



The Princess of the Brazen Mountain

Polish Fairy Tales

Polish

Intermediate

11 min read

There was a young prince, who was not only most handsome and well-grown, but also most kind-hearted and good. Now sooner or later kindness always meets its reward, though it may not seem so at first.

One summer's evening the prince was walking on the banks of a lake, when he looked up, and saw to his great surprise, in the air, against the rosy clouds of the sunset, three beautiful beings with wings—not angels, nor birds—but three beautiful damsels.

And having alighted on the ground they dropped their wings and their garments, and left them lying on the shore and leaped into the cool water, and began splashing and playing about in it, like so many waterfowl.

As soon as the prince saw this he came out from his hiding-place in the bushes, picked up one pair of wings and hid himself again.

When they had been long enough in the water, the beautiful damsels came again to land, and dressed themselves quickly.

Two of them soon had on both their white dresses and their wings; but the youngest could not find hers.

They held a short consultation, and the result was, that the two elder flew away in the shape of birds, as fast as they could, to fetch another pair of wings for their younger sister.

They soon vanished in the blue sky; but she remained alone, wringing her hands, and crying.

“What are you crying for, you lovely maiden?” asked the prince, emerging from the bushes.

“Oh! I am so unhappy!” she replied. “I am a princess of the Brazen Mountain; my sisters and I came here to bathe in the lake; and somebody has stolen my wings; so I must wait here, until they bring me another pair.”

“I am a prince,” he replied; “this is my father’s kingdom; be my wife, and I will give you back your wings.”

“Very well,” she said; “I consent, only you must give me back my wings at once.”

“Let us first go to church, and get married,” he answered, and taking the lovely princess by the hand, he brought her to his father and mother, and asked their permission to marry her.

The king and queen were delighted with their beautiful daughter-in-law, gave them their blessing, and all was got ready for the wedding.

And directly they came back from church the prince, overcome with joy, kissed his bride, and gave her back her wings.

She took them joyfully, fastened them to her shoulders; then flew out of the window, and vanished.

All the wedding-guests were in consternation; the king looked very serious; the queen wept bitterly; but the prince so grieved after his bride, that, having obtained his parents’ consent, he went out into the wide world to search for that Brazen Mountain, where he hoped to find her.

He travelled for a long time, inquiring about it of every one he met; but nobody had ever heard of such a mountain; and he began to give up all hope of ever finding it.

Late one evening he saw a twinkling light before him, which he followed, in the hope of coming to some

habitation. It led him on a long way, across level plains, through deep defiles, and at length some way into a dark forest. But at last he came to whence the light proceeded—from a solitary hermitage.

He went in; but found the hermit lying dead, with six wax candles burning around him. He had evidently been dead for some time. Yet there seemed to be nobody near him, nor any inhabitants at all in this desolate region.

The prince's first thought was how to get him buried, and with proper rites, when there was no priest—nor indeed any people at all—to be found in the neighbourhood.

While he was thinking over this, something fell from a peg in the wall, close beside him; it was a leather whip.

The prince took it up, and read on the handle these words:

“The Magic Whip.”

As he knew its virtue, he called out:

“Ho! Magical Whip! To right and left skip! And do what I will!”

The whip jumped from his hand, became invisible, and flew away.

In a short time there was the hum of a multitude through the forest; and the head-forester entered, breathless, followed by a crowd of under-keepers, and many more people with them.

Some set about making a coffin, others began digging a grave, and the head-keeper rode off to fetch a priest.

And as soon as it was dawn mass was said; the bells began ringing from several far-distant churches; and at sunrise the corpse was decently buried. When the funeral was over all the people dispersed to their homes, and the Magical Whip returned of itself to the prince's hand.

He stuck it into his girdle, and went on, till after an hour or two he came to a clearing in the forest, where twelve men were fighting desperately among themselves.

“Stop, you fellows!” exclaimed the prince. “Who are you? and what are you fighting about?”

“We are robbers,” they replied, “and we are fighting for these boots, which were the property of our deceased

leader. Whoever has them can go seven leagues at one step; and he who gets them will be our leader. As you are a stranger we will abide by your decision, as to whom this pair of boots shall belong, and give you a heap of gold into the bargain for your trouble.”

The prince drew on the boots, took the Magical Whip from his girdle, and said:

“Ho! Magical Whip! To right and left skip! And do what I will!”

The whip jumped from his hand, became invisible, and well thrashed the robbers. In the midst of the confusion the prince made his escape, and having the boots on he went seven miles at every step, and was soon far enough away from the robbers’ den.

But as he was no nearer to finding out where the Brazen Mountain was, he had no need to go quite so fast; so he took off the seven-league boots, put them under his arm, and the Magic Whip in his girdle, and went at his ordinary pace, till he came to a narrow path between some rocks, where again he came upon twelve men fighting.

They explained that they were fighting for an invisible cap, which had belonged to their late leader; and asked him, as a stranger, to decide who should have it.

So he set the Magical Whip, as before, to work; and there was a nice confusion among these robbers, for not seeing where the blows came from they fell upon one another; and at last, frightened out of their senses, they took flight, and scattered in all directions. The prince, having put on the invisible cap, was able to walk among them, and talk to them; and they all heard, though they could not see him.

He now began to consider whether he could not use all these treasures to help him to find the Brazen Mountain. So he drew on the seven-league boots, settled the invisible cap on his forehead, and taking the Magical Whip from his girdle, said:

“Oh! thou wondrous Magic Whip! Lead me on; I’ll follow thee! Onward to the Brazen Mountain Lead me, where I fain would be!”

The whip sprang from his hand. It did not become invisible this time, but glided rapidly a little above the ground, like a boat over a calm sea. Though it flew like a bird, the prince was quite able to keep pace with it,

because he had on the seven-league boots. He was scarcely aware of the fact, when in less than a quarter of an hour they came to a standstill—at the Brazen Mountain.

At first the prince was overjoyed at having reached the goal of his wishes; but when he looked more closely at its smooth perpendicular sides, hard as adamant—its summit lost in the clouds—he was in despair; for how was he ever to get to the top of it?

However, he thought there must be some way up after all; so taking off his boots and cap, he set off to walk round the base of the mountain.

In half an hour he came to a mill, with twelve millstones. The miller was an old wizard, with a long beard down to the ground. He stood beside a stove—whereupon a kettle was boiling—stirring the contents with a long iron spoon, and piling wood on the fire.

The prince looked into the kettle.

“Good morning to you, gaffer. What are you doing there?”

“That’s my own business,” replied the miller gruffly.

“What mill is this?” the prince next asked.

“That’s no business of yours,” replied the miller.

The prince was not going to be satisfied with this; so he gave his usual orders to the Magical Whip, which forthwith became invisible, and began to lash the miller soundly. He tried to run away; but it was no use; till the prince took pity on him, and called the whip back again. He put it up, and then said:

“Whose mill is this?”

“It belongs to the three princesses of the Brazen Mountain,” replied the miller. “They let down a rope here every day, and draw up all the flour they want by the rope.”

As he said this a thick silken rope came down, with a loop at the end, which struck the threshold of the mill.

The prince made ready; and when the usual sack of wheat flour was bound fast in the loop, he climbed upon it,

having first put on his invisible cap, and was thus drawn up to the top of the Brazen Mountain.

The three princesses, having drawn up their supply of flour, put it into their storehouse, and went back to their dwelling.

Their palace was most beautiful, all silver without, and all gold within. All the windows were of crystal; the chairs and tables were made of diamonds, and the floors of looking-glass. The ceilings were like the sky, with mimic stars and moon shining therein; and in the principal saloon there was a sun, with rays all round; beautiful birds were singing, monkeys were telling fairy tales; and in their midst amongst all this sat three most beautiful princesses.

The two eldest were weaving golden threads in their looms; but the youngest, the prince's wife, sat silently apart from her sisters, listening to the murmur of a fountain, her head leaning on her hand, in deep thought. And as she sat there two pearly tears coursed down her lovely face.

“What are you thinking of, sister?” asked the two elder princesses.

“I am thinking of the prince, my husband. I love to think of him, and I am so sorry for him, poor fellow! To think I left him for no fault at all; and when we loved one another so dearly! Oh! sisters! I shall have to leave you, and go back to him; only I fear he will never forgive me, however I entreat him, for having behaved so unkindly to him.”

“I forgive you, I forgive you everything, darling!” exclaimed the prince throwing off the invisible cap, and embracing her rapturously.



“The truant wife is captured.” Illustration by Cecile Walton, published in Polish Fairy Tales by Maude Ashurt Biggs (1920), John Lane Company.

Then she gave him wings like her own, and they flew away together. In an hour or two they arrived in his father’s kingdom.

The king and queen welcomed them joyfully, and all was greatest joy and happiness henceforward.

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