

The Tale of Twice

or

Sharon, the Devil and the Fisherman

© Reg Down

All rights reserved. No part of this publication, in part or in whole may be reproduced, transmitted or utilized in any form, without the permission of the author, except for brief quotations in critical articles and reviews.

Not far from here there lived a young girl, about twelve years old. Her real name was Sharon, but everyone called her Twice because she was twice as bad as other bad children. She pulled her sister's hair, poked her brother in the ribs and broke eggs just for the fun of it.

One day Sharon was walking along a riverbank when she came upon a man sitting in a boat. The boat was leaking and the man was furiously bailing the water out with a bucket. But as fast as he bailed the water rushed into his boat.

"Help!" cried the man. "Throw me reeds to block the hole or my boat will sink."

Sharon sat down on the bank and laughed as the man's arms became tired and the boat slowly filled with water. At last the boat sank and he tried to swim to shore.

"Help!" cried the man again. "I can't swim!"

But Sharon sat and watched. She could have helped. There was a long branch lying in the grass next to her and she could have reached out with it and pulled him in, but she didn't even try. At last the man sank beneath the water and Sharon went on her way.

That night she had a dream, and in her dream she saw the man struggling in the water. She saw herself sitting on the riverbank and doing nothing. Then an angel came and carried the man's soul away. At the same moment the devil appeared and stood beside her with a grin on his face.

Sharon woke up sweating. She looked around the room for the devil. She didn't see him, but she knew he was close because the room smelled of rotten eggs.

That night Sharon did not sleep—nor the next night, nor the next. She became quiet, kept to herself and did not bother anybody or break anything. Everyone wondered what was wrong with her – perhaps she was unwell. But people were so fed up with her they did not care whether or not she was ill. They were only too glad she wasn't being mean and breaking things.

A week went by and still Sharon had not slept. She stopped eating and sat all day beneath a fig tree growing in the yard. It was the only place she wanted to be. After two weeks she could not walk and her parents had to carry her out to the tree.

At last Sharon became too weak to live. As she took her last breath a little bird landed on her breast and sang as if its heart would burst.

Her soul grew wings and went looking for the man who had drowned in the river. She searched for a long time, but at last she found him. He recognized her instantly, and raising his hand, blessed her.

Sharon was astonished. "Why do you bless me?" she asked.

"To thank you," he replied. "You saved my soul, and for that I bless you."

"But how could I have saved your soul?" she asked. "I let you drown!"

"Yes, you did," said the man. "But the boat did not belong to me. I had asked a fisherman to ferry me across the river, but I really wanted to steal his boat. When we reached the middle of the river I pushed him overboard and watched him drown. Then I rowed away quickly. But in my haste the boat hit a rock. That's when you found me. As I was drowning I looked up and saw the devil standing beside you on the shore and grinning at me. I saw myself clearly then and renounced evil forever. If you had saved me I would have harmed you, and many others besides, and my soul would have been lost. That is why I am blessing and thanking you."

"But it is I who have come seeking forgiveness," Sharon cried.

"Gladly," said the man. "Gladly do I forgive you."

"But what about the one you killed?" asked Sharon. "What happened to him?"

"I sought him out, just as you sought me out," the man replied, wiping bitter tears of regret from his eyes. "But he was no ordinary fisherman. He was the one who died for us all."