

A Modern Fairy Tale

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Originating from the peaks of Lantau island, meandering across woods and valleys before passing a village and then pouring into the sea, Tin Chuen River, literally “the spring of heaven”, has nurtured villagers, as well as numerous plants and animals, for centuries. Jimmy and Wilson, two 16-year-old boys, used to enjoy immersing themselves in the ice-cool and crystal-clear water, if not fishing by the river bank with buckets full of fish in the evening. This day, they were competing to break the record of 3 buckets.

“See? My third bucket’s almost full. I’m gonna win anyway,” said Jimmy, boasting.

“Maybe,” Wilson replied with mixed indifference and envy. “You know, my mom says if you over-fish, the river god will drag you to the underwater palace and never let you back.” He shot Jimmy a dangerous look. “I’d be more careful if I were you.”

“Yeah?” Jimmy raised his eyebrows. “Oh, yeah, *yeah!*”

“Yeah,” a strange voice echoed.

“What do you mean?” Wilson retorted, fury growing inside.

“I mean: *you are a blabbermouth*. Clear enough?”

“And I mean: you are somehow correct, Mr. Wilson,” the voice spoke again. They turned towards one of the buckets where the response came from to find a small gray crab standing on the rim, its claws waving clumsily, it being so little it would otherwise go unnoticed without such sound and movement. “I am Ambassador Charles R. A. Black from Tin Chuen Palace, which is right under this river, and I’m here on a special mission. Our Princess Florence Regina Olivia Georgia III would like to invite you to a short rendezvous.” With a clap of the crab’s claws, and a flash of light, Jimmy and Wilson found themselves in the palace before they could scream or bolt.

To say the palace a store room would be more appropriate. Princess Florence, surprisingly a human, was seated on a wooden block, surrounded by aluminum cans instead of gold; newspaper instead of paintings; atop, the chandelier was replaced by used light bulbs. “My dear young men,” Princess Florence announced, “you can see that our kingdom is facing great trouble. We really need your help. Would you?” she pleaded, if not begged.

Jimmy and Wilson looked at each other, hesitant.

“Your majesty, actually I do not swim well.”

"And I have homework to do."

"I....."

"I shall give you 3 magic pebbles," Princess Florence snapped, "and beware of the monster. If you return triumphantly, you will be our heroes, and I will sumptuously reward you."

So they were on their journey.

They came to the head-waters of the river to discover that the nature has been severely damaged. Many trees were sawn, rocks dispersed across the river bank, water contaminated by mud. "I didn't realize that we have done such a huge damage to the nature," Wilson exclaimed with regret. "And look," Jimmy added, sighing, pointing to a fallen bird's nest, "we've destroyed the homes of some animals too."

They took out a magic pebble, and said a spell: "Give me power, magic pebble." A miracle happened: sprouts burst from the trunks, rocks rolled to the mountains. Suddenly, a few sparrows flew out of the woods. "It may take years, but I hope it will recover some day," said Wilson.

Along the river they walked, and gradually they noticed trash floating on the river.

"How disgusting!"

"So filthy and it stinks."

Jimmy picked up a lunch box, embarrassed to find his name on it. He took out another magic pebble and said the spell. This time the trash did not vanish at once; they turned into flowers.

"Hey, Jimmy, what do you think the monster would look like? A gorilla?" Wilson asked when they moved on.

"I've no idea."

"Chooooooooo....." The sudden noise struck them like lightning. Heat ran onto their faces, and their visibility was blurred by thick black smoke. "Monster!" they shrieked, and dashed for life. They ran quite a while before stopping to realize that no monster was after them. "Then what's that deadly monster?"

"It's the factory over there you humans operate," Princess Florence appeared out of nowhere. "The heat, smoke, sewage and pollutants poured into the river have killed so many. If you don't make a

change now, you will suffer as well."

"My last magic pebble can't remove these factories, but it can plant a seed of protecting the environment in everybody's heart. I hope that you humans will eventually notice the urge and react immediately, and only by such could the deadly monster be destroyed," said Princess Florence. They threw the pebble into the air and said the spell. A magic has started to work.

"Why has Princess Florence kept calling us 'you humans'?" Jimmy can't help pondering when they were returning to Tin Chuen Palace.

They became heroes and Princess Florence gave them the reward as promised: a kiss. "It's a good deal after all," they thought. At the touch of her lips something magical happened: Princess Florence transformed into a frog, so did Jimmy and Wilson. "I was cursed by the witch and turned into human. By kissing you the curse breaks, and I can become a frog again. Oh, I've forgotten to introduce to you my sister, Fiona, who is also a frog."

And, at least so the sisters thought, they lived happily forever.