



Anastasia and the Peacock

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Animals, Magic

Once upon a time there was a young girl who lived happily in a castle with her parents and two brothers. She spent all of her time inside the castle as she was easily frightened and the only things she enjoyed about the exterior of the castle were the birds that circled overhead. She was called Anastasia and her brothers Constantine and Julius. As their parents were very busy, they were watched over by an old maid who seemed to never age any more than she already had. One day, their father called them together and sat them down. He said to them, "You are all above the age of eighteen and I love you very much, but for the sake of the kingdom you must begin searching for a marriage." The brothers had been waiting for this and were overjoyed as they both already had brides in mind, and not long after the castle was filled with the sounds of two new couples being embraced into the family. Anastasia, however, did not share this sentiment and when confronted with her brother's new brides she began dreaming of a way to escape the same fate. She asked her maid what she should do to escape, but was only told to bide her time until the moment when she knew what she truly was. This was enough to content her for the time being so she did nothing to pursue a suitor, leading her father to begin sending potential candidates to serenade her at her window in hopes of persuading her to change her mind. Years passed with no suitors tempting her outside of the castle, so her father resorted to more drastic measures. He thought, "If only I could get her to leave the castle, she would only see the endless possibilities of life and finally embrace the concept of marriage!" So he began scheming up ways to convince his daughter to walk out the gates. First he conducted a fake attack on his son Julius outside her window, hoping to lure her out to help him. The old maid overheard these plans and warned Anastasia so she merely raised the alarm and calmly watched the proceedings from her window. He next instructed Constantine to dress up as if he was

from the Far East and come to the castle as a traveling exotic birds salesman. The next day, he arrived in disguise with a menagerie of beautiful parrots and birds of paradise, enrapturing his sister with their beauty. After three days pretending to be someone he was not, he made as if to leave the castle, greatly distressing Anastasia. However, during his time there the maid had been watching, and when he took off his disguise to sleep at night recognized him as Constantine. Accordingly she warned Anastasia, and when he invited her with him on the road she politely declined his offer. Her father had anticipated this however, and had scoured the globe for the one bird that could tempt her outside the castle premises. Brought out in a magnificent cage was a peacock from India, with its iridescent eyes and colorful plumage. This was unlike anything Anastasia had seen before, and upon first sight she was filled with a feeling unlike any she had experienced before. She felt a connection to the bird unlike that even for her own family, and was reminded of the words of her maid. She walked to the cage, each step making her heart pound faster. She reached the golden bars and reached out her hand, and as soon as she made contact with the peacock's feathers was transformed in a bright flash of light into an even more beautiful peacock. Her family was astonished and began searching for the source of this witchcraft, only to be stopped by the old maid. She told them how Anastasia had longed for an escape from marriage, and how out of her pity had placed an enchantment allowing her charge to be transformed into the most beautiful bird in the world. Her father wept, as now he could see his actions had transformed his little girl into an entirely different creature. He vowed to never again force his children to do anything, and built a haven for birds, including his daughter in the center of the castle, where they lived happily ever after.

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