

The Green Castle

Once upon a time in a land far away, there lived a little boy in a small cottage at the edge of a dark forest. And he lived all alone with no father and no mother to take care of him. He had no sister or brother, not even any little friends to play with except for the squirrels, the birds, the chipmunks and the deer that came to his cottage. They were truly his friends, and he called them each by name.

No one knew where he had come from or whom he belonged to or why he

lived all alone in the cottage at the edge of the forest. The people in the nearby village told bad stories about him and said there must be an evil curse upon him, else why would no one know where he came from, and why would he never grow up. And they would have nothing to do with him.

He fed himself from berries and nuts that he found in the forest around his cottage. But sometimes when he got very hungry, he went into the village to look for something to eat. But the people shouted angry words at him and threw sticks and stones and told him to go away.

Sometimes he found a pair of shoes or a jacket or some trousers that the villagers had thrown away, and he took these with him back to the cottage. That was all the clothes he had, and he was sad because

nobody cared for him or wanted him around.

One day when he went into the village to look for food and clothes, a huge man with white bushy hair and grey bushy eyebrows threw a stick at him, wiggled the hairy wart on his nose, ran and kicked him and said, "Get out of here you little boy, and go back where you belong, because we don't want you here."

So the little boy went home to his cottage at the edge of the forest. He rolled up his little jacket in a roll to put under his head for a pillow. Then he lay down on the cold hard board that he used for a bed and pulled some old ragged clothes over him for a blanket to keep him warm. He felt very, very sad and said, "This is not where

I belong. I would like to be where I belong.”

After a long while he went to sleep, and he dreamed that he went on a long, long journey and that he walked to the top of a hill and looked down on a long green valley. At the end of the valley was a high mountain, and on top of the mountain was a great castle. It had golden turrets reaching into the sky, the whole roof shone with gold, the windows sparkled as if made of polished silver, and the walls were like green fire. And in his dream he said to himself. “That is nice. I would like to belong there.”

In the morning when he woke up he remembered his dream and said to himself, “This is not where I belong. Nobody wants me here, and I can’t get anything to

eat or anything to wear in this place. And this cottage is not warm, and I don't have any bed to lie in except for these hard boards, and I don't have a blanket to cover myself except these ragged clothes. I might as well be hungry and cold and sore some place else as here."

So he started out walking. He walked all day not knowing where he was going, just putting one foot in front of the other, plodding along into the day. And when it came evening he looked for a hollow tree where he could crawl in to sleep, and he slept a good sleep until morning, when he got up and started walking again.

Again he walked all day long into the evening until he found another hollow tree to sleep in. The next morning he got up and walked again, and he was hungry.

And as he walked along, he found a tree hanging over the path with golden fruit hanging from its limbs of a kind he had never seen before. He took some and ate, and it was good.

And he walked on through the morning until he came to a small village. But as he walked from one street to the next, the village seemed empty, without a soul anywhere. Finally he saw an old woman sitting by the road crying. He felt so sorry to see her cry that went over to her and said, "Lady, Why are you sad?" And the lady said, "I dropped my basket of cheeses and the basket broke and the cheeses fell all over the ground, and they all got dirty, and now I don't know what to do."

The little boy said, "Lady, I can help you." and he took a stout piece of string

out of his pocket and tied the basket together until it was good like new. He gathered up the cheeses one by one and wiped them off so they were clean and put them back into the basket. Then he gave them all back in the basket to the old lady.

And she said, "Little boy, you are kind. Please take a cheese with my thanks, so at least you will have something to eat. So the boy thanked her and walked on through the village.

Soon he saw an old man sitting by the side of the road and looking sad, and he went over to the man and said, "Sir, why are you so sad?" The old man said, "I fell down and broke my basket and my loaves of bread scattered all over the road, and now I have no way to carry them, and they are all dirty, and I don't know what to do."

So the little boy said, "Sir, I can help you." From his pocket he took another piece of string. And he picked up the basket and found the place that was broken and tied the string around it and made it good like new again. Then he wiped off the breads and put them back in the basket and handed it all back to the old man and said, "There you are, Sir. Now please don't be sad anymore."

The man said, "Thank you, little boy," and he took a bread and gave it to him and said, "Now please take this as my thanks and have yourself a good breakfast." And the boy was happy.

So he walked along and sang a song of morning and sunshine. As he walked out of the village into the countryside, he found a tree hanging down over the road

holding beautiful red fruit of a kind he had never seen before, and a fresh little creek ran by, and he said, "This is where I will have my breakfast."

He sat down and ate some bread and cheese and took some fruit down from the tree and ate, and it was all good. As he ate, the birds and the squirrels gathered around and watched him, and he thought, "They look like my friends from the cottage, and they look hungry, too." So he broke the bread and the cheese into little pieces and scattered them on the log where he sat, and he said, "Now come, little friends. You will share breakfast with me this morning."

When all the bread and cheese were gone and all the birds and squirrels were happy, he smiled and said, "That's good."

Then he stood up and took down some more red fruit from the tree and started out walking again.

He walked on, and soon the road came to the top of a high hill. When he looked down the other side, he saw it was the same valley he had seen in his dream, stretching far out into the distance, and at the other end was a high mountain reaching up to the sky, and at the top of the mountain was a great green castle with walls like green fire and a roof like burning gold, and the windows shone like silver.

And he said, "That's nice. That is where I would like to belong" And as he walked down into the valley, he found by the side of the road a little rabbit whose foot was cut and bleeding. He stopped and picked it up and looked at it and took

its paw and dipped it in some water and washed the foot and made it clean and said, "Dear little rabbit, soon you can hop again." Then he put it down gently and walked on.

Soon he saw a magnificent deer caught in the thornbush at the side of the road with a long wicked thorn through its leg, and the leg was bleeding. He unhooked the thorn out of its leg and washed its wound and stroked and comforted it with gentle words. Then he set it down and walked on thinking to himself what a noble and excellent animal that was. And he walked all through the day until late in the afternoon when he came to the bottom of the mountain. As he looked up, it seemed that the towers of the castle reached to heaven. He began to climb, and

the farther he climbed and the steeper the mountain, the easier it seemed to go, as if a gentle hand pushed him, so that he could almost run up the steep hill.

He climbed until he came to the wall of the castle and stopped before the tall iron gates. Then he sat down down and was sad, because the gates looked locked, and he didn't see how he could ever make them open, and there was no one there to help him.

He sat there a long time, almost wanting to cry. Finally he said, "I feel like I belong here." He stood up, went over and put his hand on the iron gate and pulled, and it came open in his hand.

As he walked in, the gate closed behind him by itself.

Everywhere he walked he said, "I feel like I belong here." He walked up the wide stone steps into the castle grounds and up to the crystal door. As he laid his hand on it, it came open, and he walked in, and the door closed again behind him by itself as he walked through. He walked on and on through high vaulted corridors and up broad flights of stairs and through wide empty, echoing chambers.

The whole castle was empty with not a stir of life anywhere, but the sweetness of time fulfilled lay in the air and the whole castle seemed so friendly to to him that he said over and over to himself, "I feel like I belong here."

He came up a broad circling flight of stairs into a long hallway in the upper part of the castle with windows looking out

over the valley and over the castle yards. The doors on either side all stayed tightly closed. But a great door down at the end seemed to invite him. As he went to it and laid his hand on it, it came open in his hand. He looked in and saw a great hall with a crimson carpet leading down the center aisle to a golden throne high on a platform at the other end. On either side of the aisle were rows of pews like in a great cathedral. The high windows on either side glistened in the late afternoon light like transparent silver. And chandeliers hanging from the ceiling glittered like a thousand diamonds in the sun.

He stood there amazed at the beauty and said, "How strange that I feel like I belong here." Then slowly and calmly he began to walk down the crimson aisle to-

ward the throne. And the sweetness in the air got heavier and sweeter as he walked.

He paused at the base of the high golden throne and looked up at it a long time until a strange feeling of nobility and power came into him. He climbed up the steps to the throne, turned slowly around and looked back to the doorway where he had come in. He looked at the tall windows glistening like transparent silver and at the crystal chandeliers hanging like diamonds in the sun. Then he sat down on the throne, gazed at it all and just sat there quietly and said to himself, "How very strange that I feel like I belong here."

He looked at his arms, and they were covered with sleeves of the finest silk, and he saw he was dressed in kingly robes and didn't know where they had come from.

He marveled quietly at all the wonders. But in his heart he murmured again, "How strange that I feel like I belong here."

Suddenly the silence was broken by the clatter of hooves in the courtyard, and he heard soldiers shouting and swords clanging and shields banging. And he heard a multitude of people shouting.

At first he was frightened and thought, "What will they do to me when they find me sitting here on the throne. But again came that feeling of marvel into his heart, and he said, "I really feel like I belong here."

So he sat quietly, waiting to see what would happen. Then trumpets began blowing and cymbals crashing, and footsteps marched up the stairway. A troop of soldiers came in the doorway and lined up

on either side of the aisle. The trumpeters came in blowing their grand song on long festive trumpets hung with silken banners of many brilliant colors. They lined up by the soldiers, still blowing as they stood at stiff attention. Then came the cymbal players, crashing their cymbals, and they lined up by the trumpet players. And they all made such a dreadful, glorious noise that the walls shook for joy and celebration. Then a stream of people poured in through the doors and filled all the pews.

Suddenly a high silence of expectation fell over the hall, and he heard quiet footsteps coming up the stairs to the end of the hall. An old man and woman dressed in kingly robes entered and walked slowly down the aisle toward him. As they came

to the foot of the throne, they looked up and said, "O, King..."

Then the people and the soldiers shouted, "Long live the king!" And the trumpets blew and the cymbals crashed, then suddenly all was quiet again.

The boy looked at the old man and the old lady in their royal robes and saw that they were the lady of the cheeses and the man of the breads that he had helped the day before in the empty village. Then he looked at his own arms and legs, and he saw that they were no longer the arms and legs of a little boy but those of a man. And he was amazed.

And they spoke again and said, "O, King, we have waited long for you to come. Too long was our kingdom ruled by cruelty and neglect. Now that you have

come, everything will be right again." Then they said, "O, King, all of these soldiers and all of these trumpeters and cymbalists and all of these people are the squirrels and birds that you fed with the bread and the cheese that we gave you. For thrice seven years we have been under this terrible curse, but with your kindness you have broken the spell and now we are free."

And the old man and the old lady spoke again and said, "O, King, we are your grandparents, and we lost the kingdom because your father married a wicked queen who wanted all the kingdom for herself. And she killed your father the crown prince and put a curse on all the people. We escaped only with our lives and did not know whether she had killed you, too, but you have come back to us

again. You are our rightful king, and may you live forever.”

Then everything grew quiet again, so quiet that he could hear footsteps coming up the stairs. And the door opened and a beautiful princess came in dressed in a long white gown as for a wedding. A tall man stepped to her side, and together they came slowly up the aisle in quiet majestic steps until they reached the foot of the throne.

Then the man said, “O, King, I was the Prime Minister until the curse came, and the cause of the curse was that the young daughter of a great king was brought here for safety when his kingdom fell to war. The wicked queen of our land was jealous and wanted to destroy her, but her curse fell foul on us as well, and we

lived in this valley as rabbit and deer, together with all the birds and squirrels, and this morning when you bathed our wounds, the curse began to lift, and it is through your kindness that we are all whole again.

And the young man looked down, and she was very beautiful, and the old man at his side was very wise, and he said, "Sir, you will be my Prime Minister," and to the girl he said, "You shall be my Queen."

And he stepped down from the throne and took her hand and led her up beside him and sat down again. Again there was great cheering and rejoicing, and the trumpets sang and the cymbals crashed, and all the people shouted, "Long

live our King and Queen!" And there was happiness through all the land.

And the young prince became a mighty king, and the girl grew to be a gracious and beautiful queen, and for as long as they lived, there was happiness and peace and joy throughout the kingdom.