

# Lope And The Old Witch

(A Folklore Story)

By Antonio C. Muñoz

**L**OPE was a boy fourteen years old. He lived with his mother in a village near a forest. His father died when he was twelve years old and since that time he had been working hard to help his mother. They had no property except their little house and the garden beside it. His mother was a fuel seller. Early every morning, she would go to the woods, gather the dead branches of the trees, and bind them into bundles. Lope was always with her. In the afternoon, they would take these bundles of fuel to a rich man who lived two kilometers away from their home. In the evening, they would go home with rice and fish for the next day.

One day Lope told his mother that he would fence their yard so that he could plant vegetables in it. As usual, he went with his mother to the woods but instead of gathering firewood, he cut small branches of the trees. He kept this on from day to day until he had enough materials for his fence.

One afternoon while he was in the thickest part of the forest gathering vines with which to tie his fence, he saw a wild car-

bao whose horns were entangled among the bushes and vines. The animal was exhausted. Its mouth was foaming. Lope was always kind to animals. He ran to the spot and with his bolo he cut the vines and branches. The carabao was free. With a look that seemed to say, "Thank you," the animal disappeared among the trees. Lope went on with his work. Just as he was ready to go home, he stepped on something soft and slimy. He stooped down to examine it. It was the body of a huge snake about six inches in diameter. At first he was afraid but when he noticed that the animal did not move, his fears vanished. He became interested. Perhaps the snake was also in trouble, he thought. At last he discovered that an arrow stuck through the lower part of the snake's abdomen. It was writhing in pain. It could not get away from the place as the arrow was caught in a network of vines. Lope pulled the arrow. The snake lay still for a minute. Then it coiled around and lapped Lope's foot in a dumb expression of thankfulness. Then it slowly moved away and was soon lost among the bushes.

"Good work, Lope. You are a fine lad!" cried a voice from above him. He looked up to see who it was who spoke to him. A bird with beautiful plumage was perched on a branch.

"Lope, you have done well," continued the bird. "The animals you have just saved will not forget you. Go home now for it is getting dark."

Then the bird flew away. Lope hastily tied the branches he had



*The old witch was behind him in the act of striking him with the knife.*

cut into bundles. He carried one home. The next day he spent his time carrying the remainder of the wood to his home. On the third day he fenced his garden. When the sun was setting, Lope had one more side to finish. At about seven o'clock, his mother called him for supper was ready. Lope left his work and went up the house. He had a little more space to fence.

After supper, he said, "Mother, I think I'll finish the fence now. It will not take me long."

"You may go on with your work, Lope, if you are not yet tired," replied the mother.

Lope ran down to finish his fence. After he had driven the last piece, someone greeted him, "Good-evening, Lope!"

Lope looked around. An old woman was smiling at him.

"Why do you work until late, Lope?" she asked.

"Because I want to put the garden in shape right away," Lope answered. "We are poor. We need the vegetables very much."

"Lope, come with me to my house. I have plenty of seeds for your garden. I have much money. If you come with me, you may have as much as you want. Then you will not have to work so hard," said the old woman.

"I like the work. I enjoy it," Lope replied.

"Well, it doesn't matter whether you like your work or not. I want to help you. Come with me. You will come back with seeds and money. Come, Lope, before it is too late," persuaded the old woman.

"Where is your house?" Lope asked.

"It is where that light is," said the woman pointing to a spot in the forest.

Lope and the old woman left the place. They passed through places

which Lope had not seen before. Soon they arrived at the old woman's house.

"Come up," the old woman invited him.

Lope went up. The old woman told him to sit down. When Lope was seated, she went to the room. She came out dressed in tight clothes. She went to the door and closed it. She also closed the windows. Then she got pieces of rope and tied the shutters. After that she went to the kitchen. From where he sat Lope saw her build a fire and set a big pot over it. "She must be a witch and perhaps she will eat me," Lope said to himself.

When the old witch came out, she had a big hunting knife in her hand. She sat down near Lope.

"Lope," she said, "go to that hole in the wall. Put your hand inside and bring me that bag of gold in it. We shall open it with this knife."

Lope became more suspicious but he walked toward the place indicated. He raised his hand as if to put it into the hole. Then he turned around. The old witch was behind him in the act of striking him with the knife. Lope jumped to one side to avoid the blow and then ran. The old woman chased him. Lope ran around the table with the old witch close behind him. Lope stumbled. The witch rushed upon him with

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*It was a huge snake. It grabbed Lope in its outh.*

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the gleaming blade raised for the deadly blow. Lope kicked her in the abdomen. It sent her sprawling on the floor. The knife slipped from her hand. Lope rushed towards her. It was a fight between an old person and a young one. The witch was old but Lope was too young to beat her.

Soon Lope felt the woman's fingers on his throat. He kicked her again. She fell back. Lope stood up. The woman did the same. They rushed at each other. Both fell down. They were near the knife now. The old woman grabbed it and stood up. Lope did the same. The woman rushed to strike. Lope stepped to one side and gave his opponent an uppercut. It landed on her chin. She fell down gasping. Lope seized the knife, ran to the window, and cut the rope. He opened it and jumped out. He ran as fast as he could. The witch picked up the knife which Lope left on the bench and ran after him.

Near a big tree, Lope fell down exhausted. The witch with the knife in her hand was just a short distance away. Lope expected to die. But what's that rope-like thing lowering itself from the top of the tree? It was a huge snake. It grabbed Lope in its embrace. It raised itself and placed the unconscious boy on a big branch. The witch came. She saw Lope on the branch. At once she started to climb the tree. When she had climbed a step, a carabao rushed upon her. Its sharp horn passed through her body. The animal tossed her in the air and she fell down dead.

"Lope, my good boy," cried a voice above him. "you are safe now. Go home. Get the bag from the hole in the old woman's house. It is yours. When you reach home, get one half of the gold and give it to your mother. Divide the other half among the poor people in your neighborhood. Whenever you need

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help, just call us. Say, 'Botso-Gotso, Goto--Loto, and Betsy-Getsy, help me,' and we shall be there to help you. Good-bye."

It was the same bird which talked to him the evening before. Lope saw it fly away into the forest.

The snake then took Lope and placed him on the back of the carabao. The latter ran towards Lope's home. It stopped at the old woman's house. Lope got off and went up to get the bag of gold. Then he rode on the carabao again. The animal went on until he reached Lope's home. Lope got off. He stroked the carabao's forehead. It turned around and ran towards the forest.

Lope went up. His mother was crying. She thought a wild animal had taken Lope away. When she saw her son, she ran to him and held him tightly in her arms. Lope gave her the bag and then told her the whole story.

The next day Lope and his mother went around to distribute the gold among the poor people in the neighborhood.

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