

# The Hunting King

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Once upon a time, there was a beautiful young woman living at the edge of a big forest. Her husband had died a few years ago, but she had a little son, ten years old, and a big dog, Millie, nice as a lamb, which protected both of them. They weren't rich, but the woman had a talent for growing vegetables and fruits, and they could live from them and sell some for good money. Also, the woman knew a little of sorcery. She didn't use it, because she knew fairly good that sorcery did more bad than good.

The forest was not far from a big kingdom. There lived a king who loved to be admired by his people for the fine clothes and golden accessories he wore. He only changed to more functional clothes for the one thing he loved more: Hunting. What was more, he insisted in parting from his group and making it a challenge who killed the most animals with the lowest amount of arrows – which he won every time, because he always struck the prey directly in the heart.

So it wasn't long before even in the big forest the king came upon the boy playing with Millie. But the dog was fairly big and the boy very small. So, he held his horse when he heard the screaming of the boy and the growling of the dog. He felt the blood rushing through his veins from the thrill of the hunt, took his bow and arrow and before he could even think the arrow flew – and hit its target.

For seconds the boy was still laughing, until he realized that Millie was dead. He screamed in horror as he saw the arrow pointing out of her heart. Then he saw the king sitting on his horse, and with tears rolling down his face he stumbled towards him, screaming and swearing that he would pay for that. "Tell the truth! Tell your people the truth!", the boy demanded. Judging from his words the boy knew who he was and the king realized what he had done. Also he noticed that all his fame would go down the gutter if the boy told the story – and there was the dead dog as proof. And so the king reacted without thinking: He shot another arrow and struck the boy's heart.

Now, it hit him with full impact that he had killed the boy. But, as always when exposed to stress, he had an idea. He had tried to rescue the boy from the wild dog, but he was too late, that way he would be the hero. So he got down, removed the arrow from the boy's chest, and then used the dog's mouth to give the corpse various bitemarks.

Just when he laid dog and boy over the saddle of his horse and took the reins to return to his men, he heard another scream. The woman was standing there, a basket

and fruits scattered around her feet. "Murder!", she screamed. "You are mistaken", answered the king, "I tried to save the boy from this ferocious beast, but I was too late. I am sorry for your son." But the woman didn't even flinch. "Tell the truth! Tell your people the truth!", she demanded just as her son had before- she obviously didn't believe him. But he shook his head; he was the king, after all, so he couldn't ruin his reputation. "But I told the truth!", he retorted.

"I will curse you! You will regret not being honest! Tell the truth!" But the King laughed. "There is no such thing as curses." And he mounted his horse and vanished from her sight. The king returned and told his story, and he said he would give the boy a worthy funeral. The dog's corpse was burned, and he himself attended the funeral of the nameless boy. On the way to his seat he saw a woman who wore a black cloak, and met her eyes for a short time. "Tell the truth!", she whispered; he only saw the movement of her mouth, but he did react only when he made a short speech, which he began with the words: "I will tell the truth about this boy's death." The funeral did go smoothly, and everybody loved their king even more than before.

A few months later, the king had almost forgotten about what had happened, he would be married to the daughter of a nearby kingdom. He wanted to hunt the most excellent animals to be served at his wedding ceremony. To be on time, he had to depart very early. So, he didn't know of the panicked parents of his kingdom, who searched frantically for their children that had vanished.

The only thing he knew was that he had incredible luck with his hunt that day. The deer were up early, as were the hare and boar and pheasant. Even two wolves were there, and the king thought of making a coat for his new wife. He and his men killed so many animals that the three carts were full of them. They covered them with cloth and returned to the market place to display their prey. But only a few people were interested in this, because even the childless people were searching for the kids; every kid under ten had disappeared. The king didn't know about this, but was very displeased with the lack of attention. He gave the order to remove the cloth, firmly believing that he would get the attention he deserved. The king looked at the faces of the few people standing there, and his soon-to-be wife standing on the balcony, and was pleased to see the amazed look on their faces. Amazed? No, Shocked. What was up with them? They knew he had been out hunting.

But the people began to whisper, and he got his desired attention. In mere seconds the place was filled with people, and only just before the whispering had become a screaming he saw the woman in the black cloak, with tears rolling down her face, and heard her words: "Tell the truth! Tell your people the truth!"

"But I told the truth!", he stated, but got suspicious. He turned around and found on the carts not the corpses of animals, but those of children. They were the corpses of each child that had gone missing, to be exact. His bride was pale white and everybody else also. Some parents only screamed, but most of them went crazy. They pulled him off his horse, and even the guards were so stunned and disgusted by the view they needed a moment to come to his aid. When they finally managed to get him out, he looked horribly beaten up.

The King didn't marry anyone. In fact, he wasn't even king anymore. He tried to explain that he was cursed; he even admitted the murder of the boy. He was thrown

into jail for the murders of the children, and some of his fellow hunters, too, and the woman returned to her home, alone now. Nobody lived happily ever after. Sorcery does more bad than good – that was the truth.