

PAINTINGS BY CATHERINE HYDE

*The*  
*Princess'*  
*Blankets*


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It was nearing dusk one evening, when a stranger arrived at the palace demanding to see the King. The man was dressed in black clothes and did not bow when the King entered. He had hard, grey eyes like polished stones. He explained to the King that he knew magic and could stop the Princess suffering from the cold. If he was successful, as he was certain he would be, he planned to carry the Princess back to his own land to be his wife.



When the Queen heard that the stranger was planning to take the Princess away, should he earn his reward, she was unhappy and remonstrated with the King. She was sure her daughter would not care to be the wife of a man with such stony eyes. But the King said no, the stranger should have his chance, and it would be the price the Princess would have to pay to find warmth.



The stranger was escorted to the Princess' bedchamber and stood before her. The Princess was sitting up in bed, wrapped in a fleece. The man told her why he was there and that soon he hoped to win her for his wife. The Princess felt afraid, for the stranger had cruel eyes, and even though she longed to feel warm, she hoped that he would not be the person who would cure her.

"How cold do you feel?" asked the stranger.

I shall make it difficult for this arrogant man, thought the Princess to herself. So she answered,

"As cold as the ocean is."

The stranger gave a small smile, and turned on his heel. He was gone for some time and,


although the Princess was freezing, she was glad to think she had got rid of the proud man. But no sooner had she thought this than he appeared again in her room. He flung down a huge blanket onto her bed. The Princess gasped as the blanket swamped her. It was woven in blues and greens and greys, and it moved over her body in clumsy, urgent waves. It smelled salty and seaweedy as she tossed her head on the pillow, and when she looked closer at the pattern on the blanket, she saw that many fish swam in it and that dolphins leaped in its borders. There were whales in the blanket and sad, sunken ships. There were octopuses and jellyfish. The blanket lapped at her, and she felt sick.

"THE OCEAN'S BLANKET," he said.

overheat: *the ocean's blanket*







"Warmer now!" demanded the stranger.

But the Princess was even colder than before, and trembled in her bed.

I will not go with you, she thought. So she replied,

"No. I am as cold as the forest is."

The man nodded at her, and left the room. The Princess lay in her bed, hoping that she had seen the last of him, but soon enough she heard his footsteps at her door. He came into the bedchamber and tossed a huge blanket over her.

The blanket was coarse and spiky and, as the Princess tried to push it off, it scratched at her arms and hands, drawing blood. It was roughly woven in blacks and browns and dark greens. The blanket smelled mossy and damp, and the Princess saw that it was patterned with ancient trees and birds of prey, embroidered with dark undergrowth and small, wild creatures.

"THE FOREST'S BLANKET," he said.

overleaf *the forest's blanket*