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The Porcelain Shepherdess

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On the mantelpiece of a farmhouse there once stood a small porcelain shepherdess. In one hand she held a gilded staff, and the other hand she held in front of her eyes as she stared into the distance, probably looking for her sheep. Her dress was red and green and trimmed with gold, and her boots were also gilded.

On the other side of the mantelpiece stood a porcelain flute player. He was dressed in red and white, and his flute was gilded, and his boots were red. He held his flute to his lips in a very grand manner, but his eyes were fixed on the little shepherdess. He had been in love with her for a long time, but she never gave him a glance.

Next to the flute player stood a porcelain cat, and one day the shepherdess heard the flute player sigh.

"Why are you sighing?" she asked him. He shook his head but did not answer. "I know why you are sighing," said the cat. "You are in love with the shepherdess, but she has never looked at you. Let me tell you what to do. First, you must stop looking at her. She knows that you are always staring in her direction."



The flute player shook his head again and said, "I cannot help looking at her. She is so beautiful, and I love her so much."

"But you must stop looking at her," said the porcelain cat. "There, on the middle table, is the flower girl. Look at her, play your happiest tune, and see what happens."

So the little flute player followed the porcelain cat's advice and began to play a lively tune. He smiled at the little flower girl, who smiled in return and curtsied to him. Then she began to dance, keeping time to his music. The flute player began to dance too as he played, and the cat moved her head from side to side. The little shepherdess tapped her gilded boot on the mantelpiece and watched the flute player. But he was staring at the flower girl, and for the first time, the shepherdess found the flute player quite pleasant to look at.

"I do not see what is attractive about that flower girl he is looking at," said the shepherdess to herself. "She has no color, she is as white as a rag, and even her flowers are white."

Then the little shepherdess gradually began to dance and walked to the end of the mantelpiece where the flute player stood. The cat rubbed against the flute player's leg.

"Look," she said, "but be careful, she is coming your way now."

His heart was beating very fast, but he continued to play his flute and looked at the little flower girl. But the shepherdess did not come closer than the middle of the mantelpiece, and she never looked at him once. Slowly it grew dark, and the flute player could no longer see the flower girl, so he stopped playing, and his heart was heavy again.



However, the porcelain cat wanted to make a match between the shepherdess and the flute player, so she went to the little shepherdess and asked, "Do you not think he plays well?"

"Who do you mean?" asked the crafty little shepherdess.

"The handsome flute player," said the cat.

"Oh, I haven't thought much about it," replied the shepherdess.

"Wouldn't you like to hear him play again?" said the cat. "It would cheer us up, the room is so dark."

At that moment, moonlight streamed in through the window and illuminated the room. The little shepherdess looked into the distance again and said that she would like to hear the music. So the cat trotted over to the flute player.

"She wants to hear you play," she said. "And I think you can win her over."

The flute player began to play soft music and walked over to the little shepherdess. The music was so sweet and sad that by the time he reached her, she was wiping away tears. He put his arm around her waist and told her not to cry, and that he would now play a cheerful tune for her.

"No, those are the tunes you play for the flower girl," she said, hanging her head. "I do not want you to play them for me."

"I did not play any tunes for the flower girl," he said. "They were all for you."

"But you were looking at her the whole time," said the now humble little shepherdess.

"But I was thinking of you," he replied. "Let us sit together at the end of the mantelpiece, and I will play for you. What do you want to hear?"

"Play something sad," said the little shepherdess, because like all girls, she wanted to cry when she was happiest.

"Look there," said the porcelain cat, as she curled up for a nap. "I am glad it is all settled now. The porcelain shepherdess would never have given in if he had not looked at the flower girl. These girls are strange creatures." And the cat closed her eyes, purring contentedly.

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