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The Prince and the Princess from the Forest

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Once upon a time, there were a king and a queen who had a son who was handsome and clever. When he turned eighteen, his father, the old king, fell very ill and could not get better. The queen and the prince were deeply saddened because they loved him dearly. The old king grew sicker and sicker, and on a beautiful summer day, while the birds sang, he died. The queen was so sad that she couldn't eat or sleep for many weeks. She just cried all the time. The prince feared that she would also die if she didn't eat. He begged her to come with him to a beautiful place in the forest, and eventually she agreed.

They traveled all day, and gradually the queen began to take an interest in the things they saw along the way. By evening, they had arrived at the forest. It was quite dark here because of the many trees, and they quickly lost their way. "If we have to sleep in this terrible place," said the queen, who was tired and afraid, "the wild animals will eat us." And she started to cry.

"Cheer up, mother," her son replied, "I have a feeling that good luck is coming our way." And at the next turn, they came to a cottage with a light burning.

"I told you so," exclaimed the prince. "You stay here while I go and see if I can get food and shelter for the night." They hadn't been able to bring much with them because they were traveling on foot, so they were very hungry. The prince went inside the cottage, but there was no one there and there was no food either. When he was about to leave, he suddenly saw a suit of armor and a sword hanging on the wall with a piece of paper attached to it. The paper said that whoever wore this armor and sword would be safe from all danger. The prince was very happy and immediately took the sword and armor off the wall and hid it under his cloak. He didn't want anyone to see what he had found. Then he went back to his mother, who was impatiently waiting for him.

"What have you been doing all this time?" she asked angrily. "I thought you had been killed by robbers."

"I looked around, but although I searched everywhere, I couldn't find anything to eat."

"I'm really afraid that we're in a robbers' den," said the queen. "We'd better leave, no matter how hungry we are."

"Maybe we can find another house on the way," said the prince. After a while, they came to another cottage with a light burning.

"Let's go inside here," said the prince.

"No, no, I'm scared," cried the queen. "We'll be attacked and killed! It's a robbers' den, I'm sure!"



The poor queen was very exhausted and eventually allowed herself to be persuaded to go inside. Besides, a storm was coming, but the prince, since he had the sword, was not afraid of anything. There was no one inside, but there was a table set with delicious food and drink and a few empty plates.

"This looks good," said the prince, picking up some of the strawberries from the golden dish. He had never tasted anything so delicious. But it was indeed a robbers' den and the robbers had just gone into the forest. When the queen and the prince had eaten enough, they felt very tired. The prince led his mother to a room with a large bed and said he would keep watch. When day broke, the queen woke up. The prince had decided to go into the forest alone first to see if he could find the way. When he was gone, the queen lit the fire and went to look in the other rooms. The rooms were beautifully furnished, but suddenly a hatch in the floor opened in one of the rooms. The robber chief came out of the hole and grabbed her by the ankles. The queen screamed loudly and begged him to spare her life.

"Yes, if you will promise me two things," he replied. "First, that you will take me to your country and crown me king instead of your son. Second, that you will kill him in case he tries to take the throne from me. If you do not agree, you will die."

"Kill my own son?" gasped the queen, looking at him in horror.

"Lie down on a bed and say that you have become ill. Also say that you dreamed that only beautiful apples from a nearby forest could make you well again and that you will die without the apples."

The queen shuddered at these words. She loved her son, but she was very afraid, and so she eventually agreed, hoping that something would happen to save the prince. Hardly had she made her promise than a footstep was heard and the robber chief hastily hid.

"Mother, I found the way in the forest so we will leave right after breakfast," said the prince.

"Oh, I feel so sick!" said the queen. "I cannot take a single step and there is only one thing that will cure me."

"What is that?" asked the prince.

"I dreamed," answered the queen in a weak voice, "that there is a forest where the most beautiful apples grow, and if I could eat a few of them, I would soon be well again."

"Oh, but dreams mean nothing," said the prince. "There is a wizard who lives nearby. I will go to him and ask for a spell to cure you."

"My dreams always mean something," said the queen, shaking her head. "If I don't get the apples, I will die." She did not know why the robber chief wanted to send the prince to this particular forest because many dangerous wild animals lived there.

"I'll go there, but I have to eat breakfast first," replied the prince.

"Hurry up, or I'll be dead before you come back," muttered the queen nervously. She now really believed that she was very sick and thought her son was not concerned enough. The prince went into the forest where all the dangerous animals were, such as lions, tigers, bears, and wolves. But instead of tearing him to pieces, the animals lay down on the ground and licked his hands. He soon found the tree with the apples, but the branches were too high to pick the apples, and the trunk was too smooth to climb up.

"What should I do now?" he said to himself. But when he turned around, his sword accidentally hit the tree, and immediately two apples fell down. He happily picked them up and left when a small dog ran up to him and began to pull on his clothes and whine.

"What do you want, little dog?" asked the prince, bending down to pet his soft black head.

The dog ran to a hole in the hill. The prince wanted to see what was in the hole but he couldn't fit, so he stuck his sword in to make it bigger and... the hole immediately became bigger. "Ha, it's nice to have a magical sword." And he bent down and crawled through the hole. The first thing he saw was a beautiful princess, who was bound to an iron pillar with an iron chain.

"What brought you such an unfortunate fate?" he asked, surprised, and the princess replied, "It's not very useful to tell you that, otherwise my fate will become yours."

"I'm not afraid of that. Tell me who you are and what brought you here," begged the prince.

"My story is not long," she said with a sad smile. "I'm a princess from Arabia, and the twelve robbers who live here fight each other over who will be my husband."



"Shall I save you?" asked the prince. And she replied, "You cannot save me. First of all: how can you break an iron chain?"

"Oh, that's easy enough," and the prince cut the chain in half with his sword, and the princess was free. The prince wanted to take her by the hand, but she recoiled. "No, I dare not," she cried. "If we encounter the robbers in the corridor, they will kill us both."

"How long have you been here?" asked the prince.

"About twenty years, I think," said the princess.

"Twenty years," exclaimed the prince. "Then you had better keep your eyes closed, for seeing the daylight might hurt your eyes. So, you are the princess of Arabia, whose beauty is famous all over the world. I am a prince."

"Can you come back with me to Arabia to marry me now that you have saved my life?" asked the princess. "My father will be old, so you can become king soon."

"I must live in my own country," said the prince. "But in a year, I will come to marry you. Then the princess took a ring off her finger and put it on his. The names of her father and mother were engraved on it, as well as her own. She gave the ring to the prince as a reminder of his promise to marry her in a year.

"I will die before I give it up," said the prince. "And if I am still alive in a year, I will come. I have heard that on the other side of this forest, there is a port from which ships sail to Arabia. Let us hurry there."

When they reached the port, they said goodbye, and the princess boarded a ship heading to Arabia. When she arrived in her country, there was great joy because her parents never expected to see her again. They told them about the prince, and they were very happy.

"I would still rather he were here now," said the king. "A year is a very long

time."

When the princess was gone, the prince suddenly remembered why he had gone into the forest and hurried to the house of the robbers. The robber chief could smell the apples from afar, because he had a very large nose, and he said to the queen, "That's a strange man. If he went into the forest, the wild beasts must have eaten him unless he has magic power. If he has, we must take the magic away from him."

"No, he has no magic," replied the queen. But the robber did not believe her. "When he comes back, tell him that you are well again and prepare food for him. Then tell him that you dreamt he was attacked by wild beasts and ask how he managed to escape."

When the prince arrived, he said, "How are you, mother? Here are your apples. Now you will quickly feel better and be ready to come with me."

"Oh, I am already better," she said. "And look, here is your dinner, then we will leave."

As he ate, she said to him, "I had a terrible dream while you were away. I saw you in a forest full of wild animals, and they ran around you and growled fiercely. How did you manage to escape them?"

"Oh, that was just a dream!" laughed the prince.

"But my dreams are always true," said his mother. "Tell me."

The prince thought for a moment but then decided to reveal the secret. "I found this sword and armor in the first house in the forest and as long as I wear them, nothing can hurt me. This saved me from the wild beasts."

"How can I thank you enough?" exclaimed the queen. But as soon as the prince was gone, she hurried to tell the robber chief. When the robber chief heard this, he made a sleeping potion which the queen was to give to her son. She gave her son the sleeping potion and he drank it, but he found that it had a strange taste. Immediately he fell asleep and the robber chief came in and took his sword and armor.

"These things belong to my brother," he said. After he had both of them in his hands, the thief woke the prince up.

"I am your master now," he said. "You can choose to die or I can send you blindfolded into the forest."

The prince shuddered at these words. Suddenly he turned to his mother: "Did you have a hand in this?" She denied it, but he knew she was not telling the truth.

"As long as there is life, there is hope, so take me back to the forest."

Then the robber blinded the prince, gave him a stick and some food and drink, and drove him into the forest, hoping that the wild beasts would kill him. He had no sword and armor left for protection.

"Now we will return to your land," said the robber chief.

The next day they left, and as soon as they arrived home, they married and the robber chief became king. Meanwhile, the poor prince wandered through the forest, hoping to find someone who could help him and maybe employ him because he had no money and no home. There had just been a big hunt in the forest and all the wild animals had hidden themselves, so nothing harmed him. One day, just as he thought he was about to starve to death, he came to the port from which ships sailed to Arabia. A ship was just ready to depart when the captain saw him.

"Here walks a poor blind man," he said. "This is undoubtedly the work of the robbers. Let's take him to Arabia. Will you come, good man?" he asked the prince.

The prince was very happy with these kind words and said he would gladly go. When they arrived in Arabia, the captain took him to the public baths. As he was being washed, the princess's ring slipped off his finger and was then found by the bath attendant. The man showed the ring to a friend who lived in the palace.

"This is the princess's ring, where did the ring come from?" he said.

"The ring fell from the finger of a blind man," said the man. "He must have stolen it, but I think you should give the ring to the princess."

That evening, the ring was returned to the princess and she cried out in joy: "It's the ring I gave to my fiance," she said. "Bring me to him immediately."

The bath attendant found it strange that the princess would be engaged to a blind beggar, but he did as she asked, and when she saw the prince, she cried: "Finally, you have come. The year has passed and I thought you were dead. Now we will get married immediately." The king was very surprised by the sudden arrival of the prince, but when he heard that he was blind, he became angry.

"A blind man cannot succeed me."

But the princess had always gotten her way, and eventually the king gave in. He was not satisfied, but nothing could be done. It was time for the princess to get married. On a beautiful evening, the prince and princess went into the garden and sat under a tree. Two ravens were nearby in a bush, and the prince, who understood bird language, heard one of them say: "Do you know that tonight is midsummer night?"



"Yes," said the other.

"And do you know that part of the garden that is known as the Queen's Bed?"

"Yes."

"But perhaps you do not know that whoever has poor eyesight or no eyes must bathe their eye sockets in the dew there, at night, between twelve and one o'clock.

That was good news for the prince and princess. The young man begged the princess to take him to the small patch of grass where the queen often took her nap, the Queen's Bed. When it was between twelve and one o'clock, he bathed his eyes in the dew that fell there and he could see just as well as before. "I can see you again!" he cried to the princess and looked at her in amazement.

"I do not believe it," she replied.

"Hang your handkerchief on a bush. If I find the handkerchief, you must believe me," he said. And she did, and the prince went straight to the handkerchief.

"Yes, you can see," cried the princess. "The bed of my mother, the queen, has given you back your sight." The princess walked to the bench, and when it was almost dawn, she fell asleep. Suddenly the prince saw a small golden lamp that hung around her neck with a chain and shone brightly. When the prince unfastened the chain, the lamp fell to the ground. Before he could pick up the lamp, a hawk flew in and grabbed the lamp, flying away with it. The prince chased after the bird, but he couldn't find it and he lost his way. When the princess woke up, she immediately went looking for him. But she too lost her way. The robbers in the forest captured her and brought her back to the cave from which the prince had rescued her.

Meanwhile, the hawk continued to fly with the lamp. The prince wandered through the forest, trying to find his way back to Arabia. One day, he met twelve happy young men who were looking for work.

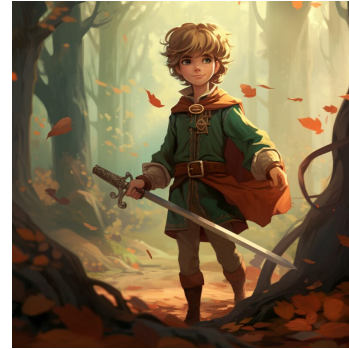
"I'll come with you, if I may," said the prince. And they replied, "The more, the merrier."

Then the prince went with them, and they all traveled on until they met an old troll.

"Where are you guys going?" the troll asked.

"We are looking for work," said the men.

"Then come work for me," said the troll. "There will be plenty to eat and drink, and you don't have to work hard. If you can answer three questions at the end of the year, I will give each of you a bag of gold. If you can't answer the questions, you will turn into beasts."



The young men thought this was a good plan, so they went home with the troll to his castle. "You have everything you need here," said the troll. "You only have to take care of the house, because I am leaving and won't return until the year is over."

When the troll left, the young men had an excellent time singing, drinking, and not working. Every day the table was set with delicious food and drink for them, and when they finished, everything was magically cleaned up by invisible hands. Only the prince, who was sad about his lost princess, ate and drank little. One day, while he was in his own room, he heard the voice of the old troll talking with another troll under his window.

"Tomorrow," he said, "the year is up."

"And what questions will you ask?" the other asked.

"First, I will ask how long they have been here. They don't know, the young fools! Secondly, I will ask what is shining on the roof of the castle."

"And what is that?"

"The lamp that I stole from the princess while she was sleeping in the garden."

"And what is the third question?"

"I will ask where the food and drink come from every day. I steal it from the king's table, but they don't know that."

The next day the troll came in.

"Now I will ask my questions," he said. "First of all, how long have you been here?"

The young men had been so busy drinking and partying that they had completely forgotten the agreement, so they remained silent.

"One week," one finally said.

"Two months," guessed another. But the prince answered, "One year."

"Right," the troll answered. But the second question was harder.

"What is shining on the roof?"

The young men guessed the sun or the moon. But none of them really knew.

"May I answer?" the prince asked.

"Yes, certainly," the troll answered, and the prince spoke.

"The lamp that you stole from the princess while she was sleeping in the garden." And the troll nodded again.

The third question was even harder.

"Where does the food you have been given come from?"

None of the young men could guess.

"May I say it?" the prince asked.

"Yes, if you can," the troll answered.

"It comes from the king's table," the prince said.

Now they could take the bags of gold and leave. The young men left in such a hurry that the prince was left behind. Later they met an old man on the way who asked them for money.

"No, we don't have any," they answered.

So they hurried on, and the prince followed them slowly.

"Sir, do you have a coin for a poor man?" the old man asked.

And the prince gave him a bag full of gold coins.

"I don't want it," said the old man, who was actually the troll they had just left. "But because you are so generous, here is the lamp of the princess, and the princess herself is in the cave where you found her, but I don't know how you will save her without the magic sword."

Now the prince knew where she was and could go to rescue her. He dressed up as a merchant and traveled to his own city where his mother, the queen, and the bandit leader lived. He had a large number of kitchen pots made of pure gold by the goldsmith. When the pots and kettles of pure gold were ready, the prince put

them in his basket and went to the palace where he asked to speak to the queen. The queen heard about the golden kitchen pots and came to see them right away. Meanwhile, the prince snuck quickly into her bedroom to grab the armor and sword without his mother noticing.

"These are beautiful items," she said, "how much do you want for them?"

"Name your own price, Your Majesty," replied the prince.

The queen really didn't know and said she wanted to wait for her husband. The prince bowed and waited silently in a corner. When the bandit leader returned, the queen called out, "Come and look at these beautiful items." But when the bandit leader entered the room, the prince touched him with the magical sword and he fell to the ground.

"Maybe you recognize me now, mother," said the prince as he took off his merchant clothes. "You better repent for all the wrong you have done to me, otherwise your life won't last much longer."

"Oh, forgive me," she cried. "I couldn't help it. I was so afraid."

The prince forgave her. The evil king had to take off his clothes and was sent into the woods where the wild animals tore him to pieces. The prince sent the queen back to her own land. Then he went to the cave where the princess was chained up and, with the help of the magical sword, he rescued her again. They sailed by ship to Arabia where they got married and ruled over both countries and lived happily ever after.

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