

Princess and the Glass Mountain

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Swedish

Intermediate
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Once upon a time there was a king who took such a joy in the chase, that he knew no greater pleasure than hunting wild beasts. Early and late he camped in the forest with hawk and hound, and good fortune always followed his hunting. But it chanced one day that he could rouse no game, although he had tried in every direction since morning. And then, when evening was coming on, and he was about to ride home, he saw a dwarf or wild man running through the forest before him. The king at once spurred on his horse, rode after the dwarf, seized him and he was surprised at his strange appearance; for he was small and ugly, like a troll, and his hair was as stiff as bean-straw. But no matter what the king said to him, he would return no answer, nor say a single word one way or another. This angered the king, who was already out of sorts because of his ill-success at the hunt, and he ordered his people to seize the wild man and guard him carefully lest he escape. Then the king rode home.

Now his people said to him: "You should keep the wild man a captive here at your court, in order that the whole country may talk of what a mighty huntsman you are. Only you should guard him so that he does not escape; because he is of a sly and treacherous disposition." When the king had listened to them he said nothing for a long time. Then he replied: "I will do as you say, and if the wild man escape, it shall be no fault of mine. But I vow that whoever lets him go shall die without mercy, and though he were my own son!"

The following morning, as soon as the king awoke, he remembered his vow.

He at once sent for wood and beams, and had a small house or cage built quite close to the castle. The small

house was built of great timbers, and protected by strong locks and bolts, so that none could break in; and a peephole was left in the middle of the wall through which food might be thrust.

When everything was completed the king had the wild man led up, placed in the small house, and he himself took and kept the key. There the dwarf had to sit a prisoner, day and night, and the people came afoot and a-horseback to gaze at him. Yet no one ever heard him complain, or so much as utter a single word.

Thus matters went for some time. Then a war broke out in the land, and the king had to take the field. At parting he said to the queen: "You must rule the kingdom now in my stead, and I leave land and people in your care. But there is one thing you must promise me you will do: that you will guard the wild man securely so that he does not escape while I am away." The queen promised to do her best in all respects, and the king gave her the key to the cage. Thereupon he had his long galleys, his "sea-wolves," push out from the shore, hoisted sail, and took his course far, far away to the other country.

The king and queen had only one child, a prince who was still small; yet great in promise. Now when the king had gone, it chanced one day that the little fellow was wandering about the royal courtyard, and came to the wild man's cage. And he began to play with an apple of gold he had. And while he was playing with it, it happened that suddenly the apple fell through the window in the wall of the cage. The wild man at once appeared and threw back the apple. This seemed a merry game to the little fellow: he threw the apple in again, and the wild man threw it out again, and thus they played for a long time. Yet for all the game had been so pleasant, it turned to sorrow in the end: for the wild man kept the apple of gold, and would not give it back again. And when all was of no avail, neither threats nor prayers, the little fellow at last began to weep. Then the wild man said: "Your father did ill to capture me, and you will never get your apple of gold again, unless you let me out." The little fellow answered: "And how can I let you out? Just you give me back my apple again, my apple of gold!" Then the wild man said: "You must do what I now tell you. Go up to your mother, the queen, and beg her to comb your hair. Then see to it that you take the key from her girdle, and come down and unlock the door. After that you can return the key in the same way, without any one knowing anything about it."

After the wild man had talked to the boy in this way, he finally did as he said, went up to his mother, begged her to comb his hair, and took the key from her girdle. Then he ran down to the cage and opened the door. And when they parted, the dwarf said: "Here is your apple of gold, that I promised to give back to you, and I thank

you for setting me free. And another time when you have need of me, I will help you in turn.” And with that he ran off on his own way. But the prince went back to his mother, and returned the key in the same way he had taken it.

When they learned at the king’s court that the wild man had broken out, there was great commotion, and the queen sent people over hill and dale to look for him. But he was gone and he stayed gone. Thus matters went for a while and the queen grew more and more unhappy; for she expected her husband to return every day. And when he did reach shore his first question was whether the wild man had been well guarded. Then the queen had to confess how matters stood, and told him how everything had happened. But the king was enraged beyond measure, and said he would punish the malefactor, no matter who he might be. And he ordered a great investigation at his court, and every human being in it had to testify. But no one knew anything. At last the little prince also had to come forward. And as he stood before the king he said: “I know that I have deserved my father’s anger; yet I cannot hide the truth; for I let out the wild man.” Then the queen turned white, and the others as well, for there was not one who was not fond of the prince. At last the king spoke: “Never shall it be said of me that I was false to my vow, even for the sake of my own flesh and blood! No, you must die the death you have deserved.” And with that he gave the order to take the prince to the forest and kill him. And they were to bring back the boy’s heart as a sign that his command had been obeyed.

Now sorrow unheard of reigned among the people, and all pleaded for the little prince. But the king’s word could not be recalled. His serving-men did not dare disobey, took the boy in their midst, and set forth. And when they had gone a long way into the forest, they saw a swine-herd tending his pigs. Then one said to another: “It does not seem right to me to lay hand on the king’s son; let us buy a pig instead and take its heart, then all will believe it is the heart of the prince.” The other serving-men thought that he spoke wisely, so they bought a pig from the swine-herd, led it into the wood, butchered it and took its heart. Then they told the prince to go his way and never return. They themselves went back to the king’s castle, and it is easy to imagine what grief they caused when they told of the prince’s death.

The king’s son did what the serving-men had told him. He kept on wandering as far as he could, and never had any other food than the nuts and wild berries that grow in the forest. And when he had wandered far and long, he came to a mountain upon whose very top stood a fir-tree. Said he to himself: “After all, I might as well climb the fir-tree and see whether I can find a path anywhere.” No sooner said than done: he climbed the tree. And as

he sat in the very top of its crown, and looked about on every side, he saw a large and splendid royal castle rising in the distance, and gleaming in the sun. Then he grew very happy and at once set forth in that direction. On the way he met a farm-hand who was ploughing, and begged him to change clothes with him, which he did. Thus fitted out he at last reached the king's castle, went in, asked for a place, and was taken on as a herdsman, to tend the king's cattle. Now he went to the forest early and late, and in the course of time forgot his grief, grew up, and became so tall and brave that his equal could not be found.

And now our story turns to the king who was reigning at the splendid castle. He had been married, and he had an only daughter. She was lovelier by far than other maidens, and had so kind and cheerful a disposition that whoever could some day take her to his home might well consider himself fortunate. Now when the princess had completed her fifteenth year, a quite unheard of swarm of suitors made their appearance, as may well be imagined; and for all that she said no to all of them, they only increased in number. At last the princess said: "None other shall win me save he who can ride up the high Glass Mountain in full armor!" The king thought this a good suggestion. He approved of his daughter's wish, and had proclaimed throughout the kingdom that none other should have the princess save he who could ride up the Glass Mountain.

And when the day set by the king had arrived, the princess was led up the Glass Mountain. There she sat on its highest peak, with a golden crown on her head, and a golden apple in her hand, and she looked so immeasurably lovely that there was no one who would not have liked to risk his life for her. Just below the foot of the hill all the suitors assembled with splendid horses and glittering armor, that shone like fire in the sun, and from round about the people flocked together in great crowds to watch their tilting. And when everything was ready, the signal was given by horns and trumpets, and then the suitors, one after another, raced up the mountain with all their might. But the mountain was high, as slippery as ice, and besides it was steep beyond all measure. Not one of the suitors rode up more than a little way, before he tumbled down again, head over heels, and it might well happen that arms and legs were broken in the process. This made so great a noise, together with the neighing of the horses, the shouting of the people, and the clash of arms, that the tumult and the shouting could be heard far away.

And while all this was going on, the king's son was rambling about with his oxen, deep in the wood. But when he heard the tumult and the clashing of arms, he sat down on a stone, leaned his cheek on his hand, and became lost in thought. For it had occurred to him how gladly he would have fared forth with the rest.

Suddenly he heard footsteps and when he looked up, the wild man was standing before him. "Thank you for the last time!" said he, "and why do you sit here so lonely and full of sorrow?" "Well," said the prince, "I have no choice but to be sad and joyless. Because of you I am a fugitive from the land of my father, and now I have not even a horse and armor to ride up the Glass Mountain and fight for the princess." "Ah," said the wild man, "if that be all you want, then I can help you! You helped me once before and now I will help you in turn." Then he took the prince by the hand, led him deep down into the earth into his cave, and behold, there hung a suit of armor forged out of the hardest steel, and so bright that a blue gleam played all around it. Right beside it stood a splendid steed, saddled and bridled, pawing the earth with his steel hoofs, and champing his bit till the white foam dropped to the ground. The wild man said: "Now get quickly into your armor, ride out and try your luck! In the meantime I will tend your oxen." The prince did not wait to be told a second time; but put on helmet and armor, buckled on his spurs, hung his sword at his side, and felt as light in his steel armor as a bird in the air. Then he leaped into the saddle so that every clasp and buckle rang, laid his reins on the neck of his steed, and rode hastily toward the mountain.

The princess's suitors were about to give up the contest, for none of them had won the prize, though each had done his best. And while they stood there thinking it over, and saying that perhaps fortune would favor them another time, they suddenly saw a youth ride out of the wood straight toward the mountain. He was clad in steel from head to foot, with helmet on head, sword in belt and shield on arm, and he sat his horse with such knightly grace that it was a pleasure to look at him. At once all eyes were turned to the strange knight, and all asked who he might be; for none had ever seen him before. Yet they had had but little time to talk and question, for no sooner had he cleared the wood, than he rose in his stirrups, gave his horse the spurs, and shot forward like an arrow straight up the Glass Mountain. Yet he did not ride up all the way; but when he had reached the middle of the steep ascent, he suddenly flung around his steed and rode down again, so that the sparks flew from his horse's hoofs. Then he disappeared in the wood like a bird in flight. One may imagine the excitement which now seized upon all the people, and there was not one who did not admire the strange knight. All agreed they had never seen a braver knight.

Time passed, and the princess's suitors decided to try their luck a second time. The king's daughter was once more led up the Glass Mountain, with great pomp and richly gowned, and was seated on its topmost peak, with the golden crown on her head, and a golden apple in her hand. At the foot of the hill gathered all the

suitors with handsome horses and splendid armor, and round about stood all the people to watch the contest. When all was ready the signal was given by horns and trumpets, and at the same moment the suitors, one after another, darted up the mountain with all their might. But all took place as at the first time. The mountain was high, and as slippery as ice, and besides, it was steep beyond all measure; not one rode up more than a little way before tumbling down again head over heels. Meanwhile there was much noise, and the horses neighed, and the people shouted, and the armor clashed, so that the tumult and the shouting sounded far into the deep wood.

And while all this was going on, the young prince was tending his oxen, which was his duty. But when he heard the tumult and the clashing of arms, he sat down on a stone, leaned his cheek on his hand, and wept; for he thought of the king's beautiful daughter, and it occurred to him how much he would like to take part and ride with the rest. That very moment he heard footsteps and when he looked up, the wild man was standing before him. "Good-day!" said the wild man, "and why do you sit here so lonely and full of sorrow?" Thereupon the prince replied: "I have no choice but to be sad and joyless. Because of you I am a fugitive from the land of my father, and now I have not even a horse and armor to ride up the mountain and fight for the princess!" "Ah," said the wild man, "if that be all you want, then I can help you! You helped me once before, and now I will help you in turn." Then he took the prince by the hand, led him deep down in the earth into his cave, and there on the wall hung a suit of armor altogether forged of the clearest silver, and so bright that it shone afar. Right beside it stood a snow-white steed, saddled and bridled, pawing the earth with his silver hoofs, and champing his bit till the foam dropped to the ground. The wild man said: "Now get quickly into your armor, ride out and try your luck! In the meantime I will tend your oxen." The prince did not wait to be told a second time; but put on his helmet and armor in all haste, securely buckled on his spurs, hung his sword at his side, and felt as light in his silver armor as a bird in the air. Then he leaped into the saddle so that every clasp and buckle rang, laid his reins on the neck of his steed, and rode hastily toward the Glass Mountain.

The princess's suitors were about to give over the contest, for none of them had won the prize, though each had played a man's part. And while they stood there thinking it over, and saying that perhaps fortune would favor them the next time, they suddenly saw a youth ride out of the wood, straight toward the mountain. He was clad in silver from head to foot, with helmet on head, shield on arm, and sword at side, and he sat his horse with such knightly grace that a braver-looking youth had probably never been seen. At once all eyes were

turned toward him, and the people noticed that he was the same knight who had appeared before. But the prince did not leave them much time for wonderment; for no sooner had he reached the plain, than he rose in his stirrups, spurred on his horse, and rode like fire straight up the steep mountain. Yet he did not ride quite up to the top; but when he had come to its crest, he greeted the princess with great courtesy, flung about his steed, and rode down the mountain again till the sparks flew about his horse's hoofs. Then he disappeared into the wood as the storm flies. As one may imagine, the people's excitement was even greater than the first time, and there was not one who did not admire the strange knight. And all were agreed that a more splendid steed or a handsomer youth were nowhere to be found.

Time passed, and the king set a day when his daughter's suitors were to make a third trial. The princess was now once more led to the Glass Mountain, and seated herself on its highest peak, with the golden crown and the golden apple, as she had before. At the foot of the mountain gathered the whole swarm of suitors, with splendid horses and polished armor, handsome beyond anything seen thus far, and round about the people flocked together to watch the contest. When all was ready the suitors, one after another, darted up the mountain with all their might. The mountain was as smooth as ice, and besides, it was steep beyond all measure; so that not one rode up more than a little way, before tumbling down again, head over heels. This made a great noise, the horses neighed, the people shouted, and the armor clashed, till the tumult and the shouting echoed far into the wood.

While this was all taking place the king's son was busy tending his oxen as usual. And when he once more heard the noise and the clash of arms, he sat down on a stone, leaned his cheek on his hand, and wept bitterly. Then he thought of the lovely princess, and would gladly have ventured his life to win her. That very moment the wild man was standing before him: "Good-day!" said the wild man, "And why do you sit here so lonely and full of sorrow?" "I have no choice but to be sad and joyless," said the prince. "Because of you I am a fugitive from the land of my father, and now I have not even a sword and armor to ride up the mountain and fight for the princess!" "Ah," said the wild man, "if that be all that troubles you I can help you! You helped me once before, and now I will help you in turn." With that he took the prince by the hand, led him into his cave deep down under the earth, and showed him a suit of armor all forged of the purest gold, and gleaming so brightly that its golden glow shone far and wide. Beside it stood a magnificent steed, saddled and bridled, pawing the earth with its golden hoofs, and champing its bit until the foam fell to the ground. The wild man said: "Now get

quickly into your armor, ride out and try your luck! In the meantime I will tend your oxen.” And to tell the truth, the prince was not lazy; but put on his helmet and armor, buckled on his golden spurs, hung his sword at his side, and felt as light in his golden armor as a bird in the air. Then he leaped into the saddle, so that every clasp and buckle rang, laid his reins on the neck of his steed, and rode hastily toward the mountain.

The princess’s suitors were about to give up the contest; for none of them had won the prize, though each had done his best. And while they stood there thinking over what was to be done, they suddenly saw a youth come riding out of the wood, straight toward the mountain. He was clad in gold from head to foot, with the golden helmet on his head, the golden shield on his arm, and the golden sword at his side, and so knightly was his bearing that a bolder warrior could not have been met with in all the wide world. At once all eyes were turned toward him, and one could see that he was the same youth who had already appeared at different times. But the prince gave them but little time to question and wonder; for no sooner had he reached the plain than he gave his horse the spurs, and shot up the steep mountain like a flash of lightning. When he had reached its highest peak, he greeted the beautiful princess with great courtesy, kneeled before her, and received the golden apple from her hand. Then he flung about his steed, and rode down the Glass Mountain again, so that the sparks flew about the golden hoofs of his horse, and a long ribbon of golden light gleamed behind him. At last he disappeared in the wood like a star. What a commotion now reigned about the mountain! The people broke forth into cheers that could be heard far away, horns sounded, trumpets called, horses neighed, arms clashed, and the king had proclaimed far and near that the unknown golden knight had won the prize.

Now all that was wanting was some information about the golden knight; for no one knew him; and all the people expected that he would at once make his appearance at the castle. But he did not come. This caused great surprise, and the princess grew pale and ill. But the king was put out, and the suitors murmured and found fault day by day. And at length, when they were all at their wits’ end, the king had a great meeting announced at his castle, which every man, high and low, was to attend; so that the princess might choose among them herself. There was no one who was not glad to go for the princess’s sake, and also because it was a royal command, and a countless number of people gathered together. And when they had all assembled, the princess came out of the castle with great pomp, and followed by her maids, passed through the entire multitude. But no matter how much she looked about her on every side, she did not find the one for whom she was looking. When she reached the last row she saw a man who stood quite hidden by the crowd. He had a flat

cap and a wide gray mantle such as shepherds wear; but its hood was drawn up so that his face could not be seen. At once the princess ran up to him, drew down his hood, fell upon his neck and cried: "Here he is! Here he is!" Then all the people laughed; for they saw that it was the king's herdsman, and the king himself called out: "May God console me for the son-in-law who is to be my portion!" The man, however, was not at all abashed, but replied: "O, you need not worry about that at all! I am just as much a king's son as you are a king!"

With that he flung aside his wide mantle. And there were none left to laugh; for instead of the grey herdsman, there stood a handsome prince, clad in gold from head to foot, and holding the princess's golden apple in his hand. And all could see that it was the same youth who had ridden up the Glass Mountain.

Then they prepared a feast whose like had never before been seen, and the prince received the king's daughter, and with her half of the kingdom. Thenceforward they lived happily in their kingdom, and if they have not died they are living there still. But nothing more was ever heard of the wild man. And that is the end.

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