

AN AUTUMN TALE

By Susan Schoon Eberly

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LONG AGO, in the dark forest known as the great woodland, there lived a big, bully-legged Bogle. This Bogle was a very quiet sort of giant. He made his home in a solitary, moss-hung cave on the banks of a slow-flowing river. The people who lived on the lonesome meadows beyond the woodland knew of the Bogle and of his cave, and because they feared him, they left him alone.

But the bully-legged Bogle was seldom lonely. When the days were dark and long, he spent his time talking to the friends who shared his cave—the spiders and the newts, the liverworts and the toadstools. When the weather was warm, he waded in the murky river. The Bogle could not swim because he was too large, and this saddened him. Yet the water felt cool as it trickled past his feet, and the river sang its gentlest songs for him, so he was never discontent for long.

On cold autumn nights, when the winds hurling through the poplar trees sounded like waterfalls, the Bogle would stand in the clearing before his cave and stretch himself taller and taller—as only true Boggles can. And soon he would be peering over the silver rim of the moon, the forest winds winding around his knees, and the star winds ruffling his hair and chilling the tips of his ears. And so he was happy in the woodland for years and generations of years.

As time passed, word of the Bogle was carried across the lonesome meadows and beyond, until finally even the Queen of the high mountains heard of the forest giant. She was named Arcite, and throughout her kingdom she was called the Coldest Queen in the World. Her castle, the Gray Havens, sat high on the pinnacle of the tallest peak. There, the snow stayed year 'round, and the icicles never melted, and the sunlight shone more silver than golden. Arcite the Coldest Queen ruled her frozen land with pride and dignity, and though she had wealth and power and the loyalty of her subjects, she was never seen to smile.

One still afternoon, the High Counselor came to her and said, “My Queen, you have all one could desire, and yet you never show happiness. Do you hide some great sorrow?”

“I have no sorrow,” replied the Queen, her face as white and calm as a January moon. “Indeed, as joy is a stranger to me, so also is sadness. I long to know both, but how do I find them?”

The High Counselor thought for a moment before she spoke. Then, slowly, she said, “Perhaps, my Queen, you would meet laughter and tears in some other place. You must seek an adventure that will teach you what you wish to know.”

The Queen pondered this advice for a moment and then nodded. She would leave the Gray Havens, trusting the High Counselor to rule in her absence.

When evening came, Arcite rode off on a horse the color of moonlight, a horse that fled the mountains as only a lowland-bred creature would. So fleet was he that by sunrise they were racing across the foothills, and by broad daylight they had reached the lonesome meadows.

On that plain, it was August. The sun had burned the meadow grasses brown, and sprung the silk from the milkweed pods, and parched the sunflowers. But even in that wilting heat, the Coldest Queen remained wrapped in ermine, her brow cool and dry.

The horse ran on through the whispering grass, and in time, a murmur reached the ears of the Queen and her mount. The murmur grew to a moan, then swelled to a roar, and they found themselves on the edge of the great woodland, where a cataract of winds crashed through the golden-leaved poplars. The Queen dismounted, removed the silver bridle and saddle from her weary horse, and set him free again upon his meadows. This done, she turned and entered the tumult of the forest alone.

The Queen had not gone far, when the wind died away and a cool silence settled around her. Far off, she heard someone humming a wordless tune, and she knew it must be the Bogle himself.

The Bogle was cooling his feet in the muddy waters of the river, but as he hummed, he noted the arrival of a stranger in his forest. “River,” he mused, “what would this pale human do if I were to grow tall as the clouds and ugly as the spiders?” The Bogle chuckled, and the river chortled, and even the poplars rustled their amusement.

But Arcite brought her own chill silence with her, and when she reached the clearing, the laughter stopped. The Bogle turned quietly to face the Queen, forgetting his plan to frighten her.

“I am Arcite the Coldest Queen,” she said, “and I have come in search of an adventure that will teach me of joy and sorrow. I suppose you must be the Bogle. Do you have a name?”

“Well,” he replied, “I am called the Big Bully-Legged Bogle, but my true name is Andrelas.” He swirled one foot in the water.

“Ah,” nodded the Queen. “Andrelas. A strange name. You’re probably an enchanted prince, or some such thing. I suppose I should kiss you to break the spell. Bend over, please.”

The Bogle was so dumbfounded by her cool assurance that he bent over without a second thought, and she placed one frosty kiss upon his leathery forehead. As he straightened up, he was surprised to see how tall the poplar trees were growing, how they suddenly blocked out the sun and then even the sky. All at once the river was flowing past his knees, then over his shoulders, and then he was being carried gently downstream.

“I’ve shrunk! I’m swimming!” he shouted. He turned to wave to the Queen and was thunderstruck to see that as he had shrunk, so she had grown. She was now taller than the poplars and still growing. “Good-bye!” he shouted. “Good luck!” And then the river carried him around a bend, out of the forest, and onto the vast meadows.

It was late afternoon before Andrelas tired of swimming and pulled himself onto the sandy shore. Once warm and dry, he clambered up the bank and looked around. Far off, he saw a small, whitewashed farmhouse,, and in a few minutes he was pounding on the back door.

“Who’s there?” asked the farmer as he came to the door.

“My name is Andrelas, and I’m tired and hungry....”

“Hmfff!” snorted the man. “You’ll have to earn your way here, but heaven knows there’s plenty of work to be done. Wipe your feet and come in.”

So Andrelas found work as a farm hand and was, for a time, content.

Meanwhile, the Coldest Queen, now treetop tall, was wondering what had gone wrong. “Oh, well,” she murmured. “This may not teach me joy or sorrow, but it certainly must be called an adventure!” She took off her ermine and her gray satin

gown and sat gravely on the riverbank in front of the cave in nothing but her camisole. She spoke to the river, and it was gentle in responding. Soon she knew the creatures who shared her home, and they became her friends. In time, she even learned to peer over the moon, as Andrelas had done, and she was content in the woodland, as Andrelas was content on the plains.

But one November night, Andrelas woke and felt a terrible aching in his chest. He rose and walked outside into the light of a full hunter's moon. "What I need," he decided, "is to grow tall and feel the star winds on my face once more." So he stretched up as tall as he could, but his arms reached no higher than the porch roof. The only thing growing was the ache in his chest. In sudden panic, he ran to the water's edge, calling out, "River, you are my friend. Please, take me back to my home again!"

So the river returned Andrelas, setting him gently on the bank in front of the cave. As he stepped onto the grass, he thanked the murky water that whispered at his feet. Then he turned toward the dark mouth of the cave and called loudly, "Lady? Fair Queen? Come out!" When Arcite stepped into the moonlight and bent down to see who was calling, Andrelas said softly, "Please, I have to do this," and kissed her white brow.

Immediately, the trees began to shrink away from Andrelas, the sky opened around him, and the moon appeared before his eyes. As the chill star winds swept across his face, the ache in his chest disappeared. But far below, he could hear a voice crying. So he grew small again, until he saw Arcite—human-sized once more—huddled at the mouth of the cave, sobbing pitifully.

"Little Queen, what is wrong?" he inquired gently. "Don't you also wish to be as you were before?"

Arcite looked up at him angrily. "No!" she shouted. "No! To be the Coldest Queen in the World again? Never! I want to stay here, to wade in my river, to grow to the moon, and to be content in the forest." And she began to sob again, knowing that she had, at last, found sorrow.

Andrelas thought hard, but the Queen's crying was as loud as the wind howling at the edge of the great woodland. Finally, he dangled one huge foot in the eddies of the river and made a suggestion. "Fair lady, listen. When you kissed me, you grew and I shrank. When I kissed you, I grew and you shrank. What would happen if we both kissed each other at exactly the same time?"

“We’d probably both shrink,” said Arcite through her tears.

“Well,” argued Andrelas, “we have to try something.” So, he bent down, and the Queen reached up, and they kissed each other once, very carefully.

Now, magic is a strange thing, and enchantments are very unpredictable. But this time Andrelas—perhaps because he was a true Bogle—had guessed rightly, and Arcite began to grow.

“Reach!” urged Andrelas. “Stretch!” And they both grew, towering higher and higher, until they could just peer at one another over the silver rim of the moon. And Arcite suddenly knew that, as she had found sorrow, so now she had found joy. She began to laugh, and Andrelas laughed with her until their laughter echoed through the stars above the lonesome meadows, and many a wakened farmer roiled over in bed, muttering, “Thunder? In November?”

Thus ends this autumn tale, and if stories are true, the two Bogles live in the great woodland still, sharing joy and sorrow for years and generations of years to come.