

The Simpleton

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Italian

Advanced
10 min read

There lived, once upon a time, a man who was as rich as he could be; but as no happiness in this world is ever quite complete, he had an only son who was such a simpleton that he could barely add two and two together. At last his father determined to put up with his stupidity no longer, and giving him a purse full of gold, he sent him off to seek his fortune in foreign lands, mindful of the adage:

How much a fool that's sent to roam
Excels a fool that stays at home.

Moscione, for this was the youth's name, mounted a horse, and set out for Venice, hoping to find a ship there that would take him to Cairo. After he had ridden for some time he saw a man standing at the foot of a poplar tree, and said to him: 'What's your name, my friend; where do you come from, and what can you do?'

The man replied, 'My name is Quick-as-Thought, I come from Fleet-town, and I can run like lightning.'

'I should like to see you,' returned Moscione.

'Just wait a minute, then,' said Quick-as-Thought, 'and I will soon show you that I am speaking the truth.'

The words were hardly out of his mouth when a young doe ran right across the field they were standing in.

Quick-as-Thought let her run on a short distance, in order to give her a start, and then pursued her so quickly and so lightly that you could not have tracked his footsteps if the field had been strewn with flour. In a very few

springs he had overtaken the doe, and had so impressed Moscione with his fleetness of foot that he begged Quick-as-Thought to go with him, promising at the same time to reward him handsomely.

Quick-as-Thought agreed to his proposal, and they continued on their journey together. They had hardly gone a mile when they met a young man, and Moscione stopped and asked him: 'What's your name, my friend; where do you come from, and what can you do?'

The man thus addressed answered promptly, 'I am called Hare's-ear, I come from Curiosity Valley, and if I lay my ear on the ground, without moving from the spot, I can hear everything that goes on in the world, the plots and intrigues of court and cottage, and all the plans of mice and men.'

'If that's the case,' replied Moscione, 'just tell me what's going on in my own home at present.'

The youth laid his ear to the ground and at once reported: 'An old man is saying to his wife, "Heaven be praised that we have got rid of Moscione, for perhaps, when he has been out in the world a little, he may gain some common sense, and return home less of a fool than when he set out."'

'Enough, enough,' cried Moscione. 'You speak the truth, and I believe you. Come with us, and your fortune's made.'

The young man consented; and after they had gone about ten miles, they met a third man, to whom Moscione said: 'What's your name, my brave fellow; where were you born, and what can you do?'

The man replied, 'I am called Hit-the-Point, I come from the city of Perfect-aim, and I draw my bow so exactly that I can shoot a pea off a stone.'

'I should like to see you do it, if you've no objection,' said Moscione.

The man at once placed a pea on a stone, and, drawing his bow, he shot it in the middle with the greatest possible ease.

When Moscione saw that he had spoken the truth, he immediately asked Hit-the-Point to join his party.

After they had all travelled together for some days, they came upon a number of people who were digging a trench in the blazing sun.

Moscione felt so sorry for them, that he said: 'My dear friends, how can you endure working so hard in heat

that would cook an egg in a minute?’

But one of the workmen answered: ‘We are as fresh as daisies, for we have a young man among us who blows on our backs like the west wind.’

‘Let me see him,’ said Moscione.

The youth was called, and Moscione asked him: ‘What’s your name; where do you come from, and what can you do?’

He answered: ‘I am called Blow-Blast, I come from Wind-town, and with my mouth I can make any winds you please. If you wish a west wind I can raise it for you in a second, but if you prefer a north wind I can blow these houses down before your eyes.’

‘Seeing is believing,’ returned the cautious Moscione.

Blow-Blast at once began to convince him of the truth of his assertion. First he blew so softly that it seemed like the gentle breeze at evening, and then he turned round and raised such a mighty storm, that he blew down a whole row of oak trees.

When Moscione saw this he was delighted, and begged Blow-Blast to join his company. And as they went on their way they met another man, whom Moscione addressed as usual: ‘What’s your name: where do you come from, and what can you do?’

‘I am called Strong-Back; I come from Power-borough, and I possess such strength that I can take a mountain on my back, and it seems a feather to me.’

‘If that’s the case,’ said Moscione, ‘you are a clever fellow; but I should like some proof of your strength.’

Then Strong-Back loaded himself with great boulders of rock and trunks of trees, so that a hundred waggons could not have taken away all that he carried on his back.

When Moscione saw this he prevailed on Strong-Back to join his troop, and they all continued their journey till they came to a country called Flower Vale. Here there reigned a king whose only daughter ran as quickly as the wind, and so lightly that she could run over a field of young oats without bending a single blade. The king had given out a proclamation that anyone who could beat the princess in a race should have her for a wife, but that

all who failed in the competition should lose their head.

As soon as Moscione heard of the Royal Proclamation, he hastened to the king and challenged the princess to race with him. But on the morning appointed for the trial he sent word to the king that he was not feeling well, and that as he could not run himself he would supply someone to take his place.

'It's just the same to me,' said Canetella, the princess; 'let anyone come forward that likes, I am quite prepared to meet him.'

At the time appointed for the race the whole place was crowded with people anxious to see the contest, and, punctual to the moment, Quick-as-Thought, and Canetella dressed in a short skirt and very lightly shod, appeared at the starting-point.

Then a silver trumpet sounded, and the two rivals started on their race, looking for all the world like a greyhound chasing a hare.

But Quick-as-Thought, true to his name, outran the princess, and when the goal was reached the people all clapped their hands and shouted, 'Long live the stranger!'

Canetella was much depressed by her defeat; but, as the race had to be run a second time, she determined she would not be beaten again. Accordingly she went home and sent Quick-as-Thought a magic ring, which prevented the person who wore it, not only from running, but even from walking, and begged that he would wear it for her sake.

Early next morning the crowd assembled on the race-course, and Canetella and Quick as-Thought began their trial afresh. The princess ran as quickly as ever, but poor Quick-as-Thought was like an overloaded donkey, and could not go a step.

Then Hit-the-Point, who had heard all about the princess's deception from Hare's-ear, when he saw the danger his friend was in, seized his bow and arrow and shot the stone out of the ring Quick-as-Thought was wearing. In a moment the youth's legs became free again, and in five bounds he had overtaken Canetella and won the race.

The king was much disgusted when he saw that he must acknowledge Moscione as his future son-in-law, and summoned the wise men of his court to ask if there was no way out of the difficulty. The council at once

decided that Canetella was far too dainty a morsel for the mouth of such a travelling tinker, and advised the king to offer Moscione a present of gold, which no doubt a beggar like him would prefer to all the wives in the world.

The king was delighted at this suggestion, and calling Moscione before him, he asked him what sum of money he would take instead of his promised bride.

Moscione first consulted with his friends, and then answered: 'I demand as much gold and precious stones as my followers can carry away.'

The king thought he was being let off very easily, and produced coffers of gold, sacks of silver, and chests of precious stones; but the more Strong-Back was loaded with the treasure the straighter he stood.

At last the treasury was quite exhausted, and the king had to send his courtiers to his subjects to collect all the gold and silver they possessed. But nothing was of any avail, and Strong-Back only asked for more.

When the king's counsellors saw the unexpected result of their advice, they said it would be more than foolish to let some strolling thieves take so much treasure out of the country, and urged the king to send a troop of soldiers after them, to recover the gold and precious stones.

So the king sent a body of armed men on foot and horse, to take back the treasure Strong-Back was carrying away with him.

But Hare's-ear, who had heard what the counsellors had advised the king, told his companions just as the dust of their pursuers was visible on the horizon.

No sooner had Blow-Blast taken in their danger than he raised such a mighty wind that all the king's army was blown down like so many nine-pins, and as they were quite unable to get up again, Moscione and his companions proceeded on their way without further let or hindrance.

As soon as they reached his home, Moscione divided his spoil with his companions, at which they were much delighted. He, himself, stayed with his father, who was obliged at last to acknowledge that his son was not quite such a fool as he looked.

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