

The Three Musicians

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

German

Advanced
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Once upon a time three musicians left their home and set out on their travels. They had all learnt music from the same master, and they determined to stick together and to seek their fortune in foreign lands. They wandered merrily from place to place and made quite a good living, and were much appreciated by everyone who heard them play. One evening they came to a village where they delighted all the company with their beautiful music. At last they ceased playing, and began to eat and drink and listen to the talk that was going on around them. They heard all the gossip of the place, and many wonderful things were related and discussed. At last the conversation fell on a castle in the neighbourhood, about which many strange and marvellous things were told. One person said that hidden treasure was to be found there; another that the richest food was always to be had there, although the castle was uninhabited; and a third, that an evil spirit dwelt within the walls, so terrible, that anyone who forced his way into the castle came out of it more dead than alive.

As soon as the three musicians were alone in their bedroom they agreed to go and examine the mysterious castle, and, if possible, to find and carry away the hidden treasure. They determined, too, to make the attempt separately, one after the other, according to age, and they settled that a whole day was to be given to each adventurer in which to try his luck.

The fiddler was the first to set out on his adventures, and did so in the best of spirits and full of courage. When he reached the castle he found the outer gate open, quite as if he were an expected guest, but no sooner had he stepped across the entry than the heavy door closed behind him with a bang, and was bolted with a huge iron

bar, exactly as if a sentinel were doing his office and keeping watch, but no human being was to be seen anywhere. An awful terror overcame the fiddler; but it was hopeless to think of turning back or of standing still, and the hopes of finding gold and other treasures gave him strength and courage to force his way further into the castle. Upstairs and downstairs he wandered, through lofty halls, splendid rooms, and lovely little boudoirs, everything beautifully arranged, and all kept in the most perfect order. But the silence of death reigned everywhere, and no living thing, not even a fly, was to be seen. Notwithstanding, the youth felt his spirits return to him when he entered the lower regions of the castle, for in the kitchen the most tempting and delicious food was spread out, the cellars were full of the most costly wine, and the store-room crammed with pots of every sort of jam you can imagine. A cheerful fire was burning in the kitchen, before which a roast was being basted by unseen hands, and all kinds of vegetables and other dainty dishes were being prepared in like manner. Before the fiddler had time to think, he was ushered into a little room by invisible hands, and there a table was spread for him with all the delicious food he had seen cooking in the kitchen.

The youth first seized his fiddle and played a beautiful air on it which echoed through the silent halls, and then he fell to and began to eat a hearty meal. Before long, however, the door opened and a tiny man stepped into the room, not more than three feet high, clothed in a dressing-gown, and with a small wrinkled face, and a grey beard which reached down to the silver buckles of his shoes. And the little man sat down beside the fiddler and shared his meal. When they got to the game course the fiddler handed the dwarf a knife and fork, and begged him to help himself first, and then to pass the dish on. The little creature nodded, but helped himself so clumsily that he dropped the piece of meat he had carved on to the floor.

The good-natured fiddler bent down to pick it up, but in the twinkling of an eye the little man had jumped on to his back, and beat him till he was black and blue all over his head and body. At last, when the fiddler was nearly dead, the little wretch left off, and shoved the poor fellow out of the iron gate which he had entered in such good spirits a few hours before. The fresh air revived him a little, and in a short time he was able to stagger with aching limbs back to the inn where his companions were staying. It was night when he reached the place, and the other two musicians were fast asleep. The next morning they were much astonished at finding the fiddler in bed beside them, and overwhelmed him with questions; but their friend hid his back and face, and answered them very shortly, saying, 'Go there yourselves, and see what's to be seen! It is a ticklish matter, that I can assure you.'

The second musician, who was a trumpeter, now made his way to the castle, and everything happened to him

exactly as it had to the fiddler. He was just as hospitably entertained at first, and then just as cruelly beaten and belaboured, so that next morning he too lay in his bed like a wounded hare, assuring his friends that the task of getting into the haunted castle was no enviable one. Notwithstanding the warning of his companions, the third musician, who played the flute, was still determined to try his luck, and, full of courage and daring, he set out, resolved, if possible, to find and secure the hidden treasure.

Fearlessly he wandered the whole castle, and as he roamed through the splendid empty apartments he thought to himself how nice it would be to live there always, especially with a full larder and cellar at his disposal. A table was spread for him too, and when he had wandered about for some time, singing and playing the flute, he sat down as his companions had done, prepared to enjoy the delicious food that was spread out in front of him. Then the little man with the beard entered as before and seated himself beside the flute-player, who wasn't the least startled at his appearance, but chatted away to him as if he had known him all his life. But he didn't find his companion very communicative. At last they came to the game, and, as usual, the little man let his piece fall on the ground. The flute-player was good-naturedly just going to pick it up, when he perceived that the little dwarf was in the act of springing on his back. Then he turned round sharply, and, seizing the little creature by his beard, he gave him such a shaking that he tore his beard out, and the dwarf sank groaning to the ground.

But as soon as the youth had the beard in his hands he felt so strong that he was fit for anything, and he perceived all sorts of things in the castle that he had not noticed before, but, on the other hand, all strength seemed to have gone from the little man. He whined and sobbed out: 'Give, oh give me my beard again, and I will instruct you in all the magic art that surrounds this castle, and will help you to carry off the hidden treasure, which will make you rich and happy for ever.'

But the cunning flute-player replied: 'I will give you back your beard, but you must first help me as you have promised to do. Till you have done so, I don't let your beard out of my hands.'

Then the old man found himself obliged to fulfil his promise, though he had had no intention of doing so, and had only desired to get his beard back. He made the youth follow him through dark secret passages, underground vaults, and grey rocks till at last they came to an open field, which looked as if it belonged to a more beautiful world than ours. Then they came to a stream of rushing water; but the little man drew out a wand and touched the waves, whereupon the waters parted and stood still, and the two crossed the river with dry feet. And how beautiful everything on the other side was! lovely green paths leading through woods and

fields covered with flowers, birds with gold and silver feathers singing on the trees, lovely butterflies and glittering beetles fluttered and crawled about, and dear little beasts hid in the bushes and hedges. The sky above them was not blue, but like rays of pure gold, and the stars looked twice their usual size, and far more brilliant than on our earth.

The youth grew more and more astonished when the little grey man led him into a castle far bigger and more splendid than the one they had left. Here, too, the deepest silence reigned. They wandered all through the castle, and came at last to a room in the middle of which stood a bed hung all round with heavy curtains. Over the bed hung a bird's cage, and the bird inside it was singing beautiful songs into the silent space. The little grey man lifted the curtains from the bed and beckoned the youth to approach. On the rich silk cushions embroidered with gold a lovely maiden lay sleeping. She was as beautiful as an angel, with golden hair which fell in curls over her marble shoulders, and a diamond crown sparkled on her forehead. But a sleep as of death held her in its spell, and no noise seemed able to waken the sleeper.

Then the little man turned to the wondering youth and said: 'See, here is the sleeping child! She is a mighty Princess. This splendid castle and this enchanted land are hers, but for hundreds of years she has slept this magic sleep, and during all that time no human being has been able to find their way here. I alone have kept guard over her, and have gone daily to my own castle to get food and to beat the greedy gold-seekers who forced their way into my dwelling. I have watched over the Princess carefully all these years and saw that no stranger came near her, but all my magic power lay in my beard, and now that you have taken it away I am helpless, and can no longer hold the beautiful Princess in her enchanted sleep, but am forced to reveal my treasured secret to you. So set to work and do as I tell you. Take the bird which hangs over the Princess's head, and which by its song sang her into this enchanted sleep—a song which it has had to continue ever since; take it and kill it, and cut its little heart out and burn it to a powder, and then put it into the Princess's mouth; then she will instantly awaken, and will bestow on you her heart and hand, her kingdom and castle, and all her treasures.

The little dwarf paused, quite worn out, and the youth did not wait long to do his bidding. He did all he was told carefully and promptly, and having cut the little bird's heart out he proceeded to make it into a powder. No sooner had he placed it in the Princess's mouth than she opened her lovely eyes, and, looking up into the happy youth's face, she kissed him tenderly, thanked him for freeing her from her magic sleep, and promised to be his wife. At the same moment a sound as of thunder was heard all over the castle, and on all the staircases and

in every room sounds were to be heard. Then a troop of servants, male and female, flocked into the apartment where the happy couple sat, and after wishing the Princess and her bridegroom joy, they dispersed all over the castle to their different occupations.

But the little grey dwarf began now to demand his beard again from the youth, for in his wicked heart he was determined to make an end of all their happiness; he knew that if only his beard were once more on his chin, he would be able to do what he liked with them all. But the clever flute-player was quite a match for the little man in cunning, and said: 'All right, you needn't be afraid, you shall get your beard back before we part; but you must allow my bride and me to accompany you a bit on your homeward way.'

The dwarf could not refuse this request, and so they all went together through the beautiful green paths and flowery meadows, and came at last to the river which flowed for miles round the Princess's land and formed the boundary of her kingdom. There was no bridge or ferryboat to be seen anywhere, and it was impossible to get over to the other side, for the boldest swimmer would not have dared to brave the fierce current and roaring waters. Then the youth said to the dwarf: 'Give me your wand in order that I may part the waves.'

And the dwarf was forced to do as he was told because the youth still kept his beard from him; but the wicked little creature chuckled with joy and thought to himself: 'The foolish youth will hand me my beard as soon as we have crossed the river, and then my power will return, and I will seize my wand and prevent them both ever returning to their beautiful country.'

But the dwarf's wicked intentions were doomed to disappointment. The happy youth struck the water with his wand, and the waves at once parted and stood still, and the dwarf went on in front and crossed the stream. No sooner had he done so than the waters closed behind him, and the youth and his lovely bride stood safe on the other side. Then they threw his beard to the old man across the river, but they kept his wand, so that the wicked dwarf could never again enter their kingdom. So the happy couple returned to their castle, and lived there in peace and plenty for ever after. But the other two musicians waited in vain for the return of their companion; and when he never came they said: 'Ah, he's gone to play the flute,' till the saying passed into a proverb, and was always said of anyone who set out to perform a task from which he never returned.

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