

A Tale of the White Deer - Vincent Lakes

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by

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A TALE OF THE WHITE DEER

A long time before the Great Storm there was a Trevlin woman in her thirties, living in the middle of a dense forest with her sickly son. Her man, the father of the child, had died in a war against the Myrdins five years earlier. She lived in a small cottage surrounded by the farmland that had provided her and her son enough food to make it through the years, but now the fields had ceased giving their generous harvest, and her son's condition had turned worse. His illness was a mystery, the healers of all nearby villages had not been able to help him. They all were puzzled and completely clueless about this disease that seemed to drain the life itself from his fragile body.

The widow worked twice as hard, but all her efforts seemed to be wasted as most of the crop died before it was ready to be harvested. She did not know what to do; starvation and the sickness of her son were about to break her spirit. If she would fail to figure out a way to get food very soon, her son might die. He was becoming weaker every day, and even though she tried to give him food from her own share, his condition did not improve.

But then one night when the widow was sitting at her porch, watching over the dwindling fields, she saw something so beautiful and delicate that it brought tears into her eyes. A pure white deer¹ was walking along the side of the field with a gentle gaze in her eyes and sure amble in her small hooves. The deer seemed to be waiting for something, but she did not seem impatient or restless. Calmly she continued walking among the long hay, gazing at the widow every now and then, and somehow the widow knew that it was she who the deer was waiting. She stood up and walked carefully across the field, for she did not want to scare this beautiful creature away, but the deer was not leaving, in fact, it seemed as she was about to come towards her from time to time, but after a few steps she always returned back to the edge of the field.

The widow reached the deer and smiled, gently tapping the animal's head. She had never seen such a magnificent creature. But then she was startled suddenly as she heard a voice inside her head. A soft and peaceful voice it was, assuring no harm to the widow, who then realized that it was the white deer speaking to her. The deer's peaceful voice helped her to calm down and soon the widow found herself breathing easier.

"Do not fear me," the deer said, "I have come to help you." Her voice was strangely hypnotic, but still clear like polished glass. "Go to your son, tend his illness with your presence - be a mother to him. Take care of him and these fields will take care of you."

"But without labor these fields provide no crop! How am I supposed to leave them

unattended?" The widow resisted the deer's advice.

"You must choose," the deer explained patiently. "While you have been working on the fields, your son has fallen ill. I am showing you the path, but it is up to you, and you alone, to decide whether you shall walk upon it or not," then the deer turned away and left the widow alone with her puzzled thoughts. After a few steps she halted for a moment and glanced at the widow once more.

"Heed my warning though, for if you accept my blessing, no vile thoughts must cross your mind, otherwise a price must be paid." Before the last words had faded from her mind, the deer had disappeared into the forest.

She returned to the cottage, where her son was coughing horribly, struggling for every painful breath. The widow made tea by using a selection of herbs and honey, and served it to her son, then she lied down next to him and comforted him by wrapping her arms around him. The boy accepted her attention and fell asleep with a light smile on his dried, fever-burned lips.

In the morning the widow woke up and made breakfast. She had carefully considered the words of the white deer and decided to follow her advice. She stayed home that day, and the fields outside were left without attention, but during the next day something incredible happened. A group of strong men appeared, seemingly out of nowhere, telling the widow they were from the nearby village and they had come to help with sowing while she took care of her sick child. The widow was stunned by the unexpected help, but then she remembered the deer's words to take care of her son and the fields would take care of her. Now she understood what they meant and she smiled brightly.

The boy's condition improved, and the fields provided plenty of crop to feed them both through the winter. But in the widow's mind, a new wishful thought spawned, a greedy thought at that. Next spring she would go out to work again, after all, her son was all better now. Together with the men she could cover so much more land that she would have extra crop to sell, which would not only secure her and her son's lives, but would also make them wealthy!

And so she did. As soon as the first sun of the spring rose to warm the land, she met the men in the fields, who wondered her eagerness to work, but with a shrug they accepted her, after all, it was her own farmland. There would be no more poverty, she thought. No more misery, but sunny days and delicious feasts until the end of times.

The sowing went well, covering a larger chunk of land than ever before. The widow glanced at all the little sprigs and smiled contently, the crop would be enormous and the reward generous. In

her thoughts profit had faded the words of the white deer, and she hardly remembered the odd encounter with the beautiful animal. She forgot what should have never been lost, and once again she ignored the needs of her son.

The summer passed and the crop grew higher than ever, and it all looked almost too good to be true. But then one day without a warning, the rain came, strong and powerful. A storm that swept across the fields and destroyed the crop that was almost ready to be reaped. The men shrugged and walked away, as there was nothing to be done with the disaster. It was too late to grow a new harvest as the cold northern wind was already beginning to blow, and there was a brisk touch of winter in the air.

Snow came early that winter, covering the fields under its sparkling mantle. At the same time with the frost returned the illness, shackling the boy back to his bed. This time the disease was stronger than ever, and no matter how much the widow looked after her son, the boy withered and died before the spring.

The widow mourned the death of her child. She had now lost her husband and son; one to the war, one to the greed, and at that moment she remembered and realized the warning given by the deer. She had fallen for greed, and the price had to be paid. Shedding bitter tears of lost hope, she wandered to the edge of the frozen field.

"Deer!" She cried. "Deer, I need you!" The snow made her feet tingle, for she had nothing but woolen wraps around her feet, but she barely noticed it.

"Deer, I demand you to show yourself!" She screamed, and as a miracle, a white deer did walk out of the frost-covered woods and approached the widow.

"What is it?" The deer whispered in her head.

"You took my son," she sobbed, "I want him back!"

"I warned you," the deer replied calmly. "The price of greed was the life of your son."

"Please," the widow begged hopelessly, "I will do anything—".

"Hear these words, for they may be of some comfort to you. Your son has passed on to the Forest of *Neldarin*², where he wanders free from all grief and sorrow. He will never have to suffer again from the burdens of the mortal world." Then without giving the widow an opportunity to speak, the magnificent white deer returned to the forest from which it came, leaving the widow alone to cry and wail for the loss of her son.

When the men returned next spring, they found the widow dead at the edge of the field. She had never made it back to the cottage, but had died on her feet while begging for the white deer to

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return and bring her son back. The men took her decomposing body and carried her into the nearby woods, where they prepared a simple and modest grave for her to sleep. After finishing the grave, they left the farm and never returned, and the forest took back what was its own.

1. Immortal Mariel has appeared in the form of a white deer in several other tales as well. The white deer has been her symbol since the early years of the First Age. She is said to be the spirit of renewal and growth, a gentle hearted one. But as this story proves to us, Immortals can be cruel and unforgiving when it comes to teaching lessons - their way of thinking differs greatly from mortals.

2. The Forest of Neldarin is a place where souls of the deceased wander free from the chains of the mortal world. Almost every Immortal is given an afterlife realm in the folklore of Dalastra, but without a doubt, Avareth's Garden (*Linduir*), Tharos' Silver Mountain (*Dolgarin*) and Morbane's Underworld (*Morgowel*) are best known among the people. In this tale, however, we learn that Mariel also has a realm of her own.