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King Frost and King Winter

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King Winter lives in a very strong palace near the cold North Pole; it is built of great blocks of thick ice, and all around it stand high, pointed icebergs and white bears keep guard at the gate. He has many little fairy servants and they are like their master, cross and spiteful, and seldom did any kind actions. King Winter is rich and powerful, but he keeps all his wealth so tightly locked up that it does no one any good; and what is worse, he often tries to get the treasures of other persons, to add to his money chests.

One day when this selfish old king was walking through the woods he saw the leaves thickly covered with gold and precious stones, which had been spread upon them by King Frost, to make the trees more beautiful and give pleasure to all who saw them. But looking at them did not satisfy King Winter; he wanted to have the gold for himself, and he made up his mind to get it. He went to his palace to call his servants to go do this. As soon as he reached the gate, he blew a loud, shrill note on his horn and in a few minutes his odd little fairies came flying in at the windows and doors and stood before him quietly waiting their commands. The king ordered some to go out into the forest, at nightfall, armed with canes and clubs, and beat off all the gold and ruby leaves; and he told others to take strong bags, and gather up all the treasure, and bring it to him.

"If that silly King Frost wants to waste all that gold and precious stones by putting it on trees, I shall teach him better," said the old king.

And as soon as night came, off they rushed to the forest, and a terrible noise they made, flying from one beautiful tree to another, banging and beating the leaves. Branches were cracking and falling on all sides, and leaves were flying around, while the sound of shouting and laughing and screaming told all who heard it that the spiteful winter fairies were at some mischief. The other fairies followed, and gathered up the poor shattered leaves, cramming them into the great bags they had brought, and taking them to King Winter's palace as fast as they were filled.



They were busy all night and when morning came, the magic forest of many-colored leaves was changed into a dreary place. Bare trees stretched their long brown branches around and seemed to shiver in the cold wind and to sigh for the beautiful dress of shining leaves so rudely torn from them.

King Winter was very much pleased, as one great sack after another was tugged in by the fairies and when morning came he called his servants together and said, "You have all worked well, my fairies, and have saved much treasure from being wasted; I will now open these bags and show you the gold. Each of you shall have a share."

The king opened a sack nearest, but to their surprise, not gold rushed out but a great heap of brown leaves, which flew all over the floor and half choked them with dust! When the king saw this he growled with rage and looked at the fairies with a dark frown on his face. They begged him to look at the next sack, but when he did so, it, too, was full of brown leaves, instead of gold and precious stones. This was too much for King Winter's patience. He tossed the bags one by one out of the palace window, and would have tossed the unlucky fairies after them, had not some of the bravest ones knelt down and asked for mercy, telling him they had obeyed his orders, and, if King Frost had taken back his treasure, they were not to blame.

This turned their master's anger against King Frost, and very angry and fierce he was. He gnashed his great teeth with rage and rushed up and down in his palace, until it shook. At last he made up his mind to go out that night, break down King Frost's beautiful palace, and take away all his riches.

When night came, he started out with all his fairies. Some were armed with the clubs they had beaten off the leaves with, and others had lumps of ice to throw at their enemy; but the king had been so angry all day that he had not told them what to do; also, he had left their sharp spears locked up. He wrapped himself in his great white cloak so that he look very powerful, and so they went on their way.



King Frost lived on the other side of the wood, and he had heard all the noise made by the winter fairies in spoiling the trees and had seen the next morning the mischief they had done. It made him very sorry to find the beautiful leaves all knocked off and taken away, and he determined to punish King Winter by going to attack his palace that night. He spent the day making ready and dressing himself and his servants in shining coats of ice-armour and giving each one several spears and darts of ice tipped with sharp diamond points. They

looked like brave little soldiers.

The two groups of fairies met in the midst of the great wood. After some words between the kings, their servants had a great battle. The winter fairies fought with their clubs and threw lumps of ice at the frost fairies; but their clubs were weak from being used so roughly the night before and soon broke; and when their ice-balls were all thrown away they could find no more. But King Frost had armed his servants well, and they threw their icy darts among the winter fairies. The trees, too, seemed to fight on the Frost King's side. The bare twigs pulled their hair and the branches ripped their ice clothes wherever they could. So the winter fairies had the worst of it and at last started off at full speed and rushed through the woods, not stopping until they reached the palace, and shut themselves in—leaving their king, who was too proud to run, all alone with King Frost and his fairies. They were not very merciful to him. They began to pull his cloak, screaming, "Give us your cloak to keep our trees warm. You stole their pretty leaves; you must give us your cloak."

Now, this was a magic cloak and had been given to King Winter by the Queen of the fairies, so when he felt them pulling at it, he wrapped it tightly around him, and began to run. After him flew the frost fairies, pulling and plucking at his great white cloak, snatching out a bit here and a bit there and laughing and shouting while King Winter howled and roared and rushed along, not knowing where he went. On they flew up and down the wood in and out among the trees,—their way marked by the scattered bits of white down from King Winter's cloak. When day began King Winter found himself near his own palace. He dashed his tattered cloak to the ground and rushed through the gate, shaking his fist at King Frost.

He and his fairies took the cloak. As they went home through the woods they hung beautiful wreaths of white down on all the trees and also trimmed the branches with their broken spears and darts, which shone like silver in the sunlight, and made the woods look as bright almost, as before it had been robbed of its golden and ruby leaves. Even the ground was covered with shining darts and white feathers. Every one thought it very beautiful, and no one could tell how it happened.

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