

Faithful and Unfaithful

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Swedish

Intermediate

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Once upon a time there was a couple of humble cottagers who had no children until, at last, the man's wife was blessed with a boy, which made both of them very happy. They named him Faithful and when he was christened a *huldra* came to the hut, seated herself beside the child's cradle, and foretold that he would meet with good fortune. "What is more," she said, "when he is fifteen years of age, I will make him a present of a horse with many rare qualities, a horse that has the gift of speech!" And with that the *huldra* turned and went away.

The boy grew up and became strong and powerful. And when he had passed his fifteenth year, a strange old man came up to their hut one day, knocked, and said that the horse he was leading had been sent by his queen, and that henceforward it was to belong to Faithful, as she had promised. Then the ancient man departed; but the beautiful horse was admired by all, and Faithful learned to love it more with every passing day.

At length he grew weary of home. "I must away and try my fortune in the world," said he, and his parents did not like to object; for there was not much to wish for at home. So he led his dear horse from the stable, swung himself into the saddle, and rode hurriedly into the wood. He rode on and on, and had already covered a good bit of ground, when he saw two lions engaged in a struggle with a tiger, and they were well-nigh overcome. "Make haste to take your bow," said the horse, "shoot the tiger and deliver the two lions!" "Yes, that's what I will

do,” said the youth, fitted an arrow to the bow-string, and in a moment the tiger lay prone on the ground. The two lions drew nearer, nuzzled their preserver in a friendly and grateful manner, and then hastened back to their cave.

Faithful now rode along for a long time among the great trees until he suddenly spied two terrified white doves fleeing from a hawk who was on the point of catching them. “Make haste to take your bow,” said the horse, “shoot the hawk and save the two doves!” “Yes, that’s what I’ll do,” said the youth. He fitted an arrow to the bow-string, and in a moment the hawk lay prone on the ground. But the two doves flew nearer, fluttered about their deliverer in a tame and grateful manner, and then hurried back to their nest.

The youth pressed on through the wood and by now was far, far from home. But his horse did not tire easily, and ran on with him until they came to a great lake. There he saw a gull rise up from the water, holding a pike in its claws. “Make haste to take your bow,” said the horse, “shoot the gull and save the pike!” “Yes, that’s what I’ll do,” answered the youth, fitted an arrow to his bow-string, and in a moment the gull was thrashing the ground with its wings, mortally wounded. But the pike who had been saved swam nearer, gave his deliverer a friendly, grateful glance, and then dove down to join his fellows beneath the waves.

Faithful rode on again, and before evening came to a great castle. He at once had himself announced to the king, and begged that the latter would take him into his service. “What kind of a place do you want?” asked the king, who was inclined to look with favor on the bold horseman.

“I should like to be a groom,” was Faithful’s answer, “but first of all I must have stable-room and fodder for my horse.” “That you shall have,” said the king, and the youth was taken on as a groom, and served so long and so well, that every one in the castle liked him, and the king in particular praised him highly.

But among the other servitors was one named Unfaithful who was jealous of Faithful, and did what he could to harm him; for he thought to himself:

“Then I would be rid of him, and need not see him continue to rise in my lord’s favor.” Now it happened that the king was very sad, for he had lost his queen, whom a troll had stolen from the castle. It is true that the queen had not taken pleasure in the king’s society, and that she did not love him. Still the king longed for her greatly, and often spoke of it to Unfaithful his servant. So one day Unfaithful said: “My lord need distress

himself no longer, for Faithful has been boasting to me that he could rescue your beautiful queen from the hands of the troll." "If he has done so," replied the king, "then he must keep his word."

He straightway ordered Faithful to be brought before him, and threatened him with death if he did not at once hurry into the hill and bring back the wife of whom he had been robbed. If he were successful great honor should be his reward. In vain Faithful denied what Unfaithful had said of him, the king stuck to his demand, and the youth withdrew, convinced that he had not long to live. Then he went to the stable to bid farewell to his beautiful horse, and stood beside him and wept. "What grieves you so?" asked the horse. Then the youth told him of all that had happened, and said that this was probably the last time he would be able to visit him. "If it be no more than that," said the horse, "there is a way to help you. Up in the garret of the castle there is an old fiddle, take it with you and play it when you come to the place where the queen is kept. And fashion for yourself armor of steel wire, and set knives into it everywhere, and then, when you see the troll open his jaws, descend into his maw, and thus slay him. But you must have no fear, and must trust me to show you the way." These words filled the youth with fresh courage, he went to the king and received permission to leave, secretly fashioned his steel armor, took the old fiddle from the garret of the castle, led his dear horse out of the stable, and without delay set forth for the troll's hill.

Before long he saw it, and rode directly to the troll's abode. When he came near, he saw the troll, who had crept out of his castle, lying stretched out at the entrance to his cave, fast asleep, and snoring so powerfully that the whole hill shook. But his mouth was wide open, and his maw was so tremendous that it was easy for the youth to crawl into it. He did so, for he was not afraid, and made his way into the troll's inwards where he was so active that the troll was soon killed. Then Faithful crept out again, laid aside his armor, and entered the troll's castle. Within the great golden hall sat the captive queen, fettered with seven strong chains of gold. Faithful could not break the strong chains; but he took up his fiddle and played such tender music on it, that the golden chains were moved, and one after another, fell from the queen, until she was able to rise and was free once more. She looked at the courageous youth with joy and gratitude, and felt very kindly toward him, because he was so handsome and courteous. And the queen was perfectly willing to return with him to the king's castle.

The return of the queen gave rise to great joy, and Faithful received the promised reward from the king. But now the queen treated her husband with even less consideration than before. She would not exchange a word with him, she did not laugh, and locked herself up in her room with her gloomy thoughts. This greatly vexed

the king, and one day he asked the queen why she was so sad: "Well," said she, "I cannot be happy unless I have the beautiful golden hall which I had in the hill at the troll's; for a hall like that is to be found nowhere else."

"It will be no easy matter to obtain it for you," said the king, "and I cannot promise you that anyone will be able to do it." But when he complained of his difficulty to his servant Unfaithful, the latter answered: "The chances of success are not so bad, for Faithful said he could easily bring the troll's golden hall to the castle." Faithful was at once sent for, and the king commanded him, as he loved his life, to make good his word and bring the golden hall from the troll's hill. It was in vain that Faithful denied Unfaithful's assertions: go he must, and bring back the golden hall.

Inconsolable, he went to his beautiful horse, wept and wanted to say farewell to him forever. "What troubles you?" asked the horse. And the youth replied: "Unfaithful has again been telling lies about me, and if I do not bring the troll's golden hall to the queen, my life will be forfeited." "Is it nothing more serious than that?" said the horse. "See that you obtain a great ship, take your fiddle with you and play the golden hall out of the hill, then hitch the troll's horses before it, and you will be able to bring the glistening hall here without trouble."

Then Faithful felt somewhat better, did as the horse had told him, and was successful in reaching the great hill. And as he stood there playing the fiddle, the golden hall heard him, and was drawn to the sounding music, and it moved slowly, slowly, until it stood outside the hill. It was built of virgin gold, like a house by itself, and under it were many wheels. Then the youth took the troll's horses, put them to the golden hall, and thus brought it aboard his ship. Soon he had crossed the lake, and brought it along safely so that it reached the castle without damage, to the great joy of the queen. Yet despite the fact, she was as weary of everything as she had been before, never spoke to her husband, the king, and no one ever saw her laugh.

Now the king grew even more vexed than he had been, and again asked her why she seemed so sad. "Ah, how can I be happy unless I have the two colts that used to belong to me, when I stayed at the troll's! Such handsome steeds are to be seen nowhere else!" "It will be anything but easy to obtain for you what you want," declared the king, "for they were untamed, and long ago must have run far away into the wild-wood." Then he left her, sadly, and did not know what to do. But Unfaithful said: "Let my lord give himself no concern, for Faithful has declared he could easily secure both of the troll's colts." Faithful was at once sent for, and the king threatened him with death, if he did not show his powers in the matter of the colts. But should he succeed in

catching them, then he would be rewarded.

Now Faithful knew quite well that he could not hope to catch the troll's wild colts, and he once more turned to the stable in order to bid farewell to the *huldra's* gift. "Why do you weep over such a trifle?" said the horse. "Hurry to the wood, play your fiddle, and all will be well!" Faithful did as he was told, and after a while the two lions whom he had rescued came leaping toward him, listened to his playing and asked him whether he was in distress. "Yes, indeed," said Faithful, and told them what he had to do. They at once ran back into the wood, one to one side and the other to the other, and returned quickly, driving the two colts before them. Then Faithful played his fiddle and the colts followed him, so that he soon reached the king's castle in safety, and could deliver the steeds to the queen.

The king now expected that his wife would be gay and happy. But she did not change, never addressed a word to him, and only seemed a little less sad when she happened to speak to the daring youth.

Then the king asked her to tell him what she lacked, and why she was so discontented. She answered: "I have secured the colts of the troll, and I often sit in the glittering hall of gold; but I can open none of the handsome chests that are filled to the brim with my valuables, because I have no keys. And if I do not get the keys again, how can I be happy?" "And where may the keys be?" asked the king. "In the lake by the troll's hill," said the queen, "for that is where I threw them when Faithful brought me here." "This is a ticklish affair, this business of those keys you want!" said the king. "And I can scarcely promise that you will ever see them again." In spite of this, however, he was willing to make an attempt, and talked it over with his servant Unfaithful. "Why, that is easily done," said the latter, "for Faithful boasted to me that he could get the queen's keys without any difficulty if he wished." "Then I shall compel him to keep his word," said the king. And he at once ordered Faithful, on pain of death, to get the queen's keys out of the lake by the troll's hill without delay.



“The pike rose to the surface with the golden keys in his mouth.” Illustration by George Hood.

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This time the youth was not so depressed, for he thought to himself: “My wise horse will be able to help me.” And so he was, for he advised him to go along playing his fiddle, and to wait for what might happen. After the youth had played for a while, the pike he had saved thrust his head out of the water, recognized him, and asked whether he could be of any service to him. “Yes, indeed!” said the youth, and told him what it was he wanted. The pike at once dived, quickly rose to the surface of the water with the golden keys in his mouth, and gave them to his deliverer. The latter hastened back with them, and now the queen could open the great chests in the golden hall to her heart’s content.

Notwithstanding, the king’s wife was as sorrowful as ever, and when the king complained about it to Unfaithful, the latter said: “No doubt it is because she loves Faithful. I would therefore advise that my lord have him beheaded. Then there will be a change.” This advice suited the king well, and he determined to carry it out shortly. But one day Faithful’s horse said to him: “The king is going to have your head chopped off. So hurry to the wood, play your fiddle, and beg the two doves to bring you a bottle of the water of life. Then go to the queen and ask her to set your head on your body and to sprinkle you with the water when you have been beheaded.” Faithful did so. He went to the wood that very day with his fiddle, and before long the two doves were fluttering around him, and shortly after brought back the bottle filled with the water of life. He took it back home with him and gave it to the queen, so that she might sprinkle him with it after he had been beheaded. She did so, and at once Faithful rose again, as full of life as ever; but far better looking. The king was astonished at what he had seen, and told the queen to cut off his own head and then sprinkle him with the water. She at once seized the sword, and in a moment the king’s head rolled to the ground. But she sprinkled none of the water of life upon it, and the king’s body was quickly carried out and buried. Then the queen and Faithful celebrated their wedding with great pomp; but Unfaithful was banished from the land and went away in disgrace. The wise horse dwelt contentedly in a wonderful chamber, and the king and queen kept the magic fiddle, the golden hall, and the troll’s other valuables, and lived in peace and happiness day after day.

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