

**the girl, the ghost and the prince**  
*a short fairytale*

by June Stevens

Published by Classy Scribe Publications

Smashwords Edition

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*This is for anyone who loved reading fairytales as a child. It is a bit silly and a lot mushy, and I think there is a moral in there somewhere.*

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Once upon a time there was a young girl whose parents had never wanted children. They found the young girl to be an inconvenience so they hid her away in a cottage in a haunted forest and only visited her once a year on her birthday. While they lived their lives carefree in the city, the girl grew up with a ghost for a nursemaid and ghosts for friends.

When the girl was a teenager there was a young, handsome ghost that came into her forest. He visited her at her cottage every day and they roamed the forest together. They fell deeply in love. They spent several years together as the young girl turned into a woman and was near the age of the Ghost. They began to talk about marriage and spending forever in the little cottage in the forest.

Then one day, the girl's mother, who had almost forgotten about her daughter, fell into favor with the Queen of the land. The Queen was searching for a suitable wife for her son, the Prince. The Prince

despised all of the girls she had brought before him because they only wanted to marry him to be rich and be a Princess. The Queen promised riches to the parents of any girl the Prince decided to marry.

The girl's mother was very excited. Finally, her daughter could be of some use. Her daughter had grown up far away from the city so she would not know who the Prince was, so she would not fawn all over him like the other girls of the land. Her daughter was, she had to admit, sweet and beautiful so the Prince was sure to like her.

So, the mother plotted to have a dinner party at her home with the King, Queen, and Prince. The girl's father took her from her cottage in the forest to their home in the city for the first time. The girl was nervous and didn't understand why her parents wanted her to come to their party, it wasn't even her birthday.

Her parents introduced the King, Queen and Prince simply as friends, using false names. The girl had never met living people before, other than her parents, so she was very shy around the three strangers. She could tell her mother wanted the young man at the party to like her. She thought he was handsome but a little rude and she wished only to be back with her Ghost love. She was polite and kind, as she'd been taught to be by her ghost nursemaid, but the entire time she was wishing she could get away from there and go back to the forest.

Right after the party her mother put her in the coach and sent her back to the cottage in the woods, not wanting to be bothered with her for even one night. She was so happy to be back in the forest and her tiny cottage. She spent the next day frolicking in the forest with her Ghost Love, as always. He told her he missed her and not to leave him again. She told him she had not wanted to go, and wished to stay there with him forever.

The very next morning the young girl was woken very, very early by her mother and father. Her mother jerked her from the bed and told her to hurry and make herself pretty. Her mother had even brought her new clothes to wear. Still very sleepy and very confused, the girl did as she was told.

A little while later the three people from her parent's party arrived with quite a lot of pomp and circumstance. Her mother introduced them as the King, Queen, and Prince. The girl was stunned. The Prince came before her and told her that he very much wanted to marry her, but first she had to meet his grandmother, the Dowager Queen. If she approved then they would marry. The young girl was upset and didn't understand. She didn't want to marry anyone but her Ghost Love, especially this arrogant young man who didn't ask her to marry him, but announced that they would marry, and only if she met the approval of his grandmother.

But, before she could tell him this, another lady came into the cottage. She was quite old, and had to be pushed in on a chair with wheels. "Come closer," the Dowager Queen demanded in a creaky old voice. The girl, taught to be polite, did as she was told. "Well, you are kind of plain and fat. Not at all like a Princess," said the Dowager Queen.

Though her ghost nursemaid had taught her to always be polite, the young girl had had enough. She'd been pulled out of her bed and told she would marry someone she didn't wish to, but only if she was good enough. Now she was being told she wasn't good enough.

"Yes, well, I have never met another Dowager Queen. Are they all as old and rude as you?" the girl asked, her tone as polite as she could make it.

There were gasps in the room, and the girl's mother squealed with dismay. But the Dowager Queen just let out a creaky laugh. "Yes, my dear, I suppose they are. You will do quite nicely. You will make a good Princess."

This made the Prince very happy, but the girl sad. She did not want to be a Princess, she just wanted to live in her cottage and be with her Ghost Love. But the Prince knelt before her and gave her a ring with a beautiful sapphire and asked her if she would marry him. Her mother squealed again, this time with glee.

The girl wanted to say no. But when she hesitated, her mother looked at her so meanly the girl knew she had no choice but to say yes. So she said yes, and she was whisked away back to her parent's house in the city without even saying goodbye to her Ghost Love.

The Queen decreed that it would take her a year to plan a wedding befitting a Prince and Princess. The girl's mother, dismayed at the idea of having to have her daughter around every day for a year, asked if the girl could have a room at the castle so that she and the Prince could get to know each other. The King and Queen agreed and lavished money and jewels on the girl's parents. The girl moved into the castle. Her rooms were beautiful and she had a lovely garden to sit in. Every day she visited the old Dowager Queen, and they became good friends. Then she would return to her rooms and sit in her little garden, and most days she spent a little time wishing she were back in her cottage in the forest.

Every day, after her visit to the Dowager Queen, the Prince visited the girl as she sat in her garden. Each day he brought her a new, expensive gift. A new pair of shiny boots, a jeweled comb for her hair, pretty ribbons, dresses, and jewelry. Then, after he gave her the gift, he sat with her for hours and they talked.

After a while the girl realized that beneath his rude exterior, the Prince was really kind and sweet. She came to like the Prince very much and looked forward to his visits every day. She missed her cottage and Ghost Love less and less. After a while, though she still missed the simple life she'd led in her cottage, she hardly ever thought of her Ghost Love.

About six months after the girl came to live in the castle, her mother died and her father left the kingdom with the riches the King and Queen had given them. With her mother and father gone, the girl was free to leave the castle without fear that she would be forced to return and marry the Prince. But the girl had fallen in love with the Prince and did not want to leave.

A few days before the wedding, the girl was on her way back to her rooms after visiting with the Dowager Queen when she heard the Prince's voice. She went to the door of the room, intending to say hello to him when she heard his friend say to him, "She is really plain and fat and nothing like a Princess. I don't understand why you are marrying her."

The girl was angry and was about to make herself known to the Prince and his friend when the Prince replied, "I know she doesn't look at all like other Princesses, but I suppose that will keep other Princes from trying to steal her away. But she is like other Princesses in one way. She will never leave me as long as I keep giving her pretty and expensive gifts."

The girl was heartbroken and couldn't hold back the cry of dismay that left her lips. The Prince turned and saw her in the doorway. He realized she had heard him. He called out to her but she ran away. That afternoon he visited her gardens as always, but she stayed in her rooms and cried. After the Prince left she went out to her garden and found a beautiful necklace on the bench where she and the Prince usually sat.

That night she left the castle and when the Prince came to her garden the next day, gift in hand, he found the necklace he'd left the night before along with all of the other gifts he'd given her, including the ring he gave her the day he came to her cottage in the forest and a note from the girl.

The note said, "I do not want to be a Princess. I do not want pretty things. I only want someone to love me as much as I love them. I cannot marry you."

When the girl returned to her cottage in the forest her ghost nursemaid took her in and comforted her. The next day her Ghost Love heard of her return and came to the cottage to see her. "Although you left me and stayed gone a whole year, I still love you," he said to her. "I missed you very much."

Though her heart ached for the Prince, the girl was glad to see her Ghost Love. She hadn't thought about him in a long time, but seeing him again she remembered how much she had cared for him. He came to visit her every day and they roamed the forest again like they had before. Though she realized now that her love for him had never been as strong as it was for the Prince, and probably never would be, she began to love him again.

Two weeks after the girl returned to the forest her Ghost Love told her, "You have been back here for a little while now, and I know that I still want to marry you. Will you come to the clearing by the river tomorrow so that we can be married and be together forever?"

The girl still loved and missed the Prince, but he hadn't loved her and was gone from her life forever. She cared about her Ghost Love, and he loved her. She thought her love for the Prince would fade with time, just as it had for her Ghost Love when she'd been at the castle. So, she agreed to marry her Ghost Love.

She went to the clearing by the river the next day. All of her ghost friends were there and her Ghost Love was standing in the center of the clearing next to a large stone. On the stone was a large, sharp knife.

"Are you ready to marry me and be with me forever?" her Ghost Love asked.

"Yes," the girl replied, hesitantly.

"Okay, then take the knife and stab yourself, and then we can be married," he said.

The girl was horrified. "I can't stab myself!" she cried.

"Okay. Then jump in the river and drown," he replied.

"No, I don't want to do that either. I don't want to kill myself," she said.

Her Ghost Love thought a moment. "I suppose we could find a passing hunter to kill you."

"No!" the girl screamed. "I do not want to die at all!"

Her Ghost Love seemed a little annoyed. "But I thought you wanted to marry me and be with me forever!"

"I do," the girl replied, not at all certain anymore. "Is there a law saying I can't marry you if I am alive?"

“There is no law like that,” her nursemaid called from the crowd of onlookers. “You can get married while you are alive and still be married after you die years from now of old age. You would still be together forever.”

The girl sighed with relief. “Then that is what I wish to do.”

Her Ghost Love looked horrified. “But, my dear, then you would grow old and ugly. Then when you died you would be old and ugly forever. Is that what you want? You are young and beautiful now. Wouldn’t you rather be young and beautiful forever?”

Suddenly the girl realized her Ghost Love didn’t really love her. “No, I do not wish to be young and beautiful forever. I just want someone to love me as much as I love them. I cannot marry you.”

The girl ran back to her cottage. She cried for days and days.

Neither the Prince nor her Ghost Love had really loved her. The Prince thought she was fat and ugly and only wanted her because he thought no one else would ever want her and try to steal her away. He’d thought that he could keep her as long as he gave her expensive things. He hadn’t understood that she wouldn’t have left him no matter who tried to steal her heart because she loved the Prince and her heart belonged to him.

Her ghost love had thought her beautiful, but only wanted her as long as she was beautiful. He had only loved her for her beauty, and not for the person she really was. That person wouldn’t change, even as her body aged.

After a week the girl stopped crying. She was sad, but she knew she couldn’t live her life that way. She grew a garden with flowers and vegetables and made a good life in her cottage with her ghost nursemaid for company. Her Ghost Love had left the forest the day she refused to marry him and after a few weeks she forgot about him completely. She realized her love for him had not been as strong as she had thought.

She didn’t forget about the Prince, though. She thought of him every day. She met new ghosts or hunters in the forest and they tried to court her, but her heart belonged to the Prince and she could not give it to another. She resigned herself to living a solitary life. She had days when she was sad, but for the most part she was content.

Then, one day about a year after she had left the Prince and the castle there was a knock on the cottage door. She opened it and gasped. There stood the Prince.

“Go away!” she said. “I do not wish to see you.”

“Please! Wait!” he cried, before she could slam the door. “Hear what I have to say, and if you still hate me then I will leave and you will never see me again.”

“Okay,” she said.

“I am very sorry for what I said that day. You see, I have loved you from the moment I met you at your parent’s house, but I could tell you didn’t like me, much less love me. That day at the cottage, as we were leaving, I heard you tell your mother you didn’t want to marry me and you wanted to be left alone to live

in the cottage and be with the ghost you loved. Even though I knew you loved another, I was determined to marry you because I loved you. I didn't know how to make you love me, so I did what had always worked with the other girls of the land, I gave you gifts."

Unable to stay quiet, the girl broke in, "You brought gifts every time you visited, but I didn't want the gifts, I just wanted you to visit. But it would have been rude to refuse the gifts. I thought you gave me gifts because you loved me."

"I did!" the Prince cried. "You see, I was too blind to see that you loved me and not the gifts. And that day you heard me talking to my friend, I was angry at you. I loved you so much and I thought you were only marrying me to have the rich life of a Princess. I just wanted you to love me as much as I loved you."

The girl was crying now. "But I did. And I loved you because of the sweet person you were to me, not because of the gifts you gave me," she sobbed.

The Prince looked sad. "I know that now. I was stupid. After getting your note I felt so ashamed. I should have come sooner, but I figured you had come back and married your Ghost Love. But a few weeks ago I met a hunter who told me about the girl he'd met in the forest. He said she lived there with a ghost nursemaid, but was not married. He said he'd tried to court the girl, but she had refused. I knew at once that the girl he had met was you. I had to come to see you."

"Why?" the girl asked through her tears.

"Because I love you with all my heart. If you will have me, I still want to marry you. If you agree, I have arranged it so that a cousin from another land to come here and become Prince and then King and take over the land when my Father and Mother step down. You don't have to be a Princess, and we can be together forever."

"You would do that for me? You would give up your kingdom?" she asked, bewildered.

"Of course, I love you. Being a Prince is really just a job. Being with you is more important to me. I could never be happy without you."

The girl smiled. "I love you too. But, I don't think you should give up your throne. Being a Prince and King is a very important job, and all the people of the land look to you to take care of them. If you stay Prince, then King I will marry you on three conditions."

The Prince dropped to one knee, grabbed her hand and kissed it. "Anything my love."

"First, we must spend every summer here at the cottage in the forest with my ghost nursemaid," she said. "Second, you must agree to only give me gifts on special occasions."

"I can do both of those things," the Prince agreed. "Though, I must tell you that every day I have you in my life is a special occasion."

The girl laughed and kissed and hugged him.

Holding her close the Prince asked, "My love, what is the third condition?"

The girl was quite for a moment. Then she replied, “You must love me with all of your heart, forever.”

The Prince smiled and kissed her again. “That is the easiest of all!”

They were married the next day and lived the rest of their lives loving each other every day. And when they were old and died, they went to live in the cottage in the haunted forest where they loved each other every day forever.

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#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

June Stevens is one of the pennames of author DJ Westerfield.

June Stevens writes paranormal romance/urban fiction. Her work is usually a little edgier than this fairytale, but she is a lover of romance in any form, and couldn't resist writing it.

DJ (June) lives with her husband in the South-Eastern U.S. When she isn't writing, editing, or creating cover art you can find her at a Red Hat meeting (as a Pink Hat) with her beloved mother-in-law or watching Doctor Who on Netflix with her husband.

Find out more about her and more works by her many pennames at:

The CurvyWriter Blog.

<http://curvywriter.info>