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THE MASK MAKER AND THE BOY

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In the storm, in the night, on the edge of the sea, a child was born. The winds which had been born in the tempest of the Gulf shook the cedar walls with firm hands. As the winds and the waves wove around the home the small child slipped into the world.

He grew, nourished by the coastal rains, his mother's love and the distant sound of his father's hands as they mended nets. The long days of summer, when the sun danced only briefly under edge of the earth, wrapped around the child and warmed his heart. The winds and the waves of winter seemed far way as the arching sky of blazing light ripened the blueberries and colored the fireweed.

When the winter came, and the sun crawled on its knees across the horizon, the small boy would shudder and pulled the fur of his blankets around him for protection. The winds and waves raged down the shore and shook his bones. He was often frightened by the twins of winter and longed for a time when the wind and waves would roll in the gentle rhythm of a summer moon.

When the sun reached high in the sky once again his fear would fall away. And so it was for twelve cycles of the seasons; warmth and fire in the summer, cold and scared in the winter. As the summer of his twelfth year passed the boy began to dread the coming of the fall. He clung to the color in the last of leaves and watched the snow creep down the great volcanos across the water with dread. His heart grew restless. As the mare's tails of the winter storms began to circle in the sky his fear returned once more.

His father's gentle hands mended the nets, and his mother gathered the last of the summer's light and laid it, dried, in cedar chests. But neither his father's hands, nor his mother's warmth could lessen his rising fear.

The winds of Autumn tore at the coast and at his heart. The winds tore at the cedar chests which had the stores of summer sun. One night the winds reached through the walls and lifted the tops of the chest and stole away the berries, fish and herbs.

As the next day's light visited the storm-torn coast, the boy saw his father pull his skin boat from off its weathered drift wood perch. Wearily he put sea to claim some of the food which had been stolen by the wind and waves.

The boy watched with ice in heart as his father braved the waves in his skin boat. His father's boat disappeared in the spindrifts of the waves and he stood watching until the last light was taken from the sky.

That night lasted longer than the boy's heart could bare. When the sun came, slowly from the dappled sky, the boy stood watching at the edge of the sea. He watched and he waited.

Seven days and seven nights he waited. Long hours of night and the turbulent hours of day rolled by and mother and son waited.

On the seventh day she said,

"He is gone."

But in his heart, underneath the ice, the boy knew it was not true. He resolved to follow his father and see where the waves and wind had taken him. He resolved in his heart, but could not act. For he was afraid. And he stayed afraid. Long into the winter, long into days when the sun was stolen by the earth.

The chests of summer warmth grew empty and the boy and his mother became hungry and anxious.

It was into these thin and anxious eyes that the mask maker of the village gazed and one day said,

"Come, child, I need your help."

"Me?" replied the boy, not believing that there was anything he could give.

"My eyes grow old and I need help carving the cedar I so love."

And so it came to be, that the small boy, now nearly a man, began to help his elder. At first the boy did little more than sweep and sort, and carry rounds from out of the forest where the Mask carver had cut them. But as the winds of gulf laid low against the spruce and cedar forests, and the winter stars lingered long in the sky, the boy began to carve. A little here, a little there, always on the Masks the elder had created.

As the last of the summer chest emptied the boy carved. And his mother waited for the return of his father.

In the early spring, when the sun began to climb in the heavens. The old mask maker called for the boy and said,

"It is time to carve your own mask."

"But I cannot," the boy protested.

The mask maker responded by placing a slab of cedar before the boy and giving him his prized chisels.

"What should I put on the mask?" the boy asked.

The mask maker took the boy by the hand and led him to a high cliff overlooking the village and the sea. Across the salt waves the three great watchers, the mountains which smoke, rose in simple majesty. The winds, stirred with spring, gathered the tips of the waves and carried the foam into the sky to make clouds. The surf which broke upon the hard rock below called to the boy. The waves and the wind and the rocks all sang his name.

The boy returned and chiselled into the yellow cedar the powerful waves, he cut into the fine grain the form of the winter winds, and etched into the aromatic slab the full fury of the winter storms.

And when he was done he held before him mask which did not seem to be his own. Looking down at his mask he saw the elder's hand in his work and yet it had been all his own doing.

The boy put his mask on. He looked out from between the fury of the storm and the crashing of the waves. He looked out from between the shape of his fear and he saw his father's boat in the subtle mist of another eye.

When the next day's sun rose, the boy was gone. He had pulled his father's second boat rack and as his mother watched, with fear and hope dancing on every wave of her heart, as her son set out in search for his father.

The son paddled for three days and three nights and with the light of the fourth day the boy saw a barren and desolate island. Jagged rocks and tumbled surf surrounded the rocky shore. The boy placed his mask upon his face and paddled into the heart of the churning sea. The boat was tossed by waves and wind, but the boy clung to his boat and his determination. When he felt his boat slide up upon the gravel of the shore he knew he had been blessed. He looked back behind him and saw a wall of water which appeared to have no pathway through. He looked before him and saw a small lodge, battered and torn, with smoke rising from the roof.

He entered the lodge and there he found his father. The spirit of the wind and the spirit of the waves held him captive.

"Release him!", commanded the son, now nearly a man.

The wind laughed and the waves howled, and refused to free his father. The son brought his mask to his face and as he did the spirit of the wind and the spirit of the sea saw their reflection for the first time.

"Release him," said the son a second time.

The wind spirit shuddered and the wave spirit gnashed its teeth, but still held fast to his father.

The son, now no longer a boy, caught hold of the spirits and held them with the solid determination of a winter storm. He held them as they flailed and cursed. He held them as they raged and roared. He held them as they called to their grandfather circling in the Gulf. He held them and did not let them go.

"Release him," he said for a third time.

And they did, for they saw that the boy had become the waves and the wind and that their strength flowed through his bones. Far to the west, in the Gulf,

the Grandfather storm slackened and the sun of the summer finally began to shine.

The boy and his father returned through wall of water with no pathway, they returned to the shore of their land and they returned to the sun filled heart of their wife and mother.

And now when the winds blow and the Gulf seas howl you can see a man standing at the edge of the waves, strong and steady. He carries a mask at his side and many blessings in his heart. And he waits patiently for the birth of another small and tiny child in heart of the winter storms.

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