

The Cloudy Crown

There was a king who had a very special crown. Radiant as the sun, or glistening as fresh rain, twinkling as stardust and powerful as thunder. This king was a wise man and every day watched his crown intently.

When people in his country told evil things, the crown became dark and dull. So the king knew there should be more music to enjoy and he ordered the musicians to play from doors and windows; resounding loud in the streets and flags started flying spontaneously. And the king joined the music and he sang out loud.

When the crown was tainted, the king knew there was a big row somewhere in the country. He found out where, and the quarrelers had to clean and polish the crown. And often they had to laugh out loud so the row was soon forgotten. It did not always work out well, but at least a little of the stain was gone and time faded what was left.

When the crown became almost transparent and the king could very nearly see through the crown, he asked for the artists. In the whole country people were drawing and painting and acting, up in the quiet attics and in the busiest schools. Till everyone in the country could clearly see the crown again.

And sometimes when the crown was freezing cold, everyone was asked to run around for fun. By order of the king, until the crown was warm again.

One day many clouds surrounded the crown. The king could hardly see the crown anymore. And in short time it grew worse, and worse. Clouds came down from the sky and attached to the crown. They grew bigger and bigger, and bigger ... until they looked like huge ash-clouds. And they found their way deep into the hearts of everyone. Then the king knew that people were frightened. And if people are frightened they will be frightened ever more. Fright contaminates. Night came and everyone went to bed afraid. Afraid of the dark, afraid of the clouds and monsters and afraid of tomorrow. Everyone, yet not the king. He was thinking. He kept a watchful eye on the people and the country. For he was the king.

All of a sudden he heard a voice: "Be brave". The king looked outside and saw a strange light in the dark night. His heart jumped. That was it, when you are scared you should do brave things, of course.

So the king decided to do brave things. He started doing small courageous things. You should know that he was a little scared of spiders; they were hair-raising. So he decided to practice being brave about spiders. On the first day he watched a great big spider. The king counted its legs. Mmmm, he felt a tiny bit brave. On the second day he watched a nest of spiders; a little ball near the window. He saw the threads wonderfully woven, the delicate web so thin and yet strong enough to support a spider. The spider filled him with amazement and wonder and he felt even braver than the day before.

The third day he was talking to the spider. It didn't answer, but again the king felt braver than before. After a week he saw a spider in his crown. Exactly where it sat there were no more clouds to

be seen. That was funny. And all of a sudden the king was not scared of spiders anymore. He took the spider and put it back at the window frame.

Yet the crown was not as bright and beautiful as before. Just on the small tip where the spider had been it was spotless. But on the crown were still many clouds.

Then the king spoke with the people of his country. He told them he needed them. Everyone should do something brave and they should help each other. That would help the crown to become bright again. But the people were serious and still frightened. The king looked also grave, but he felt brave. He knew what they should do, small steps to start with, and become braver step-by-step.

From then on people started to do all sorts of small brave things. Those afraid of water started to go into the water, a toe first, then a foot, then up to the knee – if someone helped at least. And in the end they completely went into the water till they had learned to swim. And the helpers jumped from the diving board into the water and tumbled around the brave swimmers.

Those that were not very talkative or chatty, started with a single word, such as 'yes' or 'no' or 'jee'. And if someone was really listening and nodded, or sent a friendly smile, they dared to speak more, and some of them became great storytellers telling stories people loved to hear.

Those afraid of dogs started watching dogs. They tried to imitate the dog wagging its tail. And after some time they even stroked the dog. Small dogs first, but later even big dogs. Awesome. And they frolicked with the dogs and people ran through the woods like dogs.

Each time someone had been brave or had helped somebody to be brave, part of the clouds on the crown vanished. After some time the tips of the crown appeared again. A couple of weeks later the thick clouds around the crown disappeared and wisps of clouds softly moved in the wind. In the end there were just some clouds left at the very bottom of the crown.

It took a long time, all this. People happen to be scared of particular things for good reason. Some had to practice a long long time to become brave. Nobody bothered. It was great to be brave. For then you could help.

One day unexpectedly the king said: 'Look, now the crown is shining. Radiant as the sun, glistening as fresh rain, twinkling as stardust, powerful as thunder, and brightened by your courage.' And everyone was proud of the cloudless crown. And they were so happy not to be afraid anymore.

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