



The Drummer

Brothers Grimm

German

21 min read

A young drummer went out quite alone one evening into the country, and came to a lake on the shore of which he perceived three pieces of white linen lying. “What fine linen,” said he, and put one piece in his pocket. He returned home, thought no more of what he had found, and went to bed. Just as he was going to sleep, it seemed to him as if some one was saying his name. He listened, and was aware of a soft voice which cried to him, “Drummer, drummer, wake up!”

As it was a dark night he could see no one, but it appeared to him that a figure was hovering about his bed. “What do you want?” he asked. “Give me back my dress,” answered the voice, “that you took away from me last evening by the lake.”

“You shall have it back again,” said the drummer, “if you will tell me who you are.”

“Ah,” replied the voice, “I am the daughter of a mighty King; but I have fallen into the power of a witch, and am shut up on the glass-mountain. I have to bathe in the lake every day with my two sisters, but I cannot fly back again without my dress. My sisters have gone away, but I have been forced to stay behind. I entreat you to give me my dress back.”

“Be easy, poor child,” said the drummer. “I will willingly give it back to you.”

He took it out of his pocket, and reached it to her in the dark. She snatched it in haste, and wanted to go away with it. “Stop a moment, perhaps I can help you.” “You can only help me by ascending the glass-mountain, and

freeing me from the power of the witch. But you cannot come to the glass-mountain, and indeed if you were quite close to it you could not ascend it." "When I want to do a thing I always can do it," said the drummer; "I am sorry for you, and have no fear of anything. But I do not know the way which leads to the glass-mountain."

"The road goes through the great forest, in which the man-eaters live," she answered, "and more than that, I dare not tell you." And then he heard her wings quiver, as she flew away.

By daybreak the drummer arose, buckled on his drum, and went without fear straight into the forest. After he had walked for a while without seeing any giants, he thought to himself, "I must waken up the sluggards," and he hung his drum before him, and beat such a reveille that the birds flew out of the trees with loud cries. It was not long before a giant who had been lying sleeping among the grass, rose up, and was as tall as a fir-tree.

"Wretch!" cried he; "what art thou drumming here for, and wakening me out of my best sleep?"

"I am drumming," he replied, "because I want to show the way to many thousands who are following me."

"What do they want in my forest?" demanded the giant. "They want to put an end to thee, and cleanse the forest of such a monster as thou art!" "Oho!" said the giant, "I will trample you all to death like so many ants." "Dost thou think thou canst do anything against us?" said the drummer; "if thou stoopest to take hold of one, he will jump away and hide himself; but when thou art lying down and sleeping, they will come forth from every thicket, and creep up to thee. Every one of them has a hammer of steel in his belt, and with that they will beat in thy skull." The giant grew angry and thought, "If I meddle with the crafty folk, it might turn out badly for me. I can strangle wolves and bears, but I cannot protect myself from these earth-worms." "Listen, little fellow," said he; "go back again, and I will promise you that for the future I will leave you and your comrades in peace, and if there is anything else you wish for, tell me, for I am quite willing to do something to please you." "Thou hast long legs," said the drummer, "and canst run quicker than I; carry me to the glass-mountain, and I will give my followers a signal to go back, and they shall leave thee in peace this time." "Come here, worm," said the giant; "seat thyself on my shoulder, I will carry thee where thou wishest to be." The giant lifted him up, and the drummer began to beat his drum up aloft to his heart's delight. The giant thought, "That is the signal for the other people to turn back."

After a while, a second giant was standing in the road, who took the drummer from the first, and stuck him in his own button-hole. The drummer laid hold of the button, which was as large as a dish, held on by it, and looked merrily around. Then they came to a third giant, who took him out of the button-hole, and set him on

the rim of his hat. Then the drummer walked backwards and forwards up above, and looked over the trees, and when he perceived a mountain in the blue distance, he thought, "That must be the glass-mountain," and so it was. The giant only made two steps more, and they reached the foot of the mountain, where the giant put him down. The drummer demanded to be put on the summit of the glass-mountain, but the giant shook his head, growled something in his beard, and went back into the forest.

And now the poor drummer was standing before the mountain, which was as high as if three mountains were piled on each other, and at the same time as smooth as a looking-glass, and did not know how to get up it. He began to climb, but that was useless, for he always slipped back again. "If one was a bird now," thought he; but what was the good of wishing, no wings grew for him.

Whilst he was standing thus, not knowing what to do, he saw, not far from him, two men who were struggling fiercely together. He went up to them and saw that they were disputing about a saddle which was lying on the ground before them, and which both of them wanted to have. "What fools you are," said he, "to quarrel about a saddle, when you have not a horse for it!"

"The saddle is worth fighting about," answered one of the men; "whosoever sits on it, and wishes himself in any place, even if it should be the very end of the earth, gets there the instant he has uttered the wish. The saddle belongs to us in common. It is my turn to ride on it, but that other man will not let me do it."

"I will soon decide the quarrel," said the drummer, and he went to a short distance and stuck a white rod in the ground. Then he came back and said, "Now run to the goal, and whoever gets there first, shall ride first." Both put themselves into a trot; but hardly had they gone a couple of steps before the drummer swung himself on the saddle, wished himself on the glass-mountain, and before any one could turn round, he was there. On the top of the mountain was a plain; there stood an old stone house, and in front of the house lay a great fish-pond, but behind it was a dark forest. He saw neither men nor animals, everything was quiet; only the wind rustled amongst the trees, and the clouds moved by quite close above his head. He went to the door and knocked.

When he had knocked for the third time, an old woman with a brown face and red eyes opened the door. She had spectacles on her long nose, and looked sharply at him; then she asked what he wanted. "Entrance, food, and a bed for the night," replied the drummer. "That thou shalt have," said the old woman, "if thou wilt perform three services in return."

“Why not?” he answered, “I am not afraid of any kind of work, however hard it may be.”

The old woman let him go in, and gave him some food and a good bed at night. The next morning when he had had his sleep out, she took a thimble from her wrinkled finger, reached it to the drummer, and said, “Go to work now, and empty out the pond with this thimble; but thou must have it done before night, and must have sought out all the fishes which are in the water and laid them side by side, according to their kind and size.”

“That is strange work,” said the drummer, but he went to the pond, and began to empty it. He baled the whole morning; but what can any one do to a great lake with a thimble, even if he were to bale for a thousand years?

When it was noon, he thought, “It is all useless, and whether I work or not it will come to the same thing.” So he gave it up and sat down. Then came a maiden out of the house who set a little basket with food before him, and said, “What ails thee, that thou sittest so sadly here?” He looked at her, and saw that she was wondrously beautiful. “Ah,” said he, “I cannot finish the first piece of work, how will it be with the others? I came forth to seek a king’s daughter who is said to dwell here, but I have not found her, and I will go farther.”

“Stay here,” said the maiden, “I will help thee out of thy difficulty. Thou art tired, lay thy head in my lap, and sleep. When thou awakest again, thy work will be done.” The drummer did not need to be told that twice. As soon as his eyes were shut, she turned a wishing-ring and said, “Rise, water. Fishes, come out.” Instantly the water rose on high like a white mist, and moved away with the other clouds, and the fishes sprang on the shore and laid themselves side by side each according to his size and kind. When the drummer awoke, he saw with amazement that all was done. But the maiden said, “One of the fish is not lying with those of its own kind, but quite alone; when the old woman comes to-night and sees that all she demanded has been done, she will ask thee, ‘What is this fish lying alone for?’ Then throw the fish in her face, and say, ‘This one shall be for thee, old witch.’”

In the evening the witch came, and when she had put this question, he threw the fish in her face. She behaved as if she did not remark it, and said nothing, but looked at him with malicious eyes. Next morning she said, “Yesterday it was too easy for thee, I must give thee harder work. Today thou must hew down the whole of the forest, split the wood into logs, and pile them up, and everything must be finished by the evening.”

She gave him an axe, a mallet, and two wedges. But the axe was made of lead, and the mallet and wedges were of tin. When he began to cut, the edge of the axe turned back, and the mallet and wedges were beaten out of shape. He did not know how to manage, but at mid-day the maiden came once more with his dinner and

comforted him. "Lay thy head on my lap," said she, "and sleep; when thou awakest, thy work will be done." She turned her wishing-ring, and in an instant the whole forest fell down with a crash, the wood split, and arranged itself in heaps, and it seemed just as if unseen giants were finishing the work. When he awoke, the maiden said, "Dost thou see that the wood is piled up and arranged, one bough alone remains; but when the old woman comes this evening and asks thee about that bough, give her a blow with it, and say, 'That is for thee, thou witch.'"

The old woman came, "There thou seest how easy the work was!" said she; "but for whom hast thou left that bough which is lying there still?"

"For thee, thou witch," he replied, and gave her a blow with it. But she pretended not to feel it, laughed scornfully, and said, "Early to-morrow morning thou shalt arrange all the wood in one heap, set fire to it, and burn it." He rose at break of day, and began to pick up the wood, but how can a single man get a whole forest together? The work made no progress. The maiden, however, did not desert him in his need. She brought him his food at noon, and when he had eaten, he laid his head on her lap, and went to sleep. When he awoke, the entire pile of wood was burning in one enormous flame, which stretched its tongues out into the sky. "Listen to me," said the maiden, "when the witch comes, she will give thee all kinds of orders; do whatever she asks thee without fear, and then she will not be able to get the better of thee, but if thou art afraid, the fire will lay hold of thee, and consume thee. At last when thou hast done everything, seize her with both thy hands, and throw her into the midst of the fire."

The maiden departed, and the old woman came sneaking up to him. "Oh, I am cold," said she, "but that is a fire that burns; it warms my old bones for me, and does me good! But there is a log lying there which won't burn, bring it out for me. When thou hast done that, thou art free, and mayst go where thou likest, come; go in with a good will."

The drummer did not reflect long; he sprang into the midst of the flames, but they did not hurt him, and could not even singe a hair of his head. He carried the log out, and laid it down. Hardly, however, had the wood touched the earth than it was transformed, and the beautiful maiden who had helped him in his need stood before him, and by the silken and shining golden garments which she wore, he knew right well that she was the King's daughter. But the old woman laughed venomously, and said, "Thou thinkest thou hast her safe, but thou hast not got her yet!" Just as she was about to fall on the maiden and take her away, the youth seized the old woman with both his hands, raised her up on high, and threw her into the jaws of the fire, which closed over

her as if it were delighted that the old witch was to be burnt.

Then the King's daughter looked at the drummer, and when she saw that he was a handsome youth and remembered how he had risked his life to deliver her, she gave him her hand, and said, "Thou hast ventured everything for my sake, but I also will do everything for thine. Promise to be true to me, and thou shalt be my husband. We shall not want for riches, we shall have enough with what the witch has gathered together here." She led him into the house, where there were chests and coffers crammed with the old woman's treasures. The maiden left the gold and silver where it was, and took only the precious stones. She would not stay any longer on the glass-mountain, so the drummer said to her, "Seat thyself by me on my saddle, and then we will fly down like birds."

"I do not like the old saddle," said she, "I need only turn my wishing-ring and we shall be at home." "Very well, then," answered the drummer, "then wish us in front of the town-gate." In the twinkling of an eye they were there, but the drummer said, "I will just go to my parents and tell them the news, wait for me outside here, I shall soon be back."

"Ah," said the King's daughter, "I beg thee to be careful. On thy arrival do not kiss thy parents on the right cheek, or else thou wilt forget everything, and I shall stay behind here outside, alone and deserted."

"How can I forget thee?" said he, and promised her to come back very soon, and gave his hand upon it. When he went into his father's house, he had changed so much that no one knew who he was, for the three days which he had passed on the glass-mountain had been three years. Then he made himself known, and his parents fell on his neck with joy, and his heart was so moved that he forgot what the maiden had said, and kissed them on both cheeks. But when he had given them the kiss on the right cheek, every thought of the King's daughter vanished from him. He emptied out his pockets, and laid handfuls of the largest jewels on the table. The parents had not the least idea what to do with the riches. Then the father built a magnificent castle all surrounded by gardens, woods, and meadows as if a prince were going to live in it, and when it was ready, the mother said, "I have found a maiden for thee, and the wedding shall be in three days." The son was content to do as his parents desired.

The poor King's daughter had stood for a long time without the town waiting for the return of the young man. When evening came, she said, "He must certainly have kissed his parents on the right cheek, and has forgotten me." Her heart was full of sorrow, she wished herself into a solitary little hut in a forest, and would not return

to her father's court. Every evening she went into the town and passed the young man's house; he often saw her, but he no longer knew her. At length she heard the people saying, "The wedding will take place tomorrow." Then she said, "I will try if I can win his heart back."

On the first day of the wedding ceremonies, she turned her wishing-ring, and said, "A dress as bright as the sun." Instantly the dress lay before her, and it was as bright as if it had been woven of real sunbeams. When all the guests were assembled, she entered the hall. Every one was amazed at the beautiful dress, and the bride most of all, and as pretty dresses were the things she had most delight in, she went to the stranger and asked if she would sell it to her. "Not for money," she answered, "but if I may pass the first night outside the door of the room where your betrothed sleeps, I will give it up to you." The bride could not overcome her desire and consented, but she mixed a sleeping-draught with the wine her betrothed took at night, which made him fall into a deep sleep, When all had become quiet, the King's daughter crouched down by the door of the bedroom, opened it just a little, and cried,

"Drummer, drummer, I pray thee hear!
Hast thou forgotten thou heldest me dear?
That on the glass-mountain we sat hour by hour?
That I rescued thy life from the witch's power?
Didst thou not plight thy troth to me?
Drummer, drummer, hearken to me!"

But it was all in vain, the drummer did not awake, and when morning dawned, the King's daughter was forced to go back again as she came. On the second evening she turned her wishing-ring and said, "A dress as silvery as the moon." When she appeared at the feast in the dress which was as soft as moonbeams, it again excited the desire of the bride, and the King's daughter gave it to her for permission to pass the second night also, outside the door of the bedroom. Then in the stillness of the night, she cried,

“Drummer, drummer, I pray thee hear!
Hast thou forgotten thou heldest me dear?
That on the glass-mountain we sat hour by hour?
That I rescued thy life from the witch’s power?
Didst thou not plight thy troth to me?
Drummer, drummer, hearken to me!”

But the drummer, who was stupefied with the sleeping-draught, could not be aroused. Sadly next morning she went back to her hut in the forest. But the people in the house had heard the lamentation of the stranger-maiden, and told the bridegroom about it. They told him also that it was impossible that he could hear anything of it, because the maiden he was going to marry had poured a sleeping-draught into his wine.

On the third evening, the King’s daughter turned her wishing-ring, and said, “A dress glittering like the stars.” When she showed herself therein at the feast, the bride was quite beside herself with the splendour of the dress, which far surpassed the others, and she said, “I must, and will have it.” The maiden gave it as she had given the others for permission to spend the night outside the bridegroom’s door. The bridegroom, however, did not drink the wine which was handed to him before he went to bed, but poured it behind the bed, and when everything was quiet, he heard a sweet voice which called to him,

“Drummer, drummer, I pray thee hear!
Hast thou forgotten thou heldest me dear?
That on the glass-mountain we sat hour by hour?
That I rescued thy life from the witch’s power?
Didst thou not plight thy troth to me?
Drummer, drummer, hearken to me!”

Suddenly, his memory returned to him. “Ah,” cried he, “how can I have acted so unfaithfully; but the kiss which in the joy of my heart I gave my parents, on the right cheek, that is to blame for it all, that is what stupefied me!” He sprang up, took the King’s daughter by the hand, and led her to his parents’ bed. “This is my true bride,” said he; “if I marry the other, I shall do a great wrong.”

The parents, when they heard how everything had happened, gave their consent. Then the lights in the hall were lighted again, drums and trumpets were brought, friends and relations were invited to come, and the real

wedding was solemnized with great rejoicing. The first bride received the beautiful dresses as a compensation, and declared herself satisfied.

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