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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Enchanted Boat

Once there was a King who had a very beautiful daughter, and when the Queen died the King married a woman who had a son named Tito because he thought this new Queen would be kind and good to the Princess.

But in this the King was greatly mistaken, for the Queen thought only of her son and wished to make him King.

She told the King that if he would make the Princess marry Tito that he need have no fear about the future of his kingdom, for he could be sure her son would make a good king.

“And a woman should not be Queen and rule alone such a big kingdom as you possess,” said the scheming Queen. The King, who thought more of his daughter’s happiness than anything in the world, called the Princess and told her of his plan. “Marry your stepmother’s son and all will be well with you and I can die happy,” he told the Princess.

But the Princess did not want to marry Tito, for she did not love him, and when she found that her father would not listen to her pleadings, but told her that very night she should wed Tito, the little Princess ran out of the palace and threw herself face down on the grass and wept.

When it came time for the wedding she was nowhere to be found, and though the palace and the gardens were searched, it was all in vain. The Princess had disappeared.

What had happened was that while the Princess was crying and bemoaning her sad lot she heard a sound, and when she looked up there was a lake she had never seen at the foot of the garden, and on it a beautiful boat with a sail of silk the color of gold. There was no one in the boat, and the Princess, forgetting her sorrow in her wonderment at this strange sight, ran down to the water's edge, where another surprise awaited her. For the boat came sailing straight to the place where she stood.

The Princess stepped in, and away went the boat out over the blue water, and in a few minutes she was in a country she had never seen before.

The little Princess was not frightened, for she felt sure nothing worse could befall her than if she stayed at the palace and had to marry Tito, and, while she was sorry to leave her father, she could not be happy with a man she did not love.

The lake led to a river, along the banks of which were high hills and beautiful woods, and the Princess was so lost in admiring the beauty of the scene she did not notice they were approaching a castle until her boat sailed under a white marble bridge, which soon brought her at the steps which led into the garden of the castle.

Here the strange boat stopped and the Princess knew she was expected to get out.



She walked up the steps into a garden filled with pink and white roses, with a fountain of pearl and gold in the center which threw a perfumed spray all about, which filled the air with fragrance.

There were no paths in the garden, but the grass was like green velvet and yellow birds flittered among the small green trees and sang sweet songs.

Through the roses and trees the Princess saw the entrance to the castle, and on the broad steps of marble and gold came a queer-looking creature followed by more servants than the Princess had ever seen in her father's palace.

The Princess did not feel at all afraid, although the strange-looking creature had the body of a beautiful leopard, while his head was that of the handsomest youth the Princess had ever beheld.

His hair was dark and as he came nearer to her the Princess saw that his eyes were deep blue, the kindest eyes she had ever seen.

He held out one huge paw toward her and then withdrew it and said, "I fear you will not care to take the paw of such a beast as I am, but I can assure you I will not harm you, Princess."

"I am not afraid," said the Princess, putting out her hand, "but tell me how you know that I am a princess?" After the leopard-man had taken her hand he led her up the steps, and as they walked along he told her that no one but a princess could have entered the boat. "It had sailed for many a year in quest of the princess who would be willing to sail away in it," he told her, "and as only a princess can help me, no one but a princess could get into the enchanted boat."

When the Princess and the leopard-man entered the castle he told her his strange story. He was a prince who had been changed by a witch into the shape she saw, and the only thing that could save him was a gold root which grew far up on a blue mountain-peak.

"But that root must be brought to me by a princess and no one else," said the leopard-man, "so you see how impossible it is that I shall ever regain my own shape."

"If you will tell me where this blue mountain-peak can be found," said the Princess, "I will undertake the task, for I do not wish to return to my father's palace, and I would like to help you."

"The enchanted boat will take you if you really wish to try," said the leopard-man, "but I fear it is a task you are far from fitted to undertake, for no one can go with you; that would break the spell."

The Princess, however, told him she would try, and at once set out on the strange errand, the boat sailing along the river and then out into the open sea.

By and by the Princess saw on the side of a high mountain, the top of which was blue, something growing which shone like gold, and she knew it must be the golden root for which she was seeking.

The enchanted boat sailed close to the foot of the mountain and stopped, and the Princess knew she was to get out, but how was she to reach the golden root which grew far up on the mountain?

The Princess stepped out of the boat on the rocks and sat down to think what she could do, for to climb up the steep, smooth side of the mountain was out of the question; if only she could fly she thought she might reach it.

Just then she heard a swishing sound, and, looking up, she saw a big eagle coming toward her with a broken leg.

The bird fell at her feet, and, as so many strange things had already happened, the Princess did not feel afraid of the big creature, for she felt sure that in some way he would help her.

"Oh, you poor hurt bird!" she said, tearing off a piece of her dress to bind up its leg; then from a stream falling from the mountain she brought in the hollow of her hand water for him to drink.

At night the Princess took off her cloak and covered the eagle, while she huddled close to the mountain and behind a rock to keep the cold from herself.

In the morning she was surprised to find the eagle had flown away, but on the rocks was her cloak, and two feathers from the wings of the bird lay beside it.

The Princess put on her cloak and took up one of the feathers, and to her surprise the hand that held the feather flew up over her head.

She picked up the other feather with the other hand and up she was carried, her cloak spreading out like a pair of wings.

With the feathers she guided herself until she alighted on the top of the blue-peaked mountain.

She laid the feathers down and began to dig for the root which the Prince had said was the only thing that could save him.

When she had enough of the golden root she again took the feathers, one in each hand, and flew down to the water, where the enchanted boat, which had sailed away when she left it, now stood waiting.

The feathers from the eagle she put carefully on the rocks, but the bird was nowhere to be seen, and, knowing that it must have been a part of the magic plan to help her, the Princess sailed away, feeling sure the eagle was safe and his broken leg quite well.

When she reached the castle of the leopard-man he was on the steps to meet her and without waiting to enter the castle he took the golden root from her and tasted it.

The leopard body disappeared and there he stood before her, a tall, handsome youth whom any maiden, even a princess, would fall in love with.

The Princess told him her story and the Prince told her they would go at once to her father and he would ask for her hand, for he had already asked for her heart and found that it was his.

The enchanted boat took them back to the garden of the King, where they found that the Queen, when she knew that her son had lost the chance of becoming King when the Princess disappeared, had put the King in a dungeon under the palace and she and her son had become the rulers of the kingdom.

The Prince quickly undid all this mischief by setting the King free, and when he found out how treacherous his Queen really was he sent her, with her son, away from the palace and told them never to return or they would both be put in prison.

He was a kind-hearted King and gave them gold to care for them the rest of their days, and it did not take them long to leave the palace, you may be sure, for already the wedding feast was being made ready for the marriage of the Princess and her Prince.

The enchanted boat now was not needed, and that with the lake disappeared, but when the Princess set out with her husband to go to the castle she found that it was within her father's kingdom that the Prince had lived. At the end of the castle garden where the Prince and the Princess live is a long stone seat, and at one end grows a bush of golden flowers, the like of which no one ever saw before, and at the other is the figure of a big eagle made of gold and bronze, but only the Princess and her husband know what these things mean.