



THE SNOW QUEEN

Our story begins long ago, when the Devil was still young and spent his time creating evil things for fun. One day, he decided he would use a mirror in his newest experiment. It was a rather ordinary mirror at first sight, but he gave it extraordinary powers. Anyone who looked into it would see the darkest side of the world, and once they looked into it they could no longer believe in love and kindness. With one look, a person could turn into the most ruthless being, who could only see the world as a terrible and treacherous place.

The Devil loved his new creation and he wanted to see what would happen if as many people as possible looked inside his evil mirror. He imagined that there would be great wars and lots of hatred and maybe some fire, and he liked that idea so he flew the mirror high up into the sky. His plan, of course, was that anyone who looked up into the sky would see it, but the higher he flew, the heavier the mirror became. Soon he couldn't hold it anymore and it slipped from his grasp. It fell to the ground and smashed into a million tiny pieces.

Part of the mirror fell on a small town that was home to two very good friends – a boy named Kai and a girl called Gerda. They had lived next to each other their whole lives and they were simply inseparable. They would play together all day long, share secrets and, best of all, care for their little garden.

The morning after the mirror fell, Kai and Gerda were playing outside. It was

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a cold winter morning and they were throwing snowballs at each other. Even though it was freezing cold, they laughed and played and the merriness of a good snowball fight kept them warm. After a while, Gerda ran to another part of the garden to get some fresh snow, and she packed a snowball and threw it at Kai. Little did she know that there were pieces of the Devil's mirror in it, and as soon as the ball hit him, the smile on his face vanished. He threw a mean look at Gerda and said,

"It's bloody cold, I'm going home. I don't like playing with you anymore." And he turned on his heel and left.

"Kai, wait!" Gerda shouted. "I'm sorry I hit you! Come back to my house, I'll make you hot chocolate. You know how much you love it!" But he didn't turn around. She thought he must be angry with her because of the last ball she'd thrown at him. Had it been too icy? She was so sad and confused. They'd never fought before and she couldn't stop thinking about what had made her friend so upset.

A few days had passed, and Kai still wouldn't talk to his friend. She tried again and again to get him to come play, but he told her ruthlessly that they weren't friends anymore. She didn't understand it at all.

One day, she overheard Kai's parents talking to hers.

"He's been acting so strange and indifferent," they said. "It's as if he's a completely different person." Gerda was beginning to get suspicious and wonder if her friend was pulling a prank, but there was no way she could find out. He still wouldn't let her anywhere near him.

A few days later, the other kids from town decided to have a sledge race down the street. Kai joined them, dragging his sledge to the top of the hill and whooshing down. There was a group of boys standing nearby, planning to tie their sledges to the first carriage that would pass by. They were arguing about which one of them should be the one to do it and when Kai heard them and volunteered, saying there was nothing in the world that could scare him.

The Devil himself must have been pulling the strings on this prank, because the first carriage to pass them belonged to the Snow Queen. It wasn't even a carriage;

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it was a huge, icy sleigh adorned with frost, dragging freezing clouds behind. Wherever the Snow Queen rode, a terrible chill followed. The other boys were immediately scared and ran away, but Kai confidently ran up to it with his sledge and took hold of the back. A sudden gust of ice cold wind swallowed him whole, and the sleigh stopped. The snow queen stepped out of the carriage and walked up to the boy.

“You must be freezing,” she said. “Let me help you.” She kissed him on the forehead, and the boy stopped feeling cold.

“See? You’re better already. Now, let me kiss you once more and you shall forget all your loved ones.”

Kai had no time to resist before the queen’s lips touched his forehead again. And, just like that, he forgot everything. His parents, his friends, Gerda – he could remember none of them.

“That’s enough for now,” the queen said. “A third kiss would kill you. Now come here and sit beside me.” He climbed into the carriage, deep under the queen’s spell, and she wrapped him in furs.

Gerda knew something was wrong as soon as the queen kissed Kai the second time. She hadn’t seen Kai anywhere for quite some time, and she felt a strange chill through her bones. When she asked around, she found that no one had seen him. He’d disappeared completely and nobody knew if he’d run away, got lost or if someone had kidnapped him.

The townsfolk thought he must have drowned in the nearby river, and though Gerda didn’t believe that, she went to the rushing river nonetheless. She was determined to find her friend and find out why he had stopped loving everything and everyone.

“Tell me, river, was it you who carried Kai away from me?” She asked. “Please, tell me what you know!” She waited for an answer, but none came and so she walked on to look for him elsewhere.

“Oh Kai, where are you?” sighed Gerda, making her way through the snowy forests.

“Caw, caw,” a crow suddenly cried next to her. “I know wherre, I know wherre.”

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The black bird fluttered down and sat on her shoulder.

“You do? Well, where is he?” she asked eagerly.

“With an old crone, an old crone. In a house with a big garden, a big garden.”

“Thank you, thank you!” Gerda cried out, joyfully.

“When you cross the forest, caw caw, it will be in the second village you see, caw caw.”

Gerda walked and walked for what seemed like ages, until she finally passed the first village and entered the second one. When she reached the farthest end, she came across a big house in the middle of a large garden. Even though it was winter, the garden was lush and green as if it were summer.

Gerda plucked up her courage and knocked on the door. An old woman opened the door and invited her in. Gerda told her everything, hoping she would find Kai here. She was very disappointed to learn that the woman had never even heard of the boy. The bird must have tricked her!

“How is it that the flowers in your garden bloom even in winter?” asked Gerda, looking outside the window into the garden.

“I take good care of them and I speak with them often,” the woman said. “They like to be talked to. Why don’t you go and take a closer look? Make sure you say hello.”

The woman didn’t have to tell her twice. She’d barely finished her sentence before the girl excitedly rushed outside. She thought about all the moments she spent with Kai in their garden, tending to their roses. Then she knelt down to smell one of the little red flowers.

“Hello,” she said. “You’re all very beautiful.”

“Run away, girl!” the roses responded. “The witch will keep you here forever, if you don’t leave quickly.”

“But I have to find my friend!” Gerda said. “I don’t know where to go!”

“Go north,” the rose whispered. “You might find your friend there.”

The little talking flower seemed to tell the truth, and Gerda decided to trust it. She picked up her coat and walked quickly towards the gate.

“Where are you going, dearie?” the witch called from the house. “Stay awhile,

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there's no need to rush!" Suddenly the woman was next to her and grabbed her by the arm. Gerda managed to break free and ran away as fast as she could. "Thank you, little rose," she whispered.

Gerda walked and walked, making her way North and calling Kai's name whenever she could. One day, an arctic fox heard her cries.

"Are you looking for someone?" he asked.

"Yes, please help me, I'm looking for my friend Kai."

"What does he look like?" asked the fox, and Gerda described him.

"But that sounds just like our prince!" The fox said. "Come with me, I'll take you to the palace."

The white fox broke into a light run and the girl, frozen in her bones, followed as fast she could. She remembered the deceitful crow and wondered if she could trust the fox, but she didn't have much choice.

Soon they arrived at a grand palace and found a way through the gate. Quietly, they climbed up onto a balcony and looked in through a window. First they saw a girl inside, but then they saw a boy. He was facing away from them, but he had brown curly hair and was shaped just like her beloved Kai.

"That's Kai!" she shouted with joy. The prince and the princess heard her and turned around and the sound, but it wasn't Kai. Gerda's heart sank.

The royal family retrieved the girl from the balcony, gave her warm clothes and warmed her up by the crackling fire. They were very kind people, and they gave her food while she told them what had brought her to them. They felt very sorry for her, so they offered to lend her their golden carriage to help with her search. Once again, she was on the road. She spent many days in the carriage, but Kai was still nowhere to be found.

One night a bandit hijacked Gerda's carriage and locked her in a house nearby. The bandit was a lady, who lived in a pitiful shack with only one reindeer outside to keep her company. When she hijacked the carriage, she'd thought it would be a prince or a duke, or someone else with lots of money. She hadn't expected to find a little girl. She was very lonely, and soon they started talking. Gerda told her everything about how she set out to find her lost friend. The woman felt terrible

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for the little girl, but she still didn't want to give back the carriage.

"I'm keeping your carriage," the bandit said. "Selling that will feed me for a year. But you can take my reindeer, and I'll let you keep your coat and mittens. My reindeer will take you to a wise witch I know in the mountains. I think she might know where to find your friend. She knows everything."

Gerda thanked her for letting her go, mounted the reindeer, and rode like the wind further up north.

When she arrived at the witch's hut, the woman was waiting at the door as if she'd been expecting the girl.

"Dear child, you are wise to search for your friend," the witch said. "He is under the spell of the evil Snow Queen. There are whispers about it all through the air. Kai is to become her successor. You must hurry if you want to save him before it's too late."

Gerda would leave the next day, they decided, and when Gerda fell asleep, the woman spoke to the reindeer.

"Do you know the way to the Ice Palace?" she asked him.

He nodded and then asked, "Can't you help her? Can't you give her the strength to overcome the ice queen?" He feared for the little girl.

"Can't you see how strong she already is?" The witch asked him. "She got this far by herself. She doesn't need any more power. I can only show her the way. She has a good and pure heart, and that's the greatest power in the world."

When Gerda woke up, the woman gave her a knapsack of food and told her: "You should be on your way, there isn't much time. The reindeer knows where to go, so just make sure you stay with him."

"Thank you for everything," Gerda said. "Pray for me, please." And she climbed on the reindeer's back and together they rushed towards the Ice Palace. When they reached its gate, the animal let her climb down and hid behind a big wall to wait for the girl.

Gerda entered the palace and immediately found herself standing in a colossal hall made entirely of ice. In the middle of the hall she saw Kai sitting on a mighty throne where the Snow Queen herself used to sit. He was deep in thought, moving

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pieces of ice in front of him just by staring at them.

Gerda was so happy that she'd finally found him! She ran to him, full of joy, and wrapped him tightly in her arms.

"I knew I'd find you," she whispered. "Kai, I missed you so much." But Kai didn't even look at her. His empty eyes just kept staring at the ice in front of him.

When Gerda realized her friend hadn't even noticed her, she burst into tears. She cried and cried, and her tears fell onto Kai's chest and melted the frozen crust the Snow Queen had built around his heart.

"Gerda? Is that you?" asked Kai as if he was waking up from a terrible nightmare. He couldn't believe his eyes! Suddenly he remembered everything. He felt so terrible about how he had treated his friend! He began to cry, too, and his tears washed the effects of the devil's mirror out of his eyes.

Kai and Gerda left the Ice Palace together and found the reindeer, who was ecstatic to find that the girl was safe and that she'd saved her friend. On their way home they stopped at the wise witch's hut, the bandit's shack, and the kind palace, thanking them all from the bottom of their hearts. Their journey back was very long, and when they finally arrived, it was already spring.

Gerda and Kai never stopped being friends. Kai returned to his old, happy self, and for years to come they would sit in their garden, remembering their great adventure, laughing and, of course, talking to their roses, for everyone knows that roses love to be talked to.