

The Horse-Dew and the Witch

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Turkish

Intermediate
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Once a Padishah had three daughters. Before setting out on a journey he called his daughters before him and instructed them to feed his favourite horse personally, and not to entrust that duty to any other, as he would allow no stranger near it. The Padishah went away, and the eldest daughter carried food to the stable: the horse, however, would not permit her to approach him. The second daughter made the attempt, with no better result. Then the youngest went to the horse, who was perfectly quiet, and willingly received the food and drink from her hands. The two eldest sisters were glad thus to be relieved of an irksome and disagreeable duty.

When the Padishah returned home his first inquiry was as to whether his horse had been properly attended to during his absence. “He would not allow us even to go near him,” answered the two elder daughters, “but our youngest sister has fed him.”

On hearing this the monarch said that she should be wife to the horse, his other daughters being given in marriage to the Vezir and Sheik-ul-Islam respectively, The triple wedding festivities lasted forty days, and the youngest then went to her stable, while her sisters were taken to their splendid palaces,

Only in the daytime, however, had the youngest sister a horse for a husband and a stable for a dwelling. By night the stable was transformed into a rose garden and the horse into a handsome youth. Thus they lived in

the utmost felicity, no one except themselves knowing their secret.

It came to pass that the Padishah arranged a tournament in the court yard of the palace, and the bravest of all the knights who took part therein were the husbands of the monarch's eldest daughters, "Look!" said they to their sister of the stable, "our husbands are like lions: see how beautifully they throw their lances. Where is your horse-husband?" At this the horse shook himself, changed into human form, mounted a steed, and begging his wife not to reveal his identity, he plunged into the fray. He overcame all the combatants, unhorsed his brothers-in-law, then vanished as completely as though he had never been there.

Next day the tournament was continued, and the elder sisters treated the youngest with scorn and contempt; but again the unknown hero appeared, struck down all his opponents, and vanished as before.

On the third day the horse-knight said to his wife: "If at any time I am in danger, or you are in need of help, burn these three hairs, and wherever you may be, I will come to you." Then he hastened to the tournament and fought again with his brothers-in-law. His prowess evoked universal admiration even his sisters-in-law could not withhold their tribute of praise; but in ill-natured raillery they said to their youngest sister: "See how these knights understand the tournament; they are not like your horse-husband."

The poor woman could no longer forbear to answer that the beautiful and valiant knight was her husband; but even as she turned to point him out, he vanished. This reminded her that he had warned her never to divulge the secret. Overcome with remorse, she awaited eagerly his return to the stable, but in vain; neither horse nor man came—neither roses nor garden were to be hers that night.

"Woe is me!" she groaned, "I have betrayed my husband; I have broken my promise; thus am I punished!" She did not close her eyes all night, but wept until morning. When it was daylight she went to her father the Padishah, and with tears told him what had happened, vowing that she would go in search of her husband even if she journeyed to the ends of the earth. In vain her father attempted to dissuade her. He reminded her that her husband was a Dew and consequently she would never find him; but all his arguments failed to shake her resolution.

Grief stricken she set out on her quest, and walked so long that at last she sank exhausted at the foot of a mountain. Here, remembering the three hairs, she burned one of them, and the next instant her husband enfolded her in his arms. Both were almost speechless with joy.

“Did I not counsel you never to betray our secret to anyone?” gently chided the youth. “If my mother sees us now she will separate us immediately. This mountain is our abode; my mother will be here directly, and woe to us if she catch sight of us.”

The poor girl was terrified at these words, grieving bitterly that no sooner had she found her husband than she must lose him again. The Dew-son pitied her, gave her a light blow and changed her into an apple, which he put upon a shelf. Shrieking loudly, the witch flew down from the mountain, crying that she could smell human flesh and that human flesh she must have. In vain her son denied it—she refused to believe him.

“If you will swear on the egg to do it no harm, I will show you what I have hidden,” said the youth. The witch accordingly promised, whereon the youth gave the apple a light blow and the beautiful maiden appeared. “Behold my wife!” said he. The old woman said nothing, but set her daughter-in-law some simple tasks, and went back to her work.

For a few days the husband and wife were allowed to live in peace, but the old witch was only waiting till her son went away from home to wreak her vengeance on his wife. At last she found an opportunity. “Sweep and don’t sweep,” she commanded the maiden, and went away. The poor girl was perplexed to know what she must “sweep” and what “not sweep.” Recollecting the hairs, she took one and burnt it. Instantly her husband appeared, and she told him her difficulty. He explained that she must “sweep” the room and “not sweep” the courtyard.

The maiden acted accordingly. Towards evening the witch came in and asked whether the work was done. “I have swept and not swept,” answered the daughter-in-law. “You deceitful thing!” scolded the old woman, “you have not thought that out for yourself; my son has certainly taught you.”

Next day the old witch came again and gave the maiden three bowls, which she ordered her to fill with her tears. The maid wept and wept.

continually, but failed to fill even one of the vessels. In her difficulty she burnt the third hair, whereupon her husband appeared and advised her to fill the bowls with water and add a quantity of salt thereto. This the maiden did, and when the old woman came home in the evening, she was shown the three vessels duly filled. "You cunning creature!" stormed the witch, "that is not your own work; but you and my son shall not cheat me again."

On the following day she ordered her daughter-in-law to make a pancake. But though the maiden sought everywhere, not a single ingredient for the purpose could she find. This time she could expect no help, for her husband was away, and the three magic hairs had all been burned. The youth, however, suspecting his mother's wicked intentions, returned home unexpectedly to his wife, and seeing her in such grief he suggested that they should flee. "My mother will not rest until she has wrought your ruin," he said. "Let us escape before she returns." So they went together out into the wide world.

In the evening the witch came home, and saw that both her daughter-in-law and son were missing. "The wretches have abandoned me!" she shrieked, and calling her witch-sister to her, she sent her to follow the fugitives and bring them back. The second witch got into a bowl, made a whip out of snakes, and was of like a lightning-flash. But the Dew-son, seeing his aunt behind them in the distance, gave the maiden a light blow and changed her into a swimming-bath. He transformed himself into a bath attendant, and stood before the door. The witch came up, alighted from the bowl, and inquired of him whether he had seen a youth and a maiden. "I am just warming the bath," answered the youth; "there is no one in; if you do not believe me, go in and see for yourself." The woman, perceiving she could do nothing with him, reentered the bowl, went back to her sister, and reported the failure of her errand.

The witch asked her whether she had met anyone on the way. "Oh yes," answered she, "I spoke to the attendant at the door of a swimming bath, but he was either deaf or stupid, for I could get nothing out of him." "you were even more stupid," scolded the witch, "not to recognize that the bath and the attendant were my daughter-in-law and son." Now she called another sister and sent her after the fugitives.

The Dew-son looking back, saw his other aunt coming towards them in a bowl. He knocked his wife gently and she became a spring; he himself stood beside and drew water. The witch came up and asked whether he had seen anything of a youth and a maiden. "This spring has excellent drinking-water," the fellow answered with an air of simplicity. The woman, thinking he was too stupid to understand her questions, hurried back to her

sister with the intelligence that she could see nothing of the missing couple. The witch inquired whether she had seen anyone on the way. "Only an imbecile drawing water from a spring," was the answer. "That imbecile was my son," exclaimed the witch in a great rage, "and the spring was his wife. I see I shall have to go myself." So she stepped into the bowl, made a whip out of snakes, and set off.

Looking back the youth now saw that his mother herself was coming. Striking the maid gently he turned her into a tree, and himself into a snake coiled round it. The witch knew them, and would have torn the tree to pieces if she could have done so without harming her son. So she said to the snake, "My son, at least show me the little finger of the maid and then I will leave you in peace."

The son saw that the only way to get rid of his mother was to do as she asked. He therefore allowed one of the maid's fingers to become visible this his mother immediately devoured, and then vanished.

At another gentle blow from her husband the maid again resumed her human form; and the two went home to her father, the Padishah. His talisman having been destroyed, the youth became a mortal, and as he was no longer a Dew, his witch-mother had no more power over him. The Padishah rejoiced in the return of his lost children, their marriage was again celebrated with great pomp, and after the old monarch's decease they reigned in his stead.

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