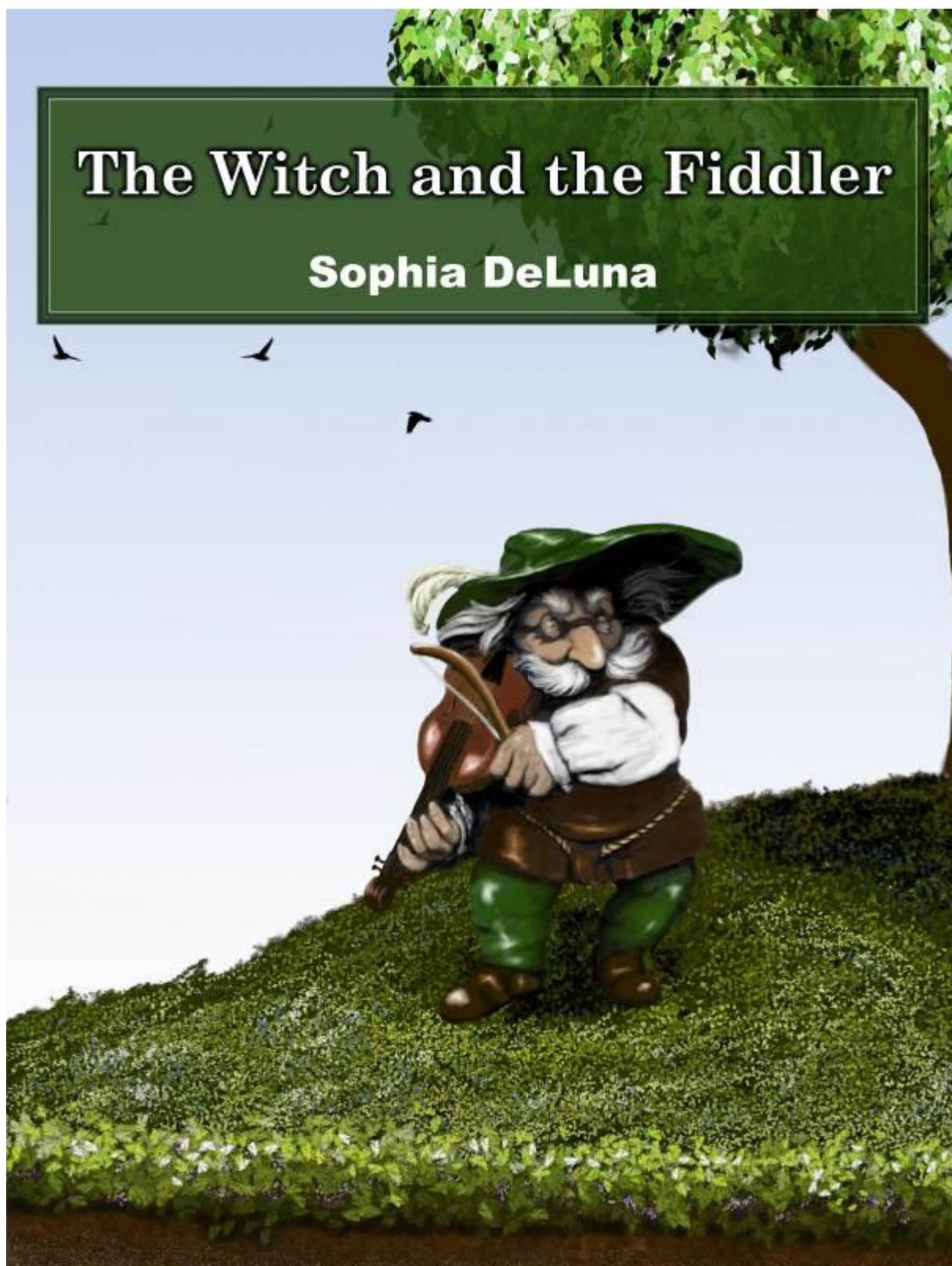


The Witch and the Fiddler

Sophia DeLuna



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By
Sophia DeLuna

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Dedicated to my wonderful friend, Agota, in whose garden Gyárfás lives.

The Witch and the Fiddler

Once upon a time in a forest far, far away, lived a good witch in her little hut.

All creatures of the forest loved her. The deer came to play on the meadow in front of her house, the birds sang the most beautiful songs to wake her in the mornings and the squirrels helped her by throwing walnuts from the big tree in her garden for she couldn't reach them on her own. Flowers were growing wherever she touched the ground, and even the trees showed their appreciation by bowing their branches to form a protective baldachin over her when she walked in the rain.

The witch loved all the creatures of the forest. She loved the deer and the birds and the squirrels. And she loved all the flowers and the trees. But most of all she loved her dear friend Gyárfás.

Gyárfás was an old gnome who had his home in a nearby mountain. He played the fiddle so beautifully that everyone who heard it was enchanted by it. And there was not a day on which the witch didn't rejoice at the wonderful melodies of her beloved neighbour and friend. Every evening the gnome would come over to the witch's house, and he would play for her while she prepared a meal for the two of them. And once they had finished their meal, they would sit on the bench in front of the house and the gnome would play the fiddle until the nightingales began their nocturnal song.

Alas, one day after they had eaten, the gnome did not pick up his fiddle, instead he asked the witch to sit down with him on the bench as there was something important he needed to tell her.

The gnome looked very sombre, and the witch wondered what was troubling her friend. So she sat down beside him and asked him to proceed.

The gnome leaned over and took both of her hands in his. Then he looked up into her dark brown eyes and said, "My dear Zsálya. We have been friends for several decades now. I want to thank you for your friendship, and I want you to know how very much I appreciated your company and your meals."

The witch smiled and said, "You are my dearest friend, Gyárfás, and your fiddle playing always brightens my day." But when Gyárfás smiled at her sadly, she furrowed her brow and asked, "Why were you talking in past tense?"

The gnome sighed and stroking his big white moustache, he said, "I am old, Zsálya, and my time here with you has come to an end. Mother Earth is calling me, and I must say goodbye to you."

The witch was shocked. She never imagined his end could be so near. She wished he would have told her sooner. She might have been able to find a way to prolong his life.

Gyárfás shook his head. "That's why I waited so long before telling you. I knew you wouldn't want to let me go. But Zsálya, dear Zsálya," he squeezed her hands to emphasise the seriousness of his words, "You must not defy Mother Earth. She already let me stay longer than what is common for my folks, just to please you. Mother Earth loves you, Zsálya. But now it is time for me to join her."

But Zsálya was distraught. The anguish she felt at the prospect of losing her dear friend was too much for her to bear. She could not simply accept his fate. And in her desperate attempt to find a solution, she remembered a spell she had once read in an old book of her mentor's. The spell served to transfer the attributes of one person or thing to another. Could

this spell be adapted for her purpose? She wasn't sure, but she was determined to try. However, she knew that her friend would not agree with her endeavour, thus, she asked Gyárfás to let her walk him home.

It was a night of a full moon and the beautiful song of the nightingales accompanied them on their walk. And as they reached his home, which was built into the mountain, Zsálya asked her friend to play for her one last time.

Glad that his friend had obviously accepted his fate, Gyárfás was happy to fulfil her last wish and began to play Zsálya's favourite song.

The witch, however, had no intention to accept his fate whatsoever. And while he played, standing in front of the rock with his eyes closed, Zsálya murmured the spell with the adaptation she had invented. Her intention was to transfer the longevity of the rock to Gyárfás. Alas, as soon as she had spoken the last word, her friend vanished in front of her eyes.

Shocked, Zsálya rushed to the place where he had stood. She could still hear him play, but he was no longer to be seen or felt. Dread filled her when she realised what must have happened. Instead of transferring the rock's longevity, the spell had caused her friend to be joined with the rock to achieve its longevity.

The witch sank down to her knees and sobbed, "What have I done? Oh my dear Gyárfás, what have I done to you?"

And while the witch cried until she had no more tears left, the gnome inside the rock continued playing his fiddle. Only as the day dawned and the full moon disappeared from view did the sound of his playing fade, and the witch was left shivering on the cold wet ground, with such an emptiness in her heart that it seemed to be too great to ever be healed.

And as she lay there unmoving, the animals of the forest gathered around her. The deer came forward and nudged her, the birds sang their most beautiful songs to cheer her up, and the squirrels brought walnuts and laid them in front of her face. But the witch only stared at the rock, not really noticing anything of her surroundings, not even noticing how cold she was.

Then a pack of wolves appeared, but none of the other animals fled. They knew that the wolves had not come to hunt. They knew that the wolves worried about the witch just as much as they did. Thus, they all watched as the wolves neared the witch, some lying down beside her, some even covering her with their furry bodies to give her warmth.

At noon, as the sun was beating down, the witch finally stirred, and the wolves got up to give her room. Slowly, the witch sat up, and with a sad smile on her face she patted the wolf closest to her and said with a voice hoarse from crying, "Thank you, my friends." And as she got up, all the animals uttered their relief, each in its own voice.

Back at home, Zsálya consulted every book on magic she owned to find a way to reverse the spell, but to no avail. As a last option she travelled to her old mentor who lived far away on the other side of the mountain. But as she arrived at the place she learned that her mentor had died a few moons ago.

Broken-hearted, the witch returned home.

She continued her life, surrounded by her friends of the forest, and every full moon she went to Gyárfás' place and listened to his playing until it faded at dawn; but she never managed to reverse the spell.

Hundreds of years went by, maybe even a thousand, who knows? But I think we can agree that it was a long, long time after, the mountain that was once the gnome's home became a quarry, and the piece of rock with which Gyárfás had been joined came into the possession of a very talented sculptor. And the sculptor started to chip at the rock, intending to sculpt a bird bath for a customer. However, his hands wouldn't work in the way he wanted, and instead of

the form of the bird bath which he tried to envision, he kept seeing the image of a gnome playing a fiddle. At first he refused to change his intention, thinking of his customer and the money it would earn him. But as his hands continued to work on their own volition and the image of the gnome persisted in front of his inner eye, he finally accepted his inspiration. And with his imagination and his skill, - and a little help from Mother Earth - he freed the gnome from the rock.

Now he is living at the bottom of my friend's garden. And on nights of a full moon, if you listen very carefully, you can hear him playing his magical tunes on his fiddle.



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