Story

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Once upon a time there was a Princess in a kingdom that bordered the threshold of enchantment. The people avoided the enchanted forest and those with strange and fantastical abilities, yet, when a person became desperate, they knew where to go to receive super natural aid.

The Princess, whose name was Charlie, had an elder brother named Dixen. Dixen was the kind of boy who flirted with every beautiful thing that crossed his path. Charlie often caught him making muscles in the castle mirrors and sending woeful letters to neighboring princesses. Although Dixen was good at catching a heart, he became heartless himself and broke the love and devotion that so many laid to his care.

Princess Charlie, however, was different. At age 10 she had a personal body gaurd who was just a few years older. He was handsome, smart, and brave, but he had no social status. As they grew up together, they fell in love and soon Charlie could not see a future without Tom in it. Charlie’s father rejected Tom as a suitor and all but banished him from the castle. Under such strict care, Princess Charlie and Tom eloped. For a full year the king did not know where his daughter was, until he received a letter explaining what had happened. He was outraged but he still loved his daughter. He allowed them to come back but under strict conditions. They were to rule over the far west part of the kingdom. That was known as the untrained Marsh land which was Unionhabbitable for anyone other than the rough mountain men/women and magical folk. The west lands was were all the magic usually origionated. And so Princess Charlie and Tom set up their home in the Marsh lands, and ruled over the very small, yet widely spread community that inhabited that portion of the land.

At the castle, Prince Dixen was becoming a man. His flirtatious manner only grew over the years and soon he was denying claims of illegitamate children. His father called him a disgrace and unfit to rule. In one encounter he broke the heart of a beautiful enchantress. He was lucky to get out of there without being turned in to flee and smashed. The enchantress vowed to take her revenge out on Dixen and make all this kingdom suffer as consequence of his actions.

Once a year in the kingdom hold a festival were all the barons, Lords and Ladies gather for a party. They host a parade for the peasants and the rulers all gather and discuss the needs of their people.

Just as Charlie and Tom were preparing to attend, their closest neighbor, an odd old witch with a hooked nose and kind eyes came out to wish them well on their journey.

“How’s the little one cooking?” The witch said pointing to to Charlie’s stomach.

Tom answered, “Just as fine as a fight from heaven. This little one’s going to be a strong fighter with eyes just like his mother.”

“I’l be cursed if that isn’t true,” the witch said. “I came out to warn you to be wary.”

“You always come out, Hazel,” Charlie said.

“Now listen to me, you be careful. I’m going to cast a protection spell on you so don’t you move an inch.” Hazel went inside.

“Hazel, there’s really no need,” Charlie started. It Tom put a hand on her to stop her from continuing. Hazel as more of a hallucinator than she was a witch but Tom liked to humor the woman. He said it was his way of respecting his elders.

Hazel came out with a branch from a willow tree, she started brushing Charlie with it while mumbling with her eyes closed. Charlie glared at Tom. Tom held back a laugh. Was he really humoring her, or being humored?

Finally, Hazel finished her spell and said, “That spell will make it so no harm will come upon you or your bun in the oven”

Charlie thanked her and gave her a hug.

Tom kissed Hazel’s hand and said, “Thank you. We must get glowing now, you take care.”

Hazel flushed as she waved the happy couple away.

As they rode along the pathway windy and Charlie knicked her arm on an unseen branch.

“So much for no harm, eh Tom?” Charlie said as she used a rag to bandage her arm.

Tom shrugged, “If I actually thought brushing you with a willow branch would keep you safe, I would do it every day.”

And they rode along.

At the such gathering of Lords and Ladies all the people commented how beautiful the princess looked, how handsome the prince looked and how peaceful the kingdom had become.

However as the party drew to a close the enchantress, whose heart had been broken by Prince Dixen, appeared. She lay a curse upon the entire kingdom that all the children under the age of one, would get sick and die by the end of the week, including those children whom still resided in their mother’s womb. The enchantress then said that it all could be avoided if the Prince turns himself over to her, however, the prince was already gone. He had run away like a coward. The enchantress then disappeared after she had said that she would be waiting by the floating rock.

The kingdom was outraged. Within hours, reports were flooding in that children and pregnant mother’s were getting sick. Fathers, brothers, and any able man began an all out hunt for the Prince. If the prince was not willing to meet his fate, the you would make him.

Charlie and Tom were both very worried but after some time, ther realized that Charlie was not being affected by the curse.

“It must have been Hazel’s spell,” Charlie said, “It must have been I am safe from magical harm, not physical.”

“From now on, I will keep a willow branch in our cottage for everyday protection,” Tom said.

Tom had also wanted to go after Dixen but Charlie knew her brother better. Chasing the cowards was useless and nothing he could do would lead to a favorable outcome, they needed to find an alternative method to break the curse. Tom agreed and they headed back to their cottage to prepare for a journey to the enchanted forest.

On their way to the forest they passed by Hazel’s house. Hazel stopped them and asked them about their quest. Princess Charlie explained about the curse while Hazel listened in silence, which was very uncommon coming from her. After Charlie explained about the spell Hazel grabbed both of them and led them i nsider her house.

The couple had never been inside Hazel’s house before and it was not what they expected. They had thought it would have herbs and dead animals and bugs hanging from the ceiling with a cauldron sitting in the middle with something green cooking inside. Instead, they found a home cottage with flower wall paper and cushioned seats. However, Tom did note that there was a pot boiling by the fire and the contents of the pot did hold something green.

Hazel went over to a cabinet at full of glass jars and started throwing things into the pot. Then she took a cup and drank some of the green goop. She offered a cup to Tom and Charlie but they refused.

Hazel began to speak, “There are many possibilities but you have one answer which is straight forward and simple, however it will not be easy. A great sacrifice must be made in such a course to break the curse. Every other direction you could take most likely will lead to failure, but if you are willing this path will ensure success at a great cost. On this path you must travel to the enchanted forest of vision and collect branches. Take those branches to the mountain called Heaven’s entrance. Once you reach the top, which shouldn’t take long since it isn’t very far, you burn the branches. The smoke will summon the gatekeeper. He will be able to break the curse but he will ask for something I n return.”

“Such as…” Tom asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t talk to him. If he saw me he’d drag me back with him to the gate for all the crimes I must pay for.”

Charlie and Tom shared a look.

“What other options do we have?” Charlie asked.

“You could try to find the philosopher’s stone which has no leads and is mostly accepted as nothing more than myth. You could find your brother and drag him to the enchantress. You could try a counter deal with the enchantress but it’s likely she sold her soul for this curse so then that wouldn’t work. If you had longer than a week the doctors might be able to find a cure. You could move all the sick folks to the enchanted forest in hopes that the magic would help but magic is so fickle it might just turn them all into frogs. That’s all I can think of.

Tom said, “It sounds like the gatekeeper is our best option.”

Charlie nodded her agreement.

“Thank you for your help Hazel,” Charlie said, “You’ve given us more than we could ever repay you for.”

“I’ve given you an earful,” Hazel said.

Charlie put her hand on Hazel’s arm and said, “You kept our child safe. Thank you.”

“Of course my dear,” Hazel said and the couple got up to leave.

“Be careful now,” Hazel said to Charlie.

“We will,” Charlie said giving her a hug.

Tom pointed to a willow branch resting on a table, “Might it be possible that I could take one of those with us?” He asked.

“A solder like you wouldn’t be able to use the magic. Now get along, you’re burning time,” Hazel said as she shoved them out the door.

“Let’s hurry,” Charlie said.

“To the forest of vision then?” Tom asked.

Charlie nodded and they rode off.

It didn’t take long before they reached the forest of visions. The trees were all different colors and sizes. It was beautiful. It seemed like the forest called to the traveler’s. “We’ve been waiting,” It seemed to say.

Both Tom and Charlie were nervous but neither was willing to turn back or admit it to the other. They didn’t need to admit something they both already knew.

They began walking into the forest, hand in hand.

As they walked, a thick fog surrounded them.

Charlie could still feel Tom’s hand but she could not see him because of the fog. However, soon the feeling of his hand faded too.

“Tom? Tom?” Charlie called to no answer. Charlie stopped walking. In the fog she thought she saw little lights coming towards her. Soon the fog around her lightened and a gang of little lights danced around her. They sounded like little children Laughlin. They began to dance ahead and call to her to follow. She did. She only walked a bit further into the forest when a light began to form from inside her womb. The light came forth and danced with the other lights for a moment. Then the other lights danced away and the remaining light grew bigger until a young man made of light, stood infront of Charlie. He looked just like Tom but he had Charlie’s eyes. Charlie reached out to touch him be he held out a hand.

“You can’t touch me. Not yet,” The boy said.

“What are you?” Charlie asked in shock.

“I”m your son, Daniel.”

Charlie remembered the names she’d been discussing with Tom. If it was a girl, they wanted to name her Alexis. If it was a boy, they wanted to name him Daniel. Charlie just wanted to touch him, to know that he was real.

“Why?” Charlie asked.

“I want you to do it. I know you can and I’m proud of you. You will always be my mother and father. I love you.”

Charlie felt a tear run down the side of her face. She didn’t realize she’d been crying.

“I love you too,” Charlie said.

Then the young man smiled. His Gifu remains began to shrink until he was just a ball of light again. The light led Charlie for a ways until they were at the same spot where Charlie and Tom had entered. AS the fog dissipated, the little light entered Charlie’s womb and Charlie felt a surge of love.

Charlie left the forest and found Tom loading branches onto the wagon. When he saw her he ran and embraced her.

“You will not believe what I saw in there,” Tom said.

Charlie nodded, still in shock from her own vision.

“I met my grandfather and my great-grandfather and my great-great-grandfather.”

“What did they say?” Charlie asked.

“It’s not what they said, it’s who they were. My ancestors were royalty. I am a descendant of royalty. I’m not just a servant. You didn’t marry just a servant. You married a descendant of royalty.”

Charlie took Tom’s hand, “Tom, I’m so happy for you, but I want you to remember, I did not marry a servant or a prince. I married you and whatever title you have, the only one that matters to me is that you are mine.”

The couple embraced then Tom said, “They told me that they would stand by whatever judgements I decide. I don’t know what they meant.”

“I too had a vision,” Charlie said, “I saw our son Tom. He looked like you but he had my eyes. He had my eyes. He was encouraging me on our path. He was magnificent Tom, everything we could have hoped for yet so much more.”

Tom put his hand on her stomach and felt the baby kick.

“He’s going to be the joy of our lives,” Tom said.

Charlie knew that was true.

Wendy, the enchantress was in her hut under the floating rock. She wanted pickles with peanut butter and she felt sick.

As much as she hated it, she wanted Dixen back. He was so sweet, so good to her. He was the best man she had ever dated. If she was going to have to raise a child, she would do it with him by her side, if he wouldn’t come, then everyone in the kingdom would suffer.

She heard commotion from outside the window. They had found Dixen! She swayed out of the bed and stumbled towards the door.

“Dixen,” She said smiling. He looked at her and his face screwed up in a look of disgust. The towns folk punched him forward.

“We brought him, now break the curse,” Townsfolk.

“Dixen, I’m pregnant. This is your child. Don’t you want to stay with me?” Wendy said.

Dixen said, “That’s not my child, I have no children.”

“You do, Dixen, don’t you remember what you said. You said you loved me. This child is our love. Remember?”

Dixen stared her dead in the eyes and said, “I could never love a hideous creature like you. What you say is false. That is not my child.”

Wendy’s world shattered and she committed.

Townsfolk, “She’s affected by the curse as well!”

“She’s pregnant?”

“Break the curse!” A townsfolk rushed forward and shoved Dixen out of the way. No one say Dixen use that as an excuse to run away.

“Screw you! It doesn’t matter any more!” Wendy said.

“Undo the curse!”

“I won’t!” Wendy doubled over and committed again.

Townsfolk, “Please, think of your baby.”

“This baby can die! It’s not even a real baby!”

Townsfolk, “You think killing it is the right answer!”

“It’s my choice!” Wendy said.

“You had your choice when you slept with the prince. Now you must deal with the consequences.”

“Are you going to kill me? It won’t break the curse.”

“No, we won’t kill you. We will leave you alive so you have to live with the same hell you’re going to inflict on everyone else.”

Then the townsfolk left.

Wendy didn’t care. She told herself she didn’t care. Dixen didn’t love her. For all she cared, everyone could die.

Tom and Charlie arrived to the mountain. They hiked up it, Tom taking extra precautions to keep Charlie safe while carrying up the branches. When they reached the top, Tom made a fire.

“Ready ?” Tom asked.

“Ready,” Charlie said.

They began to burn the branches, as they did, the smoke from the branches rose high up into the sky. Then, coming down through the smoke the couple saw a figure. The figure was dressed in armor but wore no helmet. It came until it stood just above them.

“Do you wish to enter my gate?”

“No. Soon many innocent children will come to your gate and we ask you to spare them.”

“No.”

“Please, there must be something you can do.”

“Not me, you.”

“What? What can we do?”

“I’ll accept a sacrifice.”

“What sacrifice?”

“The children within her for the children of this kingdom.”

“You mean our son.”

“I will accept the sacrifice of your son and any further potential you might have for having children.”

Tom, “Take my life instead.”

Guardian, “No, you are not pure potential. I cannot accept that trade.”

“May we discuss it?”

“You may.”

The couple stared at eachother, both no knowing what to do or say. Finally, Charlie spoke.

“We only have one option.”

Tom didn’t say anything.

“Tom, I can’t make this decision alone. I need you to say something.” Charlie said.

“You’re stronger than me Charlie, you always have been. It was my ancestors that said I would make the right judgement. If we leave here and do not do this, we condemn every innocent child in the kingdom to death. What kind of parents would we be if we let that happen? But if we leave without our child we wouldn’t ever be parents. I know what we have to choose, but Charlie, I’m not strong enough to choose it.”

“When I talked to Daniel I remember what he said, he said, ‘I want you to do it, I know you can and I”m proud of you. You will always be my parents. I love you. What if he was talking about right now.”

“Then that would mean he already made the dicision and we would just be following his choice,” Tom said.

“Can we do that?” Charlie asked.

“We can,” Tom said.

Guardian, “Have you made your choice?”

“We choose to save the children of the kingdom,” Tom said.

“Present your sacrifice,” Gatekeeper said.

Charlie stepped forward.

The gatekeeper waved his hand and Charlie doubled over. Lights were drifting from her womb and floating up the cloud of smoke. Charlie vomited.

All through out the kingdom, children and mother’s seemed to be healing from the mass plague. Hazel knew what had happened and rode through town proclaiming that Princess Charlie had broken the spell. Even as she did, tears streamed down her face.

A few days passed and Charlie and Tom were welcomed back as heroes, however, their smiles were fake and their eyes held an expression of being haunted.

The king wanted Tom to become the next crowned prince to inherit the throne after his death since Dixen was nowhere to be found but Tom and Charlie refused. They just wanted to go back to their cottage and live out their lives there. The king granted their request.

Outside Hazel’s hut, Hazel found a pathetic mangy prince with no pride. All his nerves were shot from running and trying to escape his responsibilities.

“Have mercy,” He begged.

“Well I won’t kill you,” Hazel said and she turned him into a black widow spider. That was the last anyone knew of Prince Dixen.

About a year after the incident, the enchantress, Wendy, came to Tom and Charlie’s door with a baby in her arms.

She said, “This is Prince Dixen’s son. When I cast the spell, I sold my soul to devils. Now they are asking I pay up. I can no longer take care of him, I was never meant to be a mother anyway. He’s your nephew and I don’t know what I’l do if you tell me you can’t take care of him.”

“We’ll take care of him,” Charlie said.

“Thank you,” The enchantress hesitated then placed the child in Charlie’s arms. Charlie immediately loved him.

“What’s his name?” Charlie asked.

“I wanted to name him Egbert, after my father, but it didn’t fit. I just had a feeling, so I named him Daniel.”

Tom’s eye’s widened, “His name is Daniel?”

Wendy nodded.

“Of course it is. He has my grandfather’s eyes. He has my eyes,” Charlie said.

Tom looked into the baby’s eyes, “He does.”

“He was born on the same day as Prince Dixen’s birthday.”

“We’ll take good care of him,” Tom said.

Wendy nodded, and bit her lip. They would make much better parents than she would.

“I must go now,” she said. Wendy stood up and walked to the door. She turned back and watched the family for a moment.

Then she left and was never heard from again.

Tom and Charlie raised little Daniel with all the love in the world. He was the light of their lives.

The End

Tom always has the answers

Charlie always makes decisions by herself.

(If I had more time I would have them try different options.