

The Winter House



The days became colder and shorter. Summer went away and the blue evening skies of winter arrived. Arish felt the chill and decided to build himself a house to keep warm. He bought a plot of land, dug foundations, filled them with rocks and then laid bricks one on top of the other. He worked from dawn to until dusk and sometimes even into the night.

Once the walls were finished, he added windows, a door, a roof and a chimney. He painted the inside, hung thick curtains and put furniture in each room: a table and some chairs, a wardrobe, a bed. When everything was finished, he make a fire, sat at his table and drank a warm cup of soup. His house. His warm house. His very own warm winter house.

The next day Arish walked into town with all the necessary paperwork and handed it to the Mayor. The Mayor nodded because Arish's papers were in order. The house truly belonged to him. He went home and that night slept a warm and dreamless sleep.

Arish lived happily. He welcomed visitors, fed strangers and cooked meals for his friends.

Then one day a message came from his daughter who lived in the next village. Her son was ill and her husband had left her. Arish packed a bag at once, put on his coat, and went to her.

He stayed for a month until everything was alright again and then he returned home.

But when he approached his house he found that another man was living there with a wife and two children. Arish could not believe it.

"What are you doing living here in my house?" he said to the man.

"Your house? Why I've never seen you before. This house belongs to me!" shouted the man and he chased Arish away with a stick.

Arish went to see the Mayor,

"You have my papers. You know that I own the land and the house that I built there. You know it's the work of my own hands!"

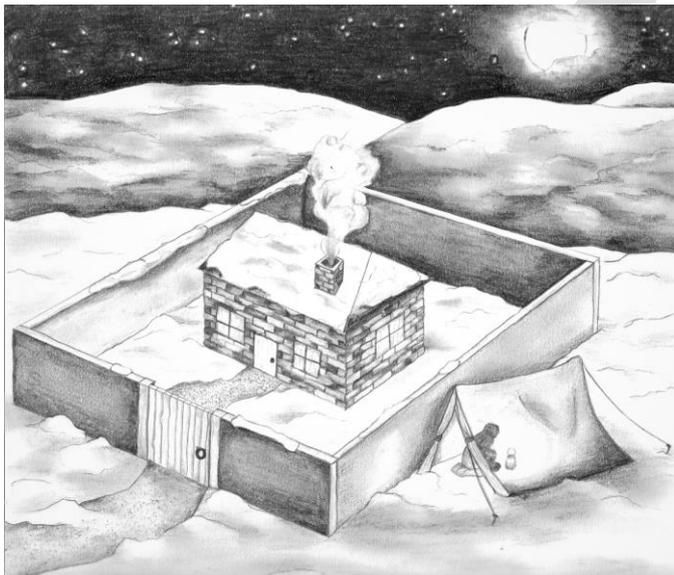
But the Mayor looked down, ashamed, and said, "Things changed while you were away Arish. The house is no longer yours. You'd better get used to it."

But Arish could not get used to it. He had built that house and it belonged to him. It was his home. It was his Winter house. It was a place to welcome friends and family and strangers but now someone else was living there.

So Arish went to the lowest court of the land and made his case. But the judge of the lowest court in the land said, “Arish, things have changed; just because you dug the foundations does not mean that this house belongs to you.”

Then he went to the middle court of the land and made his case. But the judge of this court said, “Arish, things have changed; just because you laid brick upon brick and put in windows and a door does not mean that this house belongs to you.”

Finally Arish went to the highest court of the land and made his case. But the highest judge in the land said, “Arish, things have changed; just because you hung curtains and filled the rooms with furniture does not mean that this house belongs to you.” Arish was distraught. Arish was angry. Arish was determined.



He cleared a space at the edge of the garden, put up a small tent and settled in. He waited. And while he waited the days became even colder and the nights even darker. Snow fell often and frost never left the ground. People offered him rooms in their homes and he thanked them but politely refused.

Every day the man who had come to live in Arish’s house said to him over the garden wall,

“What are you doing here? Go away, you are spoiling the way my house looks with your tent.”

And every day Arish replied,

“How can I spoil the way this house looks when it is my own house and you have stolen it from me?”

“Paaah!” said the imposter and stomped back inside to be by Arish’s fire.

Arish waited and waited and while he waited his story began to spread. People told their friends who told theirs. Then those friends told the people they knew and before long everyone in the land knew about the man in the tent who

camped outside his own house in the cold and the dark and the frost and the snow.

The people decided that Arish must have his house back so they all wrote to the mayor. The mayor read their letters but he looked down, ashamed, and wrote back to them, "Things changed while Arish was away. The house is no longer his. You'd better get used to it. All the courts in the land agree, so I must be right."

But the people did not accept this. Even though they usually disagreed with each other, they agreed about this. Even though they were different ages and sizes and colours and believed in different gods or no gods, they just could not accept what had happened to Arish.

So they made a plan and this is what they did: they each bought a brick or a rock or a window or a door or a curtain or a piece of furniture or some paint and they came to Arish's town. They set to work building him a new house. They built it right next to his first house but they made it wider, and taller and deeper. They added extra windows, a bigger door and a better chimney. They made sure that the curtains were thicker and the furniture much stronger.

And when it was finished they lit a fire in the lounge and invited Arish to come inside. Then he burst into tears. He was so grateful.

"I'd better tell the mayor," he wept. "I'd better get my paperwork in order so that this house really is mine."

"Don't bother," the people said, "the mayor no longer has any power or respect here."

Arish worried that someone else would come to live in his new house but the people set his mind at rest,

"Do not worry Arish. This house belongs to all of us because we all built it. It is our house and a house which we want you to have. If anyone tries to take it from you then they are trying to take it from all of us. They will have all of us to deal with. And they wouldn't dare do such a thing."

And with that, Arish got ready for bed, drank some warm soup by the fire, and had the best night's sleep of his life. And for all I know he is living in his winter house even now, as you finish hearing this story.

No-one would dare take Arish's house away from him again, would they?

Think About It...

How could this ever happen? How could Arish lose his house in this way?

Although it is wonderful that Arish got somewhere better to live, I can't help thinking about that other man and his family. I wonder what his story was...

And the mayor... what kind of leader was he? How would you lead if you were the mayor? Oh, and what about the law! Something was wrong with the courts wasn't it, what might that be?

What do you most want to know about this story?

How would you change it?

What's the most daring and risky story line you could add it?

Draft Copy