

# *The Lame Dog*

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Swedish

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*Intermediate*

*17 min read*

Once upon a time there lived a king, like many others. He had three daughters, who were young and beautiful to such a degree that it would have been difficult to have found handsomer maidens. Yet there was a great difference among them; for the two older sisters were haughty in their thoughts and manners; while the youngest was sweet and friendly, and everyone liked her. Besides, she was fair as the day and delicate as the snow, and far more beautiful than either of her sisters.

One day the king's daughters were sitting together in their room, and their talk happened to turn on their husbands-to-be. The oldest said: "If I ever marry, my husband must have golden hair and a golden beard!" And the second exclaimed: "And mine must have silver hair and a silver beard!" But the youngest princess held her tongue and said nothing. Then her sisters asked her whether she did not want to wish for a husband. "No," she answered, "but if fate should give me a husband, I will be content to take him as he is, and were he no more than a lame dog." Then the two other princesses laughed and joked about it, and told her the day might easily come when she would change her mind.

But many speak truth and do not know it! Thus it chanced with the king's daughters; since before the year had come to an end, each had the suitor for whom she had wished. A man with golden hair and golden beard sued for the oldest princess and won her consent to his suit. And a man with silver hair and a silver beard sued for the second and she became his bride; but the youngest princess had no other suitor than a lame dog. Then she recalled her talk with her sisters in their room, and thought to herself: "May God aid me in the marriage into

which I must enter!" Yet she would not break the word she had once passed; but followed her sisters' example and accepted the dog. The wedding lasted a number of days and was celebrated with great pomp and splendor. But while the guests danced and amused themselves, the youngest princess sat apart and wept, and when the others were laughing, her tears flowed till it made one sad to see them.

After the wedding the newly married pairs were each to drive off to their castle. And the two older princesses each drove off in a splendidly decorated coach, with a large retinue, and all sorts of honors. But the youngest had to go afoot, since her husband, the dog, had neither coach nor driver. When they had wandered long and far, they came to a great forest, so great that it seemed endless; but the dog limped along in advance, and the king's daughter followed after, weeping. And as they went along she suddenly saw a magnificent castle lying before them, and round about it were beautiful meadows and green woods, all of them most enjoyable to see. The princess stopped and asked to whom the great mansion might belong. "That," said the dog, "is our home. We will live here, and you shall rule it as you see fit." Then the maiden laughed amid her tears, and could not overcome her surprise at all she saw. The dog added: "I have but a single request to make to you, and that you must not refuse to grant." "What is your request?" asked the princess. "You must promise me," said the dog, "that you will never look at me while I am asleep: otherwise you are free to do whatever you wish." The princess gladly promised to grant his request, and so they went to the great castle. And if the castle was magnificent from without, it was still more magnificent within. It was so full of gold and silver that the precious metals gleamed from every corner; and there was such abundance of supplies of every kind, and of so many other things, that everything in the world one might have wished to have was already there. The princess spent the live-long day running from one room to another, and each was handsomer than the one she had just entered. But when evening came and she went to bed, the dog crept into his own, and then she noticed that he was not a dog; but a human being. Yet she said not a word, because she remembered her promise, and did not wish to cross her husband's will.

Thus some time passed. The princess dwelt in the beautiful castle, and had everything her heart might desire. But every day the dog ran off, and did not reappear until it was evening and the sun had set. Then he returned home, and was always so kind and friendly that it would have been a fine thing had other men done half as well. The princess now began to feel a great affection for him, and quite forgot he was only a lame dog; for the proverb says: "Love is blind." Yet time passed slowly because she was so much alone, and she often thought of

visiting her sisters and seeing how they were. She spoke of it to her husband, and begged his permission to make the journey. No sooner had the dog heard her wish than he at once granted it, and even accompanied her some distance, in order to show her the way out of the wood.

When the king's daughters were once reunited, they were naturally very happy, and there were a great many questions asked about matters old and new. And marriage was also discussed. The oldest princess said: "It was silly of me to wish for a husband with golden hair and golden beard; for mine is worse than the veriest troll, and I have not known a happy day since we married." And the second went on: "Yes, and I am no better off; for although I have a husband with silver hair and a silver beard, he dislikes me so heartily that he begrudges me a single hour of happiness." Then her sisters turned to the youngest princess and asked how she fared. "Well," was her answer, "I really cannot complain; for though I only got a lame dog, he is such a dear good fellow and so kind to me that it would be hard to find a better husband." The other princesses were much surprised to hear this, and did not stop prying and questioning, and their sister answered all their questions faithfully. When they heard how splendidly she lived in the great castle, they grew jealous because she was so much better off than they were. And they insisted on knowing whether there was not some one little thing of which she could complain. "No," said the king's daughter, "I can only praise my husband for his kindness and amiability, and there is but one thing lacking to make me perfectly happy." "What is it?" "What is it?" cried both sisters with a single voice. "Every night, when he comes home," said the princess, "he turns into a human being, and I am sorry that I can never see what he really looks like." Then both sisters again with one voice, began to scold the dog loudly; because he had a secret which he kept from his wife. And since her sisters now continually spoke about it, her own curiosity awoke once more, she forgot her husband's command, and asked how she might manage to see him without his knowing it. "O," said the oldest princess, "nothing easier! Here is a little lamp, which you must hide carefully. Then you need only get up at night when he is asleep, and light the lamp in order to see him in his true shape." This advice seemed good to the king's daughter; she took the lamp, hid it in her breast, and promised to do all that her sisters had counseled.

When the time came for them to part, the youngest princess went back to her beautiful castle. The day passed like every other day. When evening came at last and the dog had gone to bed, the princess was so driven by curiosity that she could hardly wait until he had fallen asleep. Then she rose, softly, lit her lamp, and drew near the bed to look at him while he slept. But no one can describe her astonishment when throwing the light on the

bed, she saw no lame dog lying there; but the handsomest youth her eyes had ever beheld. She could not stop looking at him; but sat up all night bending over his pillow, and the more she looked at him the handsomer he seemed to grow, until she forgot everything else in the world. At last the morning came. And as the first star began to pale in the dawn, the youth began to grow restless and awaken. The princess much frightened, blew out her lamp and lay down in her bed. The youth thought she was sleeping and did not wish to wake her, so he rose quietly, assumed his other shape, went away and did not appear again all day long.

And when evening came and it grew late, everything happened as before. The dog came home from the forest and was very tired. But no sooner had he fallen asleep than the princess rose carefully, lit her lamp and came over to look at him. And when she cast the light on his bed it seemed to her as though the youth had grown even handsomer than the day before, and the longer she looked the more handsome he became; until she had to laugh and weep from sheer love and longing. She could not take her eyes from him, and sat all night long bent over his pillow, forgetful of her promise and all else, only to be able to look at him. With the first ray of dawn the youth began to stir and awake. Then the princess was again frightened, quickly blew out her lamp and lay down in her bed. The youth thought she was sleeping, and not wishing to waken her, rose softly, assumed his other shape, went away and was gone for the entire day.

At length it grew late again, evening came and the dog returned home from the forest as usual. But again the princess could not control her curiosity; no sooner was her husband sleeping than she rose quietly, lit her lamp, and drew near carefully in order to look at him while he slept. And when the light fell on the youth, he appeared to be handsomer than ever before, and the longer she looked the more handsome he grew, until her heart burned in her breast, and she forgot all else in the world looking at him. She could not take her eyes from him, and sat up all night bending over his pillow. And when morning came and the sun rose, the youth began to move and awaken. Then the princess was much frightened, because she had paid no heed to the passing of time, and she tried to put out her lamp quickly. But her hand trembled, and a warm drop of oil fell on the youth and he awoke. When he saw what she had done, he leaped up, terrified, instantly turned into a lame dog, and limped out into the forest. But the princess felt so remorseful that she nearly lost her senses, and she ran after him, wringing her hands and weeping bitterly, and begging him to return. But he did not come back.

The king's daughter now wandered over hill and dale, along many a road new to her, in order to find her husband, and her tears flowed the while till it would have moved a stone. But the dog was gone and stayed

gone, though she looked for him North and South. When she saw that she could not find him, she thought she would return to her handsome castle. But there she was just as unfortunate. The castle was nowhere to be seen, and wherever she went she was surrounded by a forest black as coal. Then she came to the conclusion that the whole world had abandoned her, sat down on a stone, wept bitterly, and thought how much rather she would die than live without her husband. At that a little toad hopped out from under the stone, and said: "Lovely maiden, why do you sit here and weep?" And the princess answered: "It is my hard fate to weep and never be happy again. First of all I have lost the love of my heart, and now I can no longer find my way back to the castle. So I must perish of hunger here, or else be devoured by wild beasts." "O," said the toad, "if that is all that troubles you, I can help you! If you will promise to be my dearest friend, I will show you the way." But that the princess did not want to do. She replied: "Ask of me what you will, save that alone. I have never loved any one more than my lame dog, and so long as I live will never love any one else better." With that she rose, wept bitterly, and continued her way. But the toad looked after her in a friendly manner, laughed to himself, and once more crept under his stone.

After the king's daughter had wandered on for a long, long way, and still saw nothing but forest and wilderness, she grew very tired. She once more sat down on a stone, rested her chin on her hand, and prayed for death, since it was no longer possible for her to live with her husband. Suddenly there was a rustling in the bushes, and she saw a big gray wolf coming directly toward her. She was much frightened, since her one thought was that the wolf intended to devour her. But the wolf stopped, wagged his tail, and said: "Proud maiden, why do you sit here and weep so bitterly?" The princess answered: "It is my hard fate to weep and never be happy again. First of all I have lost my heart's dearest, and now I cannot find my way back to the castle and must perish of hunger, or be devoured by wild beasts." "O," said the wolf, "if that is all that troubles you, I can help you! Let me be your best friend and I will show you the way." But that did not suit the princess, and she replied: "Ask of me what you will, save that alone. I have never loved any one more than my lame dog, and so long as I live I will never love any one else better." With that she rose, weeping bitterly, and continued on her way. But the wolf looked after her in a friendly manner, laughed to himself and ran off hastily.

After the princess had once more wandered for a long time in the wilderness, she was again so wearied and exhausted that she could not go on. She sat down on a stone, wrung her hands, and wished for death, since she could no longer live with her husband. At that moment she heard a hollow roaring that made the earth tremble,

and a monstrous big lion appeared and came directly toward her. Now she was much frightened; for what else could she think but that the lion would tear her to pieces? But the beast was so weighed down with heavy iron chains that he could scarcely drag himself along, and the chains clashed at either side when he moved. When the lion finally reached the princess he stopped, wagged his tail, and asked: "Beautiful maiden, why do you sit here and weep so bitterly?" The princess answered: "It is my hard fate to weep and never be happy again. First of all I have lost my heart's dearest, and now I cannot find my way to the castle, and must perish of hunger, or be devoured by wild beasts." "O," said the lion, "if that is all that troubles you, I can help you! If you will loose my chains and make me your best friend, I will show you the way." But the princess was so terrified that she could not answer the lion, far less venture to draw near him. Then she heard a clear voice sounding from the forest: it was a little nightingale, who sat among the branches and sang:

"Maiden, maiden, loose his chains!"

Then she felt sorry for the lion, grew braver, went up to him, unloosed his chains and said: "Your chains I can loose for you; but I can never be your best friend. For I have never loved any one more than my lame dog and will never love any one else better." And then a wondrous thing took place: at the very moment the last chain fell from him, the lion turned into a handsome young prince, and when the princess looked at him more closely, it was none other than her heart's dearest, who before had been a dog. She sank to the ground, clasped his knees, and begged him not to leave her again. But the prince raised her with deep affection, took her in his arms and said: "No, now we shall never more be parted, for I am released from my enchantment, and have proved your faith toward me in every way."

Then there was joy indescribable. And the prince took his young wife home to the beautiful castle, and there he became king and she was his queen. And if they have not died they are living there to this very day.

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