



The Black Cat and The Faerie

Queen

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Animals, Fable

“I say, I’ve got a story to tell you. So, come round all you little boys and girls for I have a marvelous story to tell.”

Of course, once the magical cat started to speak, it caught the attention of all those who dared listen to his wispy little voice. As the crowd assembled into an audience, the cat smiled a wide sort of smile that stretched all the way to the tips of his ears.

A gasp sounded all around as the feline lifted his paws toward the sky. The clouds responded with flurries of snow but these snowflakes soon got bigger and bigger. Now, this was quite usual given that it was the peak of the summer season. Some muttered with worry that the frost would harm their crops. The narrator of this tale did not concern himself with such things for he was just a cat.

“Do not worry! Do not worry!” He called out to the crowd. “I did not gather you all here today to gawk at my dominion over the weather although I do concede that it is quite a feat for a feline such as myself. Many a great wizard have failed to do as I have just done with the greatest of ease.”

A few listeners shivered but despite the cold, they stayed to listen to their four-legged soothsayer.

“Now, this story begins in the dead of winter – in a blizzard no less...!” The cat clapped his paws together and a howling gust of wind tore through the plaza making visibility impossible. But while they could not see the teller

of this tale, they could most certainly hear his voice carried upon the wind.

And so, we begin...

Once upon a time, there was a black cat – me – trudging through a valley of snow. It was so frigid that I was frozen through and through. Still, I marched on like a good little soldier going to war.

I do not know what I hoped to find but clearly, I was on the search for something. And, at last, I found it in the form of a castle. Shelter! Shelter! A refuge from these blasted winds hellbent on striking me dead with a spear made of frost.

To my dismay, the bridge was drawn. At the time, human language was not yet in my arsenal of skills so all I could do was meow a feeble meow that was snuffed by the wind's howl.

Of course, it came to no surprise when my cries fell on deaf ears. Would no one rescue this poor cat's life? The answer was 'no' as everyone was much more concerned with remaining warm by the hearthside. No one dared to venture into a cold winter's night – or so I thought

My eyes flashed with a silvery light like two miniature moons cast upon either side of my nose. Through them, I perceived the frozen moat below but not its thickness. Could it support my weight or would one step send me plunging into icy depths?

With my body turning into an icicle, time was certainly not on my side. To stop and contemplate my situation would result in certain death. So, I threw caution to the wind and slid down the slippery slope made even slicker by the layer of snow. Halfway down my decent, I lost my footing and tumbled the rest of the way.

The ice cracked on impact but it did not splinter apart. Slowly, I rose to my feet and skidded to the other side. There, I craned my neck, preparing myself for the climb to come. I had little energy left but I had to make it last or I could mark my grave at the bottom of this unknown moat.

My hind legs protested but still, they propelled me from ledge to ledge until I reached the very top. And that is where my strength finally failed me. All I could manage was to drag my claws along the wooden drawbridge.

The sound was less than that of a mouse. I had no faith that anyone would hear me.

That is, until the prince – yes, the royal prince – stuck out his head and saw me there half buried in a blanket of white.

“What might this be?” He exclaimed. The prince did not wear much in terms of clothing but this was of his usual fashion. For you see, dear listener, this boy was born on the first day of winter – or Yuletide as some might say – but I know nothing of this Yule and his tidings. “A playmate to be sure – one of the four-legged kind – but I hardly mind.” At once, I noticed his strange way of speaking like each sentence was secretly a song.

I did not have long to consider his speech before he scooped me up in his arms and cradled me against his chest.

“I will warm you right up, oh yes, I will.” He ran through the maze of corridors that constituted his castle. His footsteps echoed through the silence. Where was the life of this place? The knights? The jesters? Even the ladies-in-waiting were nowhere to be seen and anyone who has been to high court would know that they travel in a pack, petticoats ready to be brandished as weapons. I dare ye if you call yourself brave to stand in front of a group of women looking to be betrothed.

But I digress from the tale because I still cringe in memory. That night, the prince held me so close to the flames that he singed off most of my fur. I was warm alright but I was hideous for weeks to come. To my luck, it did not matter for we never left the castle and so I never found a mate worthy of impressing.

The years ticked by and our little prince wanting to become a powerful sorcerer one day spent his time mulling over spells that never obeyed him. Instead, all his would-be magic funneled into my body where it manifested into special abilities. First, the ability to talk which pleased the prince very much because it finally afforded him the opportunity to have a conversation with someone – or more specifically, somecat. And it pleased me very much because I’m rather fond of the sound of my own voice as you can probably tell.

Then came the ability to make flowers bloom. It’s a rather useless ability but at least I can make any room colorful and if I had a lass to impress, she’d never be wanting for a pretty rose.

Like those who have had contact with the sorcerer’s stone, I can turn semi-precious metal into pure gold. It

doesn't do me – a cat – much good but I suppose it's a nifty little trick to have especially if I'm ever required to buy my own freedom. Not even a feline is safe from the gallows.

And, of course, I can control the weather as you have all witnessed this morning.

But what does all this have to do with my tale, you might ask.

Well, good listeners, every great adventure starts with some magic...

When the prince was 18 years of age, I finally asked him the question I had been wondering from the very start.

“Why do you dwell here alone, dear prince? Ten years have come and gone but I have never seen a single soul stir within these walls.”

“The Faerie Queen has taken them all.”

“The Faerie Queen?” I cocked my head to the side. “Tell me more.”

“She is a beautiful creature, more beautiful than you could ever imagine with porcelain skin and hair the color of roasted chestnuts. I have only seen her drawing in books but even there, her eyes sparkle with the deepest shade of azure. Nothing in this world can compare and so, I have made up my mind. She is to be my wife!”

“But where is this Queen and does she not have a King to call her own?”

The prince did not answer the question outright. Instead, he started for the east wing, a part of the castle that had remained untouched during my stay. I followed at his heels as he swatted away cobwebs that hung high overhead. A few times, mice dashed from one room to the other. I had half a mind to catch them by the tail and have some fun with them. Perhaps I could use my magic to turn them into golden statues, now isn't that a thought?

Daydreaming as I was, I did not notice the prince turn into a room.

I looked up and he was gone. Perhaps he had finally succeeded in a magic spell of his own. That theory was dashed as soon as I backtracked and saw him standing inside a room, back to the door, face to the window. He

squinted against something round held between his thumb and pointer finger. Upon closer inspection, it became obvious that it was nothing more than a ring.

It was simple and silver. Nothing about it was particularly eye-catching or extravagant. As I said, it was just a ring – one you might give to your wife one day – or perhaps you have already given her a similar ring which she wears every day to show her faithfulness. Whatever the case, trust me when I say that it was a bore to look at.

“When my brother received an invitation to attend her Winter Ball, this ring was included. It shows the way to her kingdom. The journey is treacherous, they say, but I am determined.”

“Why then is the ring here? Did your brother not go to the Winter Ball?”

“His heart belonged to another and he could not betray her in favor of the Faerie Queen as fair as she might be. The Queen took great offense to his decision and dropped an evil curse on this land. I am the only one spared and I take it as a sign that she wants me to journey there one day and take her as my wife. Will you not come with me, my feline companion?”

“My debt to you is long overdue. So, I will journey with you to these unknown lands and lend a paw when the opportunity arises.”

He smiled then and it was the first time I had seen his lips curve in such a way. Typically, he wore a mask of concentration as he poured over his countless spells and incantations. During all other occasions, his expression was somber, muted by the silence of his castle.

Suddenly, as he slipped the ring onto his finger, there came a flash of light. This light manifested itself in the shape of a sword. Its edge was impossibly sharp, capable of splitting a page in two. The handle was wrapped in cords of leather making it a comfortable thing to hold.

His grin deepened as he swung the weapon, twisting his body into the motion. The sword collided with a nearby vase. The glass shattered on impact and if not for my cat-like reflexes, I would have been bathed in a shower of shards.

“Come. With this, no foe can stand in my way. I will accomplish what my brother was too cowardly to do himself and I will restore this kingdom to its former glory, mark my words!”

And so, we set off into the dead of winter. I kept the snow at bay but it blasted around the bubble I had cast. Beyond it, we could see nothing but the ring guided us in the right direction like a compass pointing north.

“How much farther, you figure?” The prince asked.

“I do not know.”

We continued on and on and on.

There was no end in sight but still, we carried on.

Finally, we arrived at a small cave. “We should rest here. We do not know what to expect and so, we should gather our strength as best we can.”

“I have a feeling that the castle lies just up ahead.”

“Do not assume. It is better to be safe than sorry. I have been caught in a winter storm before and I have no intention of doing so again. If my magic fails us, we will be frozen within the hour. Is that a risk you’re willing to take?”

“Yes.”

He plopped me onto his shoulder and off we went. He marched for hours upon hours. Each footstep sunk deeper and deeper into the snow. He had started to shiver.

Fatigued, I could no longer stave off the snow in such a manner. It trickled in where my spell had weakened. That snow swirled around us and chilled us down to the core.

“We should return to the cave!” I advised although I had no idea where it was. The world was nothing but a directionless vortex of white.

“We are almost there...” The prince could barely see the ring on his finger and yet, he followed it.

To my disbelief, a giant castle loomed in our wake. I was starting to think that the whole thing was nothing more than a tall tale.

The drawbridge had been lowered, acting as an invitation for us to step inside. As soon as we did, the prince collapsed. His forehead was burning up with a fever. I looked around but there was no one to call on for help. I tried to speak but all that escaped my lips was a soft ‘meow’ that I hadn’t heard in a decade’s time. It seemed my magic was connected to my master’s vitality. Without him, I was nothing more than a house cat doomed to hunt mice for the rest of his life.

“Meow!” I scratched at his face but there was no response. He didn’t even flinch.

Just then, a beautiful woman dressed all in white emerged from the woodwork. She had a soothing smile on her face that calmed my nerves. Without thinking, I rubbed against her legs and purred. I tried to stop but it was like a spell had been wrapped around my fur, making me a prisoner inside my own body. She reached down and scratched just behind my ear. It was enough to put me into a deep slumber.

When I next awoke, I was alone. It was the peak of the summer season and after a day’s travel, I ended up here. So, dear listeners, what is the moral to my story? Why tell it at all? Well, that’s for you to decide because my lonely assistant has just absconded with all your coin! Oh, the folly of lending someone your ear!

Again, a collective gasp emerged from the audience as they turned and spotted a white feline with chestnut colored ears holding a pouch of cash between her sharp set of teeth. She seemed to wink before disappearing into the night.

And so, our devious narrator ran away with the mate he never claimed to have.

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