

## Giant Land

**O**nce upon a time there lived a little boy all alone in a cottage deep in a dark forest. He didn't know who his mother and father were, or how long he had been living there, or how he came to be all alone in that place. But he was well cared for because the birds and the squirrels every day brought him fruit and nuts to eat, and rabbits came to sleep with him at night to keep him warm.

But he became very lonely, and for all the love and care he had from the animals

of the forest, there grew in him a great longing to know people and talk with them and to grow in knowledge and learning. Early one morning he told all his little feathered and furry friends goodbye, gave each one a loving pat on the head, and prepared to take his leave.

He had almost nothing in his cottage to take with him—only a stout bow and a quiver, without any arrows, and a bright red stone, cut with angles and faces and polished so that it sparkled and glittered in the sun. These he took in his hand and began walking down the path, he knew not where, only hoping that at the end of it he would find good people with whom he could live and who would fill the lonely echoes of his heart.

He hadn't gone far when he came to a rough wooden bridge that arched over a roaring stream. As he stepped up onto the bridge, a funny little man darted out from under it and said, "Ho, Ho, Where go you little man, with the bow and no arrows and the pretty red stone? How do you think you will ever get on in the world?"

The boy looked long at him and thought the little man looked friendly enough. But he didn't think he would like to live in a wet hole under a bridge deep in the dark forest, so he said merrily, "I know not where I go, but I hope it will be better than from whence I came."

The little man said, "Well, then, let me give you some arrows for your bow." And he brought out three fine, long straight arrows that had fine hard feathers

and points as sharp as slivers of glass. He gave them to the boy saying, "These arrows you must never shoot until you know your life is threatened. Then shoot quickly as strong as you can up into the sky, and good will come to you."

So the boy took the arrows with thanks, and put them in his quiver and continued walking. He hadn't gone far when he began to think about breakfast. Without his squirrel and bird friends to feed him, he wondered how he would ever find berries and fruits and nuts enough to be filled. His hunger was beginning to grow into pain when he saw a large hare standing before him in the path, thumping his rear foot on the ground and pointing with his ears off the trail into the forest.

The boy stopped and said, "Hello good fellow. What can I do for you?"

But the hare made no reply, only thumped his foot again, pointed even more sharply with his ears, and stepped off the trail into a small dark side path. He wiggled his nose as if to say, follow me, and scampered in. The boy followed him through a narrow passage in the bramble and came to a bright clearing where stood a tree laden with bright yellow fruits. And the hare pointed with his ears at the tree and seemed to smile.

So the boy took and ate, and the fruit was good and seemed to bring new power into his arms and eyes, and he felt strengthened and refreshed and ready to walk again. The hare took him back out through

the narrow passage to the main path, and he continued on his way.

After much walking he was hungry and thirsty again and began looking for something more to eat. As the pains began growing again in his stomach, he saw a badger lying across his path. He stopped to see what the fellow wanted, but the badger, without a sound, turned and scrambled up the bank, around large rock, and down to a fallen log by a stream. With one sweep of his paw he tore open the log, and a great store of hazelnuts poured out at the boy's feet. He ate his fill of the nuts and drank richly from the cool stream. Then he thanked the badger for his kindness and continued on his way.

After several more hours of walking, as the sun began to fall low in the western

sky, he came out of the forest into a landscape of rolling fields and green meadows. He remarked to himself how different the country was here. So rich but yet so desolate. No dark forest or rocky creeks or steep hills, only gentle rounds and meadows and fields with small thickets of bush here and there in the hollows. Everywhere he looked he saw rich fields, some planted with fine crops, some in good pasture waiting for cattle, but nowhere was there a farmhouse or a farmer to be seen. The farther he walked, the more strange it seemed to him that the land was so richly planted yet so desolate of people.

He was beginning to think about supper when a silver fox with sad eyes and a long ugly scar in his cheek suddenly appeared in the trail before him. With a nerv-

ous flick of his tail he pointed to a narrow space between two large rocks at the side of the path. Quickly the boy followed the fox's pointing and came through a narrow gap between low hills that led into a fair meadow, where before him he saw a tall castle surrounded by a fearful moat and high stone walls. And in the moat he saw great poisonous snakes writhing and churning back and forth watching with nervous hungry eyes for anything that might come near the water.

After he had stood looking at the castle a long while and despaired, the fox quietly flipped his tail again and disappeared into the side of a hollow tree. The boy stepped in after him and found there a small ladder leading down into a narrow dark passageway below. the fox jumped

quickly down, but the boy climbed carefully, holding his bow and red stone tightly in one hand while climbing with the other.

At the bottom of the ladder he paused a moment to accustom his eyes to the dark, then followed the fox through a narrow passage until they came to a small door. The fox stood up on his back legs and took a leather strap in his mouth, and the door came slowly open and showed a narrow stone stairway that wound around upward in a close circle, until they came to another door. That door, too, came open, and the fox flipped his tail to point forward.

There the boy saw they were in the pantry of the castle, and he knew he was in a very dangerous place. He stood look-

ing at the giant loaf of bread on the shelf and the giant ball of cheese on the table and the giant jar of cider on the floor until the fox slapped his tail sharply on the floor as if to say, Hurry. So he grabbed the great knife he found there on the table, longer than his arm and wider than his hand and with a handle so broad he had to hold it with both hands. With it he cut off a slice of bread and a block of cheese, which he ate quickly. Then he took a dipper of the cider and drank, and felt strengthened and refreshed.

The fox slapped his tail on the floor again like a captain giving a command, and the boy knew that he was being called out of the danger. They closed the door quietly behind them, went quickly down the spiral stone stairway, and hurried

through the narrow passageway back to the chamber, carefully closing the doors behind them, and came out finally through the hollow tree in the bright clean air beyond the moat and the meadow. The fox took him through the narrow passage between the rocks back to the road, then took leave of him with a deep bow and a gracious smile. And the boy walked on down the road.

But as he looked and looked for any sign of houses or farmers working in the fields, he began to wonder where he would sleep that night, and he began to have a sense of danger.

By this time it was nearly dark, and as he had not found any house to ask shelter in, and as the fox showed him plainly he must not stay in the castle, he thought

to find a soft patch of meadow beside a gentle stream. He found a place to make his bed, then went to the stream and bent down to take a drink of water, carefully holding his bow and precious red rock in his hand.

Suddenly he saw reflected in the water before him the form of a giant. Slowly, so as to not seem frightened, he stood up and turned around and looked up, up, up into the giant's face, and he saw it was a boy giant, not yet old enough to wear a beard.

The boy giant smiled at him with a strange smile, and spoke some gentle sounding words in a language he did not understand. The little boy thought maybe he was lucky to meet a friendly giant, but then he saw that the giant was fingering a

knife in his belt, and he realized the smile was false and the gentle sounding words were deceitful.

As the boy giant carefully and stealthily began removing the knife from its sheath, the little boy knew that his life was in danger, and he remembered what the little man under the bridge had told him. Quickly he took an arrow from the quiver, put it in his bow, and shot it straight up into the sky. And just as he shot, the boy giant lurched forward with his knife in hand so that the arrow went into his neck. And he fell down dead.

Then the boy was more frightened than before, for he knew he was in a very dangerous place and that he had done a very dangerous thing. Where there is a boy giant there must also be a father and

mother giant, and he knew they would be very angry. He looked for a place to run to, but nowhere in sight was there any place to hide—only gentle rolling fields of grain and open meadows, with here and there a small hill and a few small bushes in a hollow, certainly not enough for him to hide in.

He was ready to start running anywhere, just to run, when a young roe jumped out of a nearby bush and came to him and put her nose in his hand and gently nudged and pulled him until he followed her. She took him over a little hill and down into another meadow and ran with him as fast as his legs could follow until they came to the side of a low hill all covered with deep green grass. Quickly the roe pushed her face into the grass and

caught hold of a strap and pulled. The boy was amazed as a door opened out of the grass.

The roe nudged him inside and closed the door behind him. He could hear her bounding away, then all became very quiet, and he looked around to see what kind of place he was in. By the light of a small oil lamp glowing on the table he could see a high bed, a rocking chair, an oaken table with two stools, and another small table with a basin and pitcher of water. Above the table was a cupboard full of food, enough for many a day. It was a fine little room, with everything he needed for many comfortable days.

As it was nearly night already, he lay down on the little bed and prepared to sleep. He had just begun to think he might

be comfortable there for a long time, in spite of being lonely, when the ground began to pound and shake, and he thought the food and dishes would fall from the cupboard. The water splashed in the pitcher until he thought it would all spill over. After a long time of pounding and shaking, the ground finally grew quiet again, and after waiting a long time more, he finally fell asleep and had a peaceful happy dream, which he could not remember when he awoke.

He had a hearty breakfast of gruel and muffins and was beginning to wonder what he should do with his day when he heard a quiet rustling at the door. Slowly the door began to open, and he saw his little roe friend standing there as if to call him out into the sunshine.

Then, holding his bow in one hand and his red stone tightly in the other, he stepped out into the day. But instead of a bright clean meadow with green grass as he had left the night before, he saw that all was torn and trampled. Most of the bushes in the hollow were torn out by the roots, great portions of the fields of grain were ripped apart with great gashes in the earth. Only a few small pieces of grass were left undisturbed, and he saw how close the destruction had come to him. He looked at the roe with a question in his eyes, and she looked so sad, and he understood that this was done by a giant, looking for him for revenge.

The the roe closed the door behind him so there was nothing there left to be seen but the little spot of grass, nearly the

only part of the grass in the meadow that was not torn to pieces. And she nuzzled her nose on his arm and led him away over a small hill into another meadow not far away that was not torn and destroyed, and she showed that she wanted to play. There they gambled and frolicked in the fresh grass, and they played all day until evening, without being hungry, when the roe led him back to his little house in the hill and closed the door tightly behind him. The lamp was dressed, the cupboard had been restocked with food, and the bed was freshly made. He spied a small door in the wall under the table, and he knew he was being cared for. He ate a fine supper and lay down for a good night's sleep.

The following morning the roe came and called for him again to play, and again

he took his bow and two fine arrows and precious red stone and went out and gambled and frolicked in the meadows with her. And the next day, and the next. Sometimes the ground would tremble slightly as from the angry steps of a giant far away, but they would sit quietly in a bush until the earth grew calm again and she led him out in the sun again to frolic together in the grass.

So passed many days, until he began to wonder if his whole life would go thus. He loved his roe, but still he longed to be with people. When the roe saw the longing in his eyes, she nudged her nose into his hand and led him slowly over the hills to another meadow. It seemed to him that she was walking more quietly and solemnly than he had ever seen her. As they

walked, the ground began to shake under their feet, and he could see that the roe trembled as she walked, but still, calmly and deliberately she led him forward, then paused as if in great expectation.

As she paused, a great shadow came across the sun, and he looked up and saw a mother giant with anger on her face and a great slashing knife in her hand. He saw his roe run for the nearest bushes and thought, Now my life could end. Quickly he took the second arrow from his quiver and shot it straight up into the sky. Just as he released the bow, the giantess leaned forward to slash at him with her knife, and she leaned over directly into the path of the arrow. It went into her neck, and she fell down dead.

The ground shook fiercely with her falling, and he stood there for a moment not knowing what to do. He looked for his roe, but didn't see her anywhere. Suddenly he was overcome with a heavy lonesomeness, and he realized in one moment both how much he loved and missed his roe and how much he longed to be with people. He thought of the safety of his little house underground, and he thought of the long road he had travelled to find people, and he thought of all the kind and beautiful animals that had taken such good care of him for so long, and his heart was torn, and he didn't know which way to go.

Suddenly the ground began to shake again, and he knew that he still had another danger to meet. He had not long to

wait, for soon there appeared, coming toward him over the hill, an ugly father giant with a long curly black beard, long black hair hanging down over his shoulder, burning yellow eyes, and hands red and rough and scaly. His face was the color of anger, and his body trembled with rage. As soon as he saw the little boy he rushed forward with his hands out, his long raa-gged fingernails reaching out for him. And the boy said, this is where my life could end. Quickly he reached into his quiver and took the last arrow and shot with all his heart straight up into the sky.

The giant lunged forward, directly into the path of the arrow, so that it went into his neck, and he fell down dead, and the earth trembled as from an earthquake as he struck the ground.

The the roe rushed from her hiding place and pranced with joy and put her nose in his hand again and began to lead him across the meadow with a bouncing joy in every step. As they walked it seemed that a sweetness of hope and laughter filled the air, and a quiet peace came into his own heart.

Then he saw that the roe was leading him directly to the castle where the fox had taken him for his supper when he first came into this country. But instead of going though the tunnel as before, the roe took him directly to the great iron gates and across the draw bridge that crossed the moat. The poisonous snakes swimming there writhed in exceeding fury and darted at the bridge as they passed, but it seemed as a hand was holding them back

so they could not reach the pair coming safely across and into the castle yard.

She led him calmly through the high door into the great hall, then through a wide passage way and up a great winding staircase into a high tower where he could look out over the rich but empty countryside.

As he looked down he saw that the approaches to the castle were filled with hundreds of animals and birds of all kinds ambling, scampering, hopping, flittering along the ground as if expecting a festival or celebration. Then he looked around inside the tower room, and he saw standing on a pedestal a golden crown adorned with many beautiful gems. At the top of the crown he saw there was one stone missing. He took the brilliant red stone he

carried in his hand and placed it in the missing place in the crown, and it fit perfectly.

In that moment, as the stone went into the crown, he heard a rustling about him, and he looked about to see what his roe was doing. But instead of a roe he saw a beautiful princess standing there looking at him and smiling. And she took him by the hand and led him to a parapet of the tower where they could look down into the courtyard. It was filled with hundreds of people, with more streaming in from every direction, and they were all of them cheering and singing.

Then the princess led him back into the tower room, lifted the crown and put it on his head, and led him back to the

parapet, and the people looked up and cheered and cried, "Long live our King."

After all the people had cheered and cried out a long while, a tall man stepped forward from the crowd and said, "O, King, you have saved us from a terrible enchantment. These giants, whom you slew, killed your mother and father, our king and queen, and purchased a spell to take the land for themselves, but the spell was not complete, for when the rightful heir to the throne replaced the stone missing from the crown, then all would be set right again."

The boy looked and saw there was a scar across the man's cheek, and he recognized his friend the fox. And the man continued. "Long we waited for you to return to us. All the birds and the squirrels

of the forest that fed you, the rabbits that warmed you at night, are these people, your subjects, who stand before you now. We had to test you, to know that the enchantment had not twisted your heart, but we found you to be true. We are your true subjects, and we rejoice that you have come back to be our king."

Then the young king took the princess as his bride, and so they all lived happily ever after.