For my sons – S.N.

To the good intentions – J.S.

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GODFATHER DEATH



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Morning



Once, there was a poor fisherman. He was so poor that when his baby son was born, he had nothing to give him as a christening present.

"What shall we do?" said his wife.

"We must give him something," said the fisherman. "We may not have a gift, but we can find something better. I'm going to go out, and walk along the cliffs, and I'll keep walking until I find an honest man to be his godfather."

So he put on his warmest hat, and he wrapped himself in his warmest cloak, and he set out.

It was a cold, clear, midwinter morning. The sky was blue and the sun was high, and the sea was moving in – and out – and in – and out, against the rocks. The fisherman walked along the clifftop and he felt happy and full of hope.

Soon he saw a man coming towards him. The man was old and the man was bent. His beard was thick and long and white. His face was wrinkled, and his eyes were full of wisdom.

"Good day!" he called. "Who are you, and where are you going?"

"Good day, old man," replied the fisherman. "I'm a poor fisherman, and I'm looking for an honest man to be my son's godfather."

"An honest man?" said the stranger. "Look no further. I am Father God. I treat all men and all women fairly. I love all men and women and all the little children. I will be your son's godfather."





Now, most people would be pleased to have God take especial care of their son. But the fisherman had had a bad year. His boat had hit a rock. There was a hole in his roof and the rain dripped on to his bed. His baby son was cold, and his family was hungry.

He was *not* happy with God *at all.*

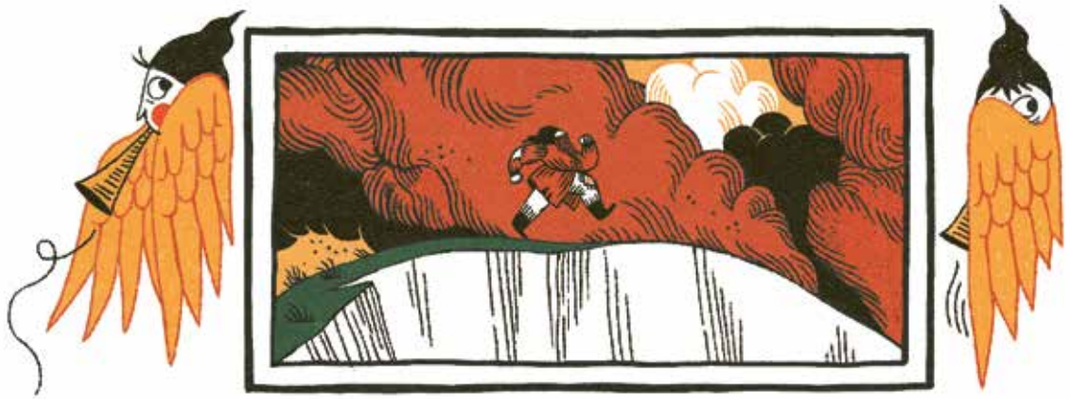
"You!" he said. "Treat all men and all women fairly! Are you *serious*? Some people live in great big palaces and eat off gold plates with silver forks! Others live in horrible cold wet houses where the rain falls down on to their bed! How is that fair? You *cannot* be my son's godfather! No. Thank. You!"



And he stuck up his nose in the air and marched straight past.



Afternoon

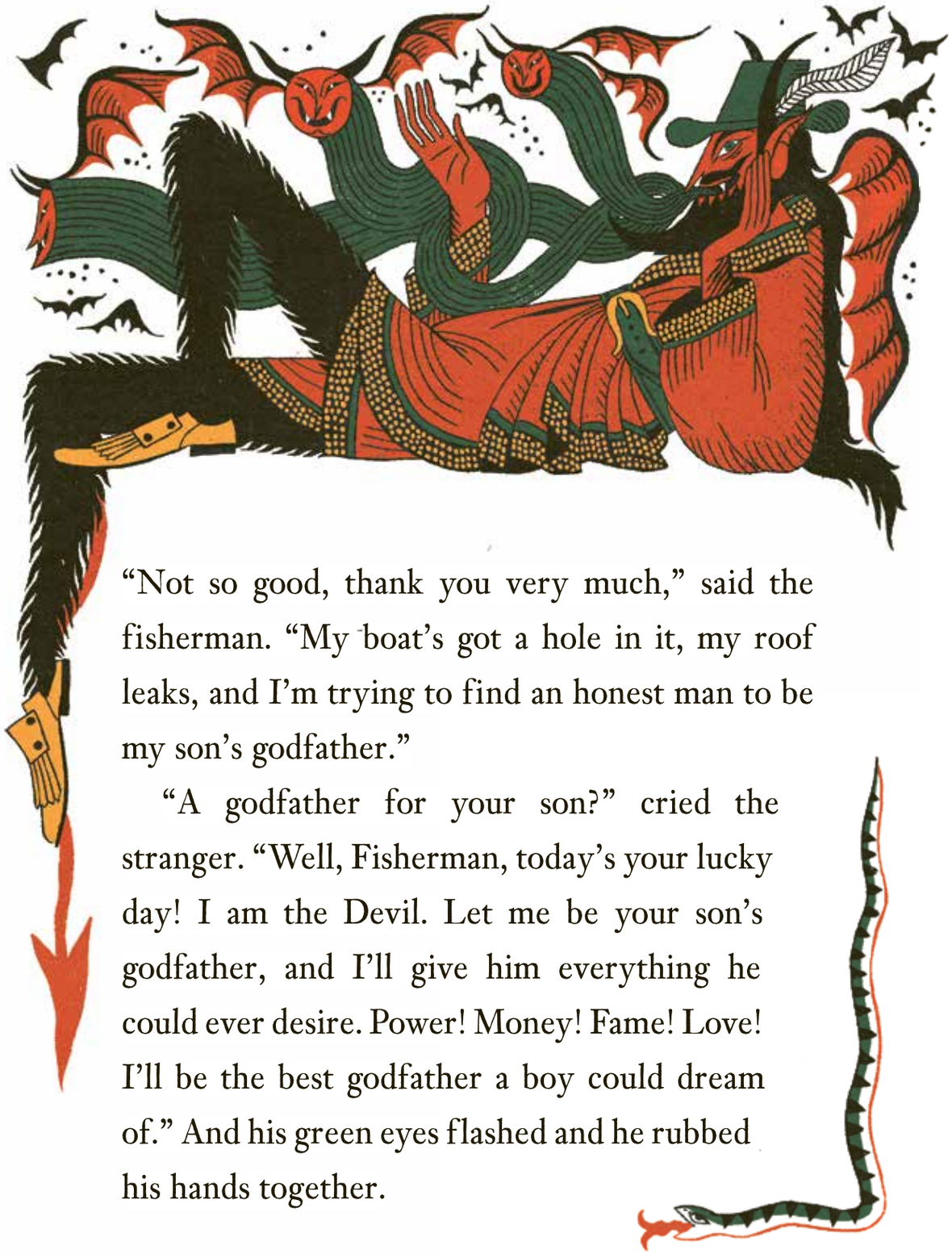


The fisherman stamped down the cliff path in a fine rage. That showed him! God! An honest man! A fair man! Ha!

The day passed. Morning turned to afternoon. The sky began to fill with clouds and the wind began to blow. And another man came walking down the path towards the fisherman.

He was a young man, tall and handsome, with black hair and green eyes. He wore a bright scarlet cloak and yellow dancing shoes. He had a pointed chin and a little black beard like a goat.

"Hello, Fisherman!" he called. "How's tricks?"



"Not so good, thank you very much," said the fisherman. "My boat's got a hole in it, my roof leaks, and I'm trying to find an honest man to be my son's godfather."

"A godfather for your son?" cried the stranger. "Well, Fisherman, today's your lucky day! I am the Devil. Let me be your son's godfather, and I'll give him everything he could ever desire. Power! Money! Fame! Love! I'll be the best godfather a boy could dream of." And his green eyes flashed and he rubbed his hands together.

Now, the fisherman was poor. He was cold. He was hungry. But he wasn't stupid.



"You!" he said. "An honest man! The Devil! What sort of a fool do you think I am? You love to make men and women unhappy. You're the wickedest, trickiest demon the world has ever known! Let *you* be my little boy's godfather! No. Thank. You."

And he crossed his arms and he marched right past the Devil.

Ha!





He walked and he walked and he walked. The sun began to set. The air grew colder. The sky grew dark. The moon rose over the water. The wind whistled and the seagulls cried and the waves crashed against the rocks. The fisherman thought of pirates, and wreckers, and drowned sailors, and ghosts and ghouls and goblins. He gave a shiver, and he pulled his cloak tight around his shoulders.

And then he heard a sound.

The sound of a horse's hooves on the path.

And he saw a man coming towards him.

A man riding a white horse.

A tall man, wrapped in a long black cloak. His face was hidden in a great black hood. And over one shoulder, he carried a long silver scythe.

Closer he came to the fisherman, closer and closer.

The fisherman could not run.

He could not hide.

He could only stand and wait.

