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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Enchanted Elm

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Once upon a time, there was a prince who wanted to go horse riding with his friends in the forest. The prince's horse bolted, and suddenly he found himself alone with his horse in a deserted part of the forest. Suddenly, the prince was startled by a wild growl at the back of the horse. The horse turned around and was scared out of its wits. A grey wolf was standing there, showing its mean yellow teeth. The horse wanted to take off in a gallop, but the prince leaned forward and hit the wolf with his whip.



"How dare you hit my pet," shouted an old witch in the distance. She approached and spoke to the prince, "You will regret this day." The prince went back to the part of the forest where he had lost his friends. But the path led back to the place where he had met the angry witch with her wolf. It looked completely different though. He began to get very thirsty. In the green field, he saw an old farmer woman. The prince asked her if she knew where he could find drinking water.

Now, this farmer woman was the angry witch in a different form. She told him where he could find a water source. Of course, he didn't know that the witch had just enchanted the water she was pointing him to. At the water source, the prince knelt at the edge and drank the water. He was about to mount his horse when a terrible pain shot through his body. His arms grew longer and turned into branches. His fingers became twigs. His feet shot roots into the earth. The prince had been transformed into a giant elm!



His friends had searched for the prince, but they couldn't find him anywhere. It took days of searching before they had to give up. A new prince ruled the land. Whenever people passed by his form, the prince would shout, "I am the prince! I am the prince!" But no one could hear him.

In the first year, the prince got new residents. Doves settled in the top branches of the tree. Although the prince couldn't talk to humans, it was different with trees and birds. He spoke their language.

On midsummer evening, the doves said to him, "Tonight the King of the Trees will visit the forest. He is tall, dark, and strong. He lives in a large pine tree in the north. On midsummer evening, he travels the world to see if everything is well with the trees." "Do you think he can help me?" asked the prince. "You could ask him," replied the doves.

Indeed, at twelve o'clock, the King of the Trees entered the forest. He was tall, dark, and stately. "Is everything well with you, my people?" asked the king with a voice as soothing as the sound of the wind in the branches on a summer day. "Yes, everything is fine," answered the trees. "Until next midsummer evening," said the stately king. Then the poor prince cried out, "Please stay a while! Even though I don't belong to your people, because I am a prince! An evil witch has turned me into a tree. Can you help me?"



"Unfortunately, my poor friend, I can do nothing," replied the king. "Do not despair, however. I travel all over the world. I will surely find someone who can help you. I will come back to you next midsummer evening." So the great elm swayed sadly with its branches, and the king set off.

The following year, in the spring, a girl visited the elm tree every day. She enjoyed seeking its shade and sitting against its trunk. The girl had been taken in by a lumberjack family after her father had passed away. Her father had once been a wealthy merchant, but he had experienced a lot of misfortune and couldn't leave anything for her. The lumberjack family was her only family, but they made her work hard every day.

The prince knew the whole story and felt a lot of sympathy for the girl. Eventually, he fell deeply in love with her. The girl felt peaceful and happy under the sheltered shade of the large elm. There was no other place where she felt so good.

Now, it was customary for lumberjacks to chop down trees in the summer to collect wood for the winter. The girl heard a lumberjack say that they were planning to cut down the large elm this time. "Oh, no, not the elm!" cried the girl. "Certainly," answered the lumberjack gruffly. "Tomorrow morning we'll chop it down. What are you crying about, foolish child?" "Oh, please don't chop down this tree," begged the girl. "Nonsense!" said the lumberjack. "I bet you're just

wasting your time under its branches. Tomorrow, it's coming down!"

That night, the girl came up with a plan to save the elm. She woke up early on midsummer morning and ran to the forest. There, she climbed up the large elm and hid in the top branches.

An hour after the sun had risen, she heard the voices of the lumberjacks. They gathered around the tree and brought out their sharp axes. The head lumberjack raised his axe in the air. "Let me deliver the first blow," he said to the men. Suddenly, a voice came from the tree top. It sang a song:



Lay down the axe and don't chop me, You'll regret it, so don't be so silly, What did you think of a quick death? Before the end of Midsummer's breath!

"There's a spirit in the tree!" cried the lumberjacks. And to the great annoyance of the head lumberjack, they all ran out of the forest at a brisk pace. At the moment when the head lumberjack himself was about to finish the job, the girl began to sing again. This time, it made the head lumberjack uneasy. Nevertheless, he tried it for the third time and heard the song again. Now, the man couldn't take it anymore and ran away in fear.

The girl stayed hidden in the tree all day. When it got dark, she fell into a deep sleep. Until shortly before midnight, she was awakened by an angry voice. It was the head lumberjack, who shouted, "Come down from the tree, you wicked, deceitful girl, or I'll chop it down immediately!"

The lumberjack had returned home and had not found the girl there. This made him suspect that it was her voice that had frightened his men away. As the lumberjack raised his axe to strike his first blow, he saw two beings coming towards him. It was the King of the Trees with his friend, the powerful wizard Gorbodoc. The lumberjack was rooted to the spot.

"Come down, young woman," said the King of the Trees. "You've done well. Your unhappy life is now a thing of the past. Only happy days lie ahead."

The girl climbed down from the tree and stood before the wizard and the king. Even in her shabby dress, she looked beautiful. Gorbodoc cast a spell, touching the trunk of the tree with his wand. In a flash, the great elm tree transformed into a handsome prince. "Welcome, prince," said the wizard. "The old witch will no longer bother you. I turned her into an owl on the way and gave her to the queen of Lanternland."

The prince was naturally grateful to the King of the Trees and the wizard. He regained his castle and married the girl. They lived happily ever after.



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