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The Love Charm

by
John Patrick Wall

The Gypsy looked at me impatiently. "What do you come here for, woodwright?"

Frankness was apparently the order of the day. "I wish for you to make a love charm for me."

"And why do you need this charm?" she asked.

"I've fallen in deep love with Rowena, whose father works Lord Theobold's land. I don't believe she even knows I'm alive. I need a charm so that she will love me forevermore."

The Gypsy held out her hand. "Two pieces of silver must cross my palm first. All payments for charms must be given in advance."

"I am not a wealthy man," I said.

"You are not a charity case, either. Cross my palm or don't waste my time."

I put two silver pieces in her hand.

"Very good," she said and bit the coins. She then took out a small bag and began to mix the ingredients in it. "For a love charm to catch a maid one needs lizard's eye, excelsior, pegasus wing, unicorn bone,..."

"Not unicorn horn?" I interrupted.

"No, that is for a fertility potion. Let's see now, white rose petals, dragon ash, light of dawn. Do you know her date of birth?"

"April first," I replied.

"That would be ram's fleece, sea shell, turtledove heart, and I need one more thing: a lock of her hair."

"I do not have one."

"Do you know nothing of magic?" she looked at me contemptuously.

"No, I don't; that is why I came to you."

"Well, the law of sympathetic magic says that a charm must have something that comes from the person being charmed in order to work. For a love charm nothing less than a lock of her hair will do. I will hold these other ingredients until the time of the full moon next week. If you do not get me a lock of her hair by then I will throw these ingredients away. No refund."

I was crushed. I could not see how I would get a lock of her hair. She wore it long and her family cut their own hair, being too poor to afford the barber.

I was quite sad but I was not willing to give up. The only plan I could think of was to sneak up behind her and cut off a lock of her hair. She came with her mother to the marketplace every Friday, so on that Friday I closed my shop and waited for them to come to the market. When I saw them, I sneaked up behind her and very carefully clipped off a lock of her hair.

She turned around and looked at me, shocked. "Walfryd, why did you do that?"

I turned as red as the moon during a lunar eclipse. "I needed... I needed a lock of your hair. I love you very much, Rowena, and I wished for the Gypsy to make a love charm so that you would love me, too, but she needed a lock of your hair and, oh, I'm so ashamed!"



She looked at me for a moment and then said, "Walfryd, you are so foolish. You are a good and kind man and I could easily love you. In fact, knowing now how you feel makes me more inclined to do so. But would you not be happier knowing that I loved you for yourself, rather than because of some Gypsy charm?"

I thought upon what she said and let the hair I had taken blow away in the wind. "Rowena, may I talk to your father?"

She smiled shyly and said, "You may." I knew there was no need to go back to the Gypsy.

THE CHRISTMAS WITCH AND THE HALLOWEEN ELF

by Virginia Kroll

The situation at the coven was always troublesome but during October it reached a peak. The rest of the witches were ecstatic, feverishly preparing for Halloween, the high point of their year. One of the members, however, had discovered that conforming to the others' standards was becoming increasingly difficult.

Estella had been under suspicion for quite some time. Her performance of witchly duties was half-hearted at best, and everyone sensed that she complied not out of enjoyment and commitment, but out of mere expectation.

At her first cackling contest, the judges had pronounced her decidedly abnormal. Her voice hadn't risen above a chuckle and, ugh upon ugh! that sweet expression was hopeless!

Estella was known to string garlands out of berries that were intended for brews and fashion wreaths from the leaves that should have been pulverized into concoctions. There was a report that she had used her ration of cornhusks to make braided ornaments instead of refurbishing her broom. Why, the old one still looked brand new; it had scarcely been used!

Indeed, Halloween had become a low priority on her calendar, for in her heart, Estella was a Christmas witch.

Not far away, on the northernmost boundary of the forest, someone else was experiencing similar woes.

Tolefson's work record had just been reviewed, and it was declared inexcusably incompetent by elfin standards. Elves, who valued every second of their time, did not treat lightly any deviation from their demanding schedule. They had proclaimed Tolefson lazy when he was, in fact, marvelously industrious. The trouble was that much of his work had to be done in secrecy.

As time when on, Tolefson found it impossible to adhere strictly to Christmas tasks. A lover of autumn and a fan of its celebrations, Tolefson had begun to

consider himself, lo and behold, a Halloween elf.

Because of his phenomenal "green thumb", Tolefson had long ago been appointed Head Nurseryman. Plants sprung up magically at his touch. His annual crop of pines was unequalled and all was seemingly well until a recent even brought him under scrutiny.

When he was supposed to be pruning evergreens he was caught jumping gleefully into a pile of oak leaves, throwing them into the air with abandon.

"Wasting time so close to Christmas!" The inspector had roared. For his offense, Tolefson lost two days of recreational privileges.

From then on, he was carefully watched. Soon he was discovered making a scarecrow out of a bale of reindeer straw which he had taken without permission from the barns. The Elfin Council had reprimanded him severely, and he was given a final chance to act in accordance with the rules.

For a while, Tolefson was able to cooperate. He stifled his Halloweenish impulses and concentrated on the yuletide chores at hand, at least on the surface. To most observers, he appeared the epitome of elfhood.

Having complete authority over agricultural matters, Tolefson had had ample opportunity to sow his special seeds. He had deftly disguised their existence by allowing them to flourish alternately with rows of holly, poinsettia, and mistletoe. Because the field elves respected Tolefson's uncanny knowledge and trusted his impeccable judgment, they assumed that anything out of the ordinary was part of a botanical experiment. Tolefson was certain that his forbidden crops would never be discovered.

One afternoon as Tolefson labored in the fields, he spotted Avery the Elf Master astride an elk, heading straight toward him.

"I've decided to witness the Holly Harvesting with my own eyes this year," announced Avery.

Tolefson gulped. His moment of exposure was at hand.

"It looks like you've really ..." Avery began, stopping abruptly in mid-sentence when something