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# Faithful John

An old king fell sick; and when he found his end drawing near, he said, "Let Faithful John come to me." Now Faithful John was the servant that he was fondest of, and was so called because he had been true to his master all his life long. Then when he came to the bed-side, the king said, "My faithful John, I feel that my end draws nigh, and I have now no cares save for my son, who is still young, and stands in need of good counsel. I have no friend to leave him but you; if you do not pledge yourself to teach him all he should know, and to be a father to him, I shall not shut my eyes in peace." Then John said, "I will never leave him, but will serve him faithfully, even though it should cost me my life." And the king said, "I shall now die in peace: after my death, show him the whole palace; all the rooms and vaults, and all the treasures and stores which lie there: but take care how you show him one room,—I mean the one where hangs the picture of the daughter of the king of the golden roof. If he sees it, he will fall deeply in love with her, and will then be plunged into great dangers on her account: guard him in this peril." And when Faithful John had once more pledged his word to the old king, he laid his head on his pillow, and died in peace.

Now when the old king had been carried to his grave, Faithful John told the young king what had passed upon his death-bed, and said, "I will keep my word truly, and be faithful to you as I was always to your father, though it should cost me my life." And the young king wept, and said, "Neither will I ever forget your faithfulness."

The days of mourning passed away, and then Faithful John said to his master, "It is now time that you should see your heritage; I will show you your father's palace." Then he led him about every where, up and down, and let him see all the riches and all the costly rooms; only one room, where the picture stood, he did not open. Now the picture was so placed, that the moment the door opened, you could see it; and it was so beautifully done, that one would think it breathed and had life, and that there was nothing more lovely in the whole world. When the young king saw that Faithful John always went by this door, he said, "Why do you not open that room?" "There is something inside," he answered, "which would frighten you." But the king said, "I have seen the whole palace, and I must also know what is in there;" and he went and began to force open the door: but Faithful John held him back, and said, "I gave my word to your father before his death, that I would take heed how I showed you what stands in that room, lest it should lead you and me into great trouble." "The greatest trouble to me," said the young king, "will be not to go in and see the room; I shall have no peace by day or by night until I do; so I shall not go hence until you open it."

Then Faithful John saw that with all he could do or say the young king would have his way; so, with a heavy heart and many foreboding sighs, he sought for the key out of his great bunch; and he opened the door of the room, and entered in first, so as to stand between the king and the picture, hoping he might not see it: but he raised himself upon tiptoes, and looked over John's shoulders; and as soon as he saw the likeness of the lady, so beautiful and shining with gold, he fell down upon the floor senseless. Then Faithful John lifted him up in his arms, and carried him to his bed, and was full of care, and thought to himself, "This trouble has come upon us; O Heaven! what will come of it?"



At last the king came to himself again; but the first thing that he said was, "Whose is that beautiful picture?" "It is the picture of the daughter of the king of the golden roof," said Faithful John. But the king went on, saying, "My love towards her is so great, that if all the leaves on the trees were tongues, they could not speak it; I care not to risk my life to win her; you are my faithful friend, you must aid me."

Then John thought for a long time what was now to be done; and at length said to the king, "All that she has about her is of gold: the tables, stools, cups, dishes, and all the things in her house are of gold; and she is always seeking new treasures. Now in your stores there is much gold; let it be worked up into every kind of vessel, and into all sorts of birds, wild beasts, and wonderful animals; then we will take it, and try our fortune." So the king ordered all the goldsmiths to be sought for; and they worked day and night, until at last the most beautiful things were made: and Faithful John had a ship loaded with them, and put on a merchant's dress, and the king did the same, that they might not be known.

When all was ready, they put out to sea, and sailed till they came to the coast of the land where the king of the golden roof reigned. Faithful John told the king to stay in the ship, and wait for him; "for perhaps," said he, "I may be able to bring away the king's daughter with me: therefore take care that everything be in order; let the golden vessels and ornaments be brought forth, and the whole ship be decked out with them." And he chose out something of each of the golden things to put into his basket, and got ashore, and went towards the king's palace. And when he came to the castle yard, there stood by the well side a beautiful maiden, who had two golden pails in her hand, drawing water. And as she drew up the water, which was glittering with gold, she turned herself round, and saw the stranger, and asked him who he was. Then he drew near, and said, "I am a merchant," and opened his basket, and let her look into it; and she cried out, "Oh! what beautiful things!" and set down her pails, and looked at one after the other. Then she said, "The king's daughter must see all these; she is so fond of such things, that she will buy all of you." So she took him by the hand, and led him in; for she was one of the waiting-maids of the daughter of the king.

When the princess saw the wares, she was greatly pleased, and said, "They are so beautiful that I will buy them all." But Faithful John said, "I am only the servant of a rich merchant; what I have here is nothing to what he has lying in yonder ship: there he has the finest and most costly things that ever were made in gold." The princess wanted to have them all brought ashore; but he said, "That would take up many days, there are such a number; and more rooms would be

wanted to place them in than there are in the greatest house." But her wish to see them grew still greater, and at last she said, "Take me to the ship, I will go myself, and look at your master's wares."

Then Faithful John led her joyfully to the ship, and the king, when he saw her, thought that his heart would leap out of his breast; and it was with the greatest trouble that he kept himself still. So she got into the ship, and the king led her down; but Faithful John staid behind with the steersman, and ordered the ship to put off: "Spread all your sail," cried he, "that she may fly over the waves like a bird through the air."

And the king showed the princess the golden wares, each one singly; the dishes, cups, basins, and the wild and wonderful beasts; so that many hours flew away, and she looked at everything with delight, and was not aware that the ship was sailing away. And after she had looked at the last, she thanked the merchant, and said she would go home; but when she came upon the deck, she saw that the ship was sailing far away from land upon the deep sea, and that it flew along at full sail. "Alas!" she cried out in her fright, "I am betrayed; I am carried off, and have fallen into the power of a roving trader; I would sooner have died." But then the king took her by the hand, and said, "I am not a merchant, I am a king, and of as noble birth as you. I have taken you away by stealth, but I did so because of the very great love I have for you; for the first time that I saw your face, I fell on the ground in a swoon." When the daughter of the king of the golden roof heard all, she was comforted, and her heart soon turned towards him, and she was willing to become his wife.

But it so happened, that whilst they were sailing on the deep sea, Faithful John, as he sat on the prow of the ship playing on his flute, saw three ravens flying in the air towards him. Then he left off playing, and listened to what they said to each other, for he understood their tongue. The first said, "There he goes! he is bearing away the daughter of the king of the golden roof; let him go!" "Nay," said the second, "there he goes, but he has not got her yet." And the third said, "There he goes; he surely has her, for she is sitting by his side in the ship." Then the first began again, and cried out, "What boots it to him? See you not that when they come to land, a horse of a foxy-red colour will spring towards him; and then he will try to get upon it, and if he does, it will spring away with him into the air, so that he will never see his love again." "True! true!" said the second, "but is there no help?" "Oh! yes, yes!" said the first; "if he who sits upon the horse takes the dagger which is stuck in the saddle and strikes him dead, the young king is saved: but who knows that? and who will tell him, that he who thus saves the king's life will turn to stone from the toes of his feet to his knee?" Then the second said, "True! true! but I know more still; though the horse be dead, the king loses his bride: when they go together into the palace, there lies the bridal dress on the couch, and looks as if it were woven of gold and silver, but it is all brimstone and pitch; and if he puts it on, it will burn him, marrow and bones." "Alas! alas! is there no help?" said the third. "Oh! yes, yes!" said the second, "if some one draws near and throws it into the fire, the young king will be saved. But what boots that? who knows and will tell him, that, if he does, his body from the knee to the heart will be turned to stone?" "More! more! I know more," said the third: "were the dress burnt, still the king loses his bride. After the wedding, when the dance begins, and the young queen dances on, she will turn pale, and fall as though she were dead; and if some one does not draw near and lift her up, and take from her right breast three drops of blood, she will surely die. But if any one knew this, he would tell him, that if he does do so, his body will turn to stone, from the crown of his head to the tip of his toe."

Then the ravens flapped their wings, and flew on; but Faithful John, who had understood it all, from that time was sorrowful, and did not tell his master what he had heard; for he saw that if he told him, he must himself lay down his life to save him: at last he said to himself, "I will be faithful to my word, and save my master, if it costs me my life."

Now when they came to land, it happened just as the ravens had foretold; for there sprung out a fine foxy-red horse. "See," said the king, "he shall bear me to my palace:" and he tried to mount, but Faithful John leaped before him, and swung himself quickly upon it, drew the dagger, and smote the horse dead. Then the other servants of the king, who were jealous of Faithful John, cried out, "What a shame to kill the fine beast that was to take the king to his palace!" But the king said, "Let him alone, it is my Faithful John; who knows but he did it for some good end?"

Then they went on to the castle, and there stood a couch in one room, and a fine dress lay upon it, that shone with gold and silver; and the young king went up to it to take hold of it, but Faithful John cast it in the fire, and burnt it. And the other servants began again to grumble, and said, "See, now he is burning the wedding dress." But the king said, "Who knows what he does it for? let him alone! he is my faithful servant John."

Then the wedding feast was held, and the dance began, and the bride also came in; but Faithful John took good heed, and looked in her face; and on a sudden she turned pale, and fell as though she were dead upon the ground. But he sprung towards her quickly, lifted her up, and took her and laid her upon a couch, and drew three drops of blood from her right breast. And she breathed again, and came to herself. But the young king had seen all, and did not know why Faithful John had done it; so he was angry at his boldness, and said, "Throw him into prison."

The next morning Faithful John was led forth, and stood upon the gallows, and said, "May I speak out before I die?" and when the king answered "It shall be granted thee," he said, "I am wrongly judged, for I have always been faithful and true:" and then he told what he had heard the ravens say upon the sea, and how he meant to save his master, and had therefore done all these things.

When he had told all, the king called out, "O my most faithful John! pardon! pardon! take him down!" But Faithful John had fallen down lifeless at the last word he spoke, and lay as a stone: and the king and the queen mourned over him; and the king said, "Oh, how ill have I rewarded thy truth!" And he ordered the stone figure to be taken up, and placed in his own room near to his bed; and as often as he looked at it he wept, and said, "Oh that I could bring thee back to life again, my Faithful John!"

After a time, the queen had two little sons, who grew up, and were her great joy. One day, when she was at church, the two children staid with their father; and as they played about, he looked at the stone figure, and sighed, and cried out, "Oh that I could bring thee back to life, my Faithful John!" Then the stone began to speak, and said, "O king! thou canst bring me back to life if thou wilt give up for my sake what is dearest to thee." But the king said, "All that I have in the world would I give up for thee." "Then," said the stone, "cut off the heads of thy children, sprinkle their blood over me, and I shall live again." Then the king was greatly shocked: but he thought how Faithful John had died for his sake, and because of his great truth towards him; and rose up and drew his sword to cut off his children's heads and sprinkle the stone with their blood; but the moment he drew his sword Faithful John was alive again, and stood before his face, and said, "Your truth is rewarded." And the children sprang about and played as if nothing had happened.

Then the king was full of joy: and when he saw the queen coming, to try her, he put Faithful John and the two children in a large closet; and when she came in he said to her, "Have you been at church?" "Yes," said she, "but I could not help thinking of Faithful John, who was so true to us." "Dear wife," said the king, "we can bring him back to life again, but it will cost us both our little sons, and we must give them up for his sake." When the queen heard this, she turned pale and was frightened in her heart; but she said, "Let it be so; we owe him all, for his great faith and truth." Then he rejoiced because she thought as he had thought, and went in and opened the closet, and brought out the children and Faithful John, and said, "Heaven be praised! he is ours again, and we have our sons safe too." So he told her the whole story; and all lived happily together the rest of their lives.

[The end of *Grimm's Fairy Tales; Faithful John* by the Brothers Grimm]