



Ririro

READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Seven Enchanted Princes

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Long ago, a girl named Honoria lived with her grandmother in a small cottage beside an orange tree. They were very poor, and one morning the grandmother sent Honoria into town to sell the oranges.

"You must bring home at least three vintens," she said — for vintens were the smallest coins in the land. "Don't come back without them."

Honoria went from door to door, but everyone in town seemed to have oranges already. Nobody wanted a single one. She walked until she had left the last houses behind her and found herself in the cool green forest.

There, half-hidden among the trees, stood a small house with its door wide open. On the table just inside lay three vintens, shining in the light. Honoria knocked and called out, but no one answered.

"I'll leave some oranges and take the coins," she said to herself. "That isn't stealing — it's a fair trade."

She set out her finest, juiciest oranges on the table and tucked the three vintens safely away. Then she turned to leave — and found the door shut fast. She pulled and rattled and tried every window in the house, but every one was locked as tight as a vault.

All day long she searched for a way out. There was nothing to eat in the house, and she was grateful for her basket of oranges. As the sun went down she heard footsteps crunching on the path outside. She was so frightened she scrambled under the table and pulled her skirts around her.

A key turned in the lock. Seven dwarfs came in, each carrying something for supper, and they lit a candle and began to cook.

"Who left us all these fine oranges?" asked one.

"A kind friend, surely," said another. "Someone who wished us well."

Honoria stayed hidden, thinking she would slip away in the morning. But she fell so deeply asleep beneath the table that she never heard the dwarfs leave at dawn, and when she woke the door was locked again.

She looked around the little house. There were dishes from last night's supper

stacked unwashed, beds unmade, floors unswept. The dwarfs had left bread and cheese on the counter. Honoria shrugged, rolled up her sleeves, and set to work.

That evening she hid under the table again. When the seven dwarfs came home and held up their candle, they stopped and stared.

"Our dishes are washed!" cried one.

"Our beds are made!" cried another.

"Our floors are swept — everything is in order!" said a third. "We've never looked so neat and clean!"

"Someone must still be here," said one of the dwarfs, peering about.

"If it's a man, we'll welcome him as a brother," said the seventh dwarf, who had been quietly looking in every corner. "And if it's a woman, we'll welcome her as a sister."



Honoria crept out from under the table. The seven dwarfs joined hands and danced around her in a ring, laughing with delight.

"A big sister!" they cried. "We have a big sister to look after us!"

Honoria could see how much it would hurt them if she said she must leave. And so, telling herself it was only for a little while, she stayed.

Weeks passed, then months, and Honoria found that she was happy. The dwarfs brought home good food and warm fires, and they brought her dresses the colour of the forest — mossy green and deep autumn brown — and a little hat with red berries on the brim that she loved more than anything she had ever owned. There was no mirror in the house, so when she wanted to see how she looked she ran to the brook and gazed at her reflection in the water.

One afternoon the king rode through the forest with his hunting party. Honoria was outside in her green dress and her berry-hat, and the king thought she was the most beautiful young woman he had ever seen. He reined in his horse and spoke to her.

"Do you live here alone?"

"No," said Honoria. "I keep house for my seven brothers."

"What a fine housekeeper you must be," said the king warmly. "Will you marry me and come to live in the palace?"

"I must ask my brothers first," Honoria replied. "Come back tomorrow and I'll

give you my answer."

That night she told the dwarfs what the king had asked. A chorus of dismay broke out around the table.

"How can we spare our big sister?"

"Who will make the beds?"

"Who will sweep the floors?"

"Who will wash the dishes?"

"Who will sew on our buttons?"

But the seventh dwarf, who had been thinking quietly while the others fussed, spoke at last. "I have always known our big sister would marry someday. Why shouldn't she marry the king? We must not be selfish."

One by one the others fell silent. "We must let her go," they agreed.

They had only one condition. Before the king kissed Honoria, he must say these words: *By permission of the seven enchanted princes*. And he must remember them himself — Honoria could not remind him.

The next day Honoria told the king, and the wedding was celebrated with great joy.

But on their wedding day, when the king leaned in to kiss his bride, Honoria burst into tears. He had forgotten the words entirely.

She turned her face away and wept, and when the king tried again she wept harder still and pulled away. No amount of coaxing helped. The king grew bewildered, then worried, and at last — to his great shame — he began to think his new queen had lost her mind. He had her locked in a quiet cell beneath the palace, and after a time he married again.

Now Honoria had one loyal friend in the palace, a sharp-eyed servant who had never believed for a moment that the queen was mad. When Honoria whispered the story of the magic words through the cell door, the servant's eyes went bright with a plan.

She went to the new queen and said: "Queen Honoria, locked below, is far cleverer than you are. She can take a sword, cut off her own head, set it back on her shoulders, and be perfectly well."

The new queen drew herself up. "I've never tried it, but if Honoria can do it, so can I."

She picked up a sword — and that was the end of her. The king, grieving,

married a third time.

The servant paid a visit to the third queen. "Queen Honoria below is more clever than you. She can cut off her hand and reattach it, good as new."

The third queen would not be outdone. She took up a sword and cut off her right hand — and fainted on the spot. The wound turned bad, and she grew very ill. Before she died she managed to tell the king what the servant had said.

The king summoned the servant in a fury. "What do you mean by spreading such stories about Queen Honoria's powers?"

"I wanted you to remember," said the servant simply, "where you first found her."

And all at once the king did remember. He remembered the forest, and the mossy green dress, and the girl who had said she must ask permission of her seven brothers before she could become his queen.

By permission of the seven enchanted princes.

He ran to the cell beneath the palace and threw open the door. He said the words — and kissed his queen. Honoria was just as lovely as the day he had first seen her, though a little pale from her long time in the dark.

And in the forest house, the seven dwarfs stood up straight and looked at their hands in wonder. They were dwarfs no longer. They were seven young princes, tall and bright-eyed, freed at last from the enchantment that had held them.

"Our dear sister Honoria did not forget us after all," they said — and laughed for joy.

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