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THE SNOW QUEEN

Once upon a time, there were two children named Kay and Gerda who were very good friends. They lived in small houses next to each other in a town where the winters were cold and long. Even though they did not have a big garden, their families lovingly cared for flower boxes on their windows. When spring arrived, the roses bloomed, and the two children spent many happy hours looking at them, talking, and playing together. —Look how pretty they are today, Gerda would say with a smile.

—They look as if they are greeting the sun, Kay would answer.

Kay and Gerda loved each other like brother and sister. They shared stories, games, and many happy afternoons. Gerda's grandmother would often sit with them and tell them stories.

—In the coldest places in the world, she would say, —there lives the Snow Queen.

Gerda would open her eyes wide.

—Is she bad? she would ask.

The grandmother would smile calmly.

—She is cold and silent, like ice, she would answer. —No one knows very much about her.

Kay listened with curiosity, though sometimes he laughed a little.

—I would not be afraid of her, he would say.

But one day, something strange happened. Far away from there, a wicked mirror had broken into thousands of tiny pieces. That mirror made everything good look ugly, and everything beautiful seem sad or unpleasant. When it broke, its little fragments flew through the air and traveled to many places.

Without Kay knowing it, one tiny piece of the mirror entered one of his eyes, and another lodged in his heart.

—Ow! cried Kay suddenly, putting his hand to his face.

—What is wrong? Gerda asked with worry.

Kay blinked several times.

—I do not know... I felt something strange.

From that moment on, Kay began to change. He no longer looked at the flowers with love. He no longer enjoyed games as before. He even started to speak harshly and make fun of things he used to like.

—Those roses are not so pretty, he would say. —And those stories are for little children.

Gerda looked at him sadly.

—Do not speak like that, Kay, she would say. —You were not like this before.

But Kay became cold and distant. Then winter came. One day, while the snow was falling, Kay saw a white and shining sleigh pass by. In it rode a woman dressed in clothes as pale as snow.

She was tall, beautiful, and very serious. Her eyes seemed to be made of ice.

It was the Snow Queen.

The queen came near and looked at Kay.

—Come with me, she said in a calm voice.

Kay, as if enchanted, did not feel afraid.

—Yes, he answered.

The Snow Queen wrapped him in her cold cloak and carried him away in her sleigh over the snowy fields, far from his home.

When Kay disappeared, everyone became worried. No one knew where he was. The days passed, and Gerda cried very much.

—I must find him, she said firmly.

Gerda's grandmother tried to comfort her.

—It is a long road, dear child.

But Gerda would not give up.

—Kay is my friend. I must look for him.

And so her journey began. Gerda went out into the world with her simple dress, her heart full of love, and great hope. She walked along long roads, crossed gardens, fields, and rivers, asking everyone whether they had seen Kay.

One day she came to a beautiful garden full of flowers. There lived a kind old woman who knew magic. The woman welcomed Gerda warmly.

—Poor little one, she said. —You must be tired. Stay here and rest.

Gerda felt comfortable in that place. The garden was lovely, and everything seemed peaceful. But the old woman wanted the girl to stay with her, so with her magic she made Gerda forget Kay for a while.

Several days passed, until one morning Gerda saw some roses and suddenly remembered her friend.

—Kay! she cried. —I must keep looking for him!

The old woman could not stop her, and Gerda continued on her way.

Later she met a very clever crow who could speak like a person.

—Perhaps I can help you, said the crow. —I heard that in a nearby palace there lives a very clever young man. Perhaps he is your friend.

Gerda felt a little hope.

—Really? she asked.

—Come with me, answered the crow.

The crow led her to a great palace. There lived a kind prince and princess. But when Gerda saw the young man, she understood at once that he was not Kay.

—It is not him, she said sadly.

The princess took her hand gently.

—Do not cry, she said. —We will help you.

Then they gave her warm clothes, food, and a carriage so she could continue her journey.

Gerda went on, but along the road she was attacked by robbers. They took her to their hiding place in the forest. Among them lived a robber girl, who was wild, stubborn, and strong, but who also had a heart that could still change.

—Who are you? asked the robber girl.

—My name is Gerda, she answered. —I am looking for my friend Kay.

The robber girl looked at her in silence.

—You are brave, she said at last. —I like you.

At the camp there was a reindeer tied up. The reindeer had heard stories about the Snow Queen.

—I think Kay is in the far north, in the ice palace, said the reindeer.

The robber girl gave a short laugh, but then made a decision.

—Take her there yourself, she said to the reindeer. —Help her find her friend.

Gerda looked at her with surprise.

—Thank you, she said sincerely.

The reindeer carried Gerda over icy mountains and lands covered in snow. The wind was strong, and the cold seemed to cut the

skin, but Gerda did not give up. Along the way, she met kind people who gave her food, warm clothes, and courage to continue.

At last she reached the palace of the Snow Queen. It was a huge, white, silent place. Everything shone as if it were made of crystal. In a great frozen hall, Kay sat alone. His face was serious, and his hands were cold. He was trying to make patterns with pieces of ice, but he did not smile and did not remember Gerda.

Gerda ran to him.

—Kay! she cried. —It is me, Gerda!

Kay looked at her, but at first he said nothing. The ice in his heart would not let him feel.

Gerda began to cry.

—I have traveled very far to find you, she said. —I did not want to leave you alone.

Her tears fell on Kay's chest, and something wonderful happened. The ice in his heart began to melt. Then Kay blinked, as if waking from a very long dream.

—Gerda... he whispered.

She smiled through her tears.

—Yes, Kay. I came for you.

Kay looked at her again, and this time his eyes filled with feeling. Gerda's tears also washed out the tiny piece of mirror that was in his eye. Suddenly he saw the world as he once had: beautiful, warm, and full of love.

—Forgive me, said Kay. —I was cruel to you.

Gerda hugged him tightly.

—It is all right now, she answered. —What matters is that you are here.

At that moment, the Snow Queen's cold power over Kay disappeared. The two children left the palace hand in hand and began the journey home.

The way back seemed shorter. In every place where they had once received help, they found people glad to see them safe and well. The reindeer, the crow, and the other friends were very happy to know that Kay had been rescued.

When at last they reached their town, everything seemed familiar and dear. The windows, the houses, and the roses were still there. Gerda's grandmother welcomed them with a big smile and embraced them both.

—I knew you would return, she said with emotion.

Kay and Gerda sat once more beside the flowers, just as they had in the old days. They had grown a little, but their friendship was still strong and beautiful.

—I will never forget you, said Kay.

—And I will never stop looking for you if you are lost, Gerda answered.

From then on, they both understood that love, kindness, and true friendship can overcome even the coldest ice. And they lived with joy, always keeping the memory of that journey full of courage and hope.

THE END

