

“What is your name?” He asked.

“My name is Hope, sir.” She said.

“Then, I shall marry you and make you my wife, dear Hope. I have business in a city far from here tomorrow and I must travel there and stay for a time. When I come back, I shall make you my wife. Does it please you?”

“It pleases me.” She said. The young man gave her a gold ring to keep and to remember him and his promise and he went traveling far away.

Now the other sister was wicked and lazy and often stayed in bed while her sister worked for them both but she watched when the man would come by and visit her sister and watched with great interest when he had given her the ring.

“Now sister dear, where did you get that gold ring?”

“The man that comes by to see me, dear sister, he gave it to me.”

“Why would he give you a ring?”

“He wishes to marry me.”

“Oh? But how do you know he will marry you, sister dear? How do you know he will even come back at all? Perhaps he will meet one of the courtesans in the city and forget you. Your hope will truly be in vain!” She taunted.

“Perhaps. But I believe he will come back and when he does, he shall be my husband. My good fortune may even be yours for he can surely find you a good husband too!” Said the good sister. But the wicked sister was not content to wait for any such fortune. She waited for her sister to go to sleep that night. Then she took a stone from the garden and went inside and killed her. Then she buried her beneath the pear tree. She took the ring for her own and waited for the man to come back. A few weeks later the man came traveling back from town and just as he promised, he came to claim his bride. He did not know that his beloved Hope was dead and that it was the wicked sister that he claimed.

He had come traveling with a long train of wagons and horses as the extra wealth he had gained was great. When they had reached his house he commanded that preparations for the wedding be made and in three days they were wed.

It came about one year later that she was with child and afterward the child born to them was a daughter. As the child grew older, she became as beautiful as the sunshine with a good disposition like her mother's sister and this vexed the wife greatly and so she would often avoid the child or revile her for being merry. The wicked sister had finally shown her true colors and because of this the man spent less and less time at home and was away on business often.

One day the little girl went riding with a servant and they passed by the empty hovel. Beside it the pear tree had grown and it was extraordinarily beautiful and fragrant. They picked some pears to eat and brought some home. When her mother saw the fruit she asked: “Where did this delightful fruit come from, child?”

“The pear tree on the hill by the lonely hovel, mother.” The girl answered. The woman knew exactly where this tree was.

“I shall go and pick some for a dish.” She declared. So she went riding to the tree to pick the fruit.

When she got there the tree swayed violently to and fro and its branches slashed at her hands when she came near to it. She could not reach the fruit. Vexed, she went on home. A second time, a few days later the girl went to the tree to pick some pears. This time the tree spoke and it said to her:

*“My bones lie buried here
my bones you must dig up and carry
your mother's sister I was once
and your father I was meant to marry.”*

At this, the girl and the servant hurried home to tell her mother.

“Foolish, lying girl! Go and play in the garden and stay away from that tree or I shall give you a good thrashing!” But secretly she was curious. So she went to the tree again and tried to pick some fruit for herself and the tree said:

*“Sister, sister, flee from me!
Your evil deed has turned me into this tree!”*

The woman became afraid and she went home and demanded that the tree be picked clean of fruit and cut down and burned for firewood. So three servants went down to the pear tree, picked the fruit, brought them to her in barrels and then chopped down the tree and brought in the wood for the fire.

It happened a few days later that her husband had come home and so she had a feast held in his honor and invited many guests. A great fire was made in the feasting hall and many dishes were prepared. The woman had the pears baked in stews, tarts, sauces and in pies and served for the feast. Each dish was more delicious than the last dish and everyone ate with great relish, especially the wife. She took great delight in seeing the fruit eaten and the wood from the tree burning in the fire, thinking that her deed would never be known. The man praised his wife in front of all their guests. Suddenly, a voice out of the fire said:

*“A lie you have lived
and a lie you feast on tonight,
my bones lie in the ground
by the pear tree that was chopped down
under the moon's pale light.
My bones please dig up,
my bones lift up and carry
Your wife I was to be
but my wicked sister murdered me.”*

At this the woman jumped up in a fright and fled the hall to her bedroom where she locked the door behind her and refused to come out. As the night wore on she thought of climbing through the window and escaping but the pears she had eaten turned into black poison in her belly and the poison worked its evil through her, slowly turning her heart into wood. Before the dawn, the wicked woman was dead.

The man, realizing that he had been deceived into marrying the wicked sister went to the place where the old hovel stood. He dug up the bones by the tree stump and took them up, carried them home and buried them in his garden. Then he took his dead wife and buried her where her sister had been. The stump grew again into a pear tree but that tree grew crooked and stunted and the fruit it bore was

bitter and worthless and it eventually withered away and died. The man planted a new pear tree over his beloved's grave and it grew into the most beautiful tree in the land. The fruit it bore was the most delicious of pears and it stood tall and fair for many, many years afterward.

The Smoking Sword

Once upon a time there lived a man with his wife on the edge of town in a forest. The forest grew in the shadow of a great mountain and from this mountain flowed many wide streams into a river, thus, there were many bridges all around. Now the man was a blacksmith but he and his wife as well as the people all around were poor and struggled to find work. Each year it became harder to eke out a living. Winter was coming and they began to fret about how they would survive.

“Husband! What are we to do? We hardly have any money left to buy food!” Cried his wife.

“What would you have me do?” Asked the blacksmith.

“Please, take these few gold coins I have and go to town and get a hog for us. Perhaps we will have enough meat for the winter!”

“These are the last gold coins, but are these enough? I must also pay the bridge toll. We shall see.” The blacksmith said. He took the coins, kissed his wife and headed off to town.

Now there happened to be a troll king who lived under the mountain and he sent his troll servants to guard all of the bridges and exact tolls and they raided the town and the nearby villages when he thought he had not collected enough money from the people. No man or woman could come or go over a bridge unless they paid a toll. Thus, the troll king grew very rich and had his storehouses stocked full of food while the people suffered.

Now the blacksmith had some silver coins of his own to pay the toll to cross the bridge into town but he hid his wife's gold coins in his boot. As he was traveling through the woods he met a wise woman, sitting on the step outside her hovel.

“Come, my son! Take some ale. If you will only listen, I will reveal a secret to you.”

“What secret is this, madam?” Asked the blacksmith and he came inside her hovel and drank the ale she offered.

“If you are brave enough to face the troll king in his mountain stronghold, you may take all of his gold.”

“Me? Why me?”

“I have asked many men traveling through but none want to face the troll king. They are afraid. If no man is bold enough to overthrow him, the people will all perish over the winter.”

“What must I do to defeat the troll king?”

“If you are brave enough you will find a way. Bravery I see in your heart as plainly as I can hear the gold coins jingling in your boot. Take these copper coins here and hide them in your hat for you will need them before the day is done. When you go to the bridge the troll will steal all of your money, even the coins in your boot. But he will not know of the coins in your hat. Use them to cross back and forth over the bridges. Once you give them out, they will appear again in your hat. When you go to see the troll king, he will demand that you solve a riddle. The riddle of a special sword.”

“How will this riddle help me defeat the troll king?”

“Trolls are greedy and superstitious creatures when it comes to their family heirlooms. You are a blacksmith, are you not?”

“I am.”

“I am very old, my son, and I remember many things. Long ago, the troll king's father had a great sword made of black smoke and fire. The troll king lost his father's sword and ever since he has lamented its loss. When you are brought to him tell him that you can make him a sword of smoke. He will want it above all things and the other trolls will fear you. Go to your home and forge a sword. Then come back to see me and I shall help you with the rest!” Said the wise woman.

“Thank you, madam,” Said the blacksmith, “though I do not know if I can do this. We shall see what we shall see.” He said and set off towards town. He came to the bridge where a troll stood collecting tolls.

“Ho! Where is the toll?” Demanded the troll.

"I have the money right here, sir." He took his silver coins out.

"Humph! Silver, I suppose will do, but I do not see very many coins!" Grumbled the troll. The man started on his way.

"Halt!" Roared the troll. Trolls have a keen sense of smell when it comes to food and gold and a troll can smell gold a league away.

"I smell gold! Give it to me or you won't cross this bridge!"

"But sir! The gold coins are all I have to buy food with! If I give them to you, I will have nothing to feed my family!"

"If you do not give me your gold, I will eat you!" So the man gave the gold coins in his boot to the troll and the troll let him go on his way. In town, he could find nothing but a few withered turnips to buy. No meat to buy, no animals. Not even a small wedge of cheese.

"The trolls have raided everything in the town. We have hardly anything to eat ourselves!" Said the vendors and merchants. The man knew that if he didn't do something he and his wife and everyone all around would eventually starve, so he gathered his courage and went off to the mountain to see the troll king.

Through the forest he came to a stream and a bridge. A troll was waiting there. He paid the troll the toll with the copper coins and went on his way and found himself eventually at the foot of the mountain stronghold, the gate of the king's fortress.

"I am here to seek an audience with the king." Said the blacksmith to the guards. The trolls jeered at him but allowed him entry and on he went into the bowels of the mountain, into dark halls lined with torches, walls gleaming with gold and silver and copper bricks. In the king's hall the troll king sat drinking ale from a great stein limned with gold, counting his hoard of gold and silver coins and jewels. Trolls were bringing in even more treasure by the bucketful and piling these on the floor.

"Who are you and why do you come to my hall?" Demanded the king.

"Oh king, I know a secret! A great secret that will bring you happiness."

"I have much gold and silver. That is happiness enough."

"This thing is even greater than gold and silver!"

"Oh? And what is that?" The king asked, wondering what could really be better than gold and silver.

"I am a blacksmith and I can forge a sword of smoke and fire!" The blacksmith announced boldly. The king looked at him with a greedy gleam in his eyes.

"A smoking sword? *A smoking sword?* I would give all of my gold for such a thing! How do you know of such a sword?" The troll king nearly shivered in anticipation and greed. The other trolls began to quake in fear.

"It came to me in a vision. I am the greatest blacksmith this side of the mountain and I can forge you a sword of smoke."

"You are only a man! No man can forge a royal troll sword."

"Yet, I can do it and I shall make for you this sword." At this, the other trolls cried out for they feared anyone who could wield such a great troll sword and they were in awe of it.

"Silence, fools!" The king snapped at his quaking guards.

"Well, blacksmith! My father had a sword of smoke and fire and I have lost it and you say you will make me another? I shall put you to work in the dungeon forge."

"But no, oh king! I must use my own smithy to work my craft."

"If you do not go to the forge in the dungeon I shall roast you on a spit!"

"Oh great king! Do not be angry with me, please, but let me make this sword in my own smithy or I cannot make the sword at all, for my forge is special. It is enchanted and it has all of the elements and special tools I need to make this special sword. You do want the sword of smoke, do you not?"

"I do, I do!" The king said greedily, clapping his hands together. Then he narrowed his beady eyes.

"If you fail to bring me the sword and if it is not what you say it is, I will hunt you down and eat

you! Do not think that you can hide from me! Give me your hat, for your scent is on it. If you are lying to me I will send my soldiers out to hunt you down. You have three days, blacksmith.” The king warned.

“I shall not fail.” Said the blacksmith with a deep bow. When he bowed he secretly took out the copper coins from his hat and hid them in his hand. Then he handed his hat to one of the guards. They released him and he went on home, crossing the two bridges and paying the tolls and finding the copper coins in his hand again.

“Husband? Where is the hog? What shall we eat?” Asked his wife.

“The troll at the bridge into town stole all our money. When I got to the town market there were no animals to buy today, wife. But I have something better. I met the wise woman in the woods and she told me how to outwit the troll king and get his gold. I shall make him a smoking sword. She also gave me these copper coins.”

“Oh husband! If we have these coins then why do you need to make the sword? Why even go back?”

“To get rid of the troll king. If he remains in his mountain fortress he will starve us all out.”

“But how can you make a smoking sword?”

“I have an idea, wife.” He said and he went to his smithy and he made a great sword but this sword he made with pure iron for he knew trolls hated and feared iron. After he made the sword he asked his wife to braid her long hair that he may cut off the braid.

“If you are to make a smoking sword with my hair then the braid must be wet.” She said. So she washed her hair then braided it. The blacksmith cut it off and took the braid and the sword and went off to see the wise woman.

“So, you have come.”

“Yes, madam.” He said. Then he showed her the sword and the braid.

“Do you think this can help us? I have only three days to produce the sword or the troll king will have my hide!”

“Good, good. Your wife is clever and so are you. This wet braid and this iron sword are the very things we need. I will now show you what I will do.” She took the braid and the sword and weaved each strand of hair tightly against the iron. His wife's hair was as golden as the sun and when the woman was done the sword seemed as if it were made from pure, fine gold. Then the wise woman took hot embers from her fire pit, crushed them and worked them under the hairs until she had made the sword smoke and gleam.

“The troll king hates sunlight. If the sun touches his flesh he will turn to stone and all his minions with him. Do not enter the fortress until dawn's first light. Heed my warning and you shall defeat the troll king.” Then she gave him a fire-lit torch and sent him on his way. The man traveled that night until he was in sight of the bridge by the mountain. He blew out his torch and hid himself until dawn. At dawn he crossed the bridge with his smoking sword. It frightened the bridge troll so that he fled and did not collect the toll. The man approached the fortress and knocked at the gate.

“I beg an audience with the king!” The trolls all looked at him in wonder because of the sword but they let him in to see the king.

“Behold! A sword of smoke and fire!” He said proudly. The sword threw off much smoke and it gleamed like a bright ray of sunlight.

“My father's sword! I will have it! Give it to me!” Shouted the king. “Seize him!” The blacksmith turned and ran from the hall, cutting down any troll that came near to him. The trolls were cut down quickly before him because the sword was made of iron. He escaped from the fortress and into the forest with the king fast on his heels and all the other trolls after him. But as soon as the king had come outside the sunlight turned him into stone even as he leapt to grab the blacksmith. As soon as the king was turned to stone, all of his minions in the fortress and at the bridges turned to stone and that was how the blacksmith defeated the troll king.

The blacksmith took the sword and drove it into the king's stone heart and the stone crumbled into dust and ash. The blacksmith went and got his wife and they collected much gold, silver, livestock and meat and cheeses from the storehouses in the fortress. He also found his hat. Soon after this, the blacksmith went to visit the wise woman.

“What would you like me to bring you, madam, for I owe you so very much?” He asked.

“There is nothing that I need, my son, except my copper coins that I gave you. That is all I ask.” She said. The blacksmith gave her the copper coins back and a very large bag of gold besides.

“Bless you, my son.” She said. The man and his wife lived well through the winter and became wealthy and lived happily ever afterward.

As for the people, when they heard that the troll king and his minions had died, they all went into the fortress with buckets and wheel barrels and wagons and came out with gold, silver, jewels, cows, pigs, goats and much food besides, until the fortress was cleaned out. No one starved that winter, no one had heavy tolls to pay when crossing the bridges anymore and trade began to flourish and the town and the villages all around prospered for many years thereafter.

The Sage And The Three Brothers

Once there was an old sage who lived on a hill overlooking three cities. Now the cities were full of corruption and crime, from the rich man to the poor man. The sage had his visions and warned the people for many years of the coming destruction. The people would laugh and mock him. Some ignored him. One day three brothers from a noble house of one of the cities were traveling home from a far away land and were coming down the road on the hill. The sage saw them and called to them.

“Greetings, my sons,” he said, “I have been given a new vision. If you promise to tell the city fathers of my vision I will grant you each one wish.” The brothers agreed. So he told them his vision. Then he asked the eldest brother what was his desire.

“I want power!” He said. So power was granted to him. He asked the second brother what he desired.

“I want gold and silver!” So gold and silver were granted to him. Then he asked the youngest brother what was his desire. The youngest brother asked the sage a question.

“What would you ask for?”

“Peace and contentment.” The sage answered.

“Then, that is what I want.” Said the youngest brother. So, it was granted to him. Now when the brothers arrived into the city the older brothers went home, dismissing the old sage's request to warn the city fathers that the cities would soon fall. The youngest brother, however, warned the city fathers that the cities would fall by famine and fire and that most of the people would be put to the sword. They scoffed at him and had him whipped, for they knew that the vision was from the sage, whom they hated.

The news of the fortunes of the brothers had reached the city by herald and when they had arrived home their family went out in a hurry to welcome them.

“My son, welcome home! Glory and honor you have brought to our name and our house!” The father said and kissed and embraced his eldest son. On seeing the second son he welcomed him also.

“My son, welcome home! Glory and honor you have brought to our name and our house!” He kissed and embraced him. But on seeing the youngest son, he spat on the ground and the other two brothers mocked him.

“Fool! We have received nothing of benefit from you, but you have made us a laughingstock!” His father said. The father cursed him, had him stripped and beaten and threw him out of the house.

Years passed and the eldest son began making a name for himself in the land as a great warrior. In short time he became a general. Every campaign he fought he came out the victor. Great spoil he brought the cities of the land. Soon after, he was made ruler of the three cities. The second brother made his name in gold and silver and all precious things. His fortunes increased year after year and his wealth was great. Soon, everything he owned glittered with gold or silver. The youngest brother worked as a hired hand among pigs or as a shepherd from time to time. He had no wealth, no family, no power, only a staff, his clothes, his cooking pot and a little hut he slept in. He worked from sun up to sundown but he did not complain about his lot in life. He had plenty of food to eat and water to drink and he made a name for himself among the workers and his employer as a good man who worked hard and had a good heart. He did not become bitter whenever he saw his eldest brother riding through the city in a grand procession after a victorious battle or his other brother riding in his silk and ivory palanquin through the city streets. He was content because he had what he needed for each day.

Then, one day the sage's visions of the destruction came true. It started with a great famine through the land. Fire and bloodshed spread through the cities. Men recognized no law. The first brother feared the very men who had fought under him. Disguising himself he fled to the sage's hill.

“Oh sage! Please help me! Every man in the city is against me! Deliver my soul from death!” The ruler pleaded.

“Wicked man!” Cried the sage. “Remember all the innocents you put to the sword when you ruled

like a king! You showed no mercy to subjects, rivals or enemies! Neither will mercy be shown to you! Go and pray to your spear and your sword, for those are your gods! Get away from me, for you will die before sunrise tomorrow!” The ruler fled in terror back to his palace to hide. Upon seeing him in the distance his servants conspired against him and when he entered the palace they rose up and put him to death. The second brother fled to the sage's hill.

“Oh sage! Please help me! There is nothing to eat or drink in the land, no buying or selling! My gold and silver have become worthless, like so much dust! Deliver my soul from death!” The rich man pleaded.

“Wicked man!” Cried the sage. “May your gold and silver turn to ashes and dust in your mouth! You have grown fat from constantly sitting on your golden couch! When did you feed and care for those hungry or destitute? You ate and spent gold while others suffered! You robbed and cheated and extorted the poor one and sold them into slavery when they could not pay the debt! Go and pray to your gold and silver, for those are your gods! Get away from me, for you will surely die before the famine leaves the land!” So, in despair, he went to his home and as there was a famine in the land he had nothing but his gold and silver to eat. So he died. But the third brother saw the coming destruction and left the city before it came, traveling and working and making a name for himself all around the world. For years he did this and had become wealthy and known as good and generous and industrious. When he had come home the destruction had ended. He lead those few that were left to help rebuild the cities and those in need he fed and clothed. His name went far and wide as a wise man and soon he was made vassal ruler of the cities. Under him people prospered and the cities flourished once again under good men and good rulership. When he had become very old he saw that glory and honor he had brought to his name and to his house. He had taught his sons and grandsons to carry on in goodness, kindness and wisdom. And he died, very old, in peace and contentment.

The End

About the Author:

Victoria A. Jeffrey grew up in Portland Oregon, attended Portland Community College and studied graphic design. She is an author and an avid reader of science fiction, fantasy. She also enjoys reading historical fiction and non-fiction. She has written three collections of poetry, some short stories and a middle grade fantasy series. She is currently working on the *Red World* myth-fantasy trilogy.

Fantasy books by this author:

Red World trilogy:

Schisms

Secret Doorway Tales series:

The Green Door

The Pumpkin Princess

The Winter Wolves

The Lady Moons

The Mountain King

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