



# The magic of staytoo Christmas

A  
Christmas tale

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Once upon a time, there was an evil ice queen who ruled over a land called IsYouLand. The inhabitants of the land, who called themselves Staytoorians, feared her dark power and she was said to be particularly cruel to those who entered Nürbokeileber, the sacred capital where the queen's palace was located, without her permission.

It once happened that an IsYouLander named Gulliver Nordstern wanted to go to Nürbokeileber to study the sciences and arts. Gulliver was a shy young man, tall and lanky, with flowing dark blond hair and brown eyes that shone with a lust for discovery.

Gulliver loved to wear light-colored linen pants and shirts, but his trademark was his black vest, which he always wore over his shirts and in whose pocket he kept his grandfather's gold pocket watch.

People in the village said behind closed doors that Gulliver was not the prettiest Staytoorian, but that he had his heart in the right place.



Ever since the young Gulliver could remember, he had wanted to go to Nürbokeileber; it had been his dream since childhood. He and his best friend Forto had spent countless afternoons lying on the meadow at the edge of the village, staring up at the sky and watching the clouds go by. Meanwhile, Gulliver had raved incessantly about what it would be like to study in Nürbokeileber.

After all, Nürbokeileber was the most beautiful and magnificent place behind the seven mountains, so it was said, where scholars from all over the world gathered. Gulliver wanted to learn there about the true, the beautiful and the good so that he could later help the poor of the land.

One day, the time had finally come: a carrier pigeon had delivered Gulliver's matriculation certificate, it had opened its beak and the document had fallen at Gulliver's feet as he had just left the house.

Now Gulliver laced up his brown winter boots, ready to move to Nürbokeileber.



"Don't go!" his mother called after him as he shouldered his rucksack with all sorts of belongings that his dear mother had given him for his adventure, including thick woollen socks that she had knitted for him by the fireplace in the house and a thermos flask of warm mead.

"Your journey will be long and arduous, and full of dangers! Don't you want to stay here with us in the Shire?"

But Gulliver had already run out of the door, driven by the stories of those men and women who had already been to Nürbokeileber and had told incredible tales, including of an ogre with yellow fangs living in the swamp, whom the Ice Queen had condemned to drive away intruders from Nürbokeileber. Sometimes, it was said, he would even eat the intruders when he was very hungry.

Gulliver's eyes had lit up when the travelers had told him about all these adventures over mead and oven-baked bread in the tavern "To The Crispy Drumstick".



Gulliver hurried to the station, and while his steps almost skipped in the slush, the adventurers' scintillating stories and their words of warning echoed in his ears.

"Beware of the Ice Queen, she is as rich as a Gönngamin, her power knows no bounds, and many things make her salty. Her magic is as black as the cawing ravens on the church towers, and her soul as dark as the moonless night. With a snap of her bony fingers, she can freeze the blood in your veins!"

Gulliver felt his heart racing, filled with fear, but also with a thirst for adventure. But it seemed that the queen was already pulling at his strings with her bony fingers.

He had reached the platform, but there was no train to be seen for miles around.

"Platform four-seven-eighths: train canceled," Gulliver read the scrolling text on the station display.

"Excuse me," he addressed a moustachioed conductor on the platform, "when is the next train to Nürbokeileber?"



The conductor laughed loudly and said: "In three hours. If you're lucky, lad."

"What about the next train, which according to the timetable is due in half an hour?" asked Gulliver curiously.

"According to the announcement, it has engine trouble."

"And the next train?"

"Can't go any further because the key is stuck on the door outside."

"You've got to be kidding me."

"Wait a minute," said the conductor and took out his tablet, on which he read carefully.

"No lad, that's the original announcement."

"There must be some train that ..."

"Train number 429 could be leaving in an hour ... oh no, the announcement reads as follows: "We are standing on the track, in front of a red signal, because the section in front of us is occupied by our



train. In front of it is the head of our train."

The conductor laughed merrily and said: "You just have to like the train, as many advantages as it has."

"What about this one?" asked Gulliver excitedly, pointing to a poster showing a beautiful steam locomotive in a snowstorm.

"That's the Polar Express, lad, a special train to Pankow," said the conductor. "I'm sorry, but you'll need a lot of patience if you want to get to Nürbokeileber tonight."

Gulliver thought about it.

Should he turn back? No, what shame and ridicule would await him at home! Him, the great adventurer, who had only just made it to the station in his home town.

"Well, I'll wait then," said Gulliver, whereupon the conductor walked away shaking his head.

Just as the man had said, hours passed in which nothing happened on track four-seven-eighths, with the exception of the Polar Express rushing past at breakneck speed towards Pankow.





Snowflakes descended like feathers and Gulliver froze, beginning to miss his mother's couch grass tea as he ate the last of the brown bread with thinly sliced cheese. He could have drunk the mead she had given him, but he wanted to keep it for emergencies.

At last a train arrived, a monstrosity on the track, packed with people who had probably waited out the cold at other stations like him. Gulliver squeezed into the train, it was stuffy and cramped in here. Squeezed between other passengers, he lay down on the train floor, using his rucksack as a pillow, and fell asleep immediately.

"Next stop: Nürbokeileber."

Gulliver was woken by the mechanical-sounding announcement, he got off and looked around. It was deep night and the moon had disappeared, shrouded by black clouds, as the adventurers from the tavern had told him.

Gulliver walked on, looking around in amazement at the city, where everything was so strange and exciting at the same time.





Suddenly he was startled when he heard snoring in an alley next to him. Had he just imagined it? No, the snoring sounded again, behind a bush that was now rustling, causing snow to fall from the leaves of the bush.

"Hello?" asked Gulliver, "is anyone there?"

He walked cautiously behind the bushes, and in the pale light of the street lamp he saw a creature with green skin. It was lying on its back and had a round belly that swayed up and down as it slumbered.

"Um, hello?" asked Gulliver, worried about this creature, which was now startled awake.

Then Gulliver remembered the legend of the cruel green ogre who served the Ice Queen.

Oh no, thought Gulliver. What is he about to do to me?

"Da hol mi der Deife, wer hod mi aufgeweckt?" the creature slurred and opened its eyes.

It seemed to be staring in two directions at once.



"Are you that ogre? The man-eating monster?"

A loud, terrifying laugh filled the night, the creature held its belly bobbing up and down. Gulliver now recognized the ogre's powerful paws and yellow teeth, which reminded him of the tusks of a boar. His feet were hairy, the powerful muscles of his arms strained like the broad chest of the chain mail he wore. No doubt, this had to be the brutal creature.

"Yyyeess, I am an ogre, Gustav is my noam."

Gustav rubbed his belly with a satisfied, good-natured grin.

"But apart from chicken and mackerel, I don't get anything in the stomach. Mead of course, lots of mead. Don't you happen to have any mead with you?"

Chicken and mackerel ... That's probably where his harsh breath comes from, Gulliver thought. So all this talk is just tea.

The young adventurer breathed a sigh of relief. This was really not how he had imagined the oh-so-dangerous ogre.





"Yes, here," he said, handing the ogre the small thermos flask of mead that his mother had given him.

"Thank God! Hiccup! The Ice Queen has actually secured me a permanent supply of mead. But in recent times... hiccup! The lifts in my swamp have run out."

Ask yourself why that is, Gulliver thought, but didn't voice the thought for fear that it might change the ogre's mood.

Gulliver felt his strength gradually failing him, he urgently needed a place to stay for the night.

So he asked Gustav: "Do you know where I can sleep near here?"

"Sure, I'll sleep there now, if I've made it this far."

The ogre laughed out loud again.

When he had calmed down, he said: "Walk about 100 meters further, then cross the road and you'll find a place to stay."



"Thank you," said Gulliver, leaving the bushes and walking further down the street.

Then he saw glowing letters on a large building ahead of him, shining bright and clear like stars.

HOTEL

Gulliver joyfully ran into the building, but now he saw a long line of people in front of him, their individual limbs moving sluggishly.

"Another cunning trick by the queen," muttered Gulliver.

When it was finally his turn, he spoke to a moustachioed man in a suit who reminded him of the conductor at the station in his home town.

"Good evening," said Gulliver, who could already see a warm bed before his eyes. "I'd like to book a room for tonight."

The man looked him up and down, wrinkled his nose and looked at him as if he didn't belong here, and in a way he was right.





Gulliver felt uncomfortable between the fine suits and the ladies in smart outfits.

"Just a moment, sir," said the clerk. Gulliver thought he sounded snobbish. "All the rooms are booked except for one. We still have the Grand Deluxe Suite with king-size bed and city view from the top floor for you."

Gulliver swallowed, then asked: "How much will it cost me?"

The man looked at him snidely again, then said: "For you ... 600 thalers, sir."

"What?" asked Gulliver in horror. "I can never afford that!"

Suddenly, a man in fine threads pushed his way in and said: "I've heard that the Grand Deluxe Suite is still available. I'd like to book it."

"I'd love to, sir. That will be 300 thalers, please."

"Why is that?" asked Gulliver indignantly. "You gave me the suite for ..."



"Your prize," the man interrupted Gulliver and looked at him seriously with his small nut-brown eyes, "is the Queen's prize."

Shaking his head, Gulliver left the hotel, and because he was so tired, his feet only carried him to the nearest park bench, where he sank down exhausted.

The snow continued to trickle down from the sky, covering the whole of Nürbokeileber with its powder.

Exhausted, Gulliver lay down on the bench, shivering and rattling as he wrapped himself in a blanket that his mother had tied to his rucksack.

He only wanted to rest for a moment, but fell asleep immediately. When the first rays of sunlight tickled him awake, he saw a beautiful, snow-white bird sitting on a branch. It sang so beautifully that he listened to it. When it had finished, it waved its wings and flew ahead of him. Gulliver followed it until he came to a little house on whose roof the bird perched. When he got very close, he saw that the house was made entirely of bread and covered with gingerbread, and had windows made of the finest icing.





Suddenly Gulliver felt how hungry he was.

"I'll get to it," he said, "and have a blessed meal. I'll eat a piece of the roof, and then I'll eat from the window, I'm sure it will taste delicious!"

Gulliver stretched himself and broke off a piece of the roof.

Then a fine voice called out from the parlor: "Crunchy, crunchy, crunchy, who's crunching on my little house?"

Gulliver was startled, the door of the gingerbread house opened and an old, bony woman with a wart on her nose stared at him.

"I ... I'm sorry, I was so hungry I couldn't get in or out, and I saw your house."

"Hold out your fingers to me!" the old woman suddenly demanded.

She stepped out of the house and Gulliver realized that she had a hunched back and walked with a cane.



"What, you want me to..."

"I want to see how fat you are!" she said, and before Gulliver could think any more about this strange demand, she had already grabbed his hand.

"Boy, you're really skinny."

"And tired," said Gulliver.

"What brings you here, to Nürbokeileber?"

"I want to study the high sciences and arts for which Nürbokeileber is famous all over the world."

"Well, then you've come to the right place," said the old woman, baring her crooked teeth in a smile. "Come in, it's cold outside and I've got some hot soup on the fire."

Gulliver had to duck as he entered the little wooden house. It was cozy inside, the logs crackled in the fireplace and the smell of fresh potato soup filled the room.





Gulliver sat down on a wooden chair while the old woman hobbled over to the cast-iron pot in which the soup was simmering.

Then she handed him a large plate of steaming soup. With every spoonful that Gulliver ate, he felt his strength returning.

He ate two more plates until he was finally full and tired.

"Good woman, I have already worn out your hospitality. But may I ask you for one more favor?"

"Go ahead, go ahead," she said with a smile.

"May I spend the night in your wonderfully cozy wooden hut? Just for one night, I promise, after that I'll find somewhere else to stay and..."

"Of course, boy," she interrupted him. "That's no problem at all, you can sleep on the cot."



The old woman pointed to a wooden frame on which cozy-looking blankets and pillows were piled on top of each other. A pleasant shiver ran through Gulliver at the idea of being able to lie down and slumber there.

"Oh, that's really too kind of you," said Gulliver, who couldn't believe his luck. Suddenly a thought pricked him like a thorn. "But what about the Ice Queen? Everyone told me she was rich as a patron saint, powerful and hostile to newcomers."

"Oh, the queen," waved the old woman off, "she just likes to flail, don't worry about her."

The woman smiled as if frozen, which disturbed Gulliver, but he was too tired to worry about it. His limbs felt as heavy as lead and he longed for the cot on the other side of the room.

"Get some rest, boy, and tomorrow you'll go your way fresh and lively."

Then she hobbled to the old wooden staircase, climbed its creaky steps and disappeared into the upper floor of the witch's cottage.





Dead tired, Gulliver dragged himself to the cot, slumped down on it and fell asleep on the spot.

When he woke up the next morning, he thought he was dreaming when he tasted the musty air in his mouth and looked through rusty bars at stone walls where the mold was crawling up.

Gulliver moved, whereupon an eerie rattling sound was heard. He was startled when he looked down and saw heavy chains on his wrists and ankles.

"What the ..."

"Shut up!" hissed a voice next to him. It came from a young woman, Gulliver's age, who was also locked in a cage and chained up.

She was as pretty as a picture, her skin as white as snow, her lips as red as blood, her hair as black as ebony, but dressed in old linen, and the look in her green eyes was tired and sad. Gulliver noticed that she had no shoes on her feet; she must be terribly cold.



Suddenly, a door above the stairs flew open, pale daylight flooded in and Gulliver recognized the outline of the old, hunchbacked woman on the threshold of the door.

"That's the witch," whispered the young prisoner.

"Witch?" asked Gulliver incredulously.

He knew witches from stories, but never before had he come face to face with one in the flesh.

The old woman walked slowly down the steps.

"What's she planning to do to us?" asked Gulliver, seized by panic.

"What do you think? She wants to eat us!"

That's why the old woman had fattened him up like a goose with the potato soup.

"Well, how are you today, on this wonderful morning? My treasures," the witch asked bitingly, reminding Gulliver of a sinister creature that roamed the woods of his home village and that the villagers called Gullom.



Once, when Gulliver had been walking home through the forest to dear Mrs. Mama, he had met Gullom, a naked little creature with grey skin, rotten teeth and a nasty look in his yellow eyes. "My darling," Gullom had croaked, and Gulliver had fled from him.

"I see you've met Isabelle. She's been here a little longer than you."

The witch limped over to the cage where the pretty young woman stood.

"Let's see your fingers!"

Gulliver remembered that she had asked him to do the same the day before in the same tone.

The old woman worked Isabelle's delicate hand as if she were kneading cake dough.

"They're still skinny! You're not eating enough, girl!"

"Forgive me," said Isabelle in a guilty voice, "I eat everything you give me, but I just don't want to put on weight."





"All right, then I'll have to eat our new guest first. He'll make a good, fat Christmas roast."

A cold shiver ran down Gulliver's spine as the old woman talked about making him her holiday meal.

"Wait!" cried Isabelle, as the witch was about to limp to Gulliver's cage. "I'll tell you my secret, why I stay so skinny even though I eat like a barnyard dog."

The witch paused, pricked up her ears and said, "I'm curious."

Isabelle cleared her throat; even in the pale light down here, Gulliver could see that her previously pale cheeks were now flushed.

"I ... I'm embarrassed in front of the stranger. I just want to tell you."

The old woman sighed and said, "You young people, someone should understand you."



But it worked, the witch leaned over to Isabelle's cage and wedged her bony, misshapen ear between the bars.

Gulliver watched as Isabelle's delicate lips moved, but she whispered so quietly that he couldn't understand the words that left her mouth.

However, he could see from the old woman's wide eyes that Isabelle must have said something, which startled her. The old woman tried to tear herself away from the bars, but Isabelle's hand went to the rags she was wearing and pulled the witch towards her with a jerk.

The witch's head banged against the bars, causing her to fall to the ground and lie motionless.

"Quick," said Isabelle, "we don't have much time before she regains consciousness and can use her black magic."

Isabelle crouched down, stretched her slender arms through the bars and rummaged through the old woman's pockets. She smiled as she fished the bunch of keys out of one of the pockets and began to undo her bonds.



Once she had freed herself, she unlocked the lock on her cage. Then she also opened Gulliver's cage door and freed him from his chains.

The old woman on the floor slowly came to, but was dazed and moaning in pain.

Gulliver thought he could hear words escaping her mouth between the moans.

"What have I ... done."

Had he heard her correctly?

"We have to get out of here!" Isabelle snapped him out of his thoughts.

Gulliver followed her up the stairs, and when he reached the living room, he grabbed his rucksack and fled from the crispy house with Isabelle.

"Here, take these," said Gulliver, handing Isabelle his woolen socks and a pair of Adilettes.

"Oh, thank you very much," said Isabelle and slipped first the socks and then the Adilettes over her feet.





"You can't walk barefoot through the snow," Gulliver said as he pulled plastic bags over her shoes and tied them around Isabelle's ankles. That would be enough for a short distance, Gulliver hoped.

They walked in silence through the streets of Nürbokeileber for a few hours.

"Where to now?" asked Gulliver, who was hungry, thirsty and tired.

He had long since digested the potato soup from the previous evening and eaten the crispy pieces of dough that he and Isabelle had broken off from the witch's cottage to eat along the way.

"The witch," Isabelle said, "she's really the evil queen of Nürbokeileber. The Staytoorians here fear and shun her in equal measure, which is why they banished her to the witch's cottage in the forest."

"She can exercise her power from there?"



"What power the old woman still has, yes. She once lived in Nürbokeileber's palace, she was the most beautiful in all the land, as the mirror on the wall told her. But one day she gave birth to a girl who was more beautiful than her. Since then, her soul has darkened and she has turned her power, which she once used for the good of Nürbokeileber, against the people. But the humans shun her, causing her powers to dwindle day by day."

"Is that why she wanted to eat us?"

Isabelle faltered, then said: "Yes. When she consumes the souls of pure creatures, she gains immense power. Immortality, as they say."

"Where are we going now?" asked Gulliver.

"To a place where the queen has no power. If we can get there, we'll be saved."

Isabelle pointed to a fancy building looming on the horizon.

"But we have to be on our guard, the queen has her scouts and henchmen everywhere."



"What about your fingers?" asked Gulliver, his gaze now falling on the roughened fingertips of his companion.

"My ... stepmother made me spin clothes with a bobbin when I was young, day after day, until my fingers were bloody. I had to do all the household chores that came up. Unlike my sister, she was my mother's biological child, lazy and mean. It went on like that for years, once I dropped my bloody spindle down the well when I was trying to clean it with the water in it."

"What happened next?" asked Gulliver, spellbound, as he and Isabelle continued to walk through the old town of Nürbokeileber.

Candles were burning in the small windows of the half-timbered houses, wreaths of light illuminating the cozy-looking parlors.

"I met a woman who took me into her care. I did the housework for her too, but it was very different to my stepmother. No bad words were spoken and there was boiled and roasted food every day."





Isabelle turned to Gulliver and he saw that she was smiling.

"The woman told me: You just have to make sure that you make my bed well and shake it diligently so that the feathers fly, then it will snow in the world. And so it did."

"Oh come on, I don't believe in magic," said Gulliver, who couldn't imagine it for the life of him.

"It's true. You've seen with your own eyes that there is magic, but not just black magic, but white magic too. And what I experienced was white magic."

Gulliver was curious and would have liked to know more about Isabelle's miraculous story. He was just about to ask her more questions when they came to the fancy building whose lettering he could now read.

"Staytoo," he read out the red letters.

"Quick, inside," she said after glancing over her shoulder.



Isabelle had sounded nervous, so Gulliver turned around and was startled. A black shadow crept over the houses and the cobblestones of the old town they had just walked through, extinguishing candles and lights.

"The queen knows where we are. If her shadow touches us, we belong to her, forever!"

Gulliver ran to the front door of the Staytoo house and rattled it, but to no avail.

"It's locked!" he shouted in panic.

"Crap," said Isabelle, who had turned to face the shadow, which was ceaselessly swallowing up all the cheer and light of the town as it drew closer and closer.

Gulliver went to Isabelle and stood next to her.

"So that's it," he said. "I will never study the high arts of Nürbokeileber."

Suddenly, something happened that surpassed any magic, black or white.



Isabelle had touched his hand and new, unimagined powers suddenly flowed through him, powers he had never felt before.

"There must be something we can do," he said resolutely.

Isabelle pondered as the shadow drew inexorably closer.

Suddenly there was a noise behind them and Gulliver and Isabelle turned around.

A young man had opened a window on one floor of the Staytoo house. He was smartly dressed in a light blue shirt, but he seemed friendlier and more relaxed to Gulliver than the hotel manager Gulliver had met the day before in downtown Nürbokeileber.

"The Queen's curse!" he called out of the window.

"You must break the curse! Only then will the doors of Staytoo House open."





"Of course, the curse!" it dawned on Isabelle. "The old woman locked me down there for so long that I almost forgot her most treacherous of lists."

"What should we do?" asked Gulliver, who was becoming increasingly nervous in the face of the approaching, all-consuming shadow.

"What is the greatest power in the universe? The power that outshines every other power?"

Gulliver thought, which was difficult in the face of the threat.

"Don't think," she said, "you have to feel the answer."

"So you know the answer?" he asked.

"Yes. But we can only break the curse if you know it too. I can explain everything to you later, but right now we have to do the right thing."

Gulliver suddenly felt what the right thing was. His heart pounded wildly in his chest, sweat broke out on his forehead, an unprecedented warmth expanded in his body.



He summoned up all his courage to do what was necessary.

"Isabelle," he said, whereupon she looked at him with her pretty big eyes.

Then he approached her and kissed her.

As their lips touched, he became aware of a bright light that enveloped them and expanded around them.

When they broke away from each other, they looked towards the old town.

The shadow receded before the light, revealing the houses again and making the candles in the windows glow with a new radiance.

"The curse is broken!" the man above them shouted joyfully out of the window.

Gulliver and Isabelle turned around and saw that the man had disappeared from the window. Light now illuminated the hallway of the Staytoo house, and a short time later the front door opened and the man looked at them, beaming with joy.



"Welcome to Staytoo! I'm the Residential Manager, how can I help you?"

"I... we need apartments," Gulliver said, smiling at the man.

"Then welcome."

For the first time on his arduous journey, Gulliver felt like he had arrived, in a friendly, bright and modern place where he could relax.

Gulliver and Isabelle worked out the details with the Residential Manager, which was simple, quick and straightforward. Then Gulliver finally moved into his apartment and sank down on the comfortable, clean bed.

He blissfully closed his eyes and was about to drift off into a deep slumber when he suddenly heard a voice in the hallway.

Gulliver recognized the voice, it was Isabelle's. He crept to the door, pressed his ear against it and listened. He held his breath spellbound. Outside in the hallway, Isabelle seemed to be singing a song.



Oh how good it is that nobody knows that my  
name is Max Mustermann.

Today I'm dancing, tomorrow I'm leaving, the day  
after tomorrow like a whirlwind,  
early in the morning, I'll get the queen her noble  
child.

Oh how good it is that no one knows my name is  
Max Mustermann.

Gulliver carefully opened the door to his apartment.  
His hand had trembled when he had pressed down  
the handle. Now that the door was open a crack and  
he looked out, he couldn't believe his eyes.

The dwarf-like creature bouncing up and down  
happily had nothing in common with the beautiful  
Isabelle. It was wearing colorful clothes, a red  
pointed hat, a yellow shirt and yellow trousers whose  
legs disappeared into tightly laced leather shoes.

In combination with its cunning, sly expression, the  
creature reminded Gulliver of Rumpelstiltskin, a  
famous fairytale character.





When Gulliver saw what the creature was going to do next, he was startled, rushed out of the apartment and knocked the lighter out of his hand.

"Are you out of your mind?" asked Gulliver.

"Why?"

Not only the former Isabelle's appearance, but also her voice had changed; it had been bright and sweet, but this Max Mustermann sounded croaky.

"I want to make myself a fire and dance around it."

"You can forget it!" shouted Gulliver angrily. "That's against the fire regulations."

Gulliver pointed to the relevant symbols and explanations on the wall.

"How can you miss these white, bold letters on a red background? Let's take notes again!" Gulliver traced the individual syllables with the tip of his outstretched index finger. "Fire ... protection ... order ... order. Got it?"



"You can read," said the creature. "But can you also ... hear?"

Gulliver couldn't get a word out and didn't know what to say.

"What did you hear?" the little man asked him nastily, jumping towards him.

"Something about a child of the queen, and that your name is Max Mustermann."

"Damn it, in three devil's names!" Max Mustermann raged, "now that you know my name, I can't get the queen's child anymore! My power is gone!"

"Who is the queen's child? And tell me immediately what you did with Isabelle!"

Max Mustermann laughed, but in Gulliver's opinion there was a hint of despair.

"Don't you understand? There never was an Isabelle! When the Ice Queen, whom you met as a witch, realized that you, a young hero with daring, were in Nürbokeileber, she staged our encounter in the cellar.



She knew you just couldn't resist me."

"Are you saying I kissed you and not a beautiful woman?"

"Well, what can I say ..." Max Mustermann shrugged his shoulders. "The truth can be hard sometimes."

"I think I'm going to be sick," said Gulliver.

"Our plan almost worked. The Ice Queen knew that you, noble as you are, would lead me straight to the sacred Staytoo Temple. To the place that every Staytoorian knows. For here, within these protective walls, lives the only child of the Ice Queen, whom I was to fetch at dawn and bring back to her."

"A child lives here?" asked Gulliver, who was now even more irritated.

"Not a child in that sense, no. The queen's child has long since grown up. Oh God, I've already revealed far too much."



"Now listen carefully," said Gulliver, biting his lip in anger. "You tell me right now which apartment that woman lives in, or I'll give you a slap in the face that you'll still be feeling in the new year."

"You wouldn't do that," said Max Mustermann with fear in his voice.

"Do you want to find out?"

"All right, all right! She's in apartment 13."

Gulliver looked down the hall.

"The apartment at the end of the hall?"

"Yes," said Max Mustermann. "Now if you would be so kind as to let me go my way in peace. I have to tell the Queen that our plan has failed."

"Then get lost," said Gulliver, "if I see you here again, I'll call the Residential Manager."

"That won't be necessary," said Max Mustermann and trudged off.





Gulliver's heart was pounding in his throat. It was deep night, but he couldn't possibly go to bed now after finding out that the Ice Queen's daughter was living here in the Staytoo house. He had to warn her, tell her that she was in danger.

Breathing frantically, Gulliver walked down the corridor, the path seemed arduous. He stopped in front of the apartment door, took a deep breath and knocked three times.

Silence on the other side.

He knocked again.

Once.

Twice.

Then a third time.

Apparently the Ice Queen's daughter was asleep, Gulliver was annoyed with himself, hoping he hadn't woken her up.

"Sorry," he whispered to himself and was just about to leave when he suddenly heard a voice like honey in his ear.



"Is it you?"

"Depends," said Gulliver, "who she means."

"You're the young man who checked in tonight, along with the woman."

"The woman ... is not a woman," Gulliver said.

"What do you mean?"

"Oh ... it's complicated."

"Why did you knock on my door?"

"I wanted to warn you."

"Warn you about what?"

"Of the Ice Queen. She wants to have you kidnapped, to lure you away from this safe place."

A few seconds of silence passed, then the woman on the other side of the door said: "You can tell me a lot. How do I know the witch didn't send you?"



"Well, first of all," said Gulliver with a sigh, "I suggest we leave out the whole you and you. Because that seems rather crampy."

There was silence again for a moment, but then the woman said: "Okay, we can do that. I'm Sabine, and you?"

"An unusual name," whispered Gulliver, but apparently not quietly enough.

"Hey, don't talk about my name like that. What's your name, please?"

"Gulliver."

"Oh, of course the name isn't unusual at all," she mocked.

"All right, then. And what do you suggest now, Gulliver?"

"No idea. Where I come from, they ask for proof."

"Where is that?"

"In a village in the Shire, far, far away from Nürbokeileber."



"Proof, you say?"

"Yep. Proof that shows I'm not a rogue."

"How about a trial by fire? You could light a few coals outside in the yard and barefoot ..."

"That might suit you," said Gulliver.

"All right, how about you have a heroic brawl with a few scoundrels in front of me to show me what a noble soul you are?"

Gulliver sighed again and asked: "Can you think of any test that won't put my life in danger?"

"You could find my glass shoe that I lost on the way to the Staytoo house, somewhere out on the road. The Residential Manager promised me he'd look for it, but he's been searching the streets day after day, but hasn't found it yet."

Is there anything else I could do to free you?"





"Hm, there's certainly something there. If you have a brave heart, of course."

"What does that mean again?"

"Well, there's a legend that the prince who belongs to the king's daughter is able to climb up her hair into her chambers. You go into the courtyard, I let my hair down and you climb up it like a rope."

"We're on the second floor here, your hair will never reach ..."

"Hey, do you have any idea how long I've been in here? Luckily there's the super-affordable Staytoo all-in rent, which is why I live here in a relaxed atmosphere."

"All-in rent?" Gulliver asked curiously.

"Yes, everything is included: water, electricity and, of course, the accommodation. You don't have to worry about any other costs. And luckily there's also a WiFi flat rate, otherwise I wouldn't know how to treat myself to all those TikTok reels."

"That sounds great, I want to stay here too!"



"I can only recommend it. Even though I'd really like to go to the hairdresser again, I'll do that as soon as I'm free. You'd think I was wearing extensions as long as my hair is now. But it's all real hair, I swear!"

"Okay, okay, so this hair climbing plan ... how is it going to work?"

"Actually, you can start right away. But one more thing is important."

"What else?" asked Gulliver, who was already about to go downstairs.

"You have to say the magic words: Sabine, Sabine, let your hair down!"

"Fine by me," said Gulliver, for whom nothing seemed too strange that evening.

When he arrived in the backyard, he saw that some of the apartment windows were tilted open.

This could be something, thought Gulliver, summoned up all his heroism and shouted up to the open window on the second floor: "Sabine, Sabine, let your hair down!"



"Quiet, I want to sleep!" came from one of the other apartments.

But Gulliver had reached his destination, the light in the apartment above him came on and a long mop of black hair was let down.

"This is madness," cursed Gulliver, who suffered from a fear of heights, but now found new courage.

Meter by meter, he climbed the hair like a rope until he finally reached the apartment window, through which he climbed in.

A woman now stood before him, her skin as white as snow, her lips as red as blood, her long, long hair as black as ebony.

"Isabelle?" he asked, confused.

"No, Sabine," the woman said and smiled. "The witch stole my looks to give them to Max Mustermann. But I am the real beauty."

"Well then," said Gulliver and took a step closer so that they were both looking deep into each other's eyes.



"When Max Mustermann was still in your shape, he told me that love breaks the power of the queen."

"That's true too," said Sabine.

"I kissed Max Mustermann, which wasn't exactly one of my life highlights."

"I know," Sabine said with a smile. "If you kiss me, the queen's power will be broken forever, and we will one day rule IsYouLand as king and queen, just for all Staytoorians."

"That sounds good," said Gulliver.

Then they both kissed.

The days passed, the people rejoiced in the streets because the Queen's power had been broken. The sun shone, bringing nature to life, the joy of life was everywhere, shimmering through the warm air.

Then came the big day, Gulliver and Sabine were married on the expansive roof terrace of the





Staytoo apartment building. People traveled from all corners of IsYouLand, including Gulliver's mother Gertrud, who sat in the front row and dabbed her tears of joy with a handkerchief while Ogre Gustav gave the solemn wedding speech.

"Would you like to ... hiccup! Take Gulliver as your husband?"

"Yes, I do."

"And would you, Gulliver, like to take this woman as your wife?"

"Yes, I do."

"You've got it going on, man!" shouted a young man enthusiastically from the crowd of guests.

"By virtue of the office conferred on me, as an ogre I declare myself man and wife. And now I'm going to the bar to toast myself with mead."

The crowd cheered as Gulliver and Sabine kissed once more.

"It was a great idea to celebrate here," said Gulliver



and looked into his wife's eyes, filled with happiness.

Sabine smiled mischievously and said: "The Staytoo parties here in the house are simply legendary, so it was absolutely clear to me that there could only be one place for our wedding."

"I can hardly wait to live here with you," said Gulliver, but his face took on a worried look the next moment when he saw a piece of cake fall onto the fine white tablecloth of one of the guests.

"What is it, dearest?" asked Sabine.

"We'll have so much work to do after the party, my dear Mrs. Mama will have to laboriously scrub the fine tablecloth by hand and ..."

"Don't worry, dearest," she said and gave Gulliver a kiss. "There's a laundromat in the Staytoo house where the laundry is done automatically and thoroughly. Also..." Sabine smiled broadly again. "What's more, we can always throw another great party in the communal rooms. And if we haven't run out of steam yet, we work out in the fitness room."



Gulliver's eyes began to light up.

"There's all that in this house?"

"It's all included in that all-in rental I was talking about. Pretty lit, right?"

Gulliver nodded and said: "You have truly found the most beautiful place in all of Nürbokeileber, oh, what am I saying, the most beautiful place in the whole country!"

The newlyweds were just about to kiss again when a man's voice boomed through the massive speakers that Gulliver and Sabine had set up in preparation for the ceremony.

A man with round glasses and short hair was standing on the stage, wearing jeans and a beige cotton sweater.

He shouted into the microphone he was holding: "Are you ready for a big party?"

The guests raised their hands and shouted "Yay!" Gulliver's mother Gertrude also eagerly shouted



eager to share what he had never experienced with her before.

"OK, let's go!" shouted the DJ and fired up his pop playlist, whereupon the music boomed out of the speakers.

The couple started their dance first, followed by the guests. The guests partied happily and exuberantly until late into the night.

IsYouLand has since shone in new splendor, Sabine and Gulliver moved into the royal palace, and if they haven't died, they still live there today.

END



We wish you  
Merry Christmas!

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