

The Horse's Hat

by Daniella Rushton

Upon the cobbled streets of Nintra, on a cold, wet day, tiny feet could be heard, pitter-pattering through the puddles, as children ran wild through the ancient old town.

Their tiny voices stretched long and narrow, like the streets in which they ran, mingling with the echoes, sounding from the gigantic, bronze church bells.

It was Sunday, a day of rest. However, for a horse named Chico this was being severely put to the test, for as the crowds jostled and cafes overflowed, this special horse trotted upon the old cobbles pulling a trap.



A gelding, an Italian trotter, who wore a hat, although a rather silly one, made from an old sack with buttons, and silly flower too.

Chico's master was called Maximus. A kind man, short in stature with hardly any teeth, but a grin as wide as the world. He found his happiness from the pleasure he gave to the many visitors who paid whatever they could to sit in his worn-out trap.

Lace that covered the seats, had once been lovingly laid, and delicately made, by Maximus's mother. Now appeared tattered and the once new cream colour was now dirty and dull.

Chico understood his masters call to please folk, as he grinded the cobbles every single day. The same route by the palace, the café, and the park and then back to the museum.

Whatever the season, whether the wind was whistling, and leaves were blowing, or the sun was shining, every night Maximus would caringly wash down the horse he so loved.

Chico loved his master and in return wanted to please him for working so hard, providing pleasure to the city folk, but most of all he wanted to be free of his silly hat.

Daily they passed the ponies at the palace, and daily the royal horses would mock and jeer him. If the hat bought in money for Maximus, he was happy. But secretly, he longed to be free of it.

And so it came about, one day as they passed the park, Maximus halted, to take a rest, for his health wasn't what it used to be. Chico, turned to gaze at the splendour of the trees and the many exotic plants. Some of the trees were huge with roots that spread far and wide. Having seen them every day, he had got used their majesty. Today, he looked at them differently.

Chico gazed so dreamingly, as he remembered what his mother had once said, that the stately trees were made not only of wood but also of magic. He also remembered her telling him that wishes were granted to those who visited the trees, but, and she said slowly, only if they, '*patiently believed.*'

Chico hadn't understood what she meant by patiently believe, but now he saw the trees as a way of making a wish and being free of the silly hat.

Days passed and a hard winter arrived in Nintra, frosting the streets, and closing the city folk's pockets.

As winter closed in, Maximus had hoped for more pennies into the pot. Many people were not kind, some hadn't even paid to ride in his trap.

'Never mind' said Maximus gently to himself, 'new beginnings are not far away' as he tossed the last few remaining logs onto the fire.

From his doorless humble stable, not far away, Chico could see Maximus through the window of his ramshackle cottage, huddled around the flame.

Believing life could be better for both of them and in the depths of that cold winter's night, he wondered off to the park, to seek an answer from the trees.

It was eerie in the park for Chico, but the moonlight cleared his path. The tree's branches, so bare, glared back in strange shapes, following their midnight visitors every move. There was one particular tree that seemed to draw Chicos' attention the most. The night light reflected upon its trunk, making its bark shimmer silver.

As he drew closer, the silver, so bright became dazzling, Chico could hear the sound of broken branches and twigs snapping. Pulling his gaze from the light, he could see that all the surrounding tree's branches had folded down and their trunks lay upon the park floor. They were bowing to the silver tree, from which a smoky voice came.

'Return to me every night for fifty-four days and what your heart desires will be granted. Take wood from my floor, for Maximus, for the worker must be paid.'

Every night Chico did what the silver tree told him. He returned, became dazzled by its silver, and reflected upon his desire and as instructed took spare wood.

Some nights, he found it hard to go to the park. He needed his rest, but the wood kept his master warm and before long the nights became less long, less cold and the birds began to sing, and Spring came.

In Nintra's hard cold winter that year, despite having warmth from the extra wood, Chico's master fell further ill. As the early buds of spring burst forth, so too emerged the city folk. But Maximus was unable to do what he loved most, to serve and bring joy to his customers.

On the fifty fourth day, Chico returned from the park to his stable with a hopeful smile. He felt renewed in 'patiently believing' and was grateful for his mother sharing it with him. He somehow, someway, felt his wish would be granted.

It wasn't long before the sun rose, but Chico's heart sadly fell.

A blanket of silence fell over the stable. His master wouldn't be greeting him that morning, for Maximus had returned to his creator and Chico's wish, not to wear the silly hat had been granted. It wouldn't be needed anymore.

With his head hung low, life continued, and Chico decided to still venture into town every day. In respect for his master, he still wore the silly hat. Faithfully he followed the same route, now without the trap and his beloved master to lead.

Passing the familiar places; the palace, by the café and the park and back to the museum, he walked and sometimes trotted, yet couldn't understand why the silver tree had forsaken his wish.

Then, it so happened that one day as he walked by the palace paddock, the ponies didn't mock and jeer him as they once did and a young princess, petting one of them, was taken aback by Chico's silly hat.

“What a sweet hat! Aren’t you Chico, the late Maximus’s horse?” For news travelled fast in Nintra. Chico blushed at the much-needed affection and neighed in glee.

“Why, come, make your new home here at the palace for your work is now done.”

Chico graciously accepted the royal offer and resided comfortably in his new surroundings.

His wish had been granted in a way he hadn’t at all expected and the silly hat wasn’t worn again, but hung, on his royal stable door.

THE END