



The Fisherman, the Selkie and the Moon

Contributed by Sylvia Troon

Many years ago, on top of a cliff there lived an old fisherman and his wife in a small stone cottage. They worked hard, but had few possessions, and their clothes were rough and worn. However they rarely grumbled. On warm evenings they liked to sit together on an old bench outside their cottage listening to the birds and the sea. He puffed on his pipe, mending his nets, while she busied herself with her knitting – the needles going clickitty-clickitty in her old hardworking hands. They especially liked to watch the moon as it appeared above the horizon and rose slowly in the sky.

One day the old fisherman made his way down the cliff path as usual to the shore. It was a warm and sunny day, and the sea made a gentle whispering sound. He rowed out in his boat, lowered his net and waited. After a long time he felt a tugging at the net. He pulled it up and was surprised to find a seal caught in it. Its sleek coat was marked with strange and beautiful patterns, and there was a soft light in its deep dark eyes. To the old man's amazement, the seal spoke: "Auld man, I am an enchanted selkie, and I am askin' ye tae set me free!" He replied, "Bonnie selkie, of course I will set ye free!" And after he had gently helped the creature out of the tangled net, it dived under the waves and disappeared.

When the old fisherman returned home he told his wife about the selkie. She said, "I mind when I wis wee, ma grannie telt me that if ye helped an enchanted selkie, you could ask it for a wish – but mebbe that's just an auld wife's tale!" Later, as they sat on the bench outside he noticed that his wife was staring out to sea, the knitting needles no longer going clickitty-clickitty in her hands. She said at last, "Husband, I'm thinkin' we should find out if ma grannie's tale is true – after all, we could dae wi' a wee bit o' help ourselves." Then with a chuckle she said, "Think whit Mistress McNab wid say if we got a new house better than hers!" He puffed on his pipe and muttered, "Humph! Are ye no happy in our ain wee house?" She sighed, "Aye! But.." After that there was no more talk of enchanted selkies and new houses.

However that night as the moon shone through their one small window, the old woman lay in bed tossing and turning, unable to sleep. She nudged the old man and said, "Husband, wake up, will ye!" He mumbled, "Whit's up?" She told him she could not get a wink of sleep for thinking about the selkie, and about what her grannie had said. She went on and on about it till for the sake of some peace and quiet, he promised to see the selkie in the morning..

Next day he set off, with his wife's words ringing in his ears, "Mind tae ask the selkie for a new house wi' painted walls and tiled roof, three rooms – oh, and lace curtains, a shiny new kettle, and.." He thought to himself, "Whit's happenin' tae her? She's goin' off her heid!" By now there was a thin haze covering the sky, a breeze was blowing, and the waves were making a hissing sound. He stood on the furthest rock and called out, "Selkie, bonnie selkie!" His words merged with the hiss of the waves, "S-s-selkie... S-s-selkie..." All at once the selkie popped its head out of the water, and said, "Why do you call me?" "Oh bonnie selkie," replied the old man, "I am right sorry tae trouble ye, but it's ma wife ye see. She thinks I should mak a wish. She says.." "Stop!" said the selkie, "Just tell me what she wants!" After he told the selkie, it looked at him with its deep dark eyes, and said, "Go back tae your wife. Her wish is granted!" Then it dived under the waves and disappeared.

(1st transformation)

What a sight met his eyes when he returned! His wife, dressed in a new woollen skirt, snow-white apron and cap, was standing on the doorstep of a brand-new cottage. It had neat whitewashed walls, a red-tiled roof, and three rooms. However she would not allow him over the doorstep till he had taken off his boots and dusted down his clothes. "Husband, isn't it braw!" she exclaimed, "I canna wait tae see Mistress McNab's face when she sees all THIS!" Oh how proud she was of her new house! She polished, cleaned and dusted all day long, and invited folk from the nearby village in for tea. She showed them everything, including the lace curtains and the shiny new kettle. Mistress McNab was speechless! As for the old bench outside, it was replaced by a new one, and the minute the teeniest drop of rain fell on it, it was taken inside – "I dinna want any marks on it!" she said. In fact she was beginning to lose interest in sitting outside any more. The knitting needles no longer went clickitty-clickitty, but lay unused on her lap. She began to complain about the clutter of the fishing nets and her husband's pipe smoke. She complained by the weather. "Och, it's awfie cauld out here!" she would say, "I'll get a chill!" As time went on, the fisherman found her staring out of the window at the sea, frowning and fidgeting. "Oh no!" he thought, "She must be thinkin' o' that selkie again.." His heart sank.

The next evening, she said, "Husband, it's no fair. Mistress McNab's house is the same size as mine. I want a bigger one – as big as the Laird's MANSION HOUSE!" He shook his head in disbelief and muttered, "Humph!"

One night when the moon was shining brightly, she lay in bed, tossing and turning, unable to sleep. She prodded the old man and said, "Husband, wake up, will ye!" He grumbled, "If it's that selkie you're thinkin' about, forget it – I'm no going' back, and that's final!" But she went on and on about it, till for the sake of a wee bit of peace and quiet, he promised to see the selkie in the morning.

Next day he set off with his wife's words ringing in his ears, "Mind tae ask for a MANSION house wi' servants, big gardens, and.." He thought to himself, "She IS off her heid!" By now the sky was covered in grey clouds, and the wind had started to moan. The sea was choppy and flecked with foam. He stood on the furthest rock and called out, "Selkie, bonnie selkie!" His words merged with the sound of the moaning wind, "Se-e-lkie.. Se-e-elkie.." All at once the selkie popped its head out of the water. "Why do ye call me?" it asked. "Oh bonnie

selkie," replied the old man, "I'm right sorry tae trouble ye, but it's ma wife ye see. She's no verra happy. She.." "Stop!" said the selkie, "Just tell me what she wants!" After he had told the selkie. It looked at him with its deep dark eyes and said, "Go back tae your wife. Her wish is granted!" Then it dived under the waves and disappeared.

(2nd transformation)

What a sight met his eyes when he returned! Up a long driveway, bordered by gardens, was a stately mansion house, rising to three floors with rows and rows of windows, and many rooftop turrets. In the doorway stood his wife, She was dressed in satin and lace, and her hair was piled on top of her head under a hat decorated with ribbons and feathers. She looked down at him. "Och tut-tut!" she said, "Look at ye, yer a sight for sore eyes! My maid will bring ye a new outfit!" "Humph!" he muttered. However, for the sake of a wee bit of peace and quiet, he agreed to wear a new suit, but he refused to discard his favourite hat – his old blue bonnet. This annoyed his wife immensely, but there was nothing she could do about it.

During the days that followed he hardly ever saw his wife as she was far too busy running the big house and being an important lady. She made sure her rich guests were shown everything, including the chandeliers and bit painted portraits (one of herself of course) "OOH!" and "AAHH" they said, very impressed. There was no more sitting outside, and no more clickitty-clickitty of knitting needles. "When I go outside," she remarked, "I need to be seen in my shiny new horse-drawn carriage!" However, whenever she spoke to her husband, it was always to complain about something, such as "Och, these curtains don't match the wallpaper!" Often he saw her staring out of the window towards the sea, fidgeting and frowning. "Oh no!" he thought, "She's thinkin' o' that selkie again.." and his heart sank.

The next evening, she said, "Husband, it's no fair! All the lords and ladies have big mansion houses too. I want something even bigger. I want a CASTLE. Aye – a castle fit for a queen! I want tae be a QUEEN!" He shook his head in disbelief and muttered, "Humph!"

That night when the moon was shining brightly, she lay in bed tossing and turning, unable to sleep. She prodded the old man so hard he almost fell out of the huge bed. "Wake up will ye!" she said, "Ye've got tae go down tae see that selkie!" "NO WAY!" was his answer. But she said, "If ye won't - I WILL!". He sat bolt upright and stared at her. "Ye canna dae that!" he exclaimed "I can and I WILL!" she answered. "Humph!" he muttered. He lay awake thinking, and decided that in the morning he would go see and see the selkie after all. However he would not tell it that his wife wanted to be queen in a castle. Instead he would ask the selkie to put a stop to his wife's silly nonsense.

The next day he set off with his wife's words ringing in his ears, "Mind tae ask for a grand castle wi' lots o' statues, and towers and flags, and.." He thought to himself, "She really is off her heid!" By now the sky was covered in dark clouds, driven along by a loud rushing wind. Waves were racing towards the shores and crashing down. The old fisherman clambered on to the furthest rock and called out, "Selkie, bonnie selkie!" His words merged with the sound of the rushing wind: "S-s-selkie-ie-ie, s-s-selkie-ie-ie.." All at once the selkie popped its head out of the water. "Why do you call me?" it said. "Oh bonnie selkie," he

answered, "I'm right sorry tae trouble ye, but it's about ma wife. She's no verra happy. She... ." "Stop!" said the selkie, "Just tell me what she wants!" He tried to say that his wife did not want anything, and that she wanted it all to stop. But when he saw the selkie's deep dark eyes staring at him, he knew that the selkie did not believe him, and that it already had guessed what his wife really wanted. It said, "Go back tae your wife. Her wish is granted!" Then it dived under the waves and disappeared.

(3^d transformation)

What a sight met his eyes when he returned! A long avenue led up to a castle, rising to seven floors with rows and rows of windows, and a roof of towers and flags that seemed to touch the clouds. He was taken by guards to see the queen, his wife. There she was sitting on a golden throne, dressed in silks, satins, and lace, and covered in jewels. On top of her enormous wig was perched a golden crown. She looked down at him. "Och tut-tut!" she said, "Look at you! You're a sight for sore eyes! I will hire a tailor to make a special outfit for you. And DO get rid of that terrible old hat!" "Humph!" muttered the old man. However to keep the peace, he allowed himself to be fitted out in a new velvet suit with silk stockings – but he refused to part with his old blue bonnet. This infuriated her, but there was nothing she could do about it.

During the days that followed he rarely saw his wife, as she was far too busy being the most important queen in the land. She made sure that all her rich guests were shown everything, including the marble fountains and her golden coach studded with rubies and diamonds. "OOH!" and "AHH!" they said, very impressed. She had forgotten all about the days when she used to sit outside with her knitting needles going clickitty-clickitty. "When I go outside," she remarked, "I need to be seen in my golden coach!" However, when she spoke to her husband, it was always to complain about something, such as "The roast swan was overcooked tonight!" As time went on he noticed her staring out the window towards the sea, fidgeting and frowning. "Oh no!" he thought, "She's thinkin' o' that selkie again.." and his heart sank.

The next evening she said, "Husband, it's no fair! The moon has more power than I have! I want tae rule the night skies. I want to be ruler of the oceans o' the world – ruler o' the TIDES! And I'll need a palace made o' shinin' stars!" He shook his head in disbelief, and muttered, "Humph!"

One night when the moon was shining brightly, she lay in bed tossing and turning, unable to sleep. She gave the old man such a hefty prod that he tumbled right out of the huge four-poster bed. "Husband, wake up ye auld dozey-heid!" she said. "If ye dinna go tae see that selkie, I promise ye – I WILL this time!" He got back into bed and pulled the covers up over his ears, and snored loudly, pretending to be asleep. But she lay awake staring at a beam of moonlight shining through a chink in the curtains. When she was certain her husband was fast asleep, she got out of bed, put on her dressing gown, and crept out the room in her slippers. The castle was quiet as she went down the long stairway, then out by the back door. She ran as fast as her old legs would carry her to the cliff, and scrambled down the path to the shore. A storm was brewing. Dark clouds were building up and a wind was fast becoming a gale. It blew and it moaned, it whistled and it made a loud rushing noise. The

waves rose higher and higher, crashing on the shore with a deafening sound. The moon appeared from behind a cloud and shone on the old woman as she struggled on to the furthest rock. Her nightclothes flapped around her thin frame, and her hair streamed out, wild and wet. She shouted, "Selkie come here!" Many times she called, her voice snatched away by the wind. But the selkie popped its head out of the water and said, "Why do ye call me?" "Selkie!" she said, "I want tae have the power o' the moon. I want tae be ruler of the tides. And I want a palace o' shinin' stars!" The selkie stared at her with its deep dark eyes, "Are ye sure?" it said. "Aye!" she answered. "Well," it said at last, "Your wish is granted!" Then it dived under the waves and disappeared.

But now what was happening? The old woman felt herself being lifted above the stormy sea. Up, and up she went, blown this way and that by the winds – higher and higher - on and on... Then BUMP! She landed on a sharp rock. "Ouch!" she said. She stood up and looked around. Was this the MOON? The place was utterly silent. All around her were miles and miles of dust and rock stretching into the distance. Millions of stars twinkled in the blackness overhead. Then a voice whispered in her head, "Welcome to the Moon. Your wish is granted. Enjoy yourself!" She was puzzled and called out, "But how dae I rule the tides? And where is ma palace o' shinin' stars?" But no answer came, and the stars winked at her. Were they laughing at her? She began to feel frightened. She had never felt so alone before. Would she be here on the empty moon all alone for ever and ever...?

Then she thought about the enchanted selkie and all those wishes. She thought about the brand-new cottage, the mansion house and grand castle. She thought about the fame and fortune, and realised it never made her happy. She recalled how she had never been able to have a friendly wee blether with someone whenever she wanted. Then she remembered her old husband in his old blue bonnet sitting outside the old cottage overlooking the sea, mending his nets and smoking his pipe. A tear ran down her face and she whispered, "Selkie, I'm sorry. I want tae go hame..." Tiredness swept over her as she sank down on the moon's dusty surface. She felt herself drifting off, as she closed her eyes.

(back to Fisherman's Wife puppet)

The old fisherman woke up with a start. He was sitting on the bench outside the little stone cottage. He looked round and saw his wife approaching from the cliff path. She was dressed in her old worn skirt and woollen shawl. Slowly she came up, and quietly sat down beside him. He puffed on his pipe and started to mend his nets, while she took out her knitting needles from her apron pocket. The needles went clickitty-clickitty. They listened to the sound of the sea, as the shining moon looked down on them. She glanced up at her husband and smiled shyly at him. He patted her old hard-working hands, and he smiled back.