

Gobborn Seer

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English

Intermediate
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Once there was a man called Gobborn Seer, and he had a son called Jack.

One day he sent him out to sell a sheep skin, and Gobborn said, "You must bring me back the skin and the value of it as well."

So Jack started, but he could not find any who would leave him the skin and give him its price too. So he came home discouraged.

But Gobborn Seer said, "Never mind, you must take another turn at it tomorrow."

So he tried again, and nobody wished to buy the skin on those terms.

When he came home his father said, "You must go and try your luck to-morrow," and the third day it seemed as if it would be the same thing over again. And he had half a mind not to go back at all, his father would be so vexed. As he came to a bridge, like the Creek Road one yonder, he leaned on the parapet thinking of his trouble, and that perhaps it would be foolish to run away from home, but he could not tell which to do; when he saw a girl washing her clothes on the bank below. She looked up and said:

"If it may be no offence asking, what is it you feel so badly about?"

“My father has given me this skin, and I am to fetch it back and the price of it beside.”

“Is that all? Give it here, and it’s easy done.”

So the girl washed the skin in the stream, took the wool from it, and paid him the value of it, and gave him the skin to carry back.

His father was well pleased, and said to Jack, “That was a witty woman; she would make you a good wife. Do you think you could tell her again?”

Jack thought he could, so his father told him to go by-and-by to the bridge, and see if she was there, and if so bid her come home to take tea with them.

And sure enough Jack spied her and told her how his old father had a wish to meet her, and would she be pleased to drink tea with them.

The girl thanked him kindly, and said she could come the next day; she was too busy at the moment.

“All the better,” said Jack, “I’ll have time to make ready.”

So when she came Gobborn Seer could see she was a witty woman, and he asked her if she would marry his Jack. She said “Yes,” and they were married.

Not long after, Jack’s father told him he must come with him and build the finest castle that ever was seen, for a king who wished to outdo all others by his wonderful castle.

And as they went to lay the foundation-stone, Gobborn Seer said to Jack, “Can’t you shorten the way for me?”

But Jack looked ahead and there was a long road before them, and he said, “I don’t see, father, how I could break a bit off.”

“You’re no good to me, then, and had best be off home.”

So poor Jack turned back, and when he came in his wife said, “Why, how’s this you’ve come alone?” and he told her what his father had said and his answer.

“You stupid,” said his witty wife, “if you had told a tale you would have shortened the road! Now listen till I tell

you a story, and then catch up with Gobborn Seer and begin it at once. He will like hearing it, and by the time you are done you will have reached the foundation-stone.”

So Jack sweated and overtook his father. Gobborn Seer said never a word, but Jack began his story, and the road was shortened as his wife had said.

When they came to the end of their journey, they started building of this castle which was to outshine all others. Now the wife had advised them to be intimate with the servants, and so they did as she said, and it was “Good-morning” and “Good-day to you” as they passed in and out.

Now, at the end of a twelvemonth, Gobborn, the wise man, had built such a castle thousands were gathered to admire it.

And the king said: “The castle is done. I shall return to-morrow and pay you all.”

“I have just a ceiling to finish in an upper lobby,” said Gobborn, “and then it wants nothing.”

But after the king was gone off, the housekeeper sent for Gobborn and Jack, and told them that she had watched for a chance to warn them, for the king was so afraid they should carry their art away and build some other king as fine a castle, he meant to take their lives on the morrow. Gobborn told Jack to keep a good heart, and they would come off all right.

When the king had come back Gobborn told him he had been unable to complete the job for lack of a tool left at home, and he should like to send Jack after it.

“No, no,” said the king, “cannot one of the men do the errand?”

“No, they could not make themselves understood,” said the Seer, “but Jack could do the errand.”

“You and your son are to stop here. But how will it do if I send my own son?”

“That will do.”

So Gobborn sent by him a message to Jack’s wife. “Give him Crooked and Straight!”

Now there was a little hole in the wall rather high up, and Jack's wife tried to reach up into a chest there after "crooked and straight," but at last she asked the king's son to help her, because his arms were longest.

But when he was leaning over the chest she caught him by the two heels, and threw him into the chest, and fastened it down. So there he was, both "crooked and straight!"

Then he begged for pen and ink, which she brought him, but he was not allowed out, and holes were bored that he might breathe.

When his letter came, telling the king, his father, he was to be let free when Gobborn and Jack were safe home, the king saw he must settle for the building, and let them come away.

As they left Gobborn told him: Now that Jack was done with this work, he should soon build a castle for his witty wife far superior to the king's, which he did, and they lived there happily ever after.

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