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The White Doe

Madame d'Aulnoy

A long time ago, there lived a royal couple who wished for a child, but it seemed impossible. The queen sat by the fountain, pondering about how it would be to have a daughter. Suddenly, a crab appeared and said, "Your Majesty, if you wish, I can take you to the palace of the fairies where your wish will be granted."

The queen followed the crab and arrived at a beautiful fairy castle. The fairies told her that she would have a daughter named Desirée. Shortly after, a baby princess was born. The queen called upon the fairies and thanked them a thousand times until the door opened, and the crab appeared. "Ungrateful queen," cried the crab. "You made no effort to inform me, the Fountain Fairy, about the birth of your child. For your ingratitude, she shall not see the daylight until her fifteenth year. The slightest ray of sunlight will cost her life."

The fairies immediately used their magic to erect a tall tower without windows or doors. There, the princess was locked up and lived by candlelight in a place where the sun never shone. When the princess turned fourteen, a portrait of her was painted and sent to different kingdoms. Prince Guerrier fell in love with the portrait. His father, the king, approved of the marriage and sent a wealthy young man named Bécafigue to the princess's castle.

Bécafigue was a good friend of Guerrier and brought gifts and a portrait of Guerrier to the castle. Desirée's parents were thrilled about the planned wedding but asked the prince to wait three months until she turned fifteen. Guerrier was disappointed that the princess did not come with Bécafigue. He couldn't eat or sleep and became dangerously ill.

Desirée had two bridesmaids, Giroflée and Longue Epine. Giroflée was loyal to Desirée, but Longue Epine was jealous. She was friends with Princess Noire, who had wanted to marry Guerrier herself. Desirée looked at the portrait of Guerrier every day and had many conversations with it. One day, Desirée heard that Guerrier was seriously ill with longing to see her. She decided to visit him and got into a dark carriage that could only be opened at night.

Princess Noire and Longue Epine executed a wicked plan. In broad daylight, Princess Noire cut open the roof of the carriage. For the first time in her life, Desirée saw daylight. Shortly after, she transformed into the shape of a young white deer and fled into the forest.



Giroflée chased after her, while Longue Epine put on Desirée's clothes to impersonate the princess. When Guerrier saw the princess, she looked nothing like the portrait. "We have been deceived!" cried the prince. As a result, she and Princess Noire were imprisoned. Helplessly, Guerrier left the castle with Bécafigue to calm down. For days, the men wandered through a dense forest. Desirée wandered around in the same forest but was unrecognizable as a deer. Not for Giroflée. She knew that this must be the princess. She also noticed that the deer could not speak, but understood everything that was said.

A fairy from the fairy castle appeared to them at night. She couldn't break the spell, but could shorten the time of the transformation. At night, Desirée would have her own shape, but during the day, she would be a deer. The fairy brought them to a little cottage of an old woman. They were given a room to sleep.

Guerrier and Bécafigue also knocked on the same cottage door. The friendly old woman answered and they asked if she had any food. "You better stay here tonight," the woman said. "It can be very spooky in the woods at night." And so the men were given a room next to the princess's. Guerrier couldn't help but notice the white deer. Every day he tried to chase after it, but every evening it disappeared into thin air.

One day Guerrier had chased the deer for so long that he fell down exhausted. While he lay there, the deer approached and recognized him from the portrait of Prince Guerrier. The prince woke up in shock, and the princess ran away. "Stay here, dear deer!" he heard himself calling out. "I would take you with me everywhere," was the last thing he heard. The next day, Guerrier saw the deer again and, to prevent it from running away, he shot an arrow into its leg. "I'm sorry, dear deer," he said tenderly and took it back to the cottage. There he tied up the deer and treated its wound with special herbs.

Giroflée hurried over. "Sir," she said politely, "this deer belongs to me, and I've had it for much longer than you have." The deer obediently followed her in a way that left no doubt in Guerrier's mind. To his great surprise, Giroflée took the deer into the cottage where he himself was staying. Bécafigue recognized Giroflée. He had seen her at Princess Desirée's castle. "Our rooms are separated by only a thin wall," Bécafigue realized, and he made a hole to peek through. There he saw the princess sitting, and Giroflée was tending to her arm.

"Let me die," he heard the princess say, "death would be better than the life I'm leading. Being a deer all day and unable to tell him of my sad fate." The prince stood up and knocked gently on the door. Giroflée opened it and Guerrier threw himself at Desirée's feet. Their joy was great, and they spoke to each other all night until daylight entered the room. But this time Desirée did not transform and remained her own beautiful self.

The marriage of Prince Guerrier and Desirée was celebrated together with the marriage of Bécafigue and Giroflée. At Desirée's request, Princess Noire and Longue Epine were released from prison.

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