



## ROSIE AND THE PEACOCK KING

Once upon a time there lived a king and queen. They had two handsome sons – the older was called Prince Biggus and the younger Prince Tinyus. One day the queen gave birth to a beautiful young princess. They had always longed for a daughter and named their little girl Rosie. Everyone was charmed by her beauty and a great celebration was held in her honour. The sound of celebratory trumpets echoed throughout the whole country and many guests arrived to see the princess, including the fairy godmothers, who were supposed to foretell the princess's future. But when the time came for the godmothers to share the prophecy, the fairies just kept making excuses and avoiding the subject. However the queen was persistent, so one of the fairy godmothers finally told her, whispering:

“Our dearest queen, we can't tell you much except that both of your sons will suffer great misfortune because of the princess.”

The queen's throat suddenly tightened in fear and from that day, she sadly moped around, spending every waking minute thinking about what the fairy godmother had told her. The king saw that something was tormenting her, but despite his unending questions she didn't say a word – until one day when the king lost all his patience and she had to spill the terrible news.

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When the king heard the prophecy, he felt a pang in his heart.

“If we want to keep our sons safe, Rosie needs to die as soon as possible. We don’t have any other choice,” he said after a moment of silence.

But the queen wouldn’t hear of it. She would never allow that.

Ever since then, the king roamed the castle halls with a terrible weight on his heart.

One day, someone told the queen about an old hermit living in the woods. Everyone sought his advice, as he was most knowledgeable, and the next morning, she decided to do the same.

Once she had a horse saddled up, she set off, galloping through the woods, and after a short while arrived at the wise hermit’s dwelling. The old man courteously greeted her and soon learnt why the queen had decided to go looking for him. She told him about the grave threat her family faced and asked him for advice.

“You will have to lock Rosie in a tower, which she must never leave,” proposed the hermit. The queen thanked him, paid him generously and quickly rushed back to the castle.

The king gave an immediate order to build a tower reaching to the sky as quickly as possible and in just a few weeks, little Rosie found herself locked inside. Her royal parents and brothers visited her every single day to keep her in good spirits because they all loved each other very much.

The family lived like this for many years until the day of Rosie’s eighteenth birthday, when the older son, Prince Biggus, said to the king: “Father, our sister is a woman now, old enough to marry. Shouldn’t we find her a husband?” But the king and queen would have none of it.

Before long, their parents fell gravely ill and passed away. The bells tolled sadly as the whole kingdom, covered in black, mourned for them. Rosie, too, was deeply sorrowed by the loss of her beloved mum and dad.

The country soon got a new king when Prince Biggus ascended to the throne, and everyone joyously cheered for him. The brothers promptly decided to set their beautiful sister free, once and for all, and so they set out to rescue her from her long imprisonment in the tower.

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Rosie was so happy! Now she was finally allowed to explore all the wonders of the world. The princess was completely stunned with the beauty of the blooming garden and the singing fountains, not knowing where to look first since everything around her was so magnificent and utterly new to her. Butterflies and birds fluttered around her, singing merrily, while her dog Long Tail bounced happily around – until he ran off towards the forest. Rosie went after him but then stopped short when a huge peacock appeared in front of her, to feast her eyes on its broad and beautiful fan of a tail. That's when her brothers joined her and told her that these gorgeous fowls were bred for their tasty meat.

This upset the princess and she cried out: “How could anyone have the heart to kill such a beautiful creature? I swear I won't marry anyone else but the Peacock King, and then, then I will forbid this slaughter!”

Her brothers watched her, completely dumbfounded. “Don't be silly, Rosie, darling! A peacock king? Where do you think we would find him?” asked the older one after a while.

“Well, if you look for him carefully, I'm sure you will succeed,” answered Rosie stubbornly.

The two young men just shook their heads, running out of words. Rosie took the peacock into the castle with her where all the people had already gathered to welcome her back home, bowing and bringing her heaps of gifts. The princess was beaming and everyone was quite charmed with her beauty and kind heart. Her brothers kept racking their brains however, where could they find this peacock king, who may not even exist. At last they came up with a plan. They would have their sister's portrait painted and then travel with it around the world. They were determined to find Rosie's peacock king no matter what. The older brother passed his crown and responsibilities onto his sister, to take care of the kingdom and rule justly while he was gone.

Rosie hugged each of her brothers tenderly before they set off on their adventure. Asking everyone along the road about the Peacock King, they made their way through the world, but not a single soul ever heard of him and so they tirelessly marched on, not knowing where to exactly, until they reached the kingdom

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of the Mayflies. There were swarms of them everywhere, piercing the air with such an ear splitting buzz that the brothers couldn't even hear themselves talk. Eventually, the older brother asked one of the mayflies about the Peacock King. "Your Majesty, you have taken the longest road possible, indeed. His empire is thousands of miles away." was the reply he received.

Prince Biggus first stared in amazement. How did the bug know all of this? But he quickly gave up on that thought, happy they had finally found some luck on their quest. Soon they embarked on their journey again and finally reached the empire. There were peacocks everywhere, their squawking echoing far and wide, and everybody was clad in fancy clothes heavily adorned with peacock feathers. Fortune smiled on the princes immediately. The Peacock King was passing by just then in his beautiful golden carriage set with precious stones. The king himself looked quite dazzling in his crown made of peacock feathers and as soon as he noticed the two brothers, he knew they were foreigners. He halted the carriage and sent for them.

The brothers bowed before the king and the older one said: "Your Majesty, please, would you do us the favour and look at this painting?" they said, uncovering Rosie's portrait, and the king's eyes filled with love as soon as he set them upon her image.

"What a beautiful girl you have just shown me! How gorgeous she is! But I don't believe she is real," said the Peacock King after a while.

"I swear, the painting doesn't even do justice to her real beauty," replied the younger prince.

But the Peacock King just kept staring at them inquisitively, so the prince went on: "My brother here is a king. I am a prince and the girl in the portrait is our sister, Princess Rosie. She's not only beautiful, but also wise and kind-hearted. We are here to offer you her hand in marriage and a chest full of gold as her dowry."

"I will gladly marry such a beautiful girl," said the king, delighted, "she will have everything her heart desires, I will shower her with love and wealth. But if she's not as gorgeous as her portrait, I will have your heads cut off, you can count on that."

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The brothers nodded.

“Well, since we agree, I am going to lock you up until your sister arrives,” said the king with a smirk.

Both brothers were certain that Rosie is much prettier than the portrait and accepted the king’s proposal. They were well taken care of, even if imprisoned, and the king himself made time to visit them every now and then. They wrote a letter to Rosie immediately, telling her they found her Peacock King and that she should arrive as soon as possible to meet him.

She was so happy when she read the news, telling everyone about her upcoming travels to the empire of the Peacock King whom she was soon going to marry. The whole kingdom cheered for her and there were even fireworks and a thirty cannon salute.

Rosie entrusted the royal crown and her beloved peacock to the wisest elders, and with a chest full of gold and beautiful dresses, she set off on the long journey to the Peacock King, bringing with her only her maid, the maid’s daughter, and her dog Long Tail.

Soon they sailed the high seas in a ship, laughing and singing merrily.

At one point Rosie’s maid approached the captain and whispered into his ear: “Do you want to be rich?” Do you want a pouch full of golden coins?”

“Well, of course, I do! Who wouldn’t want such a thing?” exclaimed the captain in response.

“It’s yours if you help me throw the princess overboard tonight. Then I’ll dress my own daughter in her clothes, bring her to the Peacock King and he will marry her,” she said as she explained her dreadful plan.

When the night came, the maid, her daughter and the captain brought their plan into action. At night when the princess fell asleep, the trio pushed the royal bed containing the princess and her dog into the waves. Luckily, the mattress in the bed was made of feathers from a special water bird, so it floated on the water just as if it were an ordinary boat.

Both Rosie and Long tail were frightened when they finally woke up. The poor dog started barking and howling and a good many fish gathered around to see

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the unusual boat and the strange wailing creature.

Meanwhile the ship dropped the maid and her daughter ashore where they were welcomed by a group of the king's men and dozens of beautiful carriages.

Even though the maid did everything to dress her daughter up as a princess, she couldn't hide her squinty eyes, crooked legs and especially her peevish and irritable character. Everyone gasped, completely dumbstruck, when the younger woman, dressed in the most amazing gown, disembarked from the ship.

"What are you staring at? Well, stop gawking and get me something to eat," snapped the daughter.

Instantly, the bystanders started muttering: "Poor king! Such a hideous hag. He didn't deserve this."

The procession soon started moving towards the palace and before long, everyone laughed at her, including the peacocks, shouting: "Phooey! Look at that ugly hag in the carriage!"

The sham princess fumed and raged, yelling at the guards to kill the birds.

The sea captain, worried how this would all play out, slowly came to realize that he may have made a huge mistake, partaking in something so cruel.

The Peacock King was dying to finally meet the beautiful princess. He fell in love with her at first sight, even though he had only seen her portrait. The princess was about to appear any minute now and there was a lot of chaos and commotion at the courtyard. Then she finally arrived and the king, seeing the hag sitting in the carriage, went all stiff. Angered and shocked, he rushed at once to the two locked-up brothers.

"This is outrageous! What nerve! Who do these two scoundrels think I am! Prettier than the portrait! Pah! Guards, follow me! Death is coming for them! And throw everyone from that carriage into the darkest tower!"

Meanwhile the princes still waited for their dear sister, believing she would arrive shortly and set them free again. But instead of freedom, the deepest prison awaited them now, filled with water up to their necks, from which no one had ever come out alive. None of them had any idea what happened and why they were so cruelly punished, when finally three days later the Peacock King

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appeared, accusing them of lying, treachery and wickedness. But the brothers still didn't understand what the king was talking about. Their sister was certainly no ugly gargoyle as the king kept calling her, and they wanted to prove to him their innocence.

However, Rosie was still sailing the sea in her bed with the dog and wailing helplessly. She thought it was the Peacock King, who ordered the crew to get rid of her. That he changed his mind and didn't want to marry her anymore, and thus came up with a plan to drown her. They had been sailing for two full days and Rosie was chilled to the bone, her loyal dog Long Tail snuggled up against her, trying to warm her up a bit. They finally reached the shore the next morning, spotting a shack belonging to an old good-hearted man. He had lived there by himself for years and no living soul had strayed into these parts in ages.

When the old man heard the dog's barking coming from the beach, he went outside to see what was going on. Seeing there was a bed floating in the waves, he quickly grabbed a hook and pulled both the princess and the dog to the shore. Rosie was so relieved that they were rescued and able to finally stand on firm ground again. The kind man invited the visitors in so that they could warm up and gave Rosie some dry clothes which the man kept in memory of his late wife. Recognising the embroidery on the bed sheets the old man realised that Rosie was of noble birth, and with tears brimming in her eyes, she told him everything that had happened to her. The old man wanted to help the poor princess, but he didn't know how. He wished to feed her but had nothing in the pantry except a bit of dry bread.

"Oh, don't worry, my good sir. If you have a basket, I could send my loyal dog to bring us some good food."

The old man was shocked that a dog would know how to do a trick like that but brought the basket anyway. The princess then turned to her four-legged friend: "Sniff out the best food around and then bring it back to the shack!" The dog immediately clenched his teeth around the handle and ran to find some food for his friends.

It just so happened that the cook in the Peacock Kings palace kitchen was

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preparing a magical feast, and Long Tail ran straight into the kitchen following the delicious smell. There were tons of delicacies to choose from! Once he filled the basket with every delicacy in sight, he quickly rushed back to the princess and all three of them stuffed their bellies with the delicious royal food.

The next day, the princess sent her loyal dog with the basket once again to bring her food. Long tail ran as fast as he could and didn't stop until he arrived at the palace pantry. When he got there, he put so much food in the basket he almost couldn't pick it up. But as he was leaving the pantry, a royal adviser who was just passing by saw him. He couldn't believe his eyes. He went after the sprinting dog and chased him all the way to the shore and to the old man's shack. The advisor quickly hurried back to the palace to inform the Peacock King that some old fishmonger had sent his dog to steal the king's food.

Of course, the king didn't like this one bit and ordered that the fisherman be brought to his palace. Without knocking, the royal guards broke into the old man's house and tied everyone up, including Long Tail, and dragged them back to the palace.

The old man begged for mercy and the Peacock King granted him one chance to explain himself. He began his tale, describing everything that had happened to him, telling the whole truth about Princess Rosie and the evil maid who wanted to take Rosie's life.

The Peacock King noticed right away that the girl standing before him and crying her eyes out was a spitting image of the beautiful girl from the painting. He immediately had her untied and embraced her lovingly. Then he sent the guards to quickly release both her brothers from their cells. By then, they were both convinced this would surely be their end, but instead, they would soon embrace their beloved sister too.

They soon held a royal wedding and Rosie and the peacock king were married. They offered the good old man to come live with them in the palace. Princes Biggus and Tinyus returned to their kingdom and all our heroes lived happily in their lands. Rosie's beloved dog Long Tail became a true royal hound and enjoyed the most amazing feasts day after day.