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The Lambton Curse

written by

Malachy Doyle

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The Lambton Curse

By

Malachy Doyle

Chapter One

Young Lambton

The cook looked up. “Are you on your way to chapel, Young Lambton?”

“No chance, you old bag - I’m off fishing!” The Lord’s son grabbed a hunk of the pie she’d just taken from the oven. “Crikey, that’s hot!” he cried, tossing it from hand to hand and trying to get out of the kitchen before she caught hold of him.

He wiggled this way and that and he’d nearly escaped, but there was his father, standing in the doorway. “Give that back, boy. Go and put your Sunday clothes on and come with me to the service.”

“No fear!” He stuffed the red-hot pie in his mouth and ducked between his fathers’ legs. “I’ll see you later, old man!”

“Damn and blast!” Young Lambton was down by the river, well away from all the spoilsports, but he’d been there at least an hour, the fish weren’t biting, and his hook had just caught on a lump of weed.

“Damn and double blast!” he yelled ten minutes later, flinging his rod down on the bank. “Those stupid fish must still be asleep.” But then he saw a ripple on the surface of the water. Was it a fish? Could it really be a fish?

“I’ll give it one more go, and that’s it,” he muttered, putting a grub on his hook and casting in. Almost immediately, there was a mighty tug on the end of the line.

“Got you, you beggar!” His rod bent like a bow. “A hellish fine salmon, by the feel of you.”

Whatever he’d caught didn’t want to come ashore, but the Lord’s son wasn’t one to give up without a fight. He pulled and he tugged, he

tugged and he pulled and at last, with a mighty splash, he landed his catch.

“Hell fire!” he exclaimed. “What sort of a creature are you?”

For there, wriggling and jiggling on the end of the line, was the ugliest, most evil-looking water-creature the boy had ever seen. It was as long as his arm, more like a snake than a fish, and it scowled up at him with needle-point eyes and razor-sharp teeth.

“You shouldn’t swear like that, Young Lambton,” came a warning voice. “Especially on a Sunday.”

The youth spun round, and there behind him was an ancient old man, his face all cracked and pitted and his clothes little more than rags.

“Don’t creep up on me like that, you old beggar,” cried the boy. “And anyway, who gives a damn about Sundays – it’s just another day when people tell you what to do and what not to do,

and I’m fed up with it. Fed up with all of them!”

The young Lord turned to examine his catch again, which was lashing its tail this way and that in a desperate attempt to free itself. “If you want to be useful, whoever you are, tell me what this thing is on the end of my line. It looks like the devil, and smells even worse.”

The man came closer. “It certainly reeks, and it’s an ugly-looking brute …”

“Nearly as ugly and smelly as you!” replied the boy, with a laugh. “But what is it, old man, and where does it come from?”

The man came closer still and then pulled away, gasping.

“What’s wrong?” said Young Lambton, for the old fellow’s face had gone from a dirty brown to the palest of pale.

“There’s only one thing it can be …” came the reply, “and it’s a bad day that brings it to land.”

“Why? What is it?”

“It comes from the depths of the river,” the man told him, “and that’s where it should have stayed, lad – if you hadn’t been down here fishing when you ought to have been in chapel, like any decent soul.”