

The Three-Army Surgeons

Brothers Grimm

German

Intermediate

6 min read

Three army-surgeons who thought they knew their art perfectly, were travelling about the world, and they came to an inn where they wanted to pass the night. The host asked whence they came, and whither they were going? "We are roaming about the world and practising our art. Show me for once in a way what you can do," said the host.

Then the first said he would cut off his hand, and put it on again early next morning; the second said he would tear out his heart, and replace it next morning; the third said he would cut out his eyes and heal them again next morning. "If you can do that," said the innkeeper, "you have learnt everything."

They, however, had a salve, with which they rubbed themselves, which joined parts together, and they carried the little bottle in which it was, constantly with them. Then they cut the hand, heart and eyes from their bodies as they had said they would, and laid them all together on a plate, and gave it to the innkeeper. The innkeeper gave it to a servant who was to set it in the cupboard, and take good care of it. The girl, however, had a lover in secret, who was a soldier. When therefore the innkeeper, the three army-surgeons, and every one else in the house were asleep, the soldier came and wanted something to eat. The girl opened the cupboard and brought him some food, and in her love forgot to shut the cupboard-door again; She seated herself at the table by her lover, and they chattered away together. While she sat so contentedly there thinking of no ill luck, the cat came creeping in, found the cupboard open, took the hand and heart and eyes of the three army-surgeons, and ran off with them. When the soldier had done eating, and the girl was taking away the things and going to shut the

cupboard she saw that the plate which the innkeeper had given her to take care of, was empty. Then she said in a fright to her lover, "miserable girl, what shall I do? The hand is gone, the heart and the eyes are gone too, what will become of me in the morning?" "easy," said he, "will help thee out of thy trouble" "is a hanging outside on the gallows, I will cut off his hand. Which hand was it?" "right one." Then the girl gave him a sharp knife, and he went and cut the poor sinner's right hand off, and brought it to her. After this he caught the cat and cut its eyes out, and now nothing but the heart was wanting. "you not been killing, and are not the dead pigs in the cellar?" said he. "said the girl. "well," said the soldier, and he went and fetched a pig's heart. The girl placed all together on the plate, and put it in the cupboard, and when after this her lover took leave of her, she went quietly to bed.

In the morning when the three army-surgeons got up, they told the girl she was to bring them the plate on which the hand, heart, and eyes were lying. Then she brought it out of the cupboard, and the first fixed the thief's hand on and smeared it with his salve, and it grew to his arm directly. The second took the cat's eyes and put them in his own head. The third fixed the pig's heart firm in the place where his own had been, and the innkeeper stood by, admired their skill, and said he had never yet seen such a thing as that done, and would sing their praises and recommend them to every one. Then they paid their bill, and travelled farther.

As they were on their way, the one with the pig's heart did not stay with them at all, but wherever there was a corner he ran to it, and rooted about in it with his nose as pigs do. The others wanted to hold him back by the tail of his coat, but that did no good; he tore himself loose, and ran wherever the dirt was thickest. The second also behaved very strangely; he rubbed his eyes, and said to the others, "Comrades, what is the matter? I don't see at all. Will one of you lead me, so that I do not fall." Then with difficulty they travelled on till evening, when they reached another inn. They went into the bar together, and there at a table in the corner sat a rich man counting money. The one with the thief's hand walked round about him, made a sudden movement twice with his arm, and at last when the stranger turned away, he snatched at the pile of money, and took a handful from it. One of them saw this, and said, "Comrade, what art thou about? Thou must not steal—shame on thee!" "Eh," said he, "but how can I stop myself? My hand twitches, and I am forced to snatch things whether I will or not."

After this, they lay down to sleep, and while they were lying there it was so dark that no one could see his own hand. All at once the one with the cat's eyes awoke, aroused the others, and said, "Brothers, just look up, do you see the white mice running about there?" The two sat up, but could see nothing. Then said he, "Things are not right with us, we have not got back again what is ours. We must return to the innkeeper, he has deceived us." They went back therefore, the next morning, and told the host they had not got what was their own again; that

the first had a thief's hand, the second cat's eyes, and the third a pig's heart. The innkeeper said that the girl must be to blame for that, and was going to call her, but when she had seen the three coming, she had run out by the backdoor, and not come back. Then the three said he must give them a great deal of money, or they would set his house on fire.* He gave them what he had, and whatever he could get together, and the three went away with it. It was enough for the rest of their lives, but they would rather have had their own proper organs.

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