



THE SLEEPING BEAUTY

Once upon a time, there was a kingdom far away and in it there was a beautiful royal palace. In that palace lived a king and a queen who had plenty of everything, except for one thing: a baby. Every day, they woke up hoping that this would be the day that they would have the joy of getting a little baby.

One day, the queen was walking through the garden and listening to frogs croak, when she decided to go closer to the lake. She saw the frogs sunbathing on water lilies, and suddenly one of the frogs leaped toward her and croaked: “Your wish will come true. Within a year you will have a daughter.”

Exactly one year later, the queen had a little daughter, who they named Marianne. The king was the happiest man alive, and to celebrate the birth of his daughter, he threw an enormous party to share his joy with everyone.

As was customary, the guest list had to include the Fairies, whose job it was to determine the fate of the royal daughter. There were eleven fairies in total, but the king made a mistake and only invited ten.

On the day of the celebration, everyone in the kingdom was joyful. The atmosphere was happy all around, and even the servants in the palace whistled cheerfully in the corridors. There was so much delicious food that the tabletops creaked under the weight. All the guests ate and danced and celebrated.

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At midnight, the Fairies arrived to declare their wishes for the Princess Marianne. They foretold a wonderful life for the little girl – wisdom, beauty, good virtue, riches and many other good things. But before the last of the ten Fairies could speak, an unexpected guest interrupted the celebration. The eleventh fairy, who they had forgotten to invite, appeared in the door. She wore a long black dress and as soon as she entered the room, everyone got quiet and all eyes were on her. She looked very angry. She knew she was the only one who hadn't been invited. In a loud, dark voice, she declared, "When the princess reaches 15 years of age, she will prick her finger on a rose thorn and die." Then she turned around and disappeared like a draught through the door.

Everyone froze in fear. The queen turned pale and the king couldn't say a single word.

There is no way to undo a fairy prophecy, as everyone knows, but there was one fairy left, and she stepped forward and said in a kind voice, "She will not die, she will only sleep for one hundred years."

The next morning, the king ordered that every rose bush in the entire kingdom be destroyed. Not a single branch was allowed to remain, because even the smallest twig could grow a dangerous thorn.

As Marianne grew, the king and queen watched all the prophecies come true one by one. She grew into a wise, beautiful, clever, kind young woman, and everyone she ever met liked her at first sight. The king and queen had made sure there was not a single rose in the entire kingdom, but even though they had prohibited rose bushes years earlier, they still worried.

Then, before they knew it, the day of their daughter's fifteenth birthday arrived. A big party was planned, but before the celebrations Marianne decided to take a walk through the palace. There were dozens of rooms, and as she wandered she found a door to a little tower she had never visited before. She was a curious girl, and so she couldn't just walk by the door without trying to open it. It was unlocked! Behind it there was an old, intriguing spiral staircase. She climbed all the way to the top of the stairs, where she found another door. She tried to open it, but this time the door was locked. She was about to turn back when she noticed a big,

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rusty key in the lock. When she turned it, the lock grinded and the door opened with a creak. The princess cautiously entered the little chamber behind it. There was a single window and cobwebs were everywhere. The furniture was covered in dust, and everything looked like there had not been a single soul in this room for years. She was about to leave when she noticed a flower in the window. It was in a little pot and it had beautiful red petals. It seemed like it came from another world; Marianne spent almost all her free time in the royal garden, but she had never seen a flower like this in her life. She moved closer to the window to look at the pretty bloom, and she noticed how sweet it smelled. She wanted to touch it, but when she reached out to pick it up she felt a little prick on her finger and she collapsed to the ground, fast asleep.

But that was not the only thing that happened. All over the palace, at the moment she pricked her finger, everyone in the palace fell asleep too. The royal parents, the servants, the guests who had come to celebrate Marianne's birthday. Even the dogs in the yard, horses attached to carriages, and birds in the middle of songs fell asleep. The wind stopped blowing, and not a single leaf moved. The only movement in the entire palace was along the edges of the palace walls, as roses began to grow and thorny vines climbed up the stones.

For years, nothing happened; roses had covered the palace entirely and it became hidden from the world. People forgot that the kingdom had existed, though they told stories about a cursed kingdom and a sleeping princess that everyone thought were legends.

Children whispered stories to each other about a hidden kingdom far away beyond the mountains that nobody could see. Little boys played knights with swords and sticks in the meadows, and as they grew up they dreamed about someday searching for the cursed kingdom and saving everyone inside. They especially wanted to save the Sleeping Beauty, the princess who they said was the most beautiful girl in the world.

Many village boys and even princes from other kingdoms had tried to get to the palace over the decades. All of them only managed to find a dense thicket of thorny roses, which they found to be impossible to pass. They would sharpen

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their swords over and over again, but it was in vain; no matter how hard they tried, the wall of rose branches would not let them pass. For a whole century, many different men, short and tall, weak and strong, nobles and peasants, tried to get through and failed.

Until one day, when young Prince Julian was passing through the kingdom. His horse needed new shoes, so he stopped in a local village to look for a blacksmith. The blacksmith greeted the prince warmly, offering him refreshments while he waited for the new horseshoes.

While the prince rested and ate freshly baked pies, he listened through the window as the blacksmith's wife told some children the story of the cursed kingdom.

"...And at that moment," she told them, "the evil fairy's prophecy came true! The beautiful princess fell fast asleep for one hundred years, and with her the entire palace and everyone and everything that lived there. And what's more, an impenetrable wall of thick, thorny rose bushes grew up around the palace, guarding everyone inside. Not a single man, not even a prince, has managed to get to the cursed castle yet. Many have tried, but all of them in vain. And so the Sleeping Beauty, together with the king and the queen, is still fast asleep to this day. The blacksmith's wife finished her story and the children stared at her with open mouths.

On the other side of the window, Prince Julian was also awestruck; he jumped to his feet and with a few fast strides, he reached the blacksmith. He wanted to know everything the blacksmith knew about the story and asked for directions to the legendary cursed castle.

"It's a useless journey, sir," the blacksmith said. "You'll have to overcome many dangers before you even reach the palace, and no man has successfully overcome the briars."

The prince, however, was determined to save the Sleeping Beauty and nobody could stop him.

And so he set off for a difficult journey toward the sleeping kingdom. He was very smart and very brave, and not a single obstacle he found along the way could slow him down. Before he knew it, he reached the palace. Or, rather, he

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reached a huge, dense, tall thicket of rose bushes, so high that he could only guess that the palace had very tall towers. He got off his horse and approached the overgrown thicket. Suddenly, it happened! The branches in the thicket started loosening right before his eyes, coming apart of their own accord to let him in. As soon as he walked through, the bushes snapped back to where they had been and created a thick wall again.

The prince stood in the royal courtyard. It was completely silent. On the right, there were two hounds sleeping on the ground. Horses stood like statues next to their carriages and the carriage drivers were frozen in different positions. Cautiously, he entered the palace and saw the king sleeping on his throne, the queen next to him and many other people surrounding them, dressed in festive clothes and fast asleep. One by one, he walked through all the royal chambers, but he couldn't find the Sleeping Beauty anywhere. Finally, he found a door leading to a little tower with a chamber at the top. He walked up the stairs and found the sleeping princess lying on the ground. He had heard that she was beautiful, but now that he saw her with his own eyes, he couldn't stop looking at her. He felt his heart speed up, and he bent down, stroked her long, fair hair, and gently kissed her lips.

The moment he kissed her, Marianne woke up, opened her eyes and gazed into the young prince's eyes. He looked at her so sweetly that she knew it was his love that had saved her. In the distance they could hear dogs barking in the courtyard. Marianne took his hand and together they walked downstairs. The king and queen had also woken up from their slumber, just like all the other guests, and as everyone blinked off their long sleep the rose bushes began receding from the walls until, finally, they disappeared entirely.

A few weeks later, the blacksmith's family received the news that the prince whose horse had needed new shoes had actually found the hidden kingdom and saved it from its long sleep. Julian was forever grateful to the blacksmith for helping him get to the kingdom, and when Julian and Marianne got married, the blacksmith and his family were all invited to the wedding. The party lasted for three days and three nights, and Julian and Marianne lived happily ever after.