Abstract
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THE WITCH'S EYES

by David Sandner

Once, a long time ago, there lived a poor farmer with three sons. The farmer was very proud of his first son, for his first son was a hard worker and earned his keep. And he was proud of his second son, for his second son was a hard worker and earned his keep. But his third son was different, for he would only dream all day and turn his hand to nothing. They called the third son Co'llad for he would sit day after day before the house fire, absentmindedly sifting the coals with a stick.

"Co'llad," the farmer said one day, "you do nothing when there is work to be done. It would be better if you left, if you won't earn your keep."

And with that, Co'llad left his father's place and took the path leading into the old forest. He had listened to the village storytellers and their tales of dangers and riches in the forest. He had it in mind that there, perhaps, he would find the treasure to make his father proud and the adventure of which he dreamed. Co'llad walked all day under the towering trees as their shadows lengthened across his path. Finally, the daylight fled altogether, and the darkness poured forth, splashing down the pathway, pooling in the shadows under the tall trees.

Co'llad was hungry, not having eaten since supper the previous day, but he had not brought food. He shivered, but had not thought to find shelter earlier, and might had already come. He groped miserably into the darkness to the side of the path, gathering firewood, when he noticed a light a little further away, off the path. He stumbled through the brush towards the light.

He found that the light came from a window built into the base of a great tree. Co'llad tried to peer in the window but the glass pane was too thick and warped. He walked around the tree and found a small door on the other side. He opened it and, stooping, entered a round room. Although a kitchen fire burned under a big cooking pot, no one seemed at home.

"Hello?"

"Is it Christian blood I smell?" an old woman said behind him, stepping from the shadows. "It has been long indeed since one of your kind passed this way."

Co'llad turned and stepped back as the crane, bent and shriveled, groped towards him. He saw she had no eyes, only two empty holes where the eyes should have been.

"What do you want here?" she said.

He tried to escape back through the door, but the old woman stepped before it and he had to move away to keep his distance from her.

"I have been travelling these woods searching for treasure," he said. "But I have become hungry and would like some food."

His voice had given him away, and the old woman grabbed on to Co'llad's arm.

"Strong, strong," she said to herself, and she rocked on her heels and ran her free hand over his arm and chest. She cackled and drooled and Co'llad stared as if paralyzed into the dark pits of her eyes.

"If it's treasure you want," she said, "I can tell you where to find treasure. But you must do something for me, too. You must promise to return to me my eyes. I will tell you how."

"It will be done," promised Co'llad.

"My eyes were stolen by three brother trolls who lair nearby in a large cave. I will tell you how to get to the cave and there you will find your treasure and my eyes. You must leave soon, for it is best if you visit them at night when they are asleep."

She gave Co'llad something ill-smelling to eat and the directions to the troll's lair and, after a brief rest beside the fire, he set out. He had travelled no more than out of earshot of the witch's house when a sparrow landed on a branch nearby him.

"Wait," the bird said, "you are being sent to your death, I know. The trolls cannot be defeated unless you know their weakness. The witch has sent many others to be eaten by the trolls for in this way she pays their price for the return of her eyes."

"What should I do?"

"Trolls cannot stand daylight; it turns them to stone. You must lock them outside their home just before dawn. You will find a cloak of invisibility behind this tree I am on; wear it, and with it you will defeat them."

Co'llad looked behind the sparrow's tree and, as she had said he would, found the cloak of invisibility.

"Thank you, friend sparrow. Is there anything I can do for you in return?"

"Yes. In the troll's lair you will, indeed, find the witch's eyes. Force her to change me back to my true form in return for her sight, and I shall be amply repaid."

Co'llad soon arrived before a great door. He heard a great bellowing from within.

"Hutetu. I smell Christian blood, my brothers. Let us find what supper has come to us outside."

The door opened and three enormous trolls came forth from their cave and looked about, but because Co'llad had his cloak of invisibility, they could see nothing.
Beyond the blue-white Trollgarde mountains
where the Dwarf-Kings guard their treasure of gold,
lie the storm-tossed seas of Aliador.

There sea-beasts play and pirates roam,
and coiling dragons of crimson scaly might
try their strength against Poseidon's briny face.

The Grimemog calls with its burning mists
to trap unwary sailors for the Spectre-Lord's den.

The winds come like spirits of the deep
to hurl the traveller against the rocky coasts
where the Mordru prowl and wait—not in vain.

Strange temples crumble with the centuries of sleep
on the Cumanari Plains of fenland and waste,
Ghosts haunt the Tower of Crystal there,
to sing at night of ancient deeds of glory,
and tell of wars of gnome and elf-lords
against the witchery of Mandragora, Queen of the Night,
and of great Caer-druin where the High Kings ruled.

They whisper solemn hymns to the Urubog of the North,
The Holy Mountain, where angels live and pray,
and rule the phantoms of nether-life.

The Shadow Woods lie there, too,
like serpents waiting for their prey.

I can see the great walls of Tarin with its iron gates,
deserted by all save the mice that live in palaces of jade.
My eyes look for more—but slumber is broken,
and I wake to muse on moon-mere under the stars.