

Godmother Death

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Intermediate
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There was a man, very poor in this world's goods, whose wife presented him with a baby boy. No one was willing to stand sponsor, because he was so very poor. The father said to himself: 'Dear Lord, I am so poor that no one is willing to be at my service in this matter; I'll take the baby, I'll go, and I'll ask the first person I meet to act as sponsor, and if I don't meet anybody, perhaps the sexton will help me.'

He went and met Death, but didn't know what manner of person she was; she was a handsome woman, like any other woman. He asked her to be godmother. She didn't make any excuse, and immediately saluted him as parent of her godchild, took the baby in her arms, and carried him to church. The little lad was properly christened. When they came out of church, the child's father took the godmother to an inn, and wanted to give her a little treat as godmother. But she said to him, 'Gossip, leave this alone, and come with me to my abode.' She took him with her to her apartment, which was very handsomely furnished. Afterwards she conducted him into great vaults, and through these vaults they went right into the underworld in the dark. There tapers were burning of three sizes—small, large, and middle-sized; and those which were not yet alight were very large. The godmother said to the godchild's father: 'Look, Gossip, here I have the duration of everybody's life.' The child's father gazed thereat, found there a tiny taper close to the very ground, and asked her: 'But, Gossip, I pray you, whose is this little taper close to the ground?' She said to him: 'That is yours! When any taper whatsoever burns down, I must go for that man.'

He said to her: 'Gossip, I pray you, give me somewhat additional.' She said to him: 'Gossip, I cannot do that!' Afterwards she went and lighted a large new taper for the baby boy whom they had had christened. Meanwhile, while the godmother was not looking, the child's father took for himself a large new taper, lit it, and placed it where his tiny taper was burning down.

The godmother looked round at him and said: 'Gossip, you ought not to have done that to me; but if you have given yourself additional lifetime, you have done so and possess it. Let us go hence, and we'll go to your wife.'

She took a present, and went with the child's father and the child to the mother. She arrived, and placed the boy on his mother's bed, and asked her how she was, and whether she had any pain anywhere. The mother confided her griefs to her, and the father sent for some beer, and wanted to entertain her in his cottage, as godmother, in order to gratify her and show his gratitude. They drank and feasted together. Afterwards the godmother said to her godchild's father: 'Gossip, you are so poor that no one but myself would be at your service in this matter; but never mind, you shall bear me in memory! I will go to the houses of various respectable people and make them ill, and you shall physic and cure them. I will tell you all the remedies. I possess them all, and everybody will be glad to recompense you well, only observe this: When I stand at anyone's feet, you can be of assistance to every such person; but if I stand at anybody's head, don't attempt to aid him.'

It came to pass. The child's father went from patient to patient, where the god-mother caused illness, and benefited every one. All at once he became a distinguished physician. A prince was dying—nay, he had breathed his last—nevertheless, they sent for the physician. He came, he began to anoint him with salves and give him his powders, and did him good. When he had restored him to health, they paid him well, without asking how much they were indebted. Again, a count was dying. They sent for the physician again. The physician came. Death was standing behind the bed at his head. The physician cried: 'It's a bad case, but we'll have a try.' He summoned the servants, and ordered them to turn the bed round with the patient's feet towards Death, and began to anoint him with salves and administer powders into his mouth, and did him good. The count paid him in return as much as he could carry away, without ever asking how much he was indebted; he was only too glad that he had restored him to health. When Death met the physician, she said to him: 'Gossip, if this occurs to you again, don't play me that trick any more. True, you have done him good, but only for a while; I must, none the less, take him off whither he is due.' The child's father went on in this way for some years; he was now very old. But at last he was wearied out, and asked Death herself to take him. Death was unable to take him, because he had given himself a long

additional taper; she was obliged to wait till it burned out. One day he drove to a certain patient to restore him to health, and did so.

Afterwards Death revealed herself to him, and rode with him in his carriage. She began to tickle and play with him, and tap him with a green twig under the throat; he threw himself into her lap, and went off into the last sleep. Death laid him in the carriage, and took herself off. They found the physician lying dead in his carriage, and conveyed him home. The whole town and all the villages lamented: 'That physician is much to be regretted. What a good doctor he was! He was of great assistance; there will never be his like again!' His son remained after him, but had not the same skill.

The son went one day into church, and his godmother met him. She asked him: 'My dear son, how are you?' He said to her: 'Not all alike; so long as I have what my dad saved up for me, it is well with me, but after that the Lord God knows how it will be with me.' His godmother said: 'Well, my son, fear nought. I am your christening mamma; I helped your father to what he had, and will give you, too, a livelihood. You shall go to a physician as a pupil, and you shall be more skilful than he, only behave nicely.'

After this she anointed him with salve over the ears, and conducted him to a physician. The physician didn't know what manner of lady it was, and what sort of son she brought him for instruction. The lady enjoined her son to behave nicely, and requested the physician to instruct him well, and bring him into a good position. Then she took leave of him and departed. The physician and the lad went together to gather herbs, and each herb cried out to the pupil what remedial virtue it had, and the pupil gathered it. The physician also gathered herbs, but knew not, with regard to any herb, what remedial virtue it possessed. The pupil's herbs were beneficial in every disease. The physician said to the pupil: 'You are cleverer than I, for I diagnose no one that comes to me; but you know herbs counter to every disease. Do you know what? Let us join partnership. I will give my doctor's diploma up to you, and will be your assistant, and am willing to be with you till death.'

The lad was successful in doctoring and curing till his taper burned out in limbo.

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