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The White Cat

Madame d'Aulnoy

Once upon a time, there was a king with three sons. One day, he called the three princes to him and addressed them:

"My dear children, there will come a day when I am too old to perform my duties as king properly. One of you will take over these tasks from me. Now, I do not want to choose which one of you that will be. Therefore, I have a task for you. When I retire to the countryside in a few years, the company of a small, beautiful dog would please me. Whoever finds the smallest and most beautiful dog will inherit my place on the throne."

The three princes were very surprised. But because it gave the younger brothers a chance to be king that they otherwise wouldn't have had, and the oldest was too polite to argue with his father, they accepted his special task.

And so each went his own way.

The two older brothers had many adventures, but it is the youngest who this story is specifically about.

The youngest prince was a handsome, well-mannered, and funny young man. Along the way, he caught sight of a magnificent castle. The castle was so splendidly decorated with gold, precious stones, and the finest porcelain that he was surprised at every turn. But his greatest surprise was when he discovered that the inhabitant was a graceful, small, white cat that greeted him in human language:

"Welcome, prince, the queen of the cats is very pleased to meet you."

The prince was very impressed with her. She was served by other cats who could also talk. They were all very polite and spoke very refined.

The prince looked at the medallion of the white cat. There was a small portrait painted on it of a very handsome young man. When the young prince asked about it, she showed it to him up close. To his surprise, the portrait looked like a mirror image of himself. He was about to ask about it, but suddenly saw an enormous sadness in the cat's eyes. So, he decided not to ask.



The prince enjoyed himself so much in the castle that he almost forgot about the task his father had given him. He had not been able to find a cute dog yet, and the year was almost up.

"I will help you," said the white cat. "I will give you this acorn. Take it to your father. When you break it open, the tiniest, cutest little dog will come out."

The young prince wanted to take the white cat with him to his palace, but she firmly refused the idea. The prince would miss her terribly, as he enjoyed her company immensely. So, he promised to come back to her after he had brought the dog to his father.

Of course, the youngest prince would have won with this dog over his brothers, but the king sent the three princes on a new mission. This time, they had to search for a very fine fabric called "mousseline," which should be thin and fine enough to be threaded through the eye of a needle.

The three brothers went separately on their quest for the delicate fabric, but not the youngest prince. He hurried back to the castle of the white cat. He asked for her help because what the king wanted seemed like an impossible task. But the white cat promised to help him. Her cats would spin the finest silk to weave the most delicate fabric.

The prince had become attached to the white cat. But every time he asked her about her past and her existence, she replied:

"Dear prince, do not ask me that. Invent everything you want, but I cannot tell you."

After a year, the fabric was ready. It was stored in a walnut. The prince said goodbye to the white cat again and went on his way to his father.

The two oldest princes brought the most beautiful and finest muslin that could be threaded through the eye of a needle. In the youngest prince's walnut was a

seed that consisted of several smaller seeds. In the smallest seed was an enormous amount of beautifully embroidered muslin: a fabric so fine that it could pass through the eye of any needle. It was certain that the youngest prince had also won this competition.

But the king was still not satisfied. A third task was given. He said:

"Dear children, a king needs a wife by his side. Whoever returns home with the most beautiful princess as a bride will become king."

The three princes set out again. The youngest hurried back to the castle of the white cat.

He said, "This time I must marry. The son with the most beautiful bride will become king."

The cat said, "I will help you again, be sure of that."

The prince and the white cat amused themselves every day of the year until the day arrived when the prince had to return home.

On that day, the cat took a sword, gave it to the prince, and said, "Dear prince, now you must cut off my head."

The prince was in shock and said, "My dear Blanchette (that's what he called the cat), how on earth could I cut off your head?"

But she insisted and managed to persuade him to do it.

With trembling knees and shaking hands, he took the sword and... he could not bear to watch what he was doing, but when he carefully lifted an eyelid, he saw the sweetest, most beautiful young woman he had ever seen in his life. She had come out of the body of the white cat! Immediately afterward, all the other cats in the castle also regained their human forms.

"Now I can finally tell you about myself," she sighed, her eyes shining with love and joy.

She told the prince that she was the daughter of a king who ruled over six kingdoms. Her mother was very fond of traveling and when she heard about a fairy castle, she wanted to go there. She took the princess, who was only a few weeks old at the time, with her. In the castle, the queen heard the fairies talking about the fruit that grew there. It was said to taste so fantastic, but it was forbidden to eat it. But the queen was determined to taste the fruit. One day, she was offered some of the fruit in exchange for her baby. The queen was so enchanted that she agreed. She got the fruit and the next day she took the baby with her to escape from the fairy castle. But the fairy caught the baby and so the little princess was locked up high in a tower. There, she fell in love with a prince

and they made plans to escape. But it didn't work out and the fairies killed him and turned the princess and her servants into cats. She would only be free if she found a man who looked exactly like her deceased lover. The rest of the story has already been told.

The young prince took his young princess to his father's castle and of course, she was the most beautiful bride anyone had ever seen. But the youngest prince declined the crown because his bride already had access to six kingdoms. So she gave one of her kingdoms to each of the brothers and the father, and they all got married that day. And they all lived happily ever after!

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