

Spirit of Magic

Ever since he could remember, people talked about the spirit in the forest.

There was a myth - a fairytale, really – that the villagers would tell their children as bed-time stories late in the night, feeding into their youthful imaginations about magic and monsters. As the story goes, once long ago, the forest outside the town was alive with an energy that is hard to describe. It made the air feel electric, the ground sighed with each footfall, and the trees whispered their secrets into the wind. They told of creatures who existed within this mystic woodland that appeared other-worldly; how you could stare deep into their shimmering gazes and know they felt more.

The most important element to these stories, however, was the spirit who protected the magic of the forest. Everyone described the guardian differently, as no one had ever seen the mythical being, and so its shape changed with every recounting. The boy's favorite version, though, was that of a massive koi fish. They would speak of how it swam through the sky, as if the air were its waters and gravity held no effect over it. A fierce dragon, a lovely swan, an adorable rabbit, a wise lion; all were other shapes the guardian had taken on throughout these tales, but the boy believed differently.

As time went on, people stopped believing the possibility that the legend was ever true, and were content to brush it off as a tall tale to spew to their children in order to get them to go to sleep. But even as he got older, the boy knew. He knew it was real, once, and he was determined to prove it, if only to satisfy his own unyielding curiosity. So, late one night, once all the adults had long since fallen into deep slumber, he grabbed his coat and flashlight and took off into the blackened forest.

He did not know where he was going, or what he was searching for, or even how to begin searching in the first place, but something inside told him to keep going. To just keep running, deeper and farther and faster, into the seemingly endless mess of trees and bushes. Eventually the boy began to grow tired, and his steps became clumsy, and it wasn't long until his foot was caught by a fallen branch and he was sent tumbling to the cold earth. A quiet exhale gave way to pain as he brought his now-scraped knee to his chest, eyes closing against the tears now threatening to rise.

But then, as quickly as it came, the pain was gone, and through closed eyelids the world grew unnaturally bright. The boy opened his eyes slowly to be met with the sight of the very thing he had come so far into nowhere to find. A widened look of shock was met with the form of a giant floating *koi fish*, exactly as he knew it would be. The guardian's eyes glowed bright white and he could practically feel the air crackling around him with something – with magic. The boy's own belief swelled as an exuberant grin spread across his face, belief that became so great it soon burst free as a tangible ball of light.

The boy quickly got to his feet, wonderment sparkling in his eyes at the sight of his own imagination, now a swirling ball of that very same magic everyone thought to be impossible. And then, with arms open wide, the boy took all of that belief and imagination and faith and he offered it to the spirit hovering just out of reach. He didn't know why, but he did know it was exactly what he needed to do. That wonderful ball of light then flew directly into the ethereal being, and it was welcomed with a great sense of gratitude. And as it was taken, the boy felt the air grow lighter, and the ground buzzed with life, and the trees moaned around him. And he knew – just as he had known everything else – that it was never just a fairytale. The magic here had only faded away due to lack of belief, but now it was back.

He had given it back.

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