



The Three Crowns

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Celtic

Intermediate

21 min read

There was once a king who had three daughters. The two eldest were very proud and quarrelsome, but the youngest was as good as they were bad. Well, three princes came to court them, and two of them were exactly like the eldest ladies, and one was just as lovable as the youngest. One day they were all walking down to a lake that lay at the bottom of the lawn when they met a poor beggar. The king wouldn't give him anything, and the eldest princesses wouldn't give him anything, nor their sweethearts; but the youngest daughter and her true love did give him something, and kind words along with it, and that was better than all.

When they got to the edge of the lake what did they find but the beautifullest boat you ever saw in your life; and says the eldest, 'I'll take a sail in this fine boat'; and says the second eldest, 'I'll take a sail in this fine boat'; and says the youngest, 'I won't take a sail in that fine boat, for I am afraid it's an enchanted one.' But the others persuaded her to go in, and her father was just going in after her, when up sprung on the deck a little man only seven inches high, and ordered him to stand back. Well, all the men put their hands to their swords; and if the same swords were only playthings, they weren't able to draw them, for all strength that was left their arms. Seven Inches loosened the silver chain that fastened the boat, and pushed away, and after grinning at the four men, says he to them. 'Bid your daughters and your brides farewell for awhile. You,' says he to the youngest, 'needn't fear, you'll recover your princess all in good time, and you and she will be as happy as the day is long. Bad people, if they were rolling stark naked in gold, would not be rich. Good-bye.' Away they sailed, and the

ladies stretched out their hands, but weren't able to say a word.

Well, they weren't crossing the lake while a cat 'ud be lickin' her ear, and the poor men couldn't stir hand or foot to follow them. They saw Seven Inches handing the three princesses out of the boat, and letting them down by a basket into a draw-well, but king nor princes ever saw an opening before in the same place. When the last lady was out of sight, the men found the strength in their arms and legs again. Round the lake they ran, and never drew rein till they came to the well and windlass; and there was the silk rope rolled on the axle, and the nice white basket hanging to it. 'Let me down,' says the youngest prince. 'I'll die or recover them again.' 'No,' says the second daughter's sweetheart, 'it is my turn first.' And says the other, 'I am the eldest.' So they gave way to him, and in he got into the basket, and down they let him. First they lost sight of him, and then, after winding off a hundred perches of the silk rope, it slackened, and they stopped turning. They waited two hours, and then they went to dinner, because there was no pull made at the rope.

Guards were set till next morning, and then down went the second prince, and sure enough, the youngest of all got himself let down on the third day. He went down perches and perches, while it was as dark about him as if he was in a big pot with a cover on. At last he saw a glimmer far down, and in a short time he felt the ground. Out he came from the big lime-kiln, and, lo! and behold you, there was a wood, and green fields, and a castle in a lawn, and a bright sky over all. 'It's in Tir-na-n-Oge I am,' says he. 'Let's see what sort of people are in the castle.' On he walked, across fields and lawn, and no one was there to keep him out or let him into the castle; but the big hall-door was wide open. He went from one fine room to another that was finer, and at last he reached the handsomest of all, with a table in the middle. And such a dinner as was laid upon it! The prince was hungry enough, but he was too mannerly to eat without being invited. So he sat by the fire, and he did not wait long till he heard steps, and in came Seven Inches with the youngest sister by the hand. Well, prince and princess flew into one another's arms, and says the little man, says he, 'Why aren't you eating?' 'I think, sir,' says the prince, 'it was only good manner to wait to be asked.' 'The other princes didn't think so,' says he. 'Each o' them fell to without leave, and only gave me the rough words when I told them they were making more free than welcome. Well, I don't think they feel much hunger now. There they are, good marble instead of flesh and blood,' says he, pointing to two statues, one in one corner, and the other in the other corner of the room. The prince was frightened, but he was afraid to say anything, and Seven Inches made him sit down to dinner between himself and his bride; and he'd be as happy as the day is long, only for the sight of the stone men in the

corner. Well, that day went by, and when the next came, says Seven Inches to him, 'Now, you'll have to set out that way,' pointing to the sun, 'and you'll find the second princess in a giant's castle this evening, when you'll be tired and hungry, and the eldest princess to-morrow evening; and you may as well bring them here with you. You need not ask leave of their masters; and perhaps if they ever get home, they'll look on poor people as if they were flesh and blood like themselves.'

Away went the prince, and bedad! it's tired and hungry he was when he reached the first castle, at sunset. Oh, wasn't the second princess glad to see him! And what a good supper she gave him. But she heard the giant at the gate, and she hid the prince in a closet. Well, when he came in, he snuffed, an' he snuffed, and says he, 'By the life, I smell fresh meat.' 'Oh,' says the princess, 'it's only the calf I got killed to-day.' 'Ay, ay,' says he, 'is supper ready?' 'It is,' says she; and before he rose from the table he ate three-quarters of a calf, and a flask of wine. 'I think,' says he, when all was done, 'I smell fresh meat still.' 'It's sleepy you are,' says she; 'go to bed.' 'When will you marry me?' says the giant. 'You're putting me off too long.' 'St. Tibb's Eve,' says she. 'I wish I knew how far off that is,' says he; and he fell asleep, with his head in the dish.

Next day, he went out after breakfast, and she sent the prince to the castle where the eldest sister was. The same thing happened there; but when the giant was snoring, the princess wakened up the prince, and they saddled two steeds in the stables and rode into the field on them. But the horses' heels struck the stones outside the gate, and up got the giant and strode after them. He roared and he shouted, and the more he shouted, the faster ran the horses, and just as the day was breaking he was only twenty perches behind. But the prince didn't leave the castle of Seven Inches without being provided with something good. He reined in his steed, and flung a short, sharp knife over his shoulder, and up sprung a thick wood between the giant and themselves. They caught the wind that blew before them, and the wind that blew behind them did not catch them. At last they were near the castle where the other sister lived; and there she was, waiting for them under a high hedge, and a fine steed under her.

But the giant was now in sight, roaring like a hundred lions, and the other giant was out in a moment, and the chase kept on. For every two springs the horses gave, the giants gave three, and at last they were only seventy perches off. Then the prince stopped again, and flung the second knife behind him. Down went all the flat field, till there was a quarry between them a quarter of a mile deep, and the bottom filled with black water; and before the giants could get round it, the prince and princesses were inside the kingdom of the great magician,

where the high thorny hedge opened of itself to everyone that he chose to let in. There was joy enough between the three sisters, till the two eldest saw their lovers turned into stone. But while they were shedding tears for them, Seven Inches came in, and touched them with his rod. So they were flesh, and blood, and life once more, and there was great hugging and kissing, and all sat down to breakfast, and Seven Inches sat at the head of the table.

When breakfast was over, he took them into another room, where there was nothing but heaps of gold, and silver, and diamonds, and silks, and satins; and on a table there was lying three sets of crowns: a gold crown was in a silver crown, and that was lying in a copper crown. He took up one set of crowns, and gave it to the eldest princess; and another set, and gave it to the second youngest princess; and another, and gave it to the youngest of all; and says he, 'Now you may all go to the bottom of the pit, and you have nothing to do but stir the basket, and the people that are watching above will draw you up. But remember, ladies, you are to keep your crowns safe, and be married in them, all the same day. If you be married separately, or if you be married without your crowns, a curse will follow—mind what I say.'

So they took leave of him with great respect, and walked arm-in- arm to the bottom of the draw-well. There was a sky and a sun over them, and a great high wall, covered with ivy, rose before them, and was so high they could not see to the top of it; and there was an arch in this wall, and the bottom of the draw-well was inside the arch. The youngest pair went last; and says the princess to the prince, 'I'm sure the two princes don't mean any good to you. Keep these crowns under your cloak, and if you are obliged to stay last, don't get into the basket, but put a big stone, or any heavy thing inside, and see what will happen.'

As soon as they were inside the dark cave, they put in the eldest princess first, and stirred the basket, and up she went. Then the basket was let down again, and up went the second princess, and then up went the youngest; but first she put her arms round her prince's neck, and kissed him, and cried a little. At last it came to the turn of the youngest prince, and instead of going into the basket he put in a big stone. He drew on one side and listened, and after the basket was drawn up about twenty perches, down came it and the stone like thunder, and the stone was broken into little bits.

Well, the poor prince had nothing for it but to walk back to the castle; and through it and round it he walked, and the finest of eating and drinking he got, and a bed of bog-down to sleep on, and long walks he took

through gardens and lawns, but not a sight could he get, high or low, of Seven Inches. He, before a week, got tired of it, he was so lonesome for his true love; and at the end of a month he didn't know what to do with himself.

One morning he went into the treasure room, and took notice of a beautiful snuff-box on the table that he didn't remember seeing there before. He took it in his hands and opened it, and out Seven Inches walked on the table. 'I think, prince,' says he, 'you're getting a little tired of my castle?' 'Ah!' says the other, 'if I had my princess here, and could see you now and then, I'd never know a dismal day.' 'Well, you're long enough here now, and you're wanted there above. Keep your bride's crowns safe, and whenever you want my help, open this snuff-box. Now take a walk down the garden, and come back when you're tired.'

The prince was going down a gravel walk with a quickset hedge on each side, and his eyes on the ground, and he was thinking of one thing and another. At last he lifted his eyes, and there he was outside of a smith's gate that he often passed before, about a mile away from the palace of his betrothed princess. The clothes he had on him were as ragged as you please, but he had his crowns safe under his old cloak.

Then the smith came out, and says he, 'It's a shame for a strong, big fellow like you to be lazy, and so much work to be done. Are you any good with hammer and tongs? Come in and bear a hand, an I'll give you diet and lodging, and a few pence when you earn them.' 'Never say't twice,' says the prince. 'I want nothing but to be busy.' So he took the hammer, and pounded away at the red-hot bar that the smith was turning on the anvil to make into a set of horse-shoes.

They hadn't been long at work when a tailor came in, and he sat down and began to talk. 'You all heard how the two princess were loth to be married till the youngest would be ready with her crowns and her sweetheart. But after the windlass loosened accidentally when they were pulling up her bridegroom that was to be, there was no more sign of a well, or a rope, or a windlass, than there is on the palm of your hand. So the princes that were courting the eldest ladies wouldn't give peace or ease to their lovers nor the king till they got consent to the marriage, and it was to take place this morning. Myself went down out o' curiosity, and to be sure I was delighted with the grand dresses of the two brides, and the three crowns on their heads—gold, silver, and copper, one inside the other. The youngest was standing by mournful enough, and all was ready. The two bridegrooms came in as proud and grand as you please, and up they were walking to the altar rails, when the

boards opened two yards wide under their feet, and down they went among the dead men and the coffins in the vaults. Oh, such shrieks as the ladies gave! and such running and racing and peeping down as there was! but the clerk soon opened the door of the vault, and up came the two princes, their fine clothes covered an inch thick with cobwebs and mould.

So the king said they should put off the marriage. 'For,' says he, 'I see there is no use in thinking of it till the youngest gets her three crowns, and is married with the others. I'll give my youngest daughter for a wife to whoever brings three crowns to me like the others; and if he doesn't care to be married, some other one will, and I'll make his fortune.'

'I wish,' says the smith, 'I could do it; but I was looking at the crowns after the princesses got home, and I don't think there's a black or a white smith on the face of the earth that could imitate them.' 'Faint heart never won fair lady,' says the prince. 'Go to the palace and ask for a quarter of a pound of gold, a quarter of a pound of silver, and a quarter of a pound of copper. Get one crown for a pattern, and my head for a pledge, I'll give you out the very things that are wanted in the morning.' 'Are you in earnest?' says the smith. 'Faith, I am so,' says he. 'Go! you can't do worse than lose.'

To make a long story short, the smith got the quarter of a pound of gold, and the quarter of a pound of silver, and the quarter of a pound of copper, and gave them and the pattern crown to the prince. He shut the forge door at nightfall, and the neighbours all gathered in the yard, and they heard him hammering, hammering, hammering, from that to daybreak; and every now and then he'd throw out through the window bits of gold, silver, and copper; and the idlers scrambled for them, and cursed one another, and prayed for the good luck of the workman.

Well, just as the sun was thinking to rise, he opened the door, and brought out the three crowns he got from his true love, and such shouting and huzzaing as there was! The smith asked him to go along with him to the palace, but he refused; so off set the smith, and the whole townland with him; and wasn't the king rejoiced when he saw the crowns! 'Well,' says he to the smith, 'you're a married man. What's to be done?' 'Faith, your majesty, I didn't make them crowns at all. It was a big fellow that took service with me yesterday.' 'Well, daughter, will you marry the fellow that made these crowns?' 'Let me see them first, father,' said she; but when she examined them she knew them right well, and guessed it was her true love that sent them. 'I will marry the

man that these crowns came from,' says she.

'Well,' says the king to the elder of the two princes, 'go up to the smith's forge, take my best coaches, and bring home the bridegroom.' He did not like doing this, he was so proud, but he could not refuse. When he came to the forge he saw the prince standing at the door, and beckoned him over to the coach. 'Are you the fellow,' says he, 'that made these crowns?' 'Yes,' says the other. 'Then,' says he, 'maybe you'd give yourself a brushing, and get into that coach; the king wants to see you. I pity the princess.' The young prince got into the carriage, and while they were on the way he opened the snuff-box, and out walked Seven Inches, and stood on his thigh. 'Well,' says he, 'what trouble is on you now?' 'Master,' says the other, 'please let me go back to my forge, and let this carriage be filled with paving stones.' No sooner said than done. The prince was sitting in his forge, and the horses wondered what was after happening to the carriage.

When they came into the palace yard, the king himself opened the carriage door, for respect to his new son-in-law. As soon as he turned the handle, a shower of small stones fell on his powdered wig and his silk coat, and down he fell under them. There was great fright and some laughter, and the king, after he wiped the blood from his forehead, looked very cross at the eldest prince. 'My lord,' says he, 'I'm very sorry for this accident, but I'm not to blame. I saw the young smith get into the carriage, and we never stopped a minute since.' 'It's uncivil you were to him. Go,' says he to the other prince, 'and bring the young smith here, and be polite.' 'Never fear,' says he.

But there's some people that couldn't be good-natured if they tried, and not a bit civiller was the new messenger than the old, and when the king opened the carriage door a second time, it's shower of mud that came down on him. 'There's no use,' says he, 'going on this way. The fox never got a better messenger than himself.'

So he changed his clothes, and washed himself, and out he set to the prince's forge and asked him to sit along with himself. The prince begged to be allowed to sit in the other carriage, and when they were half-way he opened his snuff-box. 'Master,' says he, 'I'd wish to be dressed now according to my rank.' 'You shall be that,' says Seven Inches. 'And now I'll bid you farewell. Continue as good and kind as you always were; love your wife; and that's all the advice I'll give you.' So Seven Inches vanished; and when the carriage door was opened in the yard, out walks the prince as fine as hands could make him, and the first thing he did was to run over to his

bride and embrace her.

Every one was full of joy but the two other princes. There was not much delay about the marriages, and they were all celebrated on the one day. Soon after, the two elder couples went to their own courts, but the youngest pair stayed with the old king, and they were as happy as the happiest married couple you ever heard of in a story.

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