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The Satyrs

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There was a queen whose husband was dead, and her only son was everything to her. One day a lady — in truth, a fairy — came to the palace and asked if she might stable her horse there for a while.

"No," said the queen. "I cannot have other people's horses mixed in with mine."

The fairy turned to go, and walked straight into the prince coming back from hunting with all his suite. In her fury at the queen's refusal, she turned the prince and every man with him into satyrs — half human from the waist up, half goat below, and walking upright like men.

The queen's grief was beyond description. The fairy, not without a flicker of satisfaction, told her there was one way to break the spell: a maiden would have to consent to marry the prince as he was, without knowing he was a prince. Until then, he must live in the stables.

The queen spent years trying. She approached noble families, merchant families, peasant families. Every time there were only fresh refusals and humiliations.

Now it happened that the grounds adjoining the paddock belonged to a duke. One day the duke's daughter was walking in her garden when the prince saw her and began beckoning to her eagerly, along with all his satyr companions. She stared at the monstrous sight and fled.

But the next day she came back, curious. And the day after. Each time, the prince would ask: "Do you wish me well?"

Each time she said no and ran away.

Her mother told her firmly to stay away from such a creature. She kept away for a full month.

Then curiosity won. She slipped back into the garden. The prince and all his companions beckoned to her again, and she went near.



"If you would just say you wish me well," said the prince, "it would give me such happiness. And if you won't — I shall dash my head against that wall and put an end to everything."

He was entirely in earnest. His eyes were bright with tears, and all the other satyrs gestured and pleaded around him.

"Poor creature," the girl thought. "There surely can't be any harm in just saying it once."

"Yes," she said. "I wish you well."

The fairy appeared at once and lifted the enchantment from the prince and all his companions. And when the duke's daughter saw what a fine, handsome prince she had just promised herself to, she found she didn't regret a word of it.

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