



The Wonderful Hair - The Story of a Poor Man Who Dreamed of an Angel

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Intermediate
6 min read

There was once a poor man who had so many children that he was at his wit's end how to feed them all and clothe them.

“Unless something turns up soon,” he thought to himself, “we shall all starve to death. Poor youngsters—I’m almost tempted to kill them with my own hands to save them from suffering the pangs of hunger!”

That night before he went to sleep he prayed God to give him help. God heard his prayer and sent an angel to him in a dream.

The angel said to him:

“To-morrow morning when you wake, put your hand under your pillow and you will find a mirror, a red handkerchief, and an embroidered scarf. Without saying a word to any one hide these things in your shirt and go out to the woods that lie beyond the third hill from the village. There you will find a brook. Follow it until

you come to a beautiful maiden who is bathing in its waters. You will know her from the great masses of golden hair that fall down over her shoulders. She will speak to you but do you be careful not to answer. If you say a word to her she will be able to bewitch you. She will hold out a comb to you and ask you to comb her hair. Take the comb and do as she asks. Then part her back hair carefully and you will see one hair that is coarser than the others and as red as blood. Wrap this firmly around one of your fingers and jerk it out. Then flee as fast as you can. She will pursue you and each time as she is about to overtake you drop first the embroidered scarf, then the red handkerchief, and last the mirror. If you reach the hill nearest your own village you are safe for she can pursue you no farther. Take good care of the single hair for its great value and you can sell it for many golden ducats.”

In the morning when the poor man awoke and put his hand under his pillow he found the mirror and the handkerchief and the scarf just as the angel had said he would. So he hid them carefully in his shirt and without telling any one where he was going he went to the woods beyond the third hill from the village. Here he found the brook and followed it until he came to a pool where he saw a lovely maiden bathing.

“Good day to you!” she said politely.

The poor man remembering the angel’s warning made no answer.

The maiden held out a golden comb.

“Please comb my hair for me, won’t you?”

The man nodded and took the comb. Then he parted the long tresses behind and searched here and there and everywhere until he found the one hair that was blood-red in color and coarser than the others. He twisted this firmly around his finger, jerked it quickly out, and fled.

“Oh!” cried the maiden. “What are you doing? Give me back my one red hair!”

She jumped to her feet and ran swiftly after him. As she came close to him, he dropped behind him the embroidered scarf. She stooped and picked it up and examined it awhile. Then she saw the man was escaping, so she tossed the scarf aside and again ran after him. This time he dropped the red handkerchief. Its bright color caught the maiden’s eye and she picked it up and lost a few more minutes admiring it while the man raced on. Then the maiden remembered him, threw away the handkerchief, and started off again in pursuit.

This time the man dropped the mirror and the maiden who of course was a Vila and had never seen a mirror before picked it up and looked at it and when she saw the lovely reflection of herself she was so amazed that she kept on looking and looking. She was still looking in it and still admiring her own beauty when the man reached the third hill beyond which the maiden couldn't follow him.

So the poor man got home with the hair safely wound about his finger.

"It must be of great value," he thought to himself. "I'll take it to the city and offer it for sale there."

So the next day he went to the city and went about offering his wonderful hair to the merchants.

"What's so wonderful about it?" they asked him.

"I don't know, but I do know it's of great value," he told them.

"Well," said one of them, "I'll give you one golden ducat for it."

He was a shrewd buyer and the others hearing his bid of one golden ducat decided that he must know that the hair was of much greater value. So they began to outbid him until the price offered the poor man reached one hundred golden ducats. But the poor man insisted that this was not enough.

"One hundred golden ducats not enough for one red hair!" cried the merchants.

They pretended to be disgusted that any one would refuse such a price for one red hair, but in reality they were all firmly convinced by this time that it was a magic hair and probably worth any amount of money in the world.

The whole city became excited over the wonderful hair for which all the merchants were bidding and for a time nothing else was talked about. The matter was reported to the Tsar and at once he said that he himself would buy the hair for one thousand golden ducats.

One thousand golden ducats! After that there was no danger of the poor man's many children dying of starvation.

And what do you suppose the Tsar did with the hair? He had it split open very carefully and inside he found a scroll of great importance to mankind for on it were written many wonderful secrets of nature.

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