

The enchanted deer and the

Dreams of the Fool

Clark Gillian

Singel Uitgevers B.V.
under Brave New Books.

Weteringschans 259,
1017 XJ Amsterdam

clarkgillian.com

29-03-2021

Second Edition
ISBN: 9789464487695

© Clark Gillian Van Herrewege

The enchanted deer and the

Dreams of the Fool

Clark Gillian

Prologue: In the land of Old Wives

Once upon a time in a faraway land, there was a space and a place so flat that even by standing atop the highest tower or a man made hill or one of its many dykes, or even by climbing the highest tree in the forest, there would not be a single mountain nor canyon nor lake anywhere in sight. This land was truly flat. As flat as flat can be.

Now, should one be in want of a tower - as most everyone of its people were - one would find themselves condemned in these lowlands to see next to nothing of interest around them, except... each other. And as it so happened, this land was called the Land of Old Wives.

Why, then, the sad little name of the Land of Old Wives?

A very long time ago the one known as the Great Evil Emperor came to visit the lands. With his hellish dogs in tow, he traveled his empire to see what was to be had, to be taken, and to possess. Because most people in the land of Old Wives didn't live in high towers and didn't have much else to do than to be aware of each other's faces and all of its wrinkles and expressions all day long; they also knew instantly what was most dear to them.

Beauty.

The people therefore knew very well it was the only thing in real danger of being taken away from them due to the Great Evil Emperor's infamous greed. Their true treasure had to be hidden before his arrival.

Of course the peoples of the Land of Old Wives soon found that true beauty isn't hidden so easily. And so, when word spread that the Great Evil Emperor was to arrive with nothing but a few days respite, panic traveled swiftly through the dark night from household to household. And the villagers hid all young women in their cellars, barns, and attics just in the nick of time.

When the Evil Emperor finally arrived in the lowlands, no enchanting beauty was anywhere to be found. Looking out from his imperial golden chariot as shiny and sparkly as the villagers had ever seen anything sparkle in their lives, he rode hungrily through the villages, seeing among all the silent women folk nothing but... Old Wives.

Starved of beauty he could possess and take away with him, he declared:

"Let this flat piece of land from now on be known as the Land of Old Wives."

And never did the Great Evil Emperor return.

Everyone in the land of old Wives thought they had outsmarted the Great Evil Emperor, but their victory would not turn out to be so sweet. The Emperor had unknowingly still managed to steal what was most dear to them. For once he had declared the flat piece of land "the Land of Old Wives", beauty itself was declared a dangerous thing, as if waiting to be stolen as soon as it was seen.

And its people began to live up to its new name.

The knock of sense

So it was that many years later, even after the Great Evil Emperor had long been forgotten, a most peculiar child was born in the Land of Old Wives. So wide and large were its eyes, that nothing could escape its gaze, even the beauty that remained hidden under a heavy blanket of fear.

Growing up, the child looked at every little thing it could lay its eyes upon and wondered at it.

Often the child said to his big brothers:

“Isn’t the sun fabulously beautiful in the morning?”

And the brothers said gruffly, still rubbing the sleeping crusts from their eyes:

“Fabulous? If you ask me, the sun could have stayed down a little while longer.”

And father said:

“Beautiful? Strange child. The sun rises in the morning and sets in the evening, and that’s all you need to know about it.”

And off he went as always to his tannery to begin the day’s work. Whenever the Hunter came around to bring in another two rabbits to Father tanner, it was understood he would receive one piece of leather from the catch. Whenever winter was fast approaching and therefore the cows were at their fattest, the farmer knew he needed to offer an additional entire leg salted

in a barrel to receive a whole tanned cowhide in return.

“Aren’t the colors and shapes of the cowhide stunning?” said the child with his admiring eyes as Father tanner started to treat the cowskin.

“Stunning?” , said Father tanner as he scrubbed off the meat-side of the skin, “As long as it is clean and tidy, it is enough. You shouldn’t think about it any more than that. ”

The child nodded, still looking at the wondrous patterns of the cowskin.

“But I still think it’s nice,” the child eventually began saying, never swayed in its admiration of funny shapes and colors.

“Well if you think so, go ahead and think it but be sure to keep it to yourself. It’s no one’s business whether you think things are beautiful or not.”

“Listen to your father,” said the Mother of the child, pickling the skins.

“A shame that it can’t be a business,” said the child.

The child looked at his Mother and saw that she too had a lot of beauty, beauty that she herself no longer saw. A beauty she had, without energy or life, like a wasteland with seeds buried too deep underground to ever sprout. This too didn’t escape the child’s wide eyes.

“Mother is beautiful too,” said the child.

Mother shivered at the words and gave the child a shy smile.

"That is true," said the Father.

"Do you think so too, but only to yourself?" asked the child.

Father the tanner looked blankly at the child for a moment and said to the Mother:

"It's time we put the child to work."

Father tanner had hoped that working in the tanning shop would help the child come to it senses.

When you know what you have to do and then do it, everything else is just a distraction. Everything else is just... another chance to be disappointed, "said Father tanner.

"Fair enough", the child said, "But I'm not sure what you think I should do is what I should be doing."

Father the tanner took a deep breath.

"Why is it that you want to be disappointed so badly? There is a way of doing things, child, and it works."

"I don't know if it works, Father," said the child, "If I have to keep myself from seeing and understanding what I want to see and understand."

The Father looked at the child and simply couldn't understand where all this came from. None of his other sons and daughters asked things that he had no answer to.

"One day you will understand. It's easiest to just do as your father says. "

Meanwhile, the Father kneaded the piece of leather further in the acid, his hands covered in oil and wax, so as to protect his hands while removing every single little hair on the piece of cowskin.

“Is it supposed to be?” Asked the child.

“What?” asked the Father, “Supposed to be what? Speak up, child. I don’t have time to talk all day!”

The child could hardly speak when his father’s voice grew heavy and deep like rock about to break off from the rocky mountainside.

“Is life supposed to be easy?”

Father tanner scraped the last hair off the cowskin.

“Why make life difficult when you can make it easy?”

The child watched, lost in thought, as his father plunged the now clean cowskin into a bucket of clear water.

“If I don’t understand why you ask me to do what you want me to do, it isn’t easy for me at all to do it.”

“That’s it!” shouted Father and knocked some sense into the child.

One day the child noticed the sun shining so beautifully. Hypnotized by how the golden rays embraced the landscape ever so gently, he had no choice but to slip out of the house and go play in the open fields outside the village.

Happily straying, the child had gone so far across the meadows that he wound up in the lands past the dikes, far out of sight.

There seemed to be an exciting *something* that drew him further and further away, drawing him deeper and deeper into the wilderness.

And there he saw what was hidden so well in the Land of Old Wives: the untamed beauty of nature blooming spontaneously. Not a flower afraid of opening its petals up towards the sun. No fern afraid of unfolding itself in full view. No tree afraid of stretching and reaching out to its limits.

And so the child danced with the frogs and the toads along the swaying blades of grass, among the butterflies and moths in the wind, while rabbits fled into their holes underground until at one point the child faced a gigantic wall of dark trees.

Hidden behind the wall of wilderness, something was moving softly towards the child, softly but still very... decidedly. The child now stared at the dark trees, trying to gaze past them into the unknown blackness where this mysterious being stirred. The child had no words through which to understand what he was witnessing and, so the moment was steeped in a deafening silence.

The longer he waited, the more it seemed that he was being watched just as much as he was watching the creature. And for the first time, he felt seen by the same sort of curious eyes by which he himself scrutinized the world.

Antlers emerged from the shadows with branches as high as the trees themselves; Fur as soft as the moss on

the tree trunks; Terrifying eyes deep and clear as the still water of a forest pond. It moved towards him, soon towering over him.

Their long, long legs; their huge, regal snout, and awesome, majestic antlers like nothing the child had ever seen before, emerged from the shadows into the light, absorbing the sunlight into its fur as if it was now glowing, until finally the giant deer came face to face with the child.

There was a moment of silence as they looked at one another. The child remained stunned. The giant deer gazed at him curiously; as if waiting to see if the child would bow to it. So enchanted was the child by the magic creature that he was just about to take a few steps closer, already reaching out his hand.

At that moment his father pulled him away with a nasty snatch at the arm. The child, pulled away so harshly, tried to look back, but the creature seemed to have already disappeared. His father hadn't seen the Enchanted Deer, mistaking it for the large trees of the dark forest.

"We thought we lost you! You are very lucky indeed that I found you before dark. Do you think a helpless child like you can survive a night alone in the forest? Something incredibly dangerous could have happened to you. Do you know what manner of dangerous creatures roam freely in the dark forest? Be glad that I have found you."

With a merciless tug and a frightening sniff, Father tanner brought the child back home. Along the way, the child tried to explain he had seen an enchanted deer in the forest, but to no avail.

From that moment on, Father tanner made sure the child no longer slip out of the house. He told mother he wouldn't tolerate any more inconvenient talk of beauty or enchantment when there was work to be done. And there was always work to be done.

The longer the child worked in the tannery, the more the child knew what to do, the more he knew how to do it; And the more he did it, the better he got at it. The longer he worked at the tannery, the more he became known through what he did, namely being the Tanner's son.

The song of the Enchanted Deer

And yet, this way of doing things didn't last very long. When he finally reached the appropriate age, his father would allow him to go to the village fair by himself. And so at the first chance he got, he did exactly that.

Excited to go out to the fair for the first time after dark, he arrived at the village square, now lit up with many lovely lanterns. All about titillating stalls and stands caught his eyes and nose with sights and aroma's unfamiliar to him.

Now, most spectacular of all was the show on the stage in the middle of the village square. It seemed to be by some mechanism unfolded from the colorful wagon to which it was attached. The young man walked towards it, joining the bustling crowd and feeling energized by the sound of the drums as he got closer.

Dancing dwarfs danced on stage while a tall, colorful bard graced the stage to tell awesome tales to constant ooh's and aah's of the crowd. Masterfully, he used masks to play all characters at the same time. In what the young man found to be a funny accent, the bard regaled the legendary heroes of old with an incredibly loud voice he was only used to hearing from the vendors at the market. But mind the funny accent, he did not. Most of all, he admired how the bard played the lute while juggling all masks and

using different voices. Never had he seen anything like it.

These tales about heroes of times passed were music to his ears and heart - a new melody to accompany his dreams. Now the Bard had ended the tale of heroic battles, and moved on to a story so tender and gentle of forbidden loves and broken hearts. So soft became his voice, jumping from one chord to the next, that the crowd was nearly moved to tears by his poetry.

At this point, many took their leave and sought out the warmth of their beds. But the show was far from over to those who remained. With fireworks he woke everyone up again. In fearsome suits, the dwarves came back to the stage as the bard began to tell dark and eerie stories about strange creatures that lurk in the forests.

“Is he just a songsinger or is he a magician too?” The tanner’s son asked meanwhile, stood next to the baker’s son, who had stayed to hear the scary stories as well.

“Both,” said the baker’s son.

“How do you know for sure?”

“Because I’ve seen him do both.”

“When?”

“In the afternoon – about the time he wakes up every day – he comes out of his wagon and sets up a table to do some magic tricks for the children,” said the baker’s son and took another long sip from his cup.

“In the afternoon? That’s too bad. I work in the tannery until evening.”

The baker’s son shrugged, “I start early in the morning, even before the sun comes up. By noon I’m done for the day.”

“That’s nice and early. Lucky you!”

“Lucky?” repeated the baker’s son. “Depends if you like to get up before even the rooster crows.”

The tanner’s son admired the Bard a moment and said:

“Imagine if those tricks were actually magic, you know? Wouldn’t that be amazing?”

“Like true magic? You mean magic like a sorcerer’s kind of magic?” said the baker’s son laughing. “Please, you don’t actually believe that, do you?”

“Well, how can you be sure?” asked the Tanner’s son.

“I... There is no such thing as magic, like in fairy tales, my brother,” said the baker’s son shaking his head.

“I...” stuttered the Tanner’s son, “It could be real, couldn’t it?”

“No, it’ couldn’t! Look. To me, true magic is conjuring up a good loaf of bread. Or perhaps for you, making a good piece of leather. That’s magic. The tricks the Bard plays on children, that’s his loaf of bread, so to speak; his piece of leather. It is real and not real at the same time. The only real thing about it is that it is meant to appear real, but it isn’t.”

The tanner's son looked at the baker's son for a moment. He had never heard him say anything as clever before. It took a while for him to understand what he just said and the baker's son could read it on his face.

"If you don't believe me, go ask him yourself!" said the baker's son, still laughing at the thought.

"Yes," said the Tanner's son dryly, "I think I'm going to."

After the shortest of nights and what seemed like the longest day of work in his entire life, the tanner's son ran back to the village square as soon as he had finished his tasks at his father's shop. He felt both exhausted and excited at the same time but nevertheless his resolve to talk to the Bard was unshakeable.

Even though the evening was still early and fresh, the village square was already bustling and many had gathered in front of the stage once again. A spectacular performance by the dancing dwarfs had the crowd excited for another night of wondrous tales and so when the bard finally appeared to the sound of the drums, the villagers cheered mightily.

Immediately the Bard burst out into a merry song to the delight of all spectators, but this time the tanner's son noticed that he was not only watching the performance, he was also watched by the performer. Immediately the young Tanner's son was reminded of his encounter with the enchanted deer. And indeed the feeling was very similar: the Bard's deep, warm, and dark eyes stayed fixed on him. and he felt as though the Bard was speaking directly to him.

As their eyes locked unto each other, the Bard began to tell of the legendary enchanted deer of the deep dark forest as if reading his mind. Immediately, the young tanner pricked up his ears so as to hear every single word. Both terrified and delighted, his ears seemed to ring as the Bard told of the fabulous fairy paradise the giant deer guards, hidden from humankind; And as he told of the giant deer known to be seen only once in a thousand years. Tall as the trees of the forest are they, with a fur shiny and soft like young moss, and beautiful giant antlers so as never to be mistaken to be anything else but legendary.

And so the Bard spoke in words that seemed to for the tanner's son only:

"Once upon a time... a very, very long time ago... In a long-forgotten time when people and animals still spoke to one another in the same language, the whole world was one single paradise and this common home called earth, they all shared."

"The grand and abundant forest that stretched to all four corners of the earth sheltered all elves and fae flying across the lands, helping humankind from their islands in the skies and their homes underground, while all beings shared their magic with each other freely and happily. "

"Many were the animals of this great era that spoke with words bright and far-reaching, almost as if the stars themselves spoke. The Enchanted Deer was one of them, one of the once many ancients. And deep in the dark forest - all that remains of the grand abundant forest that once covered the entire earth - far from the dangers of humankind, they protect the gate to what is left of fairy paradise. "

At that moment, the Bard took his harp and sang:

Heaven as it was,

The moon, as it emerged,

The sea as it descended.

The Enchanted Deer remembers all.

Life lurking in the first sands,

The song hidden in the mountains,

A melody cloaked by the rivers.

The Enchanted Deer remembers all.

Paradise just as it was,

The bees, just as they flew,

The sunset just as it shone.

The Enchanted Deer remembers all.

Man as they were,

With tender wisdom,

Through sweet eyes,

And undisturbed smiles.

The Enchanted Deer remembers all.

Taking the wood of the trees,

Animals from their nests,

Seeds from their flowers,

Taking all for themselves,

and still forgetting where it came from.

The Enchanted Deer remembers all.

The spectacle of clouds and stars,

A landscape of letting live and die,

The tempest of silence in their eyes.

The Enchanted Deer will remember all as it was.

“How sad it was, dear ones, when the Enchanted Deer watched humankind make their own gardens apart from the fairy world. And how sad it was when they watched humankind take all it desired from the forest just to keep for themselves and never give back. More and more, our human world set itself apart and in doing so, ever-growing, the world of humankind demanded more and more of the forest’s abundance while giving back nothing.”

“It was at that time that the Enchanted Deer with its large antlers dug those large, magic stones out of the ground and there split off the human world with a thick veil invisible to the human eye, to preserve its wild and untamed magic. And so the worlds were split, forever.”

Everyone listened with bated breath, most of all the tanner’s son, who was even afraid to blink so as not to miss a single moment of the Bard’s performance.

“The ever-playful elves, however, sometimes dare to slip through the veil to visit the mad humans in their mad human world. Always careful are they, knowing to not ever reveal themselves to a human’s eyes. For if

men ever find their way to the gate, they may plunder the last piece of paradise that is left on our dear mother earth, only to keep it for their own selves."

Thunderous applause woke the tanner's son from the daze he was under. He saw the entire story vividly in his mind's eye.

"I'm not entirely sure he hasn't put a spell on us," said the tanner's son to the butcher's son and the baker's son.

Cheering, all three clumped their cups together and toasted:

"To the Enchanted Deer!"

The tanner's son emptied the entire cup in one great big gulp. From the corner of his eye, he saw the Bard had left the stage already. Nervously looking around for him, he saw that he was on his way back to the wagon.

Immediately the tanner's son threw his cup to the ground and made his way through the crowd as quickly as possible.

"Wait!" cried the baker's son. "Where are you going? Are you going to talk to him?"

"Yes," the tanner's son cried as he stomped at people and accidentally kicked their shins to get ahead of the Bard in time.

"Wait for us!"

And so it was that the Bard was just about to make a final bow to his audience on the steps of his wagon when the tanner's son stumbled up on those stairs and

pushed a thick piece of leather into the magician's hands.

The Bard looked surprised at the young man at his feet.

"A present," blurted the tanner's son, panting. Meanwhile, the butcher's son and the baker's son arrived at the scene. Seeing the tanner's son panting on the steps at the feet of the surprised bard, they didn't dare to step away from the crowd.

"Many thanks," said the Bard, ignoring the crowd and helping the tanner's son to his feet. "A clean piece of leather. Well worked, fine, and sleek. Useful, perhaps, for a small drum."

"It's yours," said the tanner's son.

"Many thanks, young man."

"May I talk to you?."

The Bard, with a big smile on his face, said:

"By all means, do come in."

When the two hesitant friends saw the tanner's son enter the Bard's mysterious wagon, they suddenly jumped forward from the crowd and asked:

"Can we come along too?"

The Bard looked at them sternly.

"And what presents have you brought me?"

The butcher's son and the baker's son dug into their pockets with a sudden icy chill, but alas.

“Some other time, perhaps,” said the Bard, closing the door.

The tanner’s son, meanwhile, could not believe his eyes once he had entered the Bard’s wagon. The many colors and fragrances overwhelmed his senses, unlike anything he had ever experienced except in the beautiful flowers of spring. This home was tiny, yet the Bard had made room for paintings, statuettes, cards, pillows, blankets, clothes, plates, and cups.

“Please, sit down,” said the Bard, offering one of the many pillows as a seat.

The tanner’s son sat down on one of the cushions, but not before examining the intricate drawings on them. He marveled at the beautiful symbols and seals, but he had no clue yet as to what they meant.

“I had a feeling you would come,” said the Bard as he changed behind the folding screen.

“You did?” asked the tanner’s son.

The Bard came from behind the folding screen in a loose-fitting shirt and wide trousers tied with a cord, both white. He grabbed one of his robes – the one tinged with red, orange, and purple – and threw it on with a flourish.

“I actually don’t think I have ever seen anyone so absorbed in my stories, as you were,” said the Bard.

In the meantime, he took two cups from a cupboard, decorated with all kinds of small statues, and took out a bottle of elixir from a tiny cabinet underneath. He poured two glasses intently and handed the tanner’s son a cup.

"Cheers," the Bard said.

"Cheers," said the young fool.

And they both took a sip.

"You can put your cup here," said the Bard, brushing aside some loose coins, table knives, and wands on the low table.

"Are those magic wands?"

"Those are... wands, yes."

The tanner's son grabbed one of the wands.

The bard now took one of the wands that fell to the floor and pointed it at him, jokingly. But, to the tanner's son, it felt like suddenly the whole wagon was holding its breath and the air was sucked away from the room.

"You came here because you wanted to know something," said the Bard.

"Are you threatening me with that wand?" asked the tanner's son.

"You answer my question first, then I will answer yours," said the Bard. "I have many friends, as I do enemies. Tell me why you are here."

The tanner's son stared at the wand for a moment, surprised at the turn of events.

"Well," he began ever so cautiously, "I would have liked to know ... about you ... I would like to know ... if your magic tricks are tricks ... or if they are true magic ..."

“That’s your question?” asked the Bard.

“That’s my question.”

“You’re not here because of my father? Because of... the lead and the... his... because of the gold?”

“No,” said the tanner’s son. “Not at all.”

The Bard still stared at him in silence as if frozen in time. Suddenly, he melted into a smile, saying:

“Well then, imagine it’s all trickery,” the Bard began. “Then I’m pointing a simple wooden stick at you. No reason to be afraid of anything, right?”

“Right,” said the tanner’s son hesitantly as he watched the wand as well as the Bard himself.

“But imagine magic is real,” the Bard continued. “Then I might be pointing a tremendously powerful weapon full of mysterious possibilities beyond comprehension directly at you at this moment.”

The Bard smiled, curious at the young man’s reaction. But seeing as the tanner’s son remained silent and confused, he added, lowering his wand and throwing it to the floor:

“Do I know real magic or not? The answer lies in another riddle: Are you afraid or not? ”

The tanner’s son looked at the wand rolling on the floor, the coins on the table, the cups of elixir they had just enjoyed, and the table knives, as he reflected on the Bard’s words.

“How can I be afraid if I don’t even know what to be afraid of?”

“Yes! Spoken like a real Fool,” said the Bard happily. The tanner’s son didn’t understand why seeing the fool in him seemingly made the Bard so content.

“That is it!” cried the Bard. “That’s it!”

“I... I still don’t understand!” said the tanner’s son as the Bard poured another round of elixir.

“That’s the beginning, exactly where you need to be, don’t you see?” said the Bard, and they fell back down onto their pillows.

He handed a cup to the tanner’s son:

“Cheers!”

“Cheers!”

Once again, they both finished their cups. The tanner’s son thought to himself that all the answers he was getting from the Bard didn’t make him any wiser.

Meanwhile, the bard had taken his lute and started to sing while stretching out over the pillows:

“You are such a Fool. You are such a Fool. Don’t know what you’re getting into.”

“But if being a fool is the way to discover magic, that means magic is real. And if magic is real,” mumbled the tanner’s son, “then ... then it’s true.”

“Then what is true?” asked the Bard,

“I...”

The tanner’s son was afraid to say it out loud.

"You have already seen magical things, impossible things, things that shouldn't be, but are. I saw it in you the moment you first appeared in my audience. I saw it in the sparkle of your eyes."

The young man listened without breathing it seemed.

"That sparkle follows you, and you, too, follow it in return. That's how you ended up... here."

"Yes."

There was a pause as the Bard looked at him intensely. Softly the tinkle of the bells hanging from the door sprinkled the silence.

"The Enchanted Deer you sang about tonight...."

"Yes?"

"I have seen them. the Enchanted Deer. I have seen them with my own eyes", the tanner's son uttered as if the water finally broke through the dike.

"When was this?" asked the Bard.

"When I was a child, long ago, on the edge of the dark forest."

"I knew it."

"So it is real? The Enchanted Deer is real?"

The Bard burst out laughing, shaking the flames of the nearby candles.

"Of course it is real! Can something be unreal that you have seen with your own eyes? Even if no one believes you, it still happened to you!"

He grabbed his lute and played a happy tune, singing:

“You really are a Fool, my dear friend. A dear, dear Fool are you.”

When the tanner’s son finally emerged from the Bard’s wagon, the butcher’s son and the baker’s son immediately ran towards him.

“You shouldn’t have waited for me,” said the tanner’s son with a drunken lisp.

“Well, what did you talk about?”

“You waited for me this whole time?”

“He’s not making sense,” sighed the butcher’s son.

“Come on,” said the baker’s son, seeing that their drunken friend was close to falling on the cobblestoned street.

“Take his arm, don’t let him make more of a fool of himself than he already has.”

“What did you talk about?” The butcher’s son asked as he pulled his arm across his shoulders.

“About the Enchanted Deer!”

The two friends looked at each other in utter disappointment.

“You had the chance to ask the bard about what the world is like beyond the village, and you asked him about fairytale creatures?” cried the butcher’s son.

"Yes," laughed the tanner's son, "I wanted to know if his magic tricks were true magic."

The butcher's son sighed, but the baker's son did not give up on finding out what the Bard had told him.

"Well?" said he, "What's the secret to his magic tricks?"

"I asked him," said the tanner's son, eyes heavy with fatigue.

"Yes?"

"I asked him if his magic is real or not."

"We already know that!" they cried.

"And that's it!" laughed the tanner's son.

"That's what?"

"One and the same thing!" he cried. "The question is the answer! "

The nearby villagers started to laugh. Others shook their heads and rolled their eyes.

"It figures that the Bard would only answer questions with riddles," sighed the butcher's son.

"He called me a fool. But it is well-intentioned," the tanner's son added.

The butcher's son lowered his head, ashamed at his friend who was now laughed at by the many villagers, listening to his crazed words about the bard and his fairy tales.

“And how do you know that the Enchanted Deer really exists?”

The tanner’s son replied with a sleepy smile:

“Because I saw them myself with my own eyes!”

“The Bard is right to call you a Fool!” the villagers shouted.

Meanwhile, the baker’s son tried to talk some sense into his drunk friend:

“It’s only a story, a fairytale, something amusing to listen to, not at all something to take seriously, my friend.”

“No, you don’t understand. I saw them on the edge of the dark forest a long time ago. With its antlers as high as the top branches of the trees!”

The two friends looked at each other in disbelief.

“It looked at me! Straight at me!”

The villagers laughed even louder.

“It is true!” the tanner’s son shouted angrily.

“Stop, brother,” they said. “Soon, they’ll not think you just a simple fool, but someone truly crazy.”

“But I’m not crazy,” cried he.

“I’ve seen it. I know what I saw!”

“What is it to you that we believe you or not? Why does it bother you so?” shouted the taunting villagers, laughing, having the times of their lives.

And the tanner’s son said with an overflowing heart:

“A lot! It was the most magnificent, the most beautiful creature I have ever seen in my life! I would share this feeling with everyone I meet! Such wonder! Such beauty!”

From the doorway of his wagon, the Bard observed the villagers laugh at the fool’s words in the distance.

“Truly a fool to speak the right words to the wrong ears,” while strumming his tiny harp.

The villagers continued teasing the foolish tanner’s son, “What’s the use of being beautiful?”

“If you had seen the Enchanted Deer with your own eyes,” said he, “you wouldn’t have asked that question!”

The villagers’ only response was their continued laughter. And so it was that from that moment on, he was known by all as the village Fool.

The knapsack

Mother knew everything had changed the moment she put her son to bed after his two friends brought him in.

“There’s no harm in taking care of him as if he were sick,” she said to father Tanner, “When he’s clearly not himself.”

The next morning, however, with the bucket for hauling water still in her hand, she found that things were not going to return to how they had once been. Unexpectedly, she had found a strange knapsack in front of the front door on her way to the well.

As she stared at the strange thing, the first thought that came to her mind was that it was neither too large nor too small, and she noticed many rich colors in its fabric. Gold and silver thread glittered even in the timid light of early morning. This material had to have come from a faraway land, she thought to herself with a shudder.

She glanced at the town square in the distance. The Bard’s wagon had disappeared. Now she leaned forward, towards the knapsack, yet very slowly, meanwhile thinking of what dangers might be hidden inside. She grabbed it gently and lifted it off the sill. It jangled slightly as if it contained precious treasures. Quickly, she slipped it into the bucket she was still holding in her other hand to get water from the well upon hearing that the others in the house were also quietly waking up.

She walked to the well and hid herself behind the cold gray stones from her husband or children, who

might at this time slowly begin to wake. With a deep sigh, she took the knapsack from the bucket, put it on her lap, and began to untie the knot oh so gently so it wouldn't tinkle or clink.

The sun was just beginning to peep over the horizon with a lovely orange glow, while at the same time, the moon was still shining its silver haze.

All this treasure, she thought to herself, would lead my precious son down a path from which there is no returning. A silver cup richly decorated with intricate figures and symbols she had never before seen; A large gold coin; A dagger with a wooden handle and a dangerously shiny blade; And finally, a twig that looked like a wand.

Any person would be happy to receive such treasures, but it was not the receiving that worried Mother. It was the taking away that scared her. And she didn't want to give up her son in any way. So she tied up the knapsack, and under the watchful eye of the morning sun and moon, she held the knapsack over the well like a bucket. After a moment's hesitation, she dropped it into the water, where it sank into its unknown depths.

Immediately after, she filled her bucket with the same clear and fresh water as if nothing had happened and went on her way back to the house.

Already turned away from the well, a little voice from inside seemed to say:

“... No one can reveal it ...”

Did I perhaps hear the sound of buds opening on the spring branches, Mother thought, surely it can't be some misty voice from the cold depths of the well?

She waited a moment longer and listened, but there was only the gentle pitter-patter of water against the wet stones. Nothing out of the usual. As she shook her head and continued walking back with her bucket full of fresh water, once again she heard a tiny voice as clear as a bell:

"... No one can hide it ..."

Hearing it again, Mother rushed inside as fast as her feet could carry her. Not to raise any suspicion, she immediately started on the daily chores as usual.

During the day, she would sit at the bedside of her exhausted son for whom the Bard had left that gift. With a clean rag, carefully dipped in the cool water of the well, she wiped the beads of sweat from her son's forehead.

"Did I oversleep?" the tanner's son asked, barely conscious.

"Don't worry," said Mother. "Work will wait until you feel like yourself again."

The next day Mother once again took the bucket to bring in fresh water from the well. So as not to wake anyone, she gently opened the door and stepped out into the dark of early morning but almost tripped over something on the doorsill. To her horror, the same knapsack lay there once again.

This time she unhesitatingly grabbed the knapsack with the gold and silver treasures tingling and ringing