



The King's Secret

Emotions and Empathy

This Irish legend tells of King Maon and the secret he was extremely ashamed of. However, no secret can be kept secret forever. Eventually, the king has to face his greatest fear – the fear of shame and ridicule.



🕒 8 min

😊 5+

Once upon a time, in the northern parts of Ireland, there lived a king whose name was Maon. This king had one very peculiar habit that no one understood. You see, his head was always covered with a dark and shadowed hood. And that wasn't the only odd thing: he never had his hair cut more **than once a year**.

He didn't even have a royal barber of his own. Every year, he would choose one of his subjects to trim his hair. The greatest mystery of it all was that not one of these barbers had **ever returned home**. People were pretty certain that it was the king's doing. That he had gotten rid of every single one of them, but no one knew why. They all wondered, though.

"Perhaps he's sent them to another kingdom," thought one.

"Maybe he paid them so well they retired," said another.

"He's a good and just king. I'm sure the barbers are all fine," said a third.
"Right?" No one replied.

However, the real reason for the mystery was the king's ears. They were truly **extraordinary** – pointed and curled as if he were an elf. King Maon was terribly ashamed of his ears and he would do anything to protect his awful secret. That's why everyone and anyone who had ever seen them ended up **in the dungeon**.

One day, it was a young woodcutter's turn to take on the role of the king's barber. His name was Liam, and knowing he would never be seeing his home again, he wasn't happy in the slightest. You might even say he was a little upset. But he went.

Liam's eyes fell on the king's unusual ears the moment Moan **took off his hood**. Now he knew the king's closely-guarded secret. And he understood everything. Liam knelt before the king, begging him to let him return home.

"My mother is old and quite ill. I cannot leave her! I promise I won't ever tell anyone about your secret. I swear!" Liam cried, holding onto the hem of the king's robe.

The king heaved a **sigh after a while**. "Alright, fine. Hush! I'll let you go back to your mother, but don't you dare utter a single word about what you have just seen. If you do, there won't be a place anywhere in the world for you to **hide**."

Happy as a lark, Liam rushed back home, but the king's secret started weighing him down soon enough. He couldn't think of anything else but the king's ears. His big, pointy ears. Before long, he became completely obsessed and he couldn't even sleep **at night**.

Then one day, he fell terribly ill. The burden had turned so heavy, he couldn't even leave his bed. That's when his mother sent for one of the wise druids to ask for help.

The druid knew at once what had caused the sudden illness. "Your son is keeping a great secret. That's why he's so ill. Unless he confides in someone, it's surely going to kill him."

Liam's old mother **burst into tears**. But the druid leaned closer to Liam and whispered in his ear: "Pull yourself together, put on some clothes and go to the woods. When you reach the crossroads, turn left. Continue that way until you stumble upon an old and hollow willow tree. You can tell it all of your deepest secrets. The tree won't tell a soul."

Liam gathered the last ounce of his strength, put on some clothes and **made for the door**. He headed to the woods, just as the druid had told him. When he came across the old and hollow willow tree, he revealed the king's secret at once. Right after that moment, Liam regained his long-lost strength and good spirits. He **happily hurried back home**.

Just a few weeks later, a travelling musician was strolling through the forest, looking for some bendy wood to make a new harp for himself. When he stumbled across the old and hollow willow tree, it caught **his eye immediately**. He cut it down immediately and made it into a beautiful harp.

Before long, the sweet tones of the harp could be heard in every village, and people soon fell in **love with the sound**. One day, the news of the charming, sweet-playing harp reached the pointy, curled ears of king Maon himself. The castle and the royal court were getting ready for a marvellous party, and the king, yearning to hear the magical instrument, invited the harpist to perform.

The musician indeed arrived, but then something extraordinary happened. As you all know, the harp was made from the wood of the old willow tree that knew the king's secret, and when the harpist touched the strings, instead of its usual sweet melodies it started singing something entirely different.

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King Maon went as red as a beetroot and hung his head. But he soon realized that no one was actually laughing at him. They were quiet and respectful. So he took a deep breath and shyly took the hood off his head to reveal his pointed ears.

All of a sudden, everyone at the royal court started clapping **their hands**. They appreciated their king's courage. Maon was incredibly happy. For the first time in his life, he felt truly free and that he could be himself. He ordered everyone released from the dungeon.

From that day on, he never wore anything on his head. Not a hat, not a cap, not even his crown! He had his hair trimmed each week. And he never, ever imprisoned anyone again just because of **his own pointy ears**.