

THE STORY OF ELEUTHIA

By

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*Written Especially
for
Andrea and Melinda*

If you were to wander into a certain forest, and walk about for a while, then you might chance upon a rather odd looking old log. And if you were curious, you might crawl into that log, and then when you came out the other end, you might find yourself in an enchanted forest, in a glade so far away, and so hidden that only a few mortals have ever trod its paths; you might look up, and see a sky which has ever been blue; or look down, and notice the forest floor carpeted as far as your eye could see with shimmering flowers of yellow, blue, and red. And for each flower you would see a golden butterfly, and as they all flutter quietly about you could almost imagine that the forest floor itself was alive.

As the forest's gentle breeze rustled the leaves, you might sniff the lovely fragrance of all the flowers. And you might again crane your neck skyward, and strain to see the tops of the high pines and firs; and you might shiver to see the mighty Roc, the mightiest bird in the glade, soaring overhead.

But, before long, you would surely hear a rush, and a gallop, and you would turn in amazement, for before you would be running, faster than the wind, a streak of pure white, four hooves almost flying across the glade. And as you looked more closely, you might just hear it singing to itself, and you might think it the most melodious of tunes; and then you would stand back in surprise, for upon the creature's head you would see a horn of crystal spearing the air.

You might realize then that you had entered the home of the unicorn, and count yourself among the luckiest of mortals, for only the purest of heart are allowed here.

Once, no people came to this glade; but that was before the time of Eleuthia. Long, very long ago, Eleuthia had been like all the other unicorns that inhabit the glade. She spent her hours running with the wind, and tossing her mane in the breeze. She liked to kick up clear water in the brook, and she played with her friends, all the other unicorns, racing across meadows and fields, and down narrow paths. She was very fast, and won many of the races.

Sometimes, when she felt very brave, she galloped along the paths of the giants, who lived nearby; but she was careful not to be stepped on!

At night she lay down to sleep on a bed of flowers. Every day was like that, and that was fine with Eleuthia.

But on one never-to-be-forgotten day everything changed. Eleuthia had gone to sleep the night before, and had slept so deeply that she suspected that she herself had been placed under a magic spell.

She arose from her bed of daffodils and daisies, and wandered slowly down to the brook for a drink of water, which she knew would help her to shake off the sleep. As she looked into the stream, expecting to see her lovely unicorn's form reflected in the water, she saw--no horn! Her unicorn's horn, the very feature which made her enchanted, and immortal, was gone, away from her head, as if it had never been there.

Eleuthia shook with fear, for she knew that if she did not find the horn, soon she would be--an ordinary horse. A beautiful, stunningly white horse, but--a horse.

With tears in her eyes, she began looking. She looked underneath the fairies' toadstools; through the grassy meadows she searched; she looked, very carefully, along the giants' paths. She asked her friend the mighty Roc, the most powerful bird that ever lived, if he had seen it. But he had not.

For a day and a night she searched. She found--nothing. All through the forest, all through the glade she looked, until she knew her horn was not there.

There was one thing, and one thing alone left to do. And Eleuthia was afraid to do it, because no unicorn had ever done it.

She had to see the Wizard.

She did not even know if he really lived--the other unicorns talked of the Wizard quietly, when no one was watching; they spoke in whispers. If there was such a man, she had thought, she should be afraid of him.

But she wanted, desperately, her horn back.

And so she departed the enchanted forest in the magical glade, and headed for the great mountain in the north. By nightfall the next day she had arrived at the bottom of the mountain, and from there it looked much much higher than it had from her forest.

But she knew she had no choice. She slept a little that night, but she was afraid, and had bad dreams. In the morning she began to climb the mountain. At first, it was easy; but as she got higher, she noticed large boulders all around her; and she knew that one false step, and she could be crushed under one of them.

Higher and higher she went. It grew colder, and Eleuthia noticed snow, for the first time in her life, on the ground. Her hooves, magical as they were, slipped in the snow, and soon she was cold.

Higher still, and the snow turned to ice. She was almost to the top of the mountain, but it was ever so dangerous now. Eleuthia considered going back, to her warm forest in the magic glade. But she had to have her horn back!

A storm came up, and the winds began to howl. Eleuthia started to cry, and her tears froze on the side of her face. Was there really a Wizard at the top of this mountain?

And then she saw the cave. It was a little cave, but Eleuthia knew in her heart that this was the Wizard's cave.

She entered, and as she did she suddenly felt warmer. She looked around: it was what she expected of a cave, with a stone ceiling, stone floor, and no flowers anywhere.

She waited, expectantly.

Then, all of a sudden, before her with a POOF! stood a little man, no higher than her front leg. He wore a black robe, with all sorts of odd designs on it; and a black hat covered what must be a bald head. He was an old man, thought Eleuthia, he was, perhaps, older than her forest, and maybe older than the mountain itself. His face was wrinkled in all sorts of ways; he had small hands, and she could not see his feet at all. She was very frightened.

She had to speak, otherwise she could ask him to get her horn back. "I bring you greetings from the enchanted glade," she started.

"Yes, yes, yes!" he cackled. "I know you!" His gravelly voice cracked, like an old twig on a tree. "You're the unicorn who lost her horn? And how did you do that?"

"Surely I do not know, kind sir," answered Eleuthia politely.

"Your name," continued the Wizard, "is Eleuthia! I know that! I know everything! Do you know my name?"

"I have not had the honor of meeting so distinguished a gentleman as you, sir," replied Eleuthia.

"My name," said the Wizard quietly, looking around, as if to make sure no one else was listening, "is-- Shazalimo!"

Eleuthia thought that a very odd name, but she did not say so. Instead, she said, "I am very pleased to meet you, sir."

"And I," spoke the Wizard whose name was Shazalimo, "know how to get your horn back!"

"Oh, please tell me!" begged the unhappy unicorn.

"No, no, I shall not now. No, you shall have to perform a task for me, a very difficult task. You may not want to do it, but you have to if you want to get your horn back! Yes, you have to! But if you don't, you can go back home, and be a very happy horse, if you want to."

"Please, sir, I want my horn back!"

"Are you sure? Are you really sure?"

"Yes, sir. I beg you."

"Very well. Here is my task for you. I am going to change you into another creature--yes, I can do that! I am Shazalimo! another creature, yes, and you have to live as that creature for a time, and then you shall have your horn back!"

"Another creature? What kind? A dragon, perhaps? A mighty Roc? Or a sea serpent, or a two-headed eagle? What, pray, tell me? What fate have you for me?" Eleuthia trembled.

"Not any of those, my dear," answered the Wizard. "No, you shall be a human, a maiden girl. Well? Do you accept my challenge? Will you do as I say?"

Eleuthia pondered all this for a moment, and considered, sadly, that she had no choice. She must do as the Wizard said. "Yes, sir, I will--"

And before she had time to finish, POOF!

And everything in her life changed. A moment ago, she was standing on four legs; now she stood on two--and she didn't even fall! And she was wearing--a dress, a long, flowing blue dress that brushed the cave floor, and on her feet not unicorn-shoes, but crystalline slippers.

"Goodbye, my pretty!" shouted the Wizard named Shazalimo. And POOF! no longer was Eleuthia the unicorn in the Wizard's cave, but instead Eleuthia the maiden found herself walking down a path, far, far, away.

In the distance she saw a white shining castle, and as she drew nearer she realized that the castle was constructed of pure marble. Whoever owned this castle must himself possess strong magic, she thought.

She crossed the clear moat, in which she saw the most extraordinary fish swimming, and she entered the courtyard of the castle. She looked around, and all about were towers and spires, all seeming to reach and touch the far blue sky.

A man approached her--not a young man, she could see. An elderly man, with grey hair. As he spied her, he stopped in his tracks, and then came to her. "Who might you be?" he said, in an old man's voice. He seemed kind, and not about to hurt her.

"My name is Eleuthia," she answered.

"And are you, perchance, a Princess?" he inquired, for he was quite taken aback by her beauty.

"I--I don't really know, sir. I think perhaps I might be. I seem to be having some trouble remembering things." And it was true--Eleuthia had lost her memory, she could not remember even the slightest detail of her previous, now lost life.

"Well, you certainly are the loveliest thing to enter the Castle of Altheia, young maiden. May I, the Grand Duke Major Domo of this land welcome you to our humble kingdom!"

"Why thank you, kind sir."

"And since we do not know if you are a Princess or not, let us think that you are, and treat you as one. May we offer you our royal apartments, a place for you to stay, and to put your things?"

"I thank you again, sir, for your offer," answered Princess Eleuthia, "but truly I have no things. All I have is what you see."

"Very well then! You must then come, and meet our King. His name is King Clarmello." The Grand Duke winked. "He is old, and somewhat crotchety: but his mood should change upon seeing you!"

Eleuthia was somewhat anxious about meeting the King; what if he should turn her out, and make her go away from the Castle? For she had nowhere else to go.

Through a diamond door they went, into a huge room, with a high, vaulted ceiling, with flags of all colors and shapes hanging from the ceiling. As they approached, Eleuthia heard a gruff voice shout, "Is that you, Grand Duke, you idiot? You're late!" shouted the man who could be none other than King Clarmello. "Come on, let's go! Why isn't the weather warmer? What are those clouds doing in the sky? How come the tulips aren't blooming yet? What in heaven's name have you been doing, you--you Grand Duck!" exploded the King, his chubby round face as red as a dragon's eye.

Eleuthia did something quite unexpected then. She giggled.

And that stopped King Clarmello's tantrum dead in its tracks. He looked at her for a good minute; his mouth dropped open; he gasped; and he whispered, "Who--who?"

And then he said, "Oh--how lovely!" And nobody could remember the last time old King Clarmello had said anything like *that*.

At that moment, from a door on the side, a young man entered. This young man was the son of the old King; he was tall, and slender; he had golden hair, and wore a red tunic, with black trousers. At his side he carried a golden sword, with which, they say, he killed many a evil dragon.

Prince Tallavor normally, upon coming into the presence of his father, walked directly before the throne, bowed, and said, "By your leave, sir, what are your commands this day?" But *this* day he saw Eleuthia for the first time, and in a flash, his heart was forever lost to her.

There are some in this world who do not believe in love at first sight; but the Prince will tell you differently. He went straight to Eleuthia, and, hardly able to speak, said, "Who--who are you?"

She answered, and as they talked quietly, their eyes gazing deep into each other, the old King, and the Grand Duke watched.

The King was a cranky old man, but he was not King for nothing! He knew, he recognized very well when there was magic afoot, and he understood exactly what to do now. For that very evening he commanded a great festival, a ball more magnificent than anyone in the kingdom could remember.

Neither the Prince nor Eleuthia had ever seen anything like it. There was a great dinner, at the huge table sat every Prince, Duke, Baron, and Knight in the Kingdom, and with them were every Princess, Duchess, Baroness, and Lady: why, there must have been hundreds of them! After dinner, there was music, and dancing; and Eleuthia, who had never danced before, danced as if she had all her life with the Prince.

And afterwards, all climbed the emerald stairs to the balcony to watch the Royal Fireworks, and Eleuthia shivered with joy as the Prince put his hand in hers.

Too soon, too soon the night was ended! Eleuthia returned to her room, not at all sleepy, and feeling--well, feeling like a girl newly in love, which means she walked as if she weighed nothing at all. She dropped into her bed, floating down into the mattress like a feather.

And at that very moment, POOF! before her stood the Wizard, named Shazalimo.

"Well, my pretty! Are you ready to become a unicorn again?" He held up his hand. "Look what I have! Your horn! Well? Are you eady?"

Eleuthia's memory returned, flooding her mind like water from a broken dam. She remembered all her years in the enchanted forest, in the magic glade, far, far away. She remembered running free, as free as the wind, to live forever like the wind, in the enchanted forest.

And she also remembered the Prince. She remembered the look in his eyes as they danced about the ballroom, and when he left her after the fireworks.

She did not answer the Wizard.

"I'm waiting, waiting! What is your answer?"

But she could not. Finally she said, "What have you done to me? Why have you done this? I am in love, in love with both of my lives! You torment me!"

The Wizard only laughed, a high, cackling laugh. "Very well, very well. I give you until tomorrow night to make up your mind. Tomorrow night I shall return to you!"

And he disappeared. Eleuthia started to cry, but the moment her head touched her pillow, she fell asleep, into a deep sleep, into a sleep so deep it could only be enchanted.

When she awoke the next morning, she arose, and, opening her closet door, she found it full of the most beautiful dresses, and the loveliest clothes she could imagine. She chose a long white frock, and shoes with emeralds.

That morning she remembered everything. She knew who she was, and what she had been. She was indeed a Princess, and she was also a unicorn. But where, for her, was happiness? Which road should Eleuthia's life follow?

The Prince was waiting for her, outside in the courtyard. Instantly when he saw her he knew something was wrong. "What is troubling you, Eleuthia?" he asked straightaway.

"I--I cannot tell you," she answered.

They spent the entire day together. They walked all through the beautiful Castle of Altheia, through the Room of Mirrors, and the Room of Paintings. Through the Hall of Flowers they went, and around the Glimmering Pool. But to the Prince, at every step, Princess Eleuthia was preoccupied, her mind was someplace else.

They had a private dinner together, just the royal couple, together. They talked, and talked, but finally the Prince could stand his frustration no longer, and asked, "Please, tell me, Princess. Do you not like me? I love you, I cannot help it, but do you not feel anything for me?"

Eleuthia sadly looked into the Prince's eyes for a long moment, then choked, "I love you more than life itself!" And, as she burst into tears, she ran outside, and up the highest spire she ran, higher and higher.

When she reached the top she looked down, and in the distance she saw--unicorns, dozens of them, running and playing and cavorting in the forest, far, far away. She recognized some of her old friends,

and for a moment, more than anything else, she wanted to be with them. I want both lives, she thought, but if I cannot have both, how can I have either? she wept.

The Prince caught up to her, and joined her. "Please, my lady, please let me help."

Eleuthia looked into the eyes of the man she loved. "No, Prince. You cannot help me. Only I can help myself. Tomorrow, tomorrow, you shall know everything."

"But--"

She put her finger on his lips. "Tomorrow."

Without another word, he embraced her, and kissed her. "I could not let you go without that," he said quietly, and then he left her.

Eleuthia returned to her room. As she sat on her bed, once again, for the last time, the Wizard appeared. His appearance this evening was different; his face was less wrinkled; he was taller, and more grave. His voice, when he spoke, was deep, and strong. "Eleuthia. Tonight I require a decision. What shall it be?"

She spoke directly to him. "I will answer you tonight, but first you must answer me. Why have you done this? What was your purpose? For days now you have tortured me; I have loved someone, something I have never done before. But I love my past as much as I love my future. How can I live happily ever after now? I ask you these questions."

"These are good questions, but alas! I cannot answer," the Wizard said. "Magic is not simple, it is so complicated. But I can tell you this: the Prince needs a Princess, but there are no Princesses around who are as kind and loving as you. Yet you are a unicorn, and as long as you live the spirit of the unicorn shall live in you. You must decide how you shall live, I cannot do that for you."

Eleuthia thought a moment, then said, "If I choose for my old life, for my carefree life as a unicorn, then that would make my story a Tragedy, for our love would be unrequited. Is love, then, more important than freedom? And those that hear my story, in ages to come, why, perhaps they will shed tears upon hearing of the handsome, lonely Prince, and the unicorn-Princess he adored.

"But if I choose for the Prince, then I leave behind all that I was, all that I knew; and I will know not the future, for all will change. Perhaps, perhaps, this is a new kind of freedom, one I have not experienced. And those who hear this story will learn, again perhaps, that Love Conquers All."

"All this," responded the Wizard slowly, "is as you say."

"Very well then," said Eleuthia firmly. "I decide for love, and for the Prince. I shall live with the Prince forever, and be his Princess. But please, if it is in your powers, then I plead with you, I beg this one wish: I want to return to my very own home, to the enchanted forest, to live my life!"

The Wizard lifted his head, and raised his hands to the sky. "SO BE IT!" he shouted, and vanished. Eleuthia never saw him again. Would he grant her wish? Could he?

So it happened, a few weeks later, that the Prince of Altheia and the Princess of, well, somewhere else, were married. And it happened not long after that that the Prince got lost riding through the forest, and found himself in the prettiest glade he had ever seen; surely, it seemed to him, it must be enchanted.

After that, his horse seemed somehow to find its own way back to the Castle of Altheia, and the Prince remembered the way. In time a new crystal palace was constructed in the enchanted forest, in the magic glade; and the Prince and the Princess lived there, happily, ever after.

And so, if you should happen to wander into the enchanted glade, then be sure to visit the glistening palace in which still live the Prince and Princess; and if, perhaps, the lovely Princess should excuse herself, to gaze out a window at the frolicking unicorns: then you will understand.