

THE WHITE DEER NAMED VIRGINIA DARE

Along the bay islands, where the pale people set up their first permanent settlement, there was born a child, the one known as Virginia Dare. And the people of the islands, the Chesapeake people, called the newborn White Fawn. Around the pine-speckled islands and sea-grass peninsulas, her story was told. It said that upon the child's death, her spirit would assume the form of a frosted fawn whose face, because her race had come from across the sea, would always gaze wistfully in that direction, as if yearning for that faraway shore. The story went on to say that if ever a runner should catch the fawn after she was fully grown into a white deer and shoot her with an arrow whose head was cast of silver, this would restore her to mortal form.

Now, the far banks and islands of coasts, not often met by travelers, were home to the Hatteras people, but the long salt-bitten winters presided over by hungry moons separated them from their pale friends, and in time, they lost touch with one another. One autumn day, a hunter named Little Oak came upon some ruined, abandoned log houses in the saw grass of the settlement of Roanoke. There were no pale people living there anymore; the berry brambles and rose hips had grown up between the cracks of the wind-washed logs. Slow autumn turtles lay by the cold hearth sides of cracked ashen clay. All that the hunter named Little Oak could find was an old baby's rattle, clutched by the claws of a rose thorn. Then he spied a beautiful white doe. By instinct, he drew his bow, but he would not let the arrow loose, holding it in check, the barred turkey feathers itching at his ear.

Time passed and the white doe was well known among the hunters of Roanoke Island. Often she was seen browsing amid the brown herd of deer that lived there. But she always remained apart, turning her head to the east, sad-eyed and dreaming on the direction of the distant sea. Those who were compelled to hunt her said that their arrows, though well-aimed, fell harmless at her hooves...whereupon she would leap with the west wind, swift as milkweed down, bounding the sand hills, driving the quick curlews and iron-winged cranes up into the cold gray, slate-colored sky.

Talk of the white doe flowed like a river tumbling from its source in the clefted rocks; it went various ways. Some of the people had fear of the animal, thinking her spirit was one of desolation. They said none but the spirit deer could travel the high grassy grounds old Croatan and yet the same day be seen in the cranberry bogs of East Lake.

Always sad, head ever turned toward the eastern-glinting sea, always beautiful, always a little apart, the white doe danced in a dream of her own making. Then, early one autumn, the people of the islands decided what to do: They would hold a great deer hunt, and all the finest bow hunters would be invited to join in. Afterward, there would be a feast and celebration. Now the plan, they say, was to hunt the milk white doe. If any runner or hunter...and all the best were gathered there...could bring her down with an arrow, then all would know if she was flesh or spirit; and, thereafter, if she should prevail, then no one would ever go after her again. It was thus decreed, and the hunt and race was on. Some took to the high sunburned mounds above the sound; some went to the low thistle meadows of the flat ocean islands. Hunters and runners alike spread out like a peat fire across good ground, quaking ground, low ground and high; and the bird-swept prairies rang with their chants. The best bows were drawn and the straightest arrows notched. Only one hunter, however, had a arrow with a cast-silver tip that had come from over the sea from the island known as England...a silver arrow point given, they say, by the great queen herself. This was a thing that could, it was told, reach the heart of even the most charmed lives.

And it happened that the swift doe was chased from the rank grass of the shaky land; a bowstring's angry twang sent her flying on the north wind's breath. Through tangled wood and trail less bog, through morass and highland, she sped. And the myriad bowstrings made the sounds of harmless bees in the wake of her whiteness. She plunged on through the billows of the sound, reaching the sand hills on Roanoke.

Here, she stood atop the ruins of the old fort, gray-logged and silvery-splintered, breathing the easternmost breeze from the afar, panting, her small tongue flickering like a pink petal. Now, in the deep, wind-blown grass, Little Oak appeared, took aim at the glowing form before him, and let loose the fated bowstring that burned the air and sent the silver-headed arrow on an irretrievable mission. The beautiful sad-eyed doe leapt, heart pierced, into the air and sank desperately to the ground. Then Little Oak threw down his bow, ran to her side, lifted the head of snow, soft as a cloud, looked into the dying eyes, and saw, suddenly, the face of a pretty young woman, who, through dry, heart-spent lips, whispered her name, Virginia Dare, and died.

So goes the story. And the lost Virginia Dare, what of her? Did she die in infancy? Did her child bones mingle with the dust of her legend and blossom in the wild roses of Croatan? Did she ever grow to womanhood? Did she end her life in whatever darkness that still enshrouds the lost pale colony that vanished into the deep mists?

SHAGGY DOG STORIES

Are you familiar with shaggy dog stories? They are very, very long tales. Indeed, the essence of telling them is to make them as long and detailed as you can before you finally reach the punch line. Well, not so much punch line, perhaps. More fizzle line, which makes them delightful for telling round the campfire.

Here, to give you the general idea, and in my own words (they should always be told in your own words), is the very first shaggy dog story. It explains how such stories received the name.

Once upon a time, way up in the very north of Canada, there lived a trapper named Sam. He was a poor man, but a great reader, who shared his hard and lonely life with several well-thumbed adventure yarns and a large shaggy dog called Rover.

Now Rover wasn't much of a dog as purebreds go, his pedigree having taken many a turn for the worse. You'd be hard put to say whether he was mostly terrier or wolfhound or huskie. But he was big and likeable and, because of the cold climate, had a really exceptionally thick shaggy coat.

One day, as Sam tramped along his trap lines, he called in at another trapper's hut. The hut was empty but, on the table, was a newspaper. Not a very up-to-the-minute newspaper, but a lot more up-to-date than anything Sam had read lately. So he fell upon it eagerly and read it from cover to cover. And there, on the back page, an item caught his eye. It said that, way down in the southern part of the country, an eccentric millionaire was offering half his fortune if only someone would bring him his dying wish, a really shaggy dog.

This piece of news had a startling effect on Sam. Here at last was a way to make his fortune. It was obvious! No more struggling through bitter winters. No more loneliness and hardship. He would simply head south with big, oh-so-shaggy Rover and the ailing millionaire would be a happy man. And so, of course, would Sam.

Carefully he tore the item from the newspaper and placed it in his innermost pocket. Whistling for the dog, he hurried to his own cabin and there made preparations for his journey. It would be a long haul through some of the worst of the winter months, but he could do it!

And so, with pack sack and snowshoes, and Rover on a makeshift lead, he headed south.

(At this point you should add your own horrific tales of icy crevasses, blizzards, starvation, polar bears, thin ice, thick snow--anything to make the journey as difficult and as courageous as possible.)

Weeks passed as Sam and Rover, footsore, frostbitten and fuddled from lack of food, fought their way nearer and nearer to the millionaire's deathbed. Would they find his house? Would he have found another dog? Would he still be alive? Urgently, Sam made inquiries at each trading post or small homestead he passed.

"My word, that's a shaggy dog you have there!" folks remarked whenever he stopped.

As he drew nearer to civilization, he learned with great relief that the search for a dog continued and that the millionaire's mansion lay at the top of a steep hill just visible on the horizon.

Up they climbed, tired and tattered, arriving eventually at the huge oak studded front door. Raising a weather beaten hand, Sam tugged at the wrought iron bell-pull. Distantly the bell clanged. The door opened and a butler stood in the doorway.

"I've come about the shaggy dog story in this newspaper," said Sam, carefully drawing out the clipping from his innermost pocket and offering Rover's lead to the manservant.

Silently the butler withdrew with the dog. Sam listened to his footsteps cross the vast hall and ascend the massive circular staircase. He waited patiently on the doorstep, dreaming of the luxury soon to be his. At last the butler reappeared. Solemnly he handed back the dog.

"Not shaggy enough," he said, and shut the door.

Well, yes, that's it folks, and now you know what a shaggy dog story is. Here's a potted one for you to embellish before you toss the idea around among your boys one firelit night after a long day's hike...

A young Scout was traveling on a long train trip across Canada. Sitting across from him was an older man, very neatly and precisely dressed. Across his knees he carried a briefcase upon which he nervously drummed his fingers. Since he looked to be rather an angry sort of man, the boy didn't like to start a conversation.

Presently the man opened the briefcase and took out two paper napkins, a pocket knife and an apple. Carefully he peeled and cored the apple. He placed all the peelings on one of the two napkins and folded it into a neat parcel. Then he moved his briefcase to one side, stood up, and walked to the end of the coach. By craning his neck, the boy was able to watch him move out onto the little platform at the end of the car and throw the parcel of peel onto the tracks.

When the man returned he dusted his hands, sat down and lifted the briefcase back up across his knees. He picked up the peeled and cored apple, carefully cut it into thin slices, placed the slices onto the second napkin and made a similar neat parcel. To the boy's amazement he then repeated his routine. He moved to the end of the coach and threw the parcel on the line. When he returned, he picked up his briefcase, took out two more napkins and an orange which he began to peel...

(Now you spin out the story, having the man take all kinds of fruit, one at a time, from his case, peel each piece and throw away first the peel and then the fruit itself)

At last the young Scout could contain himself no longer and simply had to ask the man what he was doing.

"I'm making a fruit salad," said the man.

"Then why do you keep throwing it away?" the boy asked.

"I should think that was obvious," snapped the man. "I'm throwing it away because I don't like fruit salad!"

Well, okay. Groan if you like, but Pam and I developed quite a reputation on the hostel circuit for the length, the detail, the sheer nerve of some of our shaggiest tales. Let me end with my personal favorite and, when you've finished throwing rocks in this direction, why not send us some of yours?

There once was a sailor returning to his ship. Just as he approached the edge of the dock, he slipped and fell into the water between ship and dockside. As he hit the water, the ship began to swing toward the harbor wall, and he would have been crushed to death had not a little man, with great presence of mind, thrown a rope and hauled him to safety.

"Whew, thanks!" said the sailor. "You saved my life. Tell me, is there anything I can do for you in return?"

"Well actually," said the man, "there is something. I'd dearly like to work aboard ship and, in fact, I was just on my way to look for a job when I saw you in the water. If you could put in a word for me. I'd be greatly obliged."

"Done!" said the sailor. He took the little man on board and tracked down his immediate superior. "This man saved my life just now, and he really would very much like to have a job on the ship."

"Well, I don't know," said the Petty Officer. "We have a full ship's complement, but I'll certainly put in a word on his behalf to my superior. What does he do?"

"I'm a Gloop Maker," said the little man eagerly.

Not wishing to appear ignorant in front of his subordinate, the Petty Officer didn't like to ask what exactly a Gloop Maker was, so he went to see the Chief Petty Officer.

"This man saved the life of one of my seamen," he told the Chief. "Do you think we could find him a job aboard? He's a Gloop Maker."

Not wishing to appear ignorant in front of his subordinate, the Chief asked the Warrant Officer, who asked the Sub-Lieutenant and so on, all the way through the chain of command until the request reached the Captain. After congratulating the little man, the Captain, not wanting to appear ignorant, named him ship's Gloop Maker and ordered the Supply Officer to provide whatever materials were necessary for work to commence.

The little man asked for a strong block and tackle fitted up on the afterdeck, a small stool, a hammer and chisel, a portable furnace, a lump of iron measuring four metres by four metres, several kilograms of copper and several more of silver.

As the ship sailed, the little man set his stool alongside the huge chunk of iron, lit the furnace and began to melt down the copper and silver. Then, with much hammering and chiselling, he began to add blobs of copper and curlicues of silver to the sides of the lump of iron.

Each day crew members stopped and stared at the wondrously strange thing taking shape at the ship's stern. But not wishing to appear ignorant, nobody asked the Gloop Maker what he actually was making.

"Coming along nicely," said the captain as he made his daily rounds. "Any idea precisely when it will be --ah-- ready?"

"Oh yes," said the man. "At 1400 hrs. on July 15 we shall sail through the center of the Bermuda Triangle. That's when it'll be ready, and I'd like the crew assembled on deck at that hour, if you please, sir."

And so, the great day dawned, the men assembled and the Gloop Maker put down his hammer and chisel. Proudly he stood back and indicated that the block and tackle should be lowered onto his masterpiece, whose copper and silver curlicues gleamed in the sun. Carefully he directed it to be lifted from the deck and swung round until it hung over the sea at the ship's stern.

"Ready, steady, go!" he cried, and he cut it free. And, as it fell into the deep blue waters of the Atlantic, it went, "GLOOP!"

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