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The Courteous Prince

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Once upon a time, a handsome Prince fell in love with a girl who, while noble, was not of his rank. The King did not like that his son loved this girl, and His Majesty was determined to separate the lovers. He sent his highest servant to an old witch for advice. After nine days of thinking about the matter, the old witch muttered the following answer: "Her charming enchantment will remain until the day that courtesy wins."

"I'm not sure what the old witch means," said the King. "But if she can get this girl out of the Prince's sight, I can at least arrange a marriage with someone of his own rank."

And within a few days, the girl was gone. The Prince could not find a trace of her. He was very sad and declared that if he couldn't marry his true love, he would remain alone for his whole life. One beautiful day, towards the end of October, the Prince and a group of nobles went hunting. The dogs were quickly on the trail of a deer. The deer was so cunning and fast that the nobles lost sight of it. But the Prince, who was a very good rider, continued the hunt alone. He galloped for miles over the low hills until he came to a valley. There, the dogs saw the exhausted deer.

The Prince had won the hunt again. But it was getting dark in the valley and the evening sky looked menacing. He knew he was too far from the palace to go home and besides, he no longer knew the way. "If there were just a small sign of hospitality in this lonely place," he mused. "Maybe I'd better make the best of it and seek shelter in one of the rocky hollows."

He rode on through the darkness and in the distance, he saw an abandoned hunting lodge. "A dreary-looking place," sighed the Prince. "I'll have to do everything myself here. But I have my faithful dogs and my horse for company, and the hunting lodge will provide us all with a good meal."

He jumped off his horse and walked towards the old ruin. The creaking of the door gave strange echoes in the hall. The Prince stabled his horse in a small room and went with his dogs to the large dining room where he made a fire in the hearth so he could cook. While he waited for the meat to roast on the spit, he listened to the wind that made the old hunting lodge creak and rattle. His horse stamped its hooves on the ground and his dogs howled in a creepy way. The Prince sat in front of the fire and thought, "It's Halloween, the night when ghosts and witches celebrate. I'm still better off in this abandoned hall than outside."



He was about to start his supper when a strong gust of wind opened the door at the other end of the hallway and a long, thin, ghostly woman entered the room. She was dressed in gray garments that trailed on the ground. By the light of the fire, the Prince could see her hollow eyes and pale face. He was a brave Prince but this ghostly creature filled him with fear and horror. The dogs dropped their bones in shock and huddled close to their master. The gray ghost slowly approached the Prince and, pointing at him with a long pointed finger, asked, "Are you a courteous Prince?"

With a trembling voice, the Prince replied, "Of course, I will serve you. What do you wish?"

"Go to the heath and gather enough heather to make a bed for me in the tower room," said the ghostly creature.

It was a strange request, but the Prince quickly went, through the stormy night, to search for heather. He picked as much as he could carry and quickly returned to the hall where the ghostly figure was waiting for him. They climbed the half-destroyed staircase to the tower room, and there the Prince laid out a heather bed for her and put a beautiful blanket over it. Then she sent him away.

"May you sleep well," said the Prince courteously. Then he lay down by the fire, cold and tired, and fell asleep. When he woke up, the sun was shining through the windows. The Prince quickly got ready to leave because he remembered the ghostly visitor from the night before all too well.

"She undoubtedly left before the rooster crowed," he said. "I wonder if she left my beautiful blanket in the tower room. Actually, I need it on a cold autumn day. I'll go have a look."

He quickly ran up the half-destroyed staircase. When he reached the top, the door to the room opened by itself, and there, to his great surprise, stood his lost love.

"How did you get here?" gasped the Prince. "And where is the gray ghost?"

"Last night, I was the gray ghost," she said.

"And will you change shape again tonight?" he asked, frightened.

"That will never happen again," said the girl. "To separate us, an evil witch enchanted me, a spell that turned me into the hideous form you saw last night. But you broke her evil spell."

"Tell me how," said the Prince, whose face shone with happiness.

"The witch's spell could not be broken until a Prince served me, even though I looked terrible and frightening. Your courtesy broke the spell," said the girl. So the Prince and his true love rode back to the palace and were soon happily married. When the King heard of his son's adventure in the old hunting lodge, he said, "Now I know what that old witch meant with her words."



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