

## A Fable to Lay on the Table

Once upon a time three good fairies lived in a cottage in the great yoozie forest. They grew special wumby plants granted to them by the great wizard, which provided them with almost everything they needed. The seeds and shoots provided a nutritious diet and the stalks could be processed and woven into a good cloth. The surplus could be sold in the village for the little they could not provide for themselves from their garden and forest.

They lived lives of such peace and contentment that they could not understand why there should be any conflict or quarreling in the

world at all. There was enough in the world for everyone. All anyone had to do was to grow wumby plants, share everything, and do a little work and be nice to everybody else.

One day the littlest good fairy was picking berries in the woods when a troll started following her. She asked the troll what it wanted, and why did it not stay in the troll home in the mountains. The troll told her that there was no food up in the mountains and so she had

come down to the forest to find something to eat.



So the littlest fairy gave the troll some wumby bread to eat and pointed the way to the good wizard's castle. The wizard would want to hear about the problem up on troll mountain and do something to make sure the trolls were happy again.

But the troll kept following her, asking for some more wumby bread. The good little fairy gave the troll all the bread she had left and the bucket of berries she had picked as well. The troll insisted she needed more to bring back to her troll sisters, but good little fairy insisted troll must go and see the good wizard.

Good Fairy got home and told the other two good fairies of her encounter with the troll girl, which was why she had come home without any berries. Then they

noticed the troll looking through the window at them.

"No, troll, we cannot help you further. You must go the good wizard. He will fix your troll problems."

But the troll did not go away. She insisted that the wizard was mean to the trolls, and they could not deal with her. All she wanted was to live under their doorstep for awhile.

The good fairies said that they could not believe that the good wizard would really be mean to them, and they must not be hearing the whole story. Troll could not live under their doorstep.

The troll whined. She said that now the fairies were

being mean to them and they did not understand.

It was obvious that the troll was not going to go away. The fairies did not know what to do. They decided that if they did not feed the troll anything she would soon leave.

But no; the troll whined and whined outside their door, begging for something to eat. The little fairy could not stand to listen to the whine and began slipping food out the window to the troll. The other two found out what she was doing and told her she must stop. They again urged the troll to go away.

The troll then threatened to start pulling up their garden and eat one of their blumpy birds out of their blumpy hen house if the fairies did

not stop being mean and give her just a little bit to eat.

To stop the troll from doing that, they gave her some food. But now they did not know what to do. Troll would not go away. Troll was not being reasonable.

Finally, they decided that the biggest good fairy must go to the good wizard's castle and ask him what they should do. So the next morning off she went and walked all day until just before dark she reached the wizard's castle.

She knocked on the door and was taken in, fed, and put up for the night. The next morning she had her audience with the great and good wizard. The wizard was not pleased to hear the good fairy's story.

The wizard asked why they continued to feed the troll if they wanted her to go away.



The fairy became flustered. They did not want to quarrel with anyone. They did not want the troll or anyone else to think they were not nice people. But the troll would not go away. What should they do?

The wizard arched her brow and leaned forward. "What do you think you will have to do?" she asked. The good fairy broke into tears and pleaded that she did not know what to do.

The wizard told the biggest fairy to go home and think about what she had to do and why she was unable to do it.

The fairy trudged home in despair through the great yoozie forest. She did not arrive back at the cottage until late at night. She was met by the troll, who jumped out from her nest under the doorstep to complain that the other two fairies had been very mean to her while she was gone.

The troll listed all these mean things, while the two fairies cried and said the troll was making some things up and exaggerating the rest. All the weary big fairy could do was relate what the wizard had told her.

The fairies wailed but the troll whooped for joy. The wizard was wise. He knew what mean fairies they were. They made her sleep under the doorstep when there is a space under the roof where it was warm.

The big fairy asked the troll if she would stop making so much trouble and help them with the work, if they let her sleep under the roof. The troll was elated. Yes, she would love to help out with the work.

The troll was no good at doing fairy work. She was pretty good at eating fairy food. Soon she was complaining again and making trouble. The fairies felt helpless and began to be cross with each other. They began making simple mistakes they would not have before. The littlest one

complained that she felt ill all the time. All of them were getting less sleep.

One evening the fairies came back to the cottage after mending the wumby plant trellises, resetting the plants in the ground after the troll had torn several rows up because she was too impatient, and angry for unknown reasons. Troll said that picking the wumby seeds hurt her fingers.

Another troll was sitting in the kitchen. The fairies were horrified. Troll introduced her sister, who had come from the troll mountain to keep her company, because things were so bad on troll mountain and because the fairies were sometimes mean to her.

The biggest fairy asked the troll sister if she would

promise to help with the work, not break things, and not complain and make trouble, or say people did things they did not do. Troll sister earnestly promised to do all these things if she could stay with her sister under the roof.

She did not.

The fairies worked harder to feed the two trolls, repair the damage they caused, and clean up their messes. They were sure that if they were very patient and treated the trolls very nicely that they would eventually begin to be more thoughtful and willing to do their share, to learn how to do things right. "We are sure, aren't we? Anyway, what else can we do? We are not bad people. We must not hurt others or become angry."

One day a third troll arrived without an invitation and established herself in the fairy house; the big sister troll. After a couple of days of sizing up the situation, the big sister troll confronted the three fairies. "You fairies are not good. You have been mean to my sisters since they came here. You know the great wizard said we could stay here."

The bigger fairy pointed out that this was not what the wizard had said at all, and big sister troll should stop shouting so loud, and try to be more reasonable. But big sister troll insisted that it was the fairies who were unreasonable; they should try sleeping under the roof for awhile and see how they liked it. Eventually the fairies were talked into sleeping under the roof for

just a little while to prove that they were not being unreasonable, were sorry if they had unintentionally hurt the troll's feelings, and were not trying to bully the trolls.

After a little while in this arrangement, the middle fairy had had enough. She did not want to continue to have the troll sleeping in her own bed, doing nothing, and making her work twice as hard to support her. There was no end to this, because the trolls were not learning how to be nicer by the fairies being nice to them and trying very hard to understand their feelings.

The three fairies left their cottage the next morning before the trolls were awake

and went up the path to the good wizard's castle.

The good wizard was not pleased to see the fairies in the tired and stressed state they had fallen into. She was less pleased with their story. But she had no patience at all when they asked her to help them.

The three fairies had been assigned that section of the yoozie forest in order to watch over it and manage it well for whoever came after them. They were given seeds of the special wumby plant that grew only in the yoozie forest, so that they could be self sufficient. If they were incapable of managing what they were given, they must give it up. Some other provision



would be made for them. There was a group of dwarves who had been asking for a concession in the yoozie forest.

The big fairy protested that they had managed their concession very well until the trolls arrived. They had tried very hard to be nice to the trolls, because they do not wish to be mean, but it was not working. They needed help.

The wizard asked them what sort of help they needed. They wanted the wizard to send someone to talk to the trolls, because they had been unable to explain to the trolls how to be nice.

The wizard told them that part of living in the great yoozie forest was to be able to deal with trolls. She had no intention of sending

someone to rescue them every time a troll showed up. The fairies had to go back to their cottage and rethink some fundamental assumptions.

So the fairies began their dispirited trudge back through the yoozie forest to their cottage.

When the fairies arrived, the trolls were very angry that they had left without telling them. For three days there had been nobody to bake wumby bread for them and they were hungry. The cottage was dirty. The handle of the water pump had broken again. There were no more preserved berries in the cellar.

Glumly, the fairies related what the wizard had told them. The trolls refused to believe it. The wise and

good wizard had finally seen that it was not right that fairies should treat trolls so meanly, and should have so many things the trolls did not. She had obviously told the fairies to go home and find a way to get along with the trolls. Otherwise, she would have sent someone to drive the trolls away.

The fairies insisted that they were not being mean to the trolls. In fact, they could not bear it to have anyone think they were not the nicest fairies that possibly could be. So could the trolls please stop saying that they were mean?

After much effort to be reasonable with the trolls, in the end the fairies had to get to work putting everything back in order again, and getting the trolls their supper, so that they

themselves could eat and finally fall into exhausted sleep in their new places under the roof.

So it went. Then one day the big sister troll barked at the middle fairy that the blumpy hen was overcooked tonight. The middle fairy snapped back that perhaps it was time the trolls learned how to prepare food for themselves. Then they could get it exactly the way they wanted it. Big Sister Troll slapped Middle Fairy across the face. Middle Fairy flew out of the cottage in tears, and disappeared into the forest.

The bigger fairy pleaded with Big Sister Troll not to hit any of the fairies again, because violence does not solve anything. Big Sister Troll denied hitting Middle

Fairy, and anyway she had felt threatened when Middle Fairy had raised her voice, and anyway it was the custom among trolls to slap around those who were being mouthy.

Bigger Fairy chose the second of the options she had been given, and promised that the fairies would not raise their voices with the trolls, knowing that this upset and frightened them. However, the trolls must understand that it is not the custom among fairies, and that violence never solves anything.

The other two fairies went out into the forest and found the middle fairy. Middle fairy insisted she would rather live in the

woods than with the trolls and that it would be better if the three of them accepted the wizard's terms and gave up their cottage, rather than go on this way. The big fairy could not understand why reason was so impossible while the small fairy just wished the trolls would go away.

Shortly after, Big Sister Troll decided that the fairies were slow in cleaning up some Wumby flour which the little troll had spilled, and kicked big fairy. The other two fairies joined the middle fairy in the woods, to the jeers of the trolls. The fairies could come back when they got tired of living like the trolls had had to live all their lives, in the woods on roots and berries.



The three fairies sat on a log by the path toward the troll mountain, wondering if indeed, they could live on berries and nuts and fish until the trolls learned how to do something for themselves, or with no one to do things for them, went back to troll mountain. They could not understand why the good wizard had left them in this situation, where they were cold and starving while being made to seem like they were not nice.

The elf spoke up and told them that in her estimation, the wizard knew exactly what she was doing. The surprised fairies looked up and asked who the elf was. The elf replied that she had been sent by the good wizard to check up on the

situation and do what was necessary.

It was clear to the elf that there was no way the fairies were ever going to deal with their problem by themselves. So she told them that as soon as she cleared the trolls out they could pack up their personal belongings and start down the path to the Wizard's castle. There they would be assigned work under adult supervision and that is how they would remain for good.

The fairies whined that they had done everything to deal with the problem but they had no help from the good wizard. If someone had been sent who could explain things to the trolls better than they, everything would have been fine. Why was reason so impossible?

The Elf knew that she would be wasting her time, but she made an attempt at answering. The trolls were here because they had found an opportunity. This was a game to them, a holiday from life on troll mountain. They would take it as far as they could for as long as they could get away with it. Then they would go back to troll mountain, where life is as good as it can be for troll people like them, who do not have the mind to be able to live any better than that.

The fairies objected that the trolls said they were starving back on troll mountain and the wizard was not helping them.

"Did any of them look like they had been in a bad way before they arrived here?" said the Elf.

"But we cannot just be cruel and send them home. We do not want to seem to be mean people. We want all people to be reasonable. Why could not somebody help us to resolve this in a better way?"

"What is there to resolve?" asked the Elf. "You want somebody else to do this mean thing you do not want to do? The Wizard and we assistants to her have better things to do than come here to do whatever you find unpleasant to do."

"But we do not wish to be mean people. Why can this not be resolved in some reasonable way, without violence"

"Do you understand what I just said to you?" asked the Elf.

The fairies did not understand. After going around the circle a little more with them, the Elf again told them to wait there and drew her sword.

The fairies immediately ran between her and the cottage. "Violence solves nothing" they said.

"That is a tautology", said the Elf. "If you interfere with me carrying out my duty here, you are barred from the great Wizard's domain and will be banished to troll mountain. I am sure you will enjoy your stay there."

The fairies sat down on the log again, murmuring to each other and turning their situation over and over in their minds, unable to

accept the loss of their situation.

Soon the trolls came running down the path, pursued by the Elf, waving her sword. They pleaded with the fairies to intervene, to tell the Elf that they had invited them to live there, and the Wizard had approved of this. The fairies said nothing.



The Elf told the trolls to keep running. To the fairies she said that they could now collect their belongings and go. She would follow the trolls down the road to make sure they returned to troll mountain. Dwarves would be at the cottage soon to take possession and look after the remaining livestock.

The fairies got up from the log and went back to the cottage to pack.

A year later a dwarf walked down the path with a load of firewood on her shoulder. The little troll jumped up from behind the log and asked for something to eat.

The dwarf told the troll to get back to troll mountain. If she began hanging around this forest, then the three dwarves who now live in the cottage would not be as "nice" as the fairies had been.

The troll tried to argue. The dwarf made clear that she was done talking. The troll jumped onto the path in front of her and demanded to know why the dwarf did not listen. The trolls had helped the fairies when they were unable to manage by

themselves. The mean wizard had them unjustly driven away, and put the fairies out, simply because of unreasonableness and prejudice against trolls.

The dwarf put down her load and hefted her axe. She charged forward. The troll fled into the woods. The dwarf put away her axe and picked her bundled sticks up, and walked back to the cottage.

Trolls were not seen again in that part of the great yoozie forest for as long as the dwarves lived there.

And the moral of this story is...?

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