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The Blue Light

A soldier had served a king his master many years, till at last he was turned off without pay or reward. How he should get his living he did not know: so he set out and journeyed homeward all day in a very downcast mood, until in the evening he came to the edge of a deep wood. The road leading that way, he pushed forward, but had not gone far before he saw a light glimmering through the trees, towards which he bent his weary steps; and soon came to a hut where no one lived but an old witch. The poor fellow begged for a night's lodging and something to eat and drink; but she would listen to nothing: however, he was not easily got rid of; and at last she said, "I think I will take pity on you this once; but if I do, you must dig over all my garden for me in the morning." The soldier agreed very willingly to anything she asked, and he became her guest.

The next day he kept his word and dug the garden very neatly. The job lasted all day; and in the evening, when his mistress would have sent him away, he said, "I am so tired with my work that I must beg you to let me stay over the night." The old lady vowed at first she would not do any such thing; but after a great deal of talk he carried his point, agreeing to chop up a whole cart-load of wood for her the next day.

This task too was duly ended; but not till towards night; and then he found himself so tired, that he begged a third night's rest: and this too was given, but only on his pledging his word that he next day would fetch the witch the blue light that burnt at the bottom of the well.

When morning came she led him to the well's mouth, tied him to a long rope, and let him down. At the bottom sure enough he found the blue light as the witch had said, and at once made the signal for her to draw him up again. But when she had pulled him up so near to the top that she could reach him with her hands, she said, "Give me the light, I will take care of it,"—meaning to play him a trick, by taking it for herself and letting him fall again to the bottom of the well. But the soldier saw through her wicked thoughts, and said, "No, I shall not give you the light till I find myself safe and sound out of the well." At this she became very angry, and dashed him, with the light she had longed for many a year, down to the bottom. And there lay the poor soldier for a while in despair, on the damp mud below, and feared that his end was nigh. But his pipe happened to be in his pocket still half full, and he thought to himself, "I may as well make an end of smoking you out; it is the last pleasure I shall have in this world." So he lit it at the blue light, and began to smoke.

Up rose a cloud of smoke, and on a sudden a little black dwarf was seen making his way through the midst of it, "What do you want with me, soldier?" said he. "I have no business with you," answered he. But the dwarf said, "I am bound to serve you in everything, as lord and master of the blue light." "Then first of all be so good as to help me out of this well." No sooner said than done: the dwarf took him by the hand and drew him up, and the blue light of course with him. "Now do me another piece of kindness," said the soldier; "pray let that old lady take my place in the well." When the dwarf had done this, and lodged the witch safely at the bottom, they began to ransack her treasures; and the soldier made bold to carry off as much of her gold and silver as he well could. Then the dwarf said, "if you should chance at any time to want me, you have nothing to do but to light your pipe at the blue light, and I will soon be with you."

The soldier was not a little pleased at his good luck, and went to the best inn in the first town he came to, and ordered some fine clothes to be made, and a handsome room to be got ready for him. When all was ready, he called his little man to him, and said, "The king sent me away penniless, and left me to hunger and want: I have a mind to show him that it is my turn to be master now; so bring me his daughter here this evening, that she may wait upon me, and do what I bid her." "That is rather a dangerous task," said the dwarf. But away he went, took the princess out of her bed, fast asleep as she was, and brought her to the soldier.

Very early in the morning he carried her back: and as soon as she saw her father, she said, "I had a strange dream last night: I thought I was carried away through the air to a soldier's house, and there I waited upon him as his servant." Then the king wondered greatly at such a story; but told her to make a hole in her pocket and fill it with peas, so that if it were really as she said, and the whole was not a dream, the peas might fall out in the streets as she passed through, and leave a clue to tell whither she had been taken. She did so; but the dwarf had heard the king's plot; and when evening came, and the soldier said he must bring him the princess again, he strewed peas over several of the streets, so that the few that fell

from her pocket were not known from the others; and the people amused themselves all the next day picking up peas, and wondering where so many came from.

When the princess told her father what had happened to her the second time, he said, "Take one of your shoes with you, and hide it in the room you are taken to." The dwarf heard this also; and when the soldier told him to bring the king's daughter again, he said, "I cannot save you this time; it will be an unlucky thing for you if you are found out—as I think you will." But the soldier would have his own way. "Then you must take care and make the best of your way out of the city gate very early in the morning," said the dwarf. The princess kept one shoe on as her father bid her, and hid it in the soldier's room: and when she got back to her father, he ordered it to be sought for all over the town; and at last it was found where she had hid it. The soldier had run away, it is true; but he had been too slow, and was soon caught and thrown into a strong prison, and loaded with chains:—what was worse, in the hurry of his flight, he had left behind him his great treasure the blue light and all his gold, and had nothing left in his pocket but one poor ducat.

As he was standing very sorrowful at the prison grating, he saw one of his comrades, and calling out to him said, "If you will bring me a little bundle I left in the inn, I will give you a ducat." His comrade thought this very good pay for such a job: so he went away, and soon came back bringing the blue light and the gold. Then the prisoner soon lit his pipe: up rose the smoke, and with it came his old friend the little dwarf. "Do not fear, master," said he: "keep up your heart at your trial, and leave everything to take its course;—only mind to take the blue light with you." The trial soon came on; the matter was sifted to the bottom; the prisoner found guilty, and his doom passed:—he was ordered to be hung forthwith on the gallows-tree.

But as he was led out, he said he had one favour to beg of the king. "What is it?" said his majesty. "That you will deign to let me smoke one pipe on the road." "Two, if you like," said the king. Then he lit his pipe at the blue light, and the black dwarf was before him in a moment. "Be so good as to kill, slay, or put to flight all these people," said the soldier: "and as for the king, you may cut him into three pieces." Then the dwarf began to lay about him, and soon got rid of the crowd around: but the king begged hard for mercy; and, to save his life, agreed to let the soldier have the princess for his wife, and to leave the kingdom to him when he died.

[The end of *Grimm's Fairy Tales: The Blue Light* by the Brothers Grimm]