

The magical plate

A great while ago when the world was full of wonders, there lived a wealthy merchant whose only hobby was to collect as many precious materials as he could find. Due to his immense wealth, which he had acquired by any means necessary, he was able to possess many a magical, mysterious and magnificent artifacts from all around the world. Now this merchant, who was giving in--quite unceremoniously--to the ravages of time was left to live all alone with his possessions in a great big mansion. Due to his mean-spirited nature and affinity for violence, his wife left him as did his children. He lived by himself, but he was tended to by a retinue of servants and maids who were indentured to the merchant for the smallest of reasons.

The merchant did have an interest other than collecting invaluable artifacts and that was eating. He ordered his servants to cook him delectable dishes at inopportune moments throughout the day and at night. The servants suffered in silence, but they were tired of his gluttony and greed and waited for him to drop dead. One of his maids was an orphan child named Oma, a sprightly little girl who was a favorite of all the servants and maids, so much that they kept her away from the evil eye of the merchant as best they could. Left all alone in the giant house, Oma explored the corridors full of curiosity and wonder. One fine afternoon, she passed a room with a locked door and the windows boarded up. Her inquisitiveness got the best of her and she broke the lock open with as heavy a stone as she could carry in her frail arms. When she finally pushed the door open, she gazed at the most wondrous sight: she had chanced upon the merchant's collection of magical items. She walked through the room in awe for she saw muslin so thin and intricate, one could see the other side, automatic quills, a magical harp that played music by itself, a statue that could walk but not talk and a sword so sharp it could cut a wall into two. Amongst his possessions she also found a golden ceramic plate. It looked quite

ordinary in comparison to the rest of the objects, but when she touched it, it woke up and began speaking at once.

“What would you like to eat?”

At this, Oma nodded her head vigorously and began thinking about blueberry custard, her favorite food in the whole world. Lo and behold, the plate filled with the most delicious blueberry custard! Ecstatic Oma ate to her heart’s content. When it came time to leave, Oma hid the plate inside her airy robes and snuck it out of the room. She handed it to the head cook, a stout woman with a matronly demeanor. To the cook she said,

“Here Schiff, now you will not have to cook anymore. When the master asks for food, just ask this plate and it will help you.”

A crowd of maids and servants surrounded her and Oma demonstrated what the plate could do. Everyone was relieved and happy until they heard the merchant scream from the ballroom for his usual 10 cups of tea and 200 biscuits. Almost immediately, 10 cups of tea and 200 biscuits appeared on the plate, somehow all fitting neatly. Smiling one of the maids picked up the plate and handed it over to the merchant. The ravenous merchant devoured the food in one go and let out a satisfied burp. As the maid came back to pick up the plate, the merchant suddenly grabbed her hand to stop her. He eyed her with suspicion and yanked the plate out of her hand. Then talking to the plate he said,

“Give me more food.”

The plate replied back, “and what would you like to eat?”

The merchant was livid.

“How dare you lay your filthy hands on my magical plate? Where did you get this? Who gave this to you?”

This scared the maid out of her wits and she began babbling incoherently. She was slapped twice by the merchant and before he could kick her, the head cook came forward and took the blame on herself. At this the merchant grew very quiet and after a while he said,

“You are my best cook. But no one has my permission to go inside that room. I will have you flogged fifteen times, and you can remain in my mansion. But you must never again touch the plate, for if you do the consequences will be dire.”

The cook was flogged fifteen times in front of the merchant who watched the spectacle with uncanny pleasure and life went back to normal within the mansion. The chef, insulted and hurt by the merchant’s actions was in no mood to serve her master ever again and hatched a plan to leave the mansion forever with Oma. One night they stole as many artifacts as they could from the now named Room of Mystery and stowed them inside the kitchen.

The morning of their departure, Oma sprained her ankle and could not walk for a few days. Deciding to lay low for a while, they continued their routines as much as they could and prayed the merchant wouldn’t enter the Room of Mystery until they had left. As luck would have it, the merchant became suspicious of the chef’s deportment and decided to spy on her. One morning he hid in the kitchen pantry and saw with his own eyes all the stolen artifacts stowed under the sink. Furious, he jumped out from his hiding spot and attacked the chef and Oma who were the only two present at the time, with a sharp dagger he carried with himself. He cut off the chef’s right hand in one swipe. Taken aback, the chef picked up whatever object she could find and hit him on the head with as much strength as she could muster. The item was the magical plate and it smashed into exactly six pieces and scattered to the floor with a damning yelp. The merchant lost consciousness and fell down as well. Oma and the chef then stabbed him until the

floor was a red river and left the mansion with the crying plate at once, leaving other artifacts untouched.

They were free, but the only magical object they had was the plate which was now broken and the chef has lost her right hand, the most important hand needed for cooking. The two of them went to the chef's old home and started living as mother and daughter, albeit in poverty. One night as Oma went through her minimal possessions she found a small bottle of glue she had nicked from the merchant and forgotten about. Now this glue was also magical and could fix anything broken. At once, Oma applied it to the broken plate and it bonded together and become whole again, minus the scars left on the surface. Next she applied the glue on the chef's broken hand and she grew back her fingers and was whole again.

Out of sheer happiness, the two threw a feast with the plate's help for everyone in town including their friends, the maids and servants from the mansion. They also started their own luncheonette, which was the best luncheonette in town. Not only did Oma never have to worry about a morsel again in her life, she had also gained a mother in the process and they lived happily ever after.