



The Apprentice and the Cat

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Animals, Magic

Once upon a time in a kingdom far away lived a peasant boy named Sebastian. Sebastian lived in a quiet village with his mother, a seamstress, and stepfather, a shoemaker who never much cared for Sebastian. One day the queen called on Sebastian's mother to fit her for a dress. So she set out for the castle, which lay on the other side of an enchanted forest inhabited by an evil sorcerer. When she did not return after several days, all the people of the village assumed the sorcerer had killed her.

Sebastian continued to live with his stepfather, for the boy could not bear to leave the house his father and mother had built when he was just a baby. However, the stepfather soon became resentful of the boy and insisted that Sebastian repay him for taking care of his mother and he for so many years. So soon after, he became the stepfather's apprentice at his shop near the edge of the enchanted forest. Before long he was a far superior shoemaker than his stepfather. This infuriated his stepfather very much. So he began giving Sebastian more and more tasks until Sebastian was running the shop by himself, while the stepfather collected the profits, which were far more than what he had ever made by himself. Sebastian became so busy that he moved into the small workroom at the back of the shop. The room was very plain with only a workbench, a cot and a small window.

One afternoon as Sebastian was working he heard the pattering of small feet on the windowsill and looked up to see a cat perched there. "Well hello," said Sebastian not expecting a response. "Hello to you too," responded a soft sweet voice. "Who said that?" Inquired Sebastian; standing up to peer past the cat. "It's me, right in front of you," replied the cat waving its tail back and forth. Sebastian fell back into his seat in disbelief but managed to stammer, "A... talking cat?" "Yes, I am both of those things my child: a cat and talking." Said the cat playfully.

Sebastian remained silent, so the cat continued. "Why are you working here all by yourself? Have you no help?" Inquired the cat. Sebastian had relaxed enough at this point to answer. "My stepfather has me working here making shoes to repay him for taking care of my mother and I." This agitated the cat. "He said what?" Exclaimed the cat as it leapt from the window into the center of the small room. In a flash of light and a puff of smoke the cat transformed into a middle-aged woman that Sebastian soon realized was his mother. Sebastian leapt from his seat to embrace his mother who was just as happy to see him.

After their joyous reunion Sebastian's mother explained that she had encountered the sorcerer in the woods and he had turned her into a cat. Fortunately, she was able to escape. Unsure what to do she continued on to the castle to ask for help from the Queen's magicians. After months of trying, the magician's were finally able to turn her back into a human. They then gave her the ability to transform back and forth as she pleased, to insure she could safely slip by the sorcerer to return home. She then enlightened the boy as to why she was angry with his stepfather. She explained that the stepfather had tricked Sebastian, for he had made almost nothing working as a shoemaker and it was she who had provided for them. "Where is that scoundrel now?" said Sebastian's mother with an exasperated look on her face. "He should be here any minute. He always picks up the day's earnings before heading to the tavern." Replied Sebastian. Just as he said this, in came Sebastian's stepfather who stopped dead in his tracks at the sight of his presumably deceased wife. Sebastian's mother, who was now fuming, picked up a shoe and chased him all the way out of the village into the enchanted forest. Now content that he was long gone the mother returned to her son. The two made their way home and lived happily ever after.

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