

THE GIANT AND THE SHEPHERD

In days of old, a giant came into the valley. He wasn't very bright, but he was so strong that almost nothing was beyond him. He ripped huge boulders out of the ground, and threw them — like tiny pebbles — further than the eye could see. One day he met a wily, scrawny old shepherd and, wanting to show off his strength, asked him "Can you pull a tree, roots and all, out of the ground?" With that, he grabbed the fine old spruce tree, under which the old man was sitting, and upended it.

The shepherd thought a little, and answered "That's not so difficult, I can do that too."

When the giant heard this answer, he dropped the subject, and tried again: "But, can you also squeeze the water out of a stone?" He then picked up dry rock from the ground, squeezed it as hard as he could until clear water ran through his fingers.

The shepherd again thought a little, and answered "That's also not so difficult, I can do that too."

Not wanting to be outdone, the giant again changed the subject, and asked a third question: "Then, can you throw a stone so high, that it won't fall back down for a whole quarter of an hour?" He then picked a stone from the ground, and threw it straight up. It really didn't fall back to earth until quarter of an hour later.

The shepherd again thought a little, smiled, and answered "That's also not so difficult, I can do that too. Tomorrow morning, I will do everything that you have asked me — maybe even better than you did."

After the giant had left, the old man started making his preparations. First he selected a tree, which he then hollowed out and carefully covered it with its bark, so that it looked perfectly fine. For the second task, he found a large piece of old grey cheese. Then for the third task, he trapped and caught a little bird.

When he met the giant the next morning, the shepherd humbly said "I could easily pull out this tree, but I can do more. I can bend it over in two." He then pulled against the hollow tree, bending it until it finally cracked and broke.

Then he told the astonished giant "Now, I will squeeze a stone until clear water runs out of it." But, instead of a stone, he took the old grey lump of cheese, which he squeezed until the clear juice ran through his fingers.

The giant opened his eyes even wider in astonishment, than the first time, and said "You are much stronger than you look, skinny little man. But, now show me how high you can throw a stone!"

“I can throw a stone even higher than you,” answered the wily old man, “yours only stayed in the air for a quarter of an hour. I can throw a stone so high, that it will *never* return to earth.” As he spoke, he bent down as if to pick up a stone from the ground, but what he picked up was the little bird. When he threw it straight up, it spread its wings and flew. It flew high into the sky, and never, ever came back. The giant, still thinking it was a stone, stood below, watching and waiting, much longer than a quarter of an hour.

He didn’t know how, but he knew that the shepherd had beaten him, and here ends this story. What he and the shepherd did next, remains to be told another day.

THE SINGING ROSE

There was once a king who had three daughters, who were all more beautiful than the young ladies of today. They had all passed their sixteenth birthday, and the king decided that one of them should inherit his kingdom and become its queen. But, he didn't know which of the three to choose, so he set them a task. He called his three daughters to him, and said "My dear girls, I am getting on in years, and each day brings me nearer to my grave. Before I reach that point, I wish to set all the affairs of my kingdom in order, and name its future queen. She will be the one, who after going out into the world, returns to present me with a singing rose."

The three princesses sadly took leave of their father, and went their separate ways. It so happened that the youngest, and most beautiful, of the three found herself, one day, in an endless, dark forest of fir trees. Throughout the day and evening, all kinds of birds sang beautifully, and it cheered the girl to hear them. But, as night came and darkness fell, unlike her, they all returned to their nests, and the woods grew silent. Then, drifting through the night air, she heard a song, clearer and brighter than anything she had heard before. She knew, in her heart, that she was listening to the singing rose.

The young princess followed the sound, until she came to a cliff, upon which there stood a great, old castle. She climbed the narrow path, and soon stood before its huge gate. There she rang the bell, once, and waited. After some time, the heavy gate creaked open, a little, just wide enough for her to see an old man with a long grey beard looking out. "How may I help you?" he enquired, in a polite, but harsh, tone.

"I'm looking for a singing rose," answered the girl nervously, adding "do you, by any chance, have one in your garden?"

"Of course" replied the old man.

"And what," asked the frightened girl "should I give you in return, if you let me have it?"

"Nothing, at the moment." answered the old man sternly, "You may take it with you tonight, but, seven years from tomorrow, you must return with me to this place."

Seven years was a long time, and thinking only of her father and his kingdom, the princess happily agreed. The old man nodded, and disappeared behind the gate, closing it behind him. Shortly afterwards, the gate opened again, and the terrible old man came out, carrying a beautiful rose in full bloom. It was singing, so clearly and beautifully that it lifted her heart, and calmed the terrified girl. Nevertheless, as soon as she had it in her hands, she didn't wait. She turned

and ran down the path, as gracefully and carelessly as any doe, while the old man called after her “I’ll see you in seven years!”, in his cold, stern voice.

The young princess travelled all night through the dark forest, accompanied by the singing of the rose. Its clear, sweet tones, drove all her fears away, and brought happy thoughts of her father, and her future kingdom. She didn’t think once about her return to this unhappy place, in seven years time, and as the rose sang louder, and even more beautifully, she hurried on faster.

When she arrived home, her sisters had already returned empty handed. She presented her father with the rose, and each told the stories of their adventures, of which there were many. Nobody, paid much attention to the small detail, that the youngest must return with the old man to his castle, seven long years hence. The king held a great celebration, in which he named his youngest daughter his heir. She was crowned queen, but, while he still lived, her father continued to govern the kingdom.

The king, the young queen, her sisters, and the rest of the kingdom, continued with their lives, happily and peacefully, day after day, and year after year, until — until seven long years had passed.

On the first morning of the eighth year, the old man appeared before the king. He demanded of him, the princess who had taken the singing rose. The king first presented his eldest daughter, but when the old man saw her, he shook his head and said angrily “she is not the one.” The king then brought forth his second daughter, who the old man also refused, leaving the king no choice, but to part with his youngest, and dearest daughter.

The queen had to now give up her kingdom, and live with the terrible old man in the castle in the forest. There she received no visitors, and had no company except for him. Day and night, she thought, with an aching heart, about her father and her sisters. Beyond this, she was well provided for and had no other sorrow, except that all the cupboards, chests, and many rooms were locked. No keys were to be found anywhere, and the old man never gave her any.

One day, she somehow learnt that her eldest sister was soon to be married to a neighbouring prince. Desperately wanting to see her sister again, before she started her new life, she went to the old man and asked his permission to attend the wedding. He answered in his usual loud, harsh tone “You may go! But! Remember this, while you are there, you shall not laugh! If you disobey, I will tear you into a thousand pieces! If the corners of your mouth so much as turn upwards towards a smile, I shall immediately be at your side, and it will be over for you.”

The girl didn’t think that it would be difficult do this, so she agreed to his conditions. On the day of the wedding, he accompanied her to the palace, where she was joyfully received by her father and sisters. Within herself, she was very happy, and her heart sang, but she never forgot her promise to the old man. Not once did she laugh with them, or even smile. Outwardly, she wore a sad

face, which was only true in the evening when she had to return with her companion to the lonely castle in the forest.

And so, for a while her days were, again, sad and lonely, until word reached her that her other sister was also to be married. Again, she went to the old man, and nervously asked his permission to attend. He agreed, but gruffly said "This time, you are not to speak to anybody, not even yourself! I will again accompany you, and will be watching and listening carefully."

The girl was not quite so sure as the last time, but she thought that she could manage this, and so she agreed. On the day of the wedding, he accompanied her to the palace, where she was joyfully received by her father and sisters, who plied her with many questions. To each, she acted as if she were dumb, and never let a sound pass her sweet lips. She found it far more difficult to keep silent, than to keep a sad face. In the evening, when the room was so full of conversation that it buzzed like a beehive, a single sigh escaped her lips. Somehow, the old man heard it, and he quickly rose to his feet. He then, took her by the hand, and escorted her out of the hall, out of the palace and back to his castle.

And so, for a while her days were, again, sad and lonely, until one day the old man came to her in the garden, where once the singing rose had bloomed. He said to her, earnestly and steadily, but quietly "Young lady, your highness, at noon tomorrow, you must cut off my head with three blows. If you do this, then you will be set free, and this castle, and everything you find in it, will be yours." Finding her courage, the queen agreed.

On the following day, it was a Saturday, shortly before noon, the old man appeared before her, handed her a sword, knelt and bared his neck. At the first stroke of twelve, by the castle clock, she struck her first blow. Two others quickly followed, and the old man's head rolled across the floor. But, no blood ran out of the head. Instead a golden key fell out. This was the key to all the locks in the castle, and she used it to open every locked room, cupboard and chest. All of them, she found to be full of wonderful treasures. She was now not only free forever, but very rich.