



# *A Quiet Boy*

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Humor, Kids, Magic

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Once upon a time and long ago there lived a man and a woman who were very much in love so, naturally, they got married. They were very, very happy together but for one slight problem: They were painfully, hopelessly, incredibly, horribly poor. They lived in a hovel and lived on bread and water (if they were lucky). The fact is, work was scarce in their kingdom at the time and neither one could find a good job. So imagine their dismay when they discovered that they were going to have a baby.

Now, of course, under normal circumstances, having a baby is a wonderful thing and the young couple had always wanted to have children. Nevertheless, it was an extra mouth to feed and they were barely surviving themselves. How in the world would they be able to take care of a child?

Well, one day the young wife, whose name was Marie, was in the forest gathering berries when she heard someone crying out for help. She followed the voice to its source, which turned out to be an old witch, complete with a pointy hat and a nose to match who was crying out, "Help! A monster has got me! It's going to eat me! I can't get away! Help!"

"A monster hasn't got you," said Marie. "Your cape is just caught on a tree branch."

The witch turned around and saw that Marie was quite right. She extricated herself from the tree and said, "Thanks for your help, dearie."

“I didn’t really do anything.”

“Well, you answered a cry for help. That’s enough for me. Let me do something nice for you in return. I’m a witch you know, so I can do magic!”

Marie thought that perhaps this could be a chance to help herself and her family. She told the witch about their poverty and how they were worried about taking care of the child she was going to bring into the world.

“Hmmm, that’s tricky,” said the witch. “You’d better come back to my place so I can work this out.” So Marie followed the witch back to her house in the woods. She watched as the old woman flipped through spellbooks and threw seemingly random ingredients into a bubbling cauldron. Finally, she dipped a cup into the mixture and offered it to Marie. “The thing about magic is that there’s always a cost,” she said as Marie drank the potion. “You never get anything without giving up something else. Since you and your husband have so little to give up, I had to get kind of creative.”

“Well, what’s going to happen to us?”

“You will have a son. A beautiful boy. And before he is even ten years old, he will raise your family out of poverty and into great wealth and comfort.”

“That sounds wonderful!”

“But he can’t talk until he does.”

“What?”

“He will make you and your husband rich beyond your wildest dreams, but he will not speak a word before then.”

“If he can’t talk, how is he going to make us rich beyond our wildest dreams?”

“Heck if I know! This is a fairy tale!”

A few months later, Marie did give birth to a beautiful baby boy who they named Declan. And he cried and giggled and fussed and cooed, but he never spoke. He grew from a baby into a boy and didn’t talk. He could

read and write just like other boys his age, but he spoke not a word.

Despite this malady (or, perhaps, because of it), Declan was well-liked in the village. He was a pleasant enough boy, always had a friendly smile and a wave for everyone, helped others, shared his toys, things like that. But still Marie would often hear her neighbors whispering among themselves “What a shame he can’t talk.” “Poor thing.” “What a tragedy.”

One fateful day, Princess Kelly herself rode through the village. Little Declan thought she was the prettiest girl he had ever seen so he gave her a flower.

“What a fine gentleman you are,” said the sixteen-year-old princess. “And what is thy lordly name?” It was explained to her that Declan couldn’t speak, but instead of showing pity, she smiled and said, “Well, there are lots of things I can’t do. Play the piano, talk to cats, spell ‘chrysanthemum.’” Declan smiled and he was even more excited when she promised to cherish the dandelion he had given her all her life before she rode back to the palace.

Now, the good news is that the job market had improved slightly by this time and Declan’s father, Byron, was working as a shop assistant. It still didn’t pay much, but at least the immediate danger of starving had been alleviated. One day Byron brought home some vegetables from work so Marie could make stew for the family.

“Honey, you forgot the potatoes,” said Marie.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” said Byron. “I’ll go back right away and...”

“No, you’ve had a hard day. You rest. Declan,” she said, calling her son, “go to Daddy’s store and bring back some potatoes. Show them to Daddy’s boss, he’ll know to take them out of his wages.”

Being a good boy who did as he was told, Declan nodded and went to the store. As he was walking down the street a strange looking old man with an ugly cloak and a white beard ran up to him and said, “You! Boy! Take this. Don’t open it, just keep it with you and don’t give it to anyone but me, okay? Thank you!” And with that, the old man vanished.

A moment later a knight on horseback came riding up and stopped when he saw Declan. “You! Boy! Did you see a wizard pass this way?” Declan said nothing, of course. “Well? Did you see him? Which way did he go?” Declan

said nothing. "If that's the way you're going to be, you're under arrest!" He grabbed Declan and carried him off to the castle where he was brought before the king himself.

"Sir Damian," said the King, "what is the meaning of this? Why have you brought this boy into the throne room?"

"I believe he has information about the wizard who stole the emerald, sire. But he refuses to talk."

"Is this true?" the King asked Declan. "Do you know anything about the wizard?" Declan said nothing. "Well, speak up, boy! Why won't you say anything?"

"Because he can't, father."

Princess Kelly had just entered the throne room. She had not forgotten the sweet boy who had given her a flower. When you are a beautiful princess, people are always giving you gifts and flowers are one of the most popular choices. But somehow that worthless little dandelion from a poor, mute child meant more to her than the biggest bouquet from the richest prince.

Once the situation had been explained to the King, he softened considerably. "I'm sorry if you are frightened, young man," he said to Declan, kindly. "But, you see, something awful has happened. Look at my crown." Declan did so and saw that it was covered in fine gems and jewels...all except one spot where there was a gaping hole as if a jewel had been removed. "That empty spot once held the Royal Emerald, the symbol of my family's reign. Two days ago, a wizard came to the castle, claiming that he wanted to serve as my Court Magician. Instead, he stole the emerald and disappeared. Sir Damian evidently thought you were hiding something when you wouldn't answer his questions."

The King gave Declan a few gold coins as an apology and Princess Kelly offered to give him a ride back home. Once they arrived back at his house, however, they found the wizard waiting for the boy to come home. Princess Kelly was confused and a little angry, but the wizard explained everything:

"Yes, I stole your father's emerald, but only because I needed it for a magic spell I was working on. I knew he'd never part with it willingly, so I had to take it. I had every intention of giving it back when my work was done. Then that knight started chasing me and I had to get rid of the emerald. I just handed it off to the first person I

saw.”

“Which happened to be Declan, right?” Declan nodded, then reached into his pocket and took out the little bag the wizard had given him containing the Royal Emerald. “Just what is this magic spell of yours anyway?”

“It’s a spell that turns cookies back into cookie dough.”

Well, of course, Princess Kelly was completely in favor of this as an idea (as who wouldn’t be?) so she let the wizard take the emerald, on the condition that he return it as soon as he had succeeded. The wizard thanked the Princess and Declan and disappeared into the night.

Three days later, the wizard again came to see Declan. “It works!” he said, excited. “My spell works! And here is the emerald, as I promised. I thought maybe you could return it to the king. I don’t think he’ll be too happy to see me. Thanks for everything, Declan!”

Declan (and his mother and father, at their son’s silent insistence) went to the palace and were, of course, admitted right away to the throne room where the King and Princess were seated on their respective thrones. Declan walked right up to them, opened his hand and gave back the emerald.

“The Royal Emerald! You found it! You wonderful boy, you found the Royal Emerald! How can I ever repay you? Oh, sorry, I forgot you can’t answer.”

“Well, maybe I can answer for him,” said Kelly. “I happen to know that Declan and his parents live in a tiny hovel and barely have enough to get by. Maybe there is something we can do about that?”

“There most certainly is! I have a country estate I never use. You can move in at once. Of course, the estate comes with a title. Duke Declan has a nice ring to it. Let’s see, what are dukes making nowadays? Five hundred thousand gold coins per year, isn’t it?”

Marie and Byron couldn’t believe it! They were going to live in a country estate and be rich! They’d never be poor and hungry again! And just when they thought they couldn’t possibly be any happier:

“Thank you, your majesty,” said...Declan?

Yes, it had all happened exactly as the witch said. At nine years old, Declan had raised himself and his parents

from back-breaking poverty to the lap of luxury and he had done it all without saying a word. Now he could finally speak! And he became very good friends with Princess Kelly, a friendship which lasted them all the days of their lives. And when you are a duke making five hundred thousand gold coins a year and living on a beautiful estate and your best friend is a princess...well, you can't really help but live happily ever after, now can you?

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