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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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## The Golden Chain

Once, there was a Prince who fell in love with a beautiful Princess, and they were to be married. But on the night of the wedding, a wicked old witch appeared at the castle door, claiming that she had not been invited to the feast and demanding to see the King. The King ordered the servants to send the witch away, but she pushed past them and entered the banquet hall before anyone could stop her.

"You did not invite me to the feast, my King," she said, waving her cane in the air. "But I have come uninvited, and as a result, I will give you, my pretty Princess, this." As she spoke, the cane dropped to her side, and in place of the Prince stood a lion, shaking his shaggy mane and looking far from desirable.

"Ho ho ho!" cackled the old witch as she hobbled away. "Spend your honeymoon in a lion's den, my pretty Princess. Only a magical golden chain placed around his neck can restore your Prince."

Before anyone could intervene, the witch disappeared, leaving the Princess and the lion standing before the King.

"Take that beast away!" roared the King. "There will be no wedding today."

"Yes, there will be a wedding, father," said the Princess. "I promised to marry the Prince, and I love

him. Whether he has the form of a lion or a man, I shall remain true to him."

The poor lion rubbed his head against the Princess, showing his love and appreciation. Despite the objections and arguments from the King, the Princess insisted on marrying the lion.

"You shall not live in the castle," declared the King. "I will not have a wild beast in my house, even if you have chosen him as your husband."

"Very well, we will live in the forest behind the castle," said the Princess. "There is a small cottage where we can reside until I find the golden chain that the witch spoke of. It is said to be the key to restoring my Prince."

One night, while the Princess was asleep in her bed and the lion husband lay on the floor beside her, she heard a tapping sound at the window. When she woke up and looked, she saw a little bird pecking on the pane.

Quickly, the Princess rose and opened the window, and the bird flew inside.

"A fairy has sent me," it whispered. "Come, let us find the golden chain."

The Princess took one last look at her sleeping husband, knowing that she was his only friend in the world. If anything happened to her, he would be lost. However, the bird whispered again, "Come, this is your only chance to obtain the chain."

The Princess no longer hesitated and followed the bird into the forest.

"Follow me," said the bird, flying ahead of the Princess. It led her to a tree and tapped on the trunk three

times with its beak. The bark covering a small door peeled off, and the bird dropped a tiny gold key at the Princess's feet.

"Use this to open the door," said the bird. Once the Princess unlocked it, the bird added, "Now, my part is done. You must enter alone." And with that, it flew away.

The Princess stepped inside the tree, and the door closed with a click. She found herself in darkness, but it only lasted for a moment. She saw a bright light ahead and made her way towards it. There, she discovered a white rabbit with pink eyes and long ears.

"Get on my back if you wish to find the golden chain," said the rabbit.

"But you're so small," said the Princess. "How can you carry me?"

"If you want to find the chain, you must get on my back," replied the rabbit.

The rabbit stood up, and the Princess climbed onto its back. However, as soon as she attempted to settle, the rabbit transformed into a white fox and trotted away. The Princess held tightly to the fox's ears, uncertain whether it had grown larger or if she was now riding on a fox instead of a rabbit.

Eventually, they reached a river, and the fox stopped, instructing the Princess to dismount. She then realized that it was a fox with a beautiful, bushy white tail.

"You must pull my tail," said the fox to the Princess.

"You will have to pull hard if you want to find the golden chain. By doing so, I will regain my original form,

and you will discover something important in your hand."

The Princess, who was no longer surprised by unusual requests, grasped the fox's tail with both hands and pulled with all her might. As a result, the fox transformed back into a rabbit with its stubby tail and long ears. In the Princess's hand, she held the bushy white tail of the fox.

"Oh, dear! I am so sorry," said the Princess, examining the tail in her hand and then looking at the rabbit.

"Why are you sorry?" asked the rabbit.

"Because I pulled off your tail," replied the Princess.

"Oh, don't feel sorry for me," said the rabbit. "That was not my tail. I have my own. Keep that white, bushy tail, as you will need it."

"Now, my part is done, and I must be off. You must cross the river on your own. Goodbye."

With that, the rabbit bounded away, and the Princess stood there, waiting for someone else to assist her in crossing the river. However, no one came. She realized that she had to attempt it alone, even though she couldn't swim. As soon as her feet touched the cold water, fear began to grip her. Yet, she still tightly clutched the bushy white tail of the fox, and upon touching the water, she felt something warm in her hand. The tail had transformed into a beautiful, large white swan.

"Jump on my back," the swan said to the Princess.

The Princess mounted the swan's back, and they sailed towards a large rock in the middle of the river. Once they arrived, the swan instructed the Princess to pull

out one of its feathers. As the Princess did so, she once again held the bushy tail of the fox, all white and fluffy, while the swan disappeared.

The Princess found herself alone once more and wondered what to do next. Then she noticed a path leading into the rock, so she followed it.

Down, down the path she went, feeling as though she were descending into the depths of the earth. Suddenly, she found herself in a beautiful cavern, illuminated by a mysterious light filtering through the seaweed, moss, and crystal fragments that adorned its walls.

The floor of the cavern was covered in white sand, pink shells, mother-of-pearl rocks, and white coral. Among the rocks, little green bushes and pinkish shrubs grew, and something golden glittered in the sand.

The Princess heard singing, so she hid behind a rock, realizing that she might be in the garden of a magnificent and enchanting palace. She did not know how to explain her presence.

The singing grew closer, and as the Princess peeked out from behind the rock, she saw ten beautiful maidens with baskets of pearls on their arms. They were picking up the bright, glistening specks from the sand and placing them in their baskets. Once they finished, the maidens sat down in a circle, taking the bright gold bits from their baskets.

Each maiden took a piece of gold in her hand and, weaving back and forth between her forefingers and thumbs, they sang:

"Sisters, weave the golden chain, To hang around the lion's mane. Princess, bring the white fox's tail; Our silver boat must have a sail."

"The white fox's tail," thought the Princess. "I have it in my hand! Could it be that they are weaving the golden chain that will free my husband from the cruel witch's spell?"

She listened closely as they continued to sing:

"For the lion Prince, this chain we make, To break the cruel witch's stake. Come, Princess, with the white fox's tail; Our silver boat must have a sail."

Then the Princess knew what she had to do. Stepping out from behind the rock, she said, "I am here, beautiful maidens. Here is the tail of the white fox."

The maidens excitedly jumped up and surrounded the Princess.

"Oh, dear, kind Princess!" they exclaimed. "How wonderful of you to bring us the beautiful white, fluffy tail for our boat's sail. You must have gone through great efforts to acquire it."

"A fairy informed us of the cruel witch's actions on your wedding day, and we wanted to assist you. She told us that we could weave the chain from the gold found at the bottom of the ocean, as it was the only kind that could break the spell holding your Prince captive.

"The fairy also mentioned that you would want to give us something in return. We requested the tail of a white fox to serve as a sail on our silver boat. However, when the fairy informed us of the challenges you would face in obtaining it, we reconsidered. Sadly, she

said that wishes once made could not be changed, or else the spell that initiated them would be broken."

"I did not encounter any difficulties," the Princess replied. "I am truly glad that you desired the tail of the white fox, and I cannot thank you enough for this golden chain."

"We will place it in a small pearl box for you," said one of the maidens, taking out a beautiful little box made of mother-of-pearl and carefully placing the chain inside.

"Now, let us ferry you across the river to the forest," another maiden suggested, holding the box. "We can use our silver boat with the new sail."

"Come, Princess. We will take you across the river," they all chimed, leading her towards the river. At one end of the cave, the Princess beheld a beautiful river, and there, a silver boat adorned with mother-of-pearl trimmings awaited them.

Everyone climbed aboard, raising the large white tail as their sail, and they smoothly glided over the water. Before the Princess knew it, they arrived at the riverbank where the white fox had left her.

"Goodbye, Princess," bid the maidens. "We wish you endless happiness, and we hope you will cherish the chain and box as a remembrance of us."

The Princess assured them that she would never forget them and that she would treasure the box and chain above all her possessions.

With that, they set sail, leaving the Princess alone. She wondered if she could find her way back to the cottage where she had left her lion husband asleep.

"Put on these shoes," a voice said.

Beside her, the Princess spotted a fairy and two shoes adorned with tiny wings.

After putting on the shoes, the fairy said, "Now, hold the mother-of-pearl box tightly and close your eyes."

The Princess felt a light touch on her arm, signifying that the fairy had used her wand. When she opened her eyes, she found herself standing at the doorstep of her cottage, still clasping the box, but the shoes were gone.

Quietly, she opened the door and entered. The lion remained motionless. Taking the golden chain from the box, the Princess draped it over the lion's head, and in an instant, the beast transformed back into the Prince.

As the Prince opened his eyes and realized what had occurred, he rose, embraced the Princess, and kissed her. He declared that there was no one in the world as

good and beautiful as she was.

The Princess shared the tale of finding the chain and showed him the mother-of-pearl box. However, when they searched for the chain, it had vanished. Nevertheless, they cherished the box throughout their lives.

Upon seeing that his son-in-law was no longer a lion, the

King welcomed him back to the castle. They all lived happily together, and when the King passed away, the Prince and Princess ascended the throne.

