

SEARCH FOR THE MAGIC LAKE

A tale from Ecuador

A long time ago there lived a powerful Inca ruler who governed a vast empire in Ecuador. He and his wife had only one son. That son was ill and could not be cured by any of the royal physicians. As the ruler became older, his son continued to decline in health. This made the ruler very sad, so he knelt down to pray before an altar. He asked for a cure that would make his son strong enough to govern the land once he could no longer do the job himself.

To the ruler's surprise a voice answered his prayer. It told him to get water from the magic lake that touches the sky at the end of the world. Also to the ruler's surprise, a golden flask appeared in the ashes of the fire that burned in front of the altar.

The ruler was much too old to take such a long journey. His son was too weak. So, the ruler proclaimed he would reward greatly anyone who brought back water from the magic lake. Many strong young men tried, but none succeeded.

Some distance from the palace was a valley. There two brothers lived, and farmed, with their younger sister and poor parents. They heard about the proclamation. They wanted the reward so their parents wouldn't have to live the rest of their days in poverty. The boys talked their parents into letting them try to find the lake. Their young sister wanted to go with them but the boys and their parents would not let her.

For months the brothers traveled, searching for the magic lake, but were unable to find it. They had to return home to help their parents with the harvest so they came up with a plan. They decided to bring the prince water from any old lakes in the hopes they would be rewarded for their efforts. Back at the palace, the boys presented their water to the prince. No matter how much of it the prince drank, he got no better. The ruler was so angry at the brother's deceit that he chained them up in the palace's dungeon. They were given water from their own flasks to drink as a reminder of their deception.

When their sister heard what had happened she begged her parents to let her try and find the magic lake. She hoped that if she found it the ruler would free her brothers. This time, her parents let her go. She set out immediately taking some food and one of her pet llamas for company. On her first night out, she slept snuggled closely to her pet llama. When she heard the hungry cry of the puma, the young girl feared

for her pet's safety. The very next morning she sent it home before continuing on her journey.

On her second night out, the young girl climbed a tree to get away from the hungry puma and other night time predators. There, nestled in the branches, she took out some of her food. Several small birds landed next to her and she shared her meal with them. Grateful for her generosity, the birds decided to help her find the magic lake. They gave the girl a feather from each of their wings and told her that those feathers held magic powers. They also told her to hold them together like a fan, and that the feathers would take her where she wished to go. The girl was also advised that the lake was guarded by three terrible beasts, but that she shouldn't worry for the feathers would help protect her.

The girl thanked her new friends and tied their feathers together with one of her hair ribbons. She then held the feather fan up to her lips and wished to go to the magic lake at the end of the world. In just a few seconds, she was standing at the shores of a beautiful lake. All of a sudden she realized she left her provisions behind, including a flask to carry water with. She put the feather fan up to her lips and wished she had a flask. Suddenly, there appeared the same golden flask that the ruler had found in the ashes by his altar.

Before the girl could fill the flask with water, she heard a

menacing sound behind her. She looked around and saw a giant crab who told her to leave the water alone. The girl held the magic fan up to her lips and the crab fell fast asleep.

Again, before the girl could fill the flask with water, she heard the tail of a giant alligator slapping the water. It told her to leave the water alone. The girl held the magic fan up to her lips and the alligator fell asleep.

Still, before the girl could fill the flask with water, she heard a hissing sound from above. She looked up and saw a giant winged serpent. It told her to leave the water alone. The girl held the magic fan up to her lips and the serpent fell asleep.

Now that she had faced the three terrible beasts, the girl was free to fill the flask with water. As soon as she did, the girl held the magic fan up to her lips and wished to be in the palace. She arrived in a room that was occupied by the king, queen and prince. The king and queen were crying because their son was near death. The girl wasted no time. She put a few drops of water onto the prince's lips. He immediately began to recover.

The king was so happy that he offered the girl anything she desired. The girl asked for three things. First she wanted her parents to no longer be poor. The king agreed to give them more land, a larger house to live in, and enough money to live

the rest of their days comfortably.

Second the girl asked that her brother's be released from the dungeon. The king let them go immediately.

Thirdly, the girl asked that the magic fan be returned to the birds. As soon as she made this request, the fan lifted itself up and floated out of the castle towards the woods.

The girl asked for nothing for herself. The king and queen begged her to stay and live with them. The girl respectfully declined as she wanted to go back home to her parents. There she lived out the remainder of her days comfortably and happily.

Back at the palace, the golden flask always remained full, no matter how much water got drunk from it. Because of this, the prince and all his descendants remained healthy and strong.

Adapted by Kathleen Simonetta. Inspired by the tales "Search for the Magic Lake" found in these sources.

Best Loved Folktales of the World. Selected and with an introduction by Joanna Cole. Illustrated by Jill Karla Schwarz. NY: Anchor Books, c1982, pp. 767-773.

Wonder Tales From Around the World. By Heather Forest. Illustrations by David Boston. Little Rock: August House Publishers, Inc., c1995, pp. 117-121.

