



# *The deer hunter*

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Action/Adventure, Animals, Magic

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Once upon a time, in a land far, far away, lived a happy royal family of a brave king, his beautiful and kindhearted queen, and their little princess. They were held in the highest esteem by all people of their kingdom, young and old, and they were thought to be the perfect example of a family living in harmony. The three of them did everything together, from drawing and singing to walking to the farthest ends of their kingdom in search of adventure. In fact, the family's favourite thing to do was going on long walks in the wilderness together.

One day, as the three of them were walking in the wilderness, admiring the beauty of nature, they came across a small path they had never seen before. Adventurous as they were, they followed it all the way through. On both sides of the path there were deer looking at them, dazed and confused yet not scared enough to run away. The path led to the most beautiful waterfalls they had ever laid eyes on. It was the happiest moment of their life.

A few days later, it appears that fate had different plans for them. The queen had become terminally ill. The news spread like wildfire and people across the kingdom were devastated. The king could not bear to live life without his queen, and the princess could not imagine life without her mother. During all that hardship, the main maid of the palace was there to help with more than just her chores as a maid. She stepped up and consoled the young princess to the point that she significantly alleviated her pain and helped her cope with what was inevitable. It was too late for the king, though. His heart was now calloused. He blamed everything and everyone for his family's misfortune. He blamed the palace's physicians that they couldn't do anything to save her. He blamed his gods for letting his love slip away. The only person whom he didn't blame was the maid.

Father time slows down for no one and heals all. That was the case with the princess, who had accepted the maid as her stepmother shortly after. It was the same for the people of the kingdom who celebrated their new queen, especially knowing that she started as one of them. The same could be said about the king, but life on the whole had become different. His time with his princess was relished as always, but there was no more singing and drawing. There were no more walks in the wilderness for the king and the princess. His heart was not in the same place and now the only thing that made him feel better was something that his daughter despised: hunting for deer. His beauty was taken from him and now he felt it was only fair that he took away some of nature's beauty.

The king loved his daughter dearly, and perhaps now more than ever. The initial three had become two and the love they had for each other was stronger than ever. The stepmother, on the other hand, even though she was appreciated by both, was always seen as a replacement. She was the one trying to fill the shoes of the queen, not so much a queen in her own right. Of course, that wasn't what people were saying nor feeling; it was what she thought. And how she felt. And what she thought mattered. And she felt she wasn't loved. Not long after, her initial love had turned vile and she simply couldn't stand feeling redundant. She wanted the king's undivided attention and that simply couldn't happen. Not as long as the princess was around.

It was one of those mornings when the king said he would set out to hunt. They had argued so many times over this that none of them would look each other in the eye when that topic was brought up. The princess could not take it anymore and burst into tears. It was the first time that the king actually realized how traumatic his newfound escape route was to his daughter and for the first time he was ready to give it up. The stepmother, however, insisted that he went out hunting as he was planning and that she would deal with the situation. The

king had come to trusting her enough with his daughter and left. Little did he know, though, that the new queen had always hated the princess's mother ever since she was the maid. She always believed that it was she whom the king should have fallen in love with, and jealousy led her hand to poison the unlucky queen. It was the perfect plan. Everyone trusted her, no one suspected her; least of all, the young princess.

"Don't cry, my child" said the evil stepmother. "Drink this. It will make you feel better" and the poor child did exactly as she was told. When she woke up, she was all alone. Tall trees surrounded her. She couldn't feel her arms. Her head felt heavier than ever. She struggled to get up. Deer stood all around her. Suddenly, she felt the hostile presence of a deer hunter nearby. She didn't know how or why, but she quickly galloped away with all the other deer, which were not afraid of her anymore. Her antlers got tangled up in the forest's unforgiving wild branches and she felt her father drawing his bow and aiming at her. Her senses were heightened, her heart beat fast, and her antlers were harder than the branches. The arrow whizzed by her as she broke free.

The other deer were just as scared as she. As she was trying to run away from danger, she couldn't help but wonder what her stepmother had given her. The hunter's footsteps were drawing closer. She was trapped! Suddenly, she heard a familiar voice. It was a voice she hadn't heard in years, one whose timbre she could not mistake. "Follow me" said a little fairy, and the poor creature did as she was told, as always. "This way, my child" said the voice, and it was at this moment that the young princess knew that her mother had turned into a fairy. She desperately tried to call her name but to no avail. After all, she was just a deer. The fairy queen finally led her down a path she had seen before. The hunter king was still chasing them; his footsteps were becoming increasingly louder. A few jumps and hops later, there they were. The fairy had led everyone to the waterfalls the family held dearly in their hearts. The king froze. His eyes teared up and his knees just gave. He knelt to the ground and whispered "is that really you, my child?" The young deer walked closer and her father held her in his arms like her mother did. "Forgive me" he said and the curse was lifted. The antlers were gone. The girl was back. The family was united again.

When they walked back into the palace, the stepmother froze. This is not what she had expected. This wasn't possible! But love is stronger than all kinds of malevolent, dark magic. Love is light, and light always prevails over darkness! She knew then that the spell was broken. She told the king everything and begged for her life, like a coward. She had nothing noble in her heart left anymore. It was all over for her. The princess, just like her mother would, graciously asked her father to spare her and the king expelled her from his kingdom. Then, he picked up his bow and threw it into the fireplace. The deer hunting days were behind him. Love had

prevailed.

The princess couldn't help but wonder what life would have been like had her mother not intervened that day in the forest. Even though that was the one day in her life she would not wish to relive other than her mother's passing, it was also probably the last time she would get to hear mother's voice again, and that, to her, was simply priceless. "I'll always live inside your heart" whispered the fairy to her child as she flew away, free. It was time for everyone to move on.

The king and his daughter had a lot of catching up to do after all that lost time. It was time they brought the family back together, living, experiencing, tasting, exploring. The dear queen, the mother, the person who cared most about them, would always be with them in their hearts and their travels. The two of them started walking in search of new adventures. The deer were not afraid anymore, and everyone in their kingdom lived happily ever after.

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