

THE FURRY TAIL OF BETHANY

Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.

Once upon a time, maybe here and maybe far away,
there was a little town by the sea.

And in that little town, there was a little house,
and in that little house, there lived two little sisters,
and their names were Mary and Martha.

The sisters were a pretty pair, and alike as like could be.
They had soft black fur which shone in the sunlight,
and bright big eyes which twinkled like the stars,
and four little paws as white as the purest milk.
Each day, the sisters would tend to their house, and tend to their garden,
and welcome their friends and neighbours into their happy home.

Well, it so happened that one day a rumour spread in the town:
the Fisherman was coming to visit!

Everyone in those parts knew of the Fisherman,
for he travelled far and wide, telling stories and singing songs,
and making new friends wherever he went.
But to Mary and Martha, he was a special friend.

Whenever he came to visit that little town by the sea,
it was their house that he stayed in, their food that he shared
and their company that he seemed to enjoy the most.

So, when the Fisherman's boat sailed into the harbour that bright and sunny morning,
everyone was surprised to discover that Mary and Martha were not there,
gathered with the rest of the town on the quayside to meet him.

The Fisherman disembarked and greeted the crowds warmly,
telling a story here and sharing a joke there,
but sure enough, before too long he started to walk towards that little house
where Mary and Martha lived.

He knocked on the door, and let himself in;
but only Mary was there to welcome him.

To be sure, it was a warm welcome for the Fisherman in that little house by the sea.
Mary looked lovingly into the Fisherman's eyes,
she weaved her body in and out of his legs as he walked,
and as soon as he sat down in the big armchair by the hearth,
she jumped into his lap, curled up and began to purr.

All afternoon, Mary and the Fisherman stayed together.
She nuzzled into his chest, he stroked her head,
and she listened intently as he told her stories
of farmers and lords, birds and trees, distant lands and a magical kingdom.

It was almost dinnertime when Martha finally appeared at the door.
What a busy afternoon she had had!
Martha loved the Fisherman so much,
and she had wanted everything to be perfect for his visit.
So she had walked all over the town, talking to the birds, keeping the other cats in order,
warning the fox cubs to be on their best behaviour when they came for tea.
But all the time she had been busy with her preparations,
her sister had been curled up on the Fisherman's lap!
Martha was, understandably, a bit upset.
She would have liked to spend all afternoon with her dear friend the Fisherman.
She would have liked to nuzzle close to his chest and listen to his words.
If only Mary could have helped with all the chores!
Martha couldn't help it - she let out an indignant miaow.

The Fisherman smiled, and bent over to kiss her head and tickle her chin.
"Oh Martha," he said, "you've been so busy making everything perfect for me,
but I didn't come here to see a well-managed garden or a tidy house,
I came here to see you, because I love you.
I'm happy to be with you just as you are."

And with that, the Fisherman got up and laid a pure white linen cloth on the kitchen table.
From his bag, he produced warm crusty loaves and ruby-red wine,
and, for the two sisters, freshly-caught fish straight from the sea.
The Fisherman gave thanks for the food and bade the sisters come and eat;
for, he said, they had opened their hearts and their home to him,
and now he wanted to be their host.

After dinner, the Fisherman lit a fire in the hearth and settled back in the big armchair,
with Martha on his lap and Mary curled up at his feet.
As the night drew in, the Fisherman held them close to him, keeping them safe and warm;
and he promised that, wherever he was,
if they only closed their eyes and remembered him,
they would be able to feel his love and protection.

The next morning, it was time for the Fisherman to leave Mary and Martha,
and their house in the little town by the sea,
for the Fisherman still had many places to visit, and many stories to tell,
and many fish that he wanted to catch.
Of course, the sisters were sad to say goodbye,
but they knew they would see him again one day.

And what do you think happened next?

In the weeks that followed, Mary and Martha often thought of the Fisherman, every night before they went to sleep, and every morning before they started their work, and often during the day as well.

And whenever they closed their eyes and thought of him, they knew he was thinking of them too.

By and by, other guests came to visit the sisters in their house in the town by the sea. Each time a guest arrived,

Mary and Martha thought of that visit from the Fisherman and the time they had spent with him.

He was always their best and dearest friend, but little by little, they started to realise that everyone they met reminded them a little of the Fisherman too.

And so it was that whenever they enjoyed the company of a friend or a stranger, it seemed to them almost as if the Fisherman was there too.

Best of all, whenever the two sisters tasted fresh fish from the sea, or watched their friends break bread or drink wine, they remembered how the Fisherman had been their host that day.

Whenever they shared a meal with friends, it seemed as though the Fisherman was a guest at their table - or maybe they were guests at his.

And so it is, from that day to this, that Mary and Martha, and all their friends and relations and descendants, share a special love for the Fisherman.

If you are lucky enough to meet one of them - and there are many in the world - you will never find them tidying the house or checking their emails.

To be sure, they will never put on airs and graces for your visit, but they will never ignore you because they are too busy Hoovering the carpet or polishing the tableware.

You might find that they simply stand and look at you for a moment, and then maybe they will weave round your legs or headbutt your ankles, just as they did to the Fisherman all those many years ago.

And if one of them ever climbs on your lap or curls up at your feet, you can be sure that they have seen something in you which reminds them of him, their dearest and best friend.

And if they happen to sink into contemplation, with their eyes closed and their little paws twitching, please don't be offended.

They are simply enjoying the company of the Fisherman, filled with his goodness and lost in his love.