

The Fisherman Who Asked for Enough

A tale carried from the old country, retold at Tiravellan hearths ever since

Before there was a Covenant, before there was even a name for the island, there was only a fisherman named Fiach, who lived alone in a driftwood hut above the cove and caught just enough each day to keep himself fed.

One grey morning his net came up so heavy he thought he'd caught the sea floor itself — but inside was a great silver seal with eyes like lamps, tangled and gasping. Fiach cut her free with his knife, and as soon as she touched water again she turned her head back to him and spoke, in a voice like waves pulling over stones.

“You've freed me, fisherman. Ask what you like, and it will be given.”

Fiach thought of his empty hut and his thin coat, and he almost asked for gold. But he looked down at his net — patched a hundred times, barely holding — and thought instead of the other families scattered along the coast, cold in their own huts, waiting out the same long winter. So he said:

“Make it so no one on this shore goes hungry this winter. That's all I ask.”

The seal tilted her head, as if she had expected greed and been handed something else entirely. *“That is a strange wish,”* she said. *“Most who catch me ask for a castle, or a crown, or gold enough to drown in.”*

“I don't need a castle,” Fiach said. *“I need my neighbours fed. A full house next to empty ones isn't much of a house at all.”*

The seal considered this a long moment, and then she said, *“Very well. But a wish this size needs more than my word — it needs hands to carry it. Gather your neighbours at the cove tonight, all of them, and bring what little each has left.”*

Fiach didn't understand, but he did as he was told. That night the shore was crowded with tired, hungry families, each carrying whatever scraps remained — a sack of oats here, a net of herring there, a single wheel of cheese. They set it all down together on the sand, expecting the seal to

wave a fin and conjure a feast from nothing.

Instead, she only said: “*Now share it.*”

And they did — awkwardly, at first, strangers handing bread to strangers — and found, as the baskets went round, that put together it was far more than any of them had alone. No great magic came. No mountain of gold rose from the waves. Just enough, passed hand to hand, stretched exactly as far as it needed to.

“*That,*” the seal said, slipping back beneath the water, “*is the only kind of plenty that never runs out.*”

Fiach never saw her again. But the families on that shore never forgot the lesson, and when their grandchildren's grandchildren wrote down the Covenant of the Cove years later — that no neighbour would go without food or shelter, and all public questions would be settled together — the old people say they were only writing down, at last, what the seal had already taught them on the sand that night.

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A NOTE ON THE TALE

This story follows the shape of a very old and widely told folk pattern, known to folklorists as tale-type ATU 555 — a fisherman frees a magical creature from the sea and is granted a wish. The best-known versions are the Brothers Grimm's *The Fisherman and His Wife* and Pushkin's *The Tale of the Golden Fish*, in which a wish granted out of greed escalates until it collapses back to nothing.

The seal herself belongs to a second tradition: the selkie lore of Irish, Scottish, and Faroese storytelling, in which seals are understood to carry a hidden, sometimes magical nature — a fitting borrowing given Tiravell's own Irish origins.

The Fisherman Who Asked for Enough inherits the bones of the old tale — the net, the sea creature, the granted wish — but inverts its lesson. Where the classic tale-type punishes escalating greed, this version asks for exactly enough, and finds that the wish is answered not by magic but by neighbours sharing what little they have. That inversion, and its link to the Covenant of the Cove, is original to Tiravellan tradition.