

1812

GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES

FAITHFUL JOHN

Jacob Ludwig Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm

Grimm, Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) - German philologists whose collection "Kinder- und Hausmarchen," known in English as "Grimm's Fairy Tales," is a timeless literary masterpiece. The brothers transcribed these tales directly from folk and fairy stories told to them by common villagers. Faithful John (1812) - On his death-bed, the old king entrusts the care of his son to his servant, Faithful John, who promises to never allow the young king to see the enchanting picture of the Princess of the Golden Palace.

FAITHFUL JOHN

THERE WAS once an old King, who, having fallen sick, thought to himself, "This is very likely my death-bed on which I am lying." Then he said, "Let Faithful John be sent for." Faithful John was his best-beloved servant, and was so called because he had served the King faithfully all his life long. When he came near the bed, the King said to him, "Faithful John, I feel my end drawing near, and my only care is for my son; he is yet of tender years, and does not always know how to shape his conduct; and unless you promise me to instruct him in all his actions and be a true foster-father to him, I shall not be able to close my eyes in peace." Then answered Faithful John, "I will never forsake him, and will serve him faithfully, even though it should cost me my life." And the old King said, "Then I die, being of good cheer and at peace." And he went on to say, "After my death, you must lead him through the whole castle, into all the chambers, halls, and vaults, and show him the treasures that in them lie; but the last chamber in the long gallery, in which lies hidden the picture of the Princess of the Golden Palace, you must not show him. If he were to see that picture, he would directly fall into so great a love for her, that he would faint with the strength of it, and afterwards for her sake run into great dangers; so you must guard him well."

And as Faithful John gave him his hand upon it, the old King became still and silent, laid his head upon the pillow, and died.

When the old King was laid in the grave, Faithful John told the young King what he had promised to his father on his death-bed, and said, "And I will certainly hold to my promise and be faithful to you, as I was faithful to him, even though it should cost me my life." When the days of mourning were at an end, Faithful John said to the Prince, "It is now time that you should see your inheritance; I will show you all the paternal castle." Then he led him over all the place, upstairs and downstairs, and showed him all the treasures and the splendid chambers; one chamber only he did not open, that in which the perilous picture hung. Now the picture was so placed that when the door opened it was the first thing to be seen, and was so wonderfully painted that it seemed to breathe and move, and in the whole world was there nothing more lovely or more beautiful.

The young King noticed how Faithful John always passed by this one door, and asked, "Why do you not undo this door?" "There is something inside that would terrify you," answered he.

But the King answered, "I have seen the whole castle, and I will know what is in here also." And he went forward and tried to open the door by force.

Then Faithful John called him back, and said, "I promised your father on his death-bed that you should not see what is in that room; it might bring great misfortune on you and me were I to break my promise." But the young King answered, "I shall be undone if I do not go inside that room; I shall have no peace day or night until I have seen it with these eyes; and I will not move from this place until you have unlocked it." Then Faithful John saw there was no help for it, and he chose out the key from the big bunch with a heavy heart and many sighs. When the door was opened he walked in first, and thought that by standing in front of the King he might hide the picture from him, but that was no good, the King stood on tiptoe, and looked over his shoulder. And when he saw the image of the lady that was so wonderfully beautiful, and so glittering with gold and jewels, he fell on the ground powerless. Faithful John helped him up, took him to his bed, and thought with sorrow, "Ah me! the evil has come to pass; what will become of us?" Then he strengthened the King with wine, until he came to himself. The first words that he said were,

“Oh, the beautiful picture! Whose portrait is it?” “It is the portrait of the Princess of the Golden Palace,” answered Faithful John.

Then the King said, “My love for her is so great that if all the leaves of the forest were tongues they could not utter it! I stake my life on the chance of obtaining her, and you, my Faithful John, must stand by me.” The faithful servant considered for a long time how the business should be begun; it seemed to him that it would be a difficult matter to come at just a sight of the Princess. At last he thought out a way, and said to the King, “All that she has about her is of gold- tables, chairs, dishes, drinking-cups, bowls, and all the household furniture; in your treasury are five tons of gold, let the goldsmiths of your kingdom work it up into all kinds of vessels and implements, into all kinds of birds, and wild creatures, and wonderful beasts, such as may please her; then we will carry them off with us, and go and seek our fortune.” The King had all the goldsmiths fetched, and they worked day and night, until at last some splendid things were got ready. When a ship had been loaded with them, Faithful John put on the garb of a merchant, and so did the King, so as the more completely to disguise themselves. Then they journeyed over the sea, and went so far that at last they came to the city where the Princess of the Golden Palace dwelt.

Faithful John told the King to stay in the ship, and to wait for him. “Perhaps,” said he, “I shall bring the Princess back with me, so take care that everything is in order; let the golden vessels be placed about, and the whole ship be adorned.” Then he gathered together in his apron some of the gold things, one of each kind, landed, and went up to the royal castle. And when he reached the courtyard of the castle there stood by the well a pretty maiden, who had two golden pails in her hand, and she was drawing water with them; and as she turned round to carry them away she saw the strange man, and asked him who he was.

He answered, “I am a merchant,” and opened his apron, and let her look within it.

“Ah, what beautiful things!” cried she, and setting down her pails, she turned the golden toys over, and looked at them one after another.

Then she said, “The Princess must see these; she takes so much pleasure in gold things that she will buy them all from you.” Then she took him by the hand and led him in, for she was the chamber-maid.

When the Princess saw the golden wares she was very pleased, and said, “All these are so finely worked that I should like to buy them of you.” But the Faithful John said, “I am only the servant of a rich merchant, and what I have here is nothing to what my master has in the ship- the cunningest and costliest things that ever were made of gold.” The Princess then wanted it all to be brought to her; but he said, “That would take up many days; so great is the number of them, and so much space would they occupy that there would not be enough room for them in your house.” But the Princess’s curiosity and fancy grew so much that at last she said, “Lead me to the ship; I will go and see your master’s treasures.” Then Faithful John led her to the ship joyfully, and the King, when he saw that her beauty was even greater than the picture had set forth, felt his heart leap at the sight. Then she climbed up into the ship, and the King received her. Faithful

John stayed by the steersman, and gave orders for the ship to push off, saying, “Spread all sail, that she may fly like a bird in the air.” So the King showed her all the golden things, each separately- the dishes, the bowls, the birds, the wild creatures, and the wonderful beasts. Many hours were passed in looking at them all, and in her pleasure the Princess never noticed that the ship was moving onwards. When she had examined the last, she thanked the merchant, and prepared to return home; but when she came to the ship’s side, she saw that they were on the high seas, far from land, and speeding on under full sail.

“Ah!” cried she, full of terror, “I am betrayed and carried off by this merchant.

Oh that I had died rather than have fallen into his power!” But the King took hold of her hand, and said, “No merchant am I, but a King, and no baser of birth than thyself; it is because of my over-mastering love for thee that I have carried thee off by cunning. The first time I saw thy picture I fell fainting to the earth.”

When the Princess of the Golden Palace heard this she became more trustful, and her heart inclined favorably towards him, so that she willingly consented to become his wife.

It happened, however, as they were still journeying on the open sea, that Faithful John, as he sat in the forepart of the ship and made music, caught sight of three ravens in the air flying overhead. Then he stopped playing, and listened to

what they said one to another, for he understood them quite well. The first one cried, “Ay, there goes the Princess of the Golden Palace.” “Yes,” answered the second; “but he has not got her safe yet.” And the third said, “He has her, though; she sits beside him in the ship.” Then the first one spoke again, “What does that avail him? When they come on land a fox-red horse will spring towards them; then will the

King try to mount him; and if he does, the horse will rise with him into the air, so that he will never see his bride again." The second raven asked, "Is there no remedy?" "Oh yes; if another man mounts quickly, and takes the pistol out of the holster and shoots the horse dead with it, he will save the young King. But who knows that? and he that knows it and does it will become stone from toe to knee." Then said the second, "I know further, that if the horse should be killed, the young King will not even then be sure of his bride. When they arrive at the castle there will lie a wrought bride-shirt in a dish, and it will seem all woven of gold and silver, but it is really of sulphur and pitch, and if he puts it on it will burn him to the marrow of his bones." The third raven said, "Is there no remedy?" "Oh yes," answered the second; "if another man with gloves on picks up the shirt, and throws it into the fire, so that it is consumed, then is the young King de-

livered. But what avails that? He who knows it and does it will be turned into stone from his heart to his knee." Then spoke the third, "I know yet more, that even when the bride-shirt is burnt up the King is not sure of his bride; when at the wedding the dance begins, and the young Queen dances, she will suddenly grow pale and fall to the earth as if she were dead, and unless some one lifts her up and takes three drops of blood from her right breast, she will die. But he that knows this and does this will become stone from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot." When the ravens had spoken thus among themselves they flew away. Faithful John had understood it all, and from that time he remained quiet and sad, for he thought to himself that were he to conceal what he had heard from his master, misfortune would befall; and were he to reveal it his own life would be sacrificed. At last, however, he said within himself, "I will save my master, though I myself should perish!" So when they came on land, it happened just as the ravens had foretold, there sprang forward a splendid fox-red horse.

"Come on!" said the King, "he shall carry me to the castle," and was going to mount, when Faithful John passed before him and mounted quickly, drew the pistol out of the holster, and shot the horse dead. Then the other servants of the King cried out (for they did not wish well to Faithful John), "How shameful to kill that beautiful animal that was to have carried the King to his castle." But the King said, "Hold your tongues, and let him be; he is my Faithful John; he knows what is the good of it." Then they went up to the castle, and there stood in the hall a dish, and the wrought bride-shirt that lay on it seemed as if of gold and silver. The young King went up to it and was going to put it on, but Faithful John pushed him away, picked it up with his gloved hands, threw it quickly on the fire, and there let it burn.

The other servants began grumbling again, and said, "Look, he is even burning up the King's bridal shirt!" But the young King said, "Who knows but that there may be a good reason for it? Let him be, he is my Faithful John." Then the wedding feast was held; and the bride led the dance; Faithful John watched her carefully, and all at once she grew pale and fell down as if she were dead. Then he went quickly to her, and carried her into a chamber hard by, laid her down, and kneeling, took three drops of blood from her right breast. Immediately she drew breath again and raised herself up, but the young King witnessing all, and not knowing why Faithful John had done this, grew very angry, and cried out, "Throw him into prison!" The next morning Faithful John was condemned to death and led to the gallows, and as he stood there ready to suffer, he said, "He who is about to die is permitted to speak once before his end; may I claim that right?" "Yes," answered the King, "it is granted to you."

Then said Faithful John, "I have been condemned unjustly, for I have always been faithful," and he related how he had heard on the sea voyage the talk of the ravens, and how he had done everything in order to save his master.

Then cried the King, "O my Faithful John, pardon! pardon! Lead him down!" But Faithful John, as he spoke the last words, fell lifeless, and became stone.

The King and Queen had great grief because of this, and the King said, "Ah, how could I have evil-rewarded such faithfulness!" and he caused the stone image to be lifted up and put to stand in his sleeping-room by the side of his bed. And as often as he saw it he wept and said, "Would that I could bring thee back to life, my Faithful John!" After some time the Queen bore twins- two little sons- that grew and thrived, and were the joy of their parents. One day, when the Queen was in church, the two children were sitting and playing with their father, and he gazed at the stone image full of sadness, sighed, and cried, "Oh that I could bring thee back to life, my Faithful John!" Then the stone began to speak, and said, "Yes, thou canst bring me back to life again, if thou wilt bestow therefor thy best-beloved." Then cried the King, "All that I have in the world will I give up for thee!" The stone went on to

say, "If thou wilt cut off the heads of thy two children with thy own hand, and besmear me with their blood, I shall receive life again."

The King was horror-struck at the thought that he must put his beloved children to death, but he remembered all John's faithfulness, and how he had died for him, and he drew his sword and cut off his children's heads with his own hand.

And when he had besmeared the stone with their blood, life returned to it, and Faithful John stood alive and well before him; and he said to the King, "Thy faithfulness shall not be unrewarded," and, taking up the heads of the children, he set them on again, and besmeared the wounds with their blood, upon which in a moment they were whole again, and jumped about, and went on playing as if nothing had happened to them.

Now was the King full of joy; and when he saw the Queen coming he put the Faithful John and the two children in a great chest. When she came in he said to her, "Hast thou prayed in church?" "Yes," answered she, "but I was thinking all the while of Faithful John, and how he came to such great misfortune through us." "Then," said he, "dear wife, we can give him life again, but it will cost us both our little sons, whom we must sacrifice." The Queen grew pale and sick at heart, but said, "We owe it him, because of his great faithfulness." Then the King rejoiced because she thought as he did, and he went and unlocked the chest and took out the children and Faithful John, and said, "God be praised, he is delivered, and our little sons are ours again"; and he related to her how it had come to pass. After that they all lived together happily to the end of their lives.

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