



The Shadow's Sacrifice

Original Work · Not Rated · 1900 words

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A Shadow comes across a poor village struggling to survive in the coldest months, and decides to save it. No matter the cost.

An expanded version of The Shadow's Gift

Someone requested more of this myth, so here's more of this myth. Enjoy.

Oh two things you need to know; a group of Shadows is called a Cloak, and Shadow is an Element that multiple species have but they tend to think of themselves as one thing.

Long ago, in a time much harsher and more desperate than today, there was a village nestled between a great mountain and a dark forest.

It was a poor village, growing poorer every year, far from other villages and lacking the ability to produce most of what was commonly traded at the time. Always they suffered, but especially as the months grew colder and food grew sparser.

It had gotten so bad, most were resigned to not seeing the next Spring. Even the children gathered, shivering in their thin clothes and without toys with which to distract themselves, and lamented their sorry fates.

During this time, there were not many Shadows in the world, the dark creatures preferring to stay in their own Realm. They did not like light and most others did not like dark, so it only made sense for them to stay apart. But some, those for whom moonlight and starlight brought no pain, had begun to venture more permanently into the greater world. They lived in the dark of night, resting on caves or in the shadows of trees.

One little Shadow, whom we call Shayd in modern times but may have once gone by a different name, had a habit of spending his time at the very edge of the dark forest where his Cloak resided. As soon as night fell, he would dash out to explore what the sun had kept from him.

It was such that one day that he came to the poor little village. He sat hidden in the trees, close enough to hear the children's complaints. It was quite odd to him that cold or hunger should bother them, as he could feel neither, but he understood that they were in pain. Miserable as none should be, in his opinion. Sitting and listening to the children cry and groan to one another, he decided that he would do something to make them smile and play as all children should.

Some people say that Shayd was a Spirit, others an Elf. Some even say he was a sort of long-lost species of Dragon. Whatever sort of Shadow he was, he was very powerful, blessed with Creation.

When night came and the villagers' minds drifted uneasily to the Realm Of Dreams, Shayd entered the village. He gathered the dark of the night surrounding him, changing it into beautiful dolls and fixing holes in tattered roofs. He floated in through windows and chimneys, mending whatever broken things he found, leaving behind the toys he had so skillfully crafted.

It wasn't a very large village, but it wasn't the smallest either. By the time Shayd had visited each house, the sun was beginning to rise. He stood frozen in the middle of the village, transfixed by the sight that was so unusual for a Shadow, before fleeing to the safety of the dark forest.

He barely made it, the sun's light burning the tip of his tail. His fellow Shadows admonished him for his recklessness, unable to understand why he would venture away from the deepest parts of the forest in the first place, why he couldn't be content with the safety of their dark home.

His tail ached in a way only burnt Shadows feel, but he still returned to where the forest met the village, watching as the children once more gathered.

They twirled in mended clothes and compared new toys, chattering about mended tables or patched roofs, smiling brightly as they wondered aloud who could've done such a grand thing. Shayd saw the smiles of children who had only frowned before and knew, in that instant, that his pain had been well worth it.

One little girl, though, cautioned her fellows. Who knew what price would be extracted for this generosity? No-one gave without reason. And besides, the bellies were still empty and they were still shivering, their clothes and blankets much too thin despite the mending. They had no logs for fires, no land to grow crops, no goods or fine things to trade. They still would not last the Winter.

The children grew solemn at her words, and Shayd frowned. Food and warmth weren't things he felt need for, but he was now understanding how harshly the children did. To be so young yet so sure you would not last...

His deeds the previous night were kind, but they were not enough. Shayd disappeared back to the darkest parts of the forest, determined to help this little village survive. Determined to make the children smile again.

His fellow Shadows, though confused to his reasoning, helped him gather fruits and seeds from their home. Some even ventured back to their first Realm, finding those few plants that would mind neither the coldest of the world's months nor the light of day. It would take a while to gather enough for the village to survive on, so Shayd set himself on another task.

On the second night after Shayd had first seen the village, he made his way to the great mountain. Gathering his strength, he slowly carved through it, searching for that which was considered valuable. He made deep tunnels, winding through the mountain, unknowingly opening a much quicker route to other villages. He gathered that which shined, that which had colors that caught the eye, and that which felt of magic. He wasn't sure of the way the villagers measured value, but he was certain these things would be of some use.

Having been so deep in the soothing dark of the earth, he hadn't realized quite how close to dawn it was. He hurried his collection to where it was sure to be noticed by the waking villagers, leaving small parts of it at every house to be sure that all would have *something*.

Half of the village was welcomed by new light by the time he reached the final house. He nudged the shiny rocks by the door, looking up to meet the startled eyes of the same little girl who had cautioned the others. He smiled, an expression which is unfortunately quite terrifying on most Shadows, and fled back to the forest as she screamed for her parents.

The sun once more caught up with Shayd, this time burning his entire tail. The tip that had burned before was lost, even as the rest was cared for, and Shayd's fellows implored him to cease his folly and stay in the safety of their home.

Hearing the children rejoice, seeing even the cautious little girl smile and dance, Shayd was all the more confident in his decision. What was the tip of his tail compared to the lives of these children? Besides, he had only a single night's work left, then he would take their advice and stay under the canopy. For a little while, at least.

The final night, it is said that Shayd pleaded with the Wood Elves and Sprites that guarded the forest trees, convincing them in some manner to move the forest line back from the village. Some claim that Shayd was so powerful as to simply do it on his own, but most agree that it would be uncharacteristic for a Shadow to have such power over Nature.

No matter the manner in which it was accomplished, the fact remains that a large area of blank land was suddenly free. Shayd planted the gathered seeds in this land, creating crops for the villagers. It is said that these crops started to sprout almost immediately, leading credence to the theory that he had the help of the forest's Fey.

But the crops were still not grown enough to actually be eaten. Shayd took the nuts and fruits the others had collected, leaving them in the villagers' homes. As he went, he created new clothes and new blankets, warmer and more beautiful than any seen before in the village. He created logs from air and left one burning in each fireplace, stacking dozens more outside each home. He lovingly crafted toys like none that existed at the time, ones with smiling faces and twisting gears.

If this was to be the last time he visited the village he'd grown so fond of, he was going to be sure that they would be well-off. It was the longest night of the year, after all, and he had plenty of time to complete his goal.

Unfortunately, his goal took quite a bit of time longer than he expected. Just as he placed the final doll at a sleeping child's side, the sun's light crested over the mountain, beginning to spread over the village. He raced through the street, but he was slower with his injured tail, and the treeline was farther away than it had once been.

As the villagers stepped out of their doors in wonder at what had been given to them overnight, they saw a Shadow get caught fully in dawn's light. He writhed and screeched, his dark form cracking with bright lines, scaring the villagers. His beloved Cloak, his family and friends, watched helplessly from the forest as he burned away.

They condemned his foolishness and wailed at his pain, but he held no regrets. What was his already long life, he thought, compared to the barely begun lives of the children of the village? He wished desperately to survive, but consider it worth it either way.

The villagers were caught between fear of a strange creature and empathy for its obvious pain. They hovered uncertainly around him, unable to understand his pleas and weary of his fearsome form.

But the little girl, the most cautious of all the villagers, recognized him. She told the villagers of how he had been the one to deliver them wealth, and how he must have been the one to bring them such good fortune. He had saved their lives in three nights, surely they could not let him burn now?

The villagers rallied, dragging and pulling and carrying the Shadow towards the forest's edge. Shadows were feared, for good reason, but the villagers braved dark claws and blood-red eyes to return Shayd to his Cloak. How could they do otherwise, when he had given them so much without cause or price?

Shayd was healed, though he bore many injuries and scars that would last his life. He would be asked for years whether he still held no regrets, whether his folly and pain had been worth it.

He would watch as the village prospered, as they took inspiration from him and began to share between themselves without demanding anything in return. He watched the children grow, watched ones that once had no reason to smile break into laughter and song.

"Every second of it." He would answer, closing his eyes and resting his damaged body. "Every second."

In this time, in this cold and dark season, remember the little Shadow who saved a poor village that was sure of their doom. Remember the cautious girl who convinced others to brave their fear to repay him. Celebrate the love around you, give so that others are not without, and recognize what others have gone through for your sake.

Happy holidays, everyone. :)

— end of "The Shadow's Sacrifice" —