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The Five Servants

Some time ago there reigned in a country many thousands of miles off, an old queen who was very spiteful and delighted in nothing so much as mischief. She had one daughter, who was thought to be the most beautiful princess in the world; but her mother only made use of her as a trap for the unwary; and whenever any suitor who had heard of her beauty came to seek her in marriage, the only answer the old lady gave to each was, that he must undertake some very hard task and forfeit his life if he failed. Many, led by the report of the princess's charms, undertook these tasks, but failed in doing what the queen set them to do. No mercy was ever shown them; but the word was given at once, and off their heads were cut.

Now it happened that a prince who lived in a country far off, heard of the great beauty of this young lady, and said to his father, "Dear father, let me go and try my luck." "No," said the king; "if you go you will surely lose your life." The prince, however, had set his heart so much upon the scheme, that when he found his father was against it he fell very ill, and took to his bed for seven years, and no art could cure him, or recover his lost spirits: so when his father saw that if he went on thus he would die, he said to him with a heart full of grief, "If it must be so, go and try your luck." At this he rose from his bed, recovered his health and spirits, and went forward on his way light of heart and full of joy.

Then on he journeyed over hill and dale, through fair weather and foul, till one day, as he was riding through a wood, he thought he saw afar off some large animal upon the ground, and as he drew near he found that it was a man lying along upon the grass under the trees; but he looked more like a mountain than a man, he was so fat and jolly. When this big fellow saw the traveller, he arose, and said, "If you want any one to wait upon you, you will do well to take me into your service." "What should I do with such a fat fellow as you?" said the prince. "It would be nothing to you if I were three thousand times as fat," said the man, "so that I do but behave myself well." "That's true," answered the prince; "so come with me, I can put you to some use or another I dare say." Then the fat man rose up and followed the prince, and by and by they saw another man lying on the ground with his ear close to the turf. The prince said, "What are you doing there?" "I am listening," answered the man. "To what?" "To all that is going on in the world, for I can hear everything, I can even hear the grass grow." "Tell me," said the prince, "what you hear is going on at the court of the old queen, who has the beautiful daughter?" "I hear," said the listener, "the noise of the sword that is cutting off the head of one of her suitors." "Well!" said the prince, "I see I shall be able to make you of use—come along with me!" They had not gone far before they saw a pair of feet, and then part of the legs of a man stretched out; but they were so long that they could not see the rest of the body, till they had passed on a good deal further, and at last they came to the body, and, after going on a while further, to the head; "Bless me!" said the prince, "what a long rope you are!" "Oh!" answered the tall man, "this is nothing, when I choose to stretch myself to my full length, I am three times as high as any mountain you have seen on your travels, I warrant you; I will willingly do what I can to serve you if you will let me." "Come along then," said the prince, "I can turn you to account in some way."

The prince and his train went on further into the wood, and next saw a man lying by the road side basking in the heat of the sun, yet shaking and shivering all over, so that not a limb lay still. "What makes you shiver," said the prince, "while the sun is shining so warm?" "Alas!" answered the man, "the warmer it is, the colder I am; the sun only seems to me like a sharp frost that thrills through all my bones; and on the other hand, when others are what you call cold I begin to be warm, so that I can neither bear the ice for its heat nor the fire for its cold." "You are a queer fellow," said the prince; "but if you have nothing else to do, come along with me." The next thing they saw was a man standing, stretching his neck and looking around him from hill to hill. "What are you looking for so eagerly?" said the prince. "I have such sharp eyes," said the man, "that I can see over woods and fields and hills and dales;—in short, all over the world." "Well," said the prince, "come with me if you will, for I want one more to make up my train."

Then they all journeyed on, and met with no one else till they came to the city where the beautiful princess lived. The prince went straight to the old queen, and said, "Here I am, ready to do any task you set me, if you will give me your daughter as a reward when I have done." "I will set you three tasks," said the queen; "and if you get through all, you shall be the husband of my daughter. First, you must bring me a ring which I dropped in the red sea." The prince went home to his friends and said, "The first task is not an easy one; it is to fetch a ring out of the red sea, so lay your heads together and say what is to be done." Then the sharp-sighted one said, "I will see where it lies," and looked down into the sea,

and cried out, "There it lies upon a rock at the bottom." "I would fetch it out," said the tall man, "if I could but see it." "Well!" cried out the fat one, "I will help you to do that," and laid himself down and held his mouth to the water, and drank up the waves till the bottom of the sea was as dry as a meadow. Then the tall man stooped a little and pulled out the ring with his hand, and the prince took it to the old queen, who looked at it, and wondering said, "It is indeed the right ring; you have gone through this task well: but now comes the second; look yonder at the meadow before my palace; see! there are a hundred fat oxen feeding there; you must eat them all up before noon: and underneath in my cellar there are a hundred casks of wine, which you must drink all up." "May I not invite some guests to share the feast with me?" said the prince. "Why, yes!" said the old woman with a spiteful laugh; "you may ask one of your friends to breakfast with you, but no more."

Then the prince went home and said to the fat man, "You must be my guest to-day, and for once you shall eat your fill." So the fat man set to work and ate the hundred oxen without leaving a bit, and asked if that was to be all he should have for his breakfast? and he drank the wine out of the casks without leaving a drop, licking even his fingers when he had done. When the meal was ended, the prince went to the old woman and told her the second task was done. "Your work is not all over, however," muttered the old hag to herself; "I will catch you yet, you shall not keep your head upon your shoulders if I can help it." "This evening," said she, "I will bring my daughter into your house and leave her with you; you shall sit together there, but take care that you do not fall asleep; for I shall come when the clock strikes twelve, and if she is not then with you, you are undone." "O!" thought the prince, "it is an easy task to keep such a watch as that; I will take care to keep my eyes open." So he called his servants and told them all that the old woman had said. "Who knows though," said he, "but there may be some trick at the bottom of this? it is as well to be upon our guard and keep watch that the young lady does not get away." When it was night the old woman brought her daughter to the prince's house; then the tall man twisted himself round about it, the listener put his ear to the ground, the fat man placed himself before the door so that no living soul could enter, and the sharp-eyed one looked out afar and watched. Within sat the princess without saying a word, but the moon shone bright through the window upon her face, and the prince gazed upon her wonderful beauty. And while he looked upon her with a heart full of joy and love, his eyelids did not droop; but at eleven o'clock the old woman cast a charm over them so that they all fell asleep, and the princess vanished in a moment.

And thus they slept till a quarter to twelve, when the charm had no longer any power over them, and they all awoke. "Alas! alas! woe is me," cried the prince; "now I am lost for ever." And his faithful servants began to weep over their unhappy lot; but the listener said, "Be still and I will listen;" so he listened a while, and cried out, "I hear her bewailing her fate;" and the sharp-sighted man looked, and said, "I see her sitting on a rock three hundred miles hence; now help us, my tall friend; if you stand up, you will reach her in two steps." "Very well," answered the tall man; and in an instant, before one could turn one's head round, he was at the foot of the enchanted rock. Then the tall man took the young lady in his arms and carried her back to the prince a moment before it struck twelve; and they all sat down again and made merry. And when the clock struck twelve the old queen came sneaking by with a spiteful look, as if she was going to say "Now he is mine;" nor could she think otherwise, for she knew that her daughter was but the moment before on the rock three hundred miles off; but when she came and saw her daughter in the prince's room, she started, and said, "There is somebody here who can do more than I can." However, she now saw that she could no longer avoid giving the prince her daughter for a wife, but said to her in a whisper, "It is a shame that you should be won by servants, and not have a husband of your own choice."

Now the young lady was of a very proud haughty temper, and her anger was raised to such a pitch, that the next morning she ordered three hundred loads of wood to be brought and piled up; and told the prince it was true he had by the help of his servants done the three tasks, but that before she would marry him some one must sit upon that pile of wood when it was set on fire and bear the heat. She thought to herself that though his servants had done everything else for him, none of them would go so far as to burn themselves for him, and that then she should put his love to the test by seeing whether he would sit upon it himself. But she was mistaken; for when the servants heard this, they said, "We have all done something but the frosty man; now his turn is come;" and they took him and put him on the wood and set it on fire. Then the fire rose and burnt for three long days, till all the wood was gone; and when it was out, the frosty man stood in the midst of the ashes trembling like an aspen-leaf, and said, "I never shivered so much in my life; if it had lasted much longer, I should have lost the use of my limbs."

When the princess had no longer any plea for delay, she saw that she was bound to marry the prince; but when they

were going to church, the old woman said, "I will never consent;" and sent secret orders out to her horseman to kill and slay all before them and bring back her daughter before she could be married. However, the listener had pricked up his ears and heard all that the old woman said, and told it to the prince. So they made haste and got to the church first, and were married; and then the five servants took their leave and went away saying, "We will go and try our luck in the world on our own account."

The prince set out with his wife, and at the end of the first day's journey came to a village, where a swineherd was feeding his swine; and as they came near he said to his wife, "Do you know who I am? I am not a prince, but a poor swineherd; he whom you see yonder with the swine is my father, and our business will be to help him to tend them." Then he went into the swineherd's hut with her, and ordered her royal clothes to be taken away in the night; so that when she awoke in the morning, she had nothing to put on, till the woman who lived there made a great favour of giving her an old gown and a pair of worsted stockings. "If it were not for your husband's sake," said she, "I would not have given you anything." Then the poor princess gave herself up for lost, and believed that her husband must indeed be a swineherd; but she thought she would make the best of it, and began to help him to feed them, and said, "It is a just reward for my pride." When this had lasted eight days she could bear it no longer, for her feet were all over wounds, and as she sat down and wept by the way-side, some people came up to her and pitied her, and asked if she knew what her husband really was. "Yes," said she; "a swineherd; he is just gone out to market with some of his stock." But they said, "Come along and we will take you to him;" and they took her over the hill to the palace of the prince's father; and when they came into the hall, there stood her husband so richly drest in his royal clothes that she did not know him till he fell upon her neck and kissed her, and said, "I have borne much for your sake, and you too have also borne a great deal for me." Then the guests were sent for, and the marriage feast was given, and all made merry and danced and sang, and the best wish that I can wish is, that you and I had been there too.

[The end of *Grimm's Fairy Tales; The Five Servants* by the Brothers Grimm]