

The Three Princesses of Whiteland

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Norwegian

Intermediate
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Once on a time there was a fisherman who lived close by a palace, and fished for the King's table. One day when he was out fishing he just caught nothing. Do what he would—however he tried with bait and angle—there was never a sprat on his hook. But when the day was far spent a head bobbed up out of the water, and said:

“If I may have what your wife bears under her girdle, you shall catch fish enough.”

So the man answered boldly, “Yes;” for he did not know that his wife was going to have a child. After that, as was like enough, he caught plenty of fish of all kinds. But when he got home at night and told his story, how he had got all that fish, his wife fell a-weeping and moaning, and was beside herself for the promise which her husband had made, for she said, “I bear a babe under my girdle.”

Well, the story soon spread, and came up to the castle; and when the King heard the woman's grief and its cause, he sent down to say he would take care of the child, and see if he couldn't save it.

So the months went on and on, and when her time came the fisher's wife had a boy; so the king took it at once, and brought it up as his own son, until the lad grew up. Then he begged leave one day to go out fishing with his father; he had such a mind to go, he said. At first the King wouldn't hear of it, but at last the lad had his way,

and went. So he and his father were out the whole day, and all went right and well till they landed at night. Then the lad remembered he had left his handkerchief, and went to look for it; but as soon as ever he got into the boat, it began to move off with him at such speed that the water roared under the bow, and all the lad could do in rowing against it with the oars was no use; so he went and went the whole night, and at last he came to a white strand, far far away.

There he went ashore, and when he had walked about a bit, an old, old man met him, with a long white beard.

“What’s the name of this land?” asked the lad.

“Whiteland,” said the man, who went on to ask the lad whence he came, and what he was going to do. So the lad told him all.

“Aye, aye!” said the man; “now when you have walked a little farther along the strand here, you’ll come to three Princesses, whom you will see standing in the earth up to their necks, with only their heads out. Then the first—she is the eldest—will call out and beg you so prettily to come and help her; and the second will do the same; to neither of these shall you go; make haste past them, as if you neither saw nor heard anything. But the third you shall go to, and do what she asks. If you do this, you’ll have good luck—that’s all.”

When the lad came to the first Princess, she called out to him, and begged him so prettily to come to her, but he passed on as though he saw her not. In the same way he passed by the second; but to the third he went straight up.

“If you’ll do what I bid you,” she said, “you may have which of us you please.”

“Yes;” he was willing enough; so she told him how three Trolls had set them down in the earth there; but before they had lived in the castle up among the trees.

“Now,” she said, “you must go into that castle, and let the Trolls whip you each one night for each of us. If you can bear that, you’ll set us free.”

Well, the lad said he was ready to try.

“When you go in,” the Princess went on to say, “you’ll see two lions standing at the gate; but if you’ll only go right in the middle between them they’ll do you no harm. Then go straight on into a little dark room, and make your bed. Then the Troll will come to whip you; but if you take the flask which hangs on the wall, and rub

yourself with the ointment that's in it, wherever his lash falls, you'll be as sound as ever. Then grasp the sword that hangs by the side of the flask and strike the Troll dead.”

Yes, he did as the Princess told him; he passed in the midst between the lions, as if he hadn't seen them, and went straight into the little room, and there he lay down to sleep. The first night there came a Troll with three heads and three rods, and whipped the lad soundly; but he stood it till the Troll was done; then he took the flask and rubbed himself, and grasped the sword and slew the Troll.

So, when he went out next morning, the Princesses stood out of the earth up to their waists.

The next night 'twas the same story over again, only this time the Troll had six heads and six rods, and he whipped him far worse than the first; but when he went out next morning, the Princesses stood out of the earth as far as the knee.

The third night there came a Troll that had nine heads and nine rods, and he whipped and flogged the lad so long that he fainted away; then the Troll took him up and dashed him against the wall; but the shock brought down the flask, which fell on the lad, burst, and spilled the ointment all over him, and so he became as strong and sound as ever again. Then he wasn't slow; he grasped the sword and slew the Troll; and next morning when he went out of the castle the Princesses stood before him with all their bodies out of the earth. So he took the youngest for his Queen, and lived well and happily with her for some time.

At last he began to long to go home for a little to see his parents. His Queen did not like this; but at last his heart was so set on it, and he longed and longed so much, there was no holding him back, so she said:

“One thing you must promise me. This—only to do what your father begs you to do, and not what mother wishes;” and that he promised.

Then she gave him a ring, which was of that kind that any one who wore it might wish two wishes. So he wished himself home, and when he got home his parents could not wonder enough what a grand man their son had become.

Now, when he had been at home some days, his mother wished him to go up to the palace and show the King what a fine fellow he had come to be. But his father said:

“No! don’t let him do that; if he does, we shan’t have any more joy of him this time.”

But it was no good, the mother begged and prayed so long that at last he went. So when he got up to the palace he was far braver, both in clothes and array, than the other king, who didn’t quite like this, and at last he said:

“All very fine; but here you can see my Queen, what like she is, but I can’t see yours: that I can’t. Do you know, I scarce think she’s so good-looking as mine.”

“Would to Heaven,” said the young King, “she were standing here, then you’d see what she was like.” And that instant there she stood before them.

But she was very woeful, and said to him:

“Why did you not mind what I told you; and why did you not listen to what your father said? Now, I must away home, and as for you, you have had both your wishes.”

With that she knitted a ring among his hair with her name on it, and wished herself home, and was off.

Then the young King was cut to the heart, and went, day out day in, thinking and thinking how he should get back to his Queen. “I’ll just try,” he thought, “if I can’t learn where Whiteland lies;” and so he went out into the world to ask. So when he had gone a good way, he came to a high hill, and there he met one who was lord over all the beasts of the wood, for they all came home to him when he blew his horn; so the King asked if he knew where Whiteland was.

“No, I don’t,” said he, “but I’ll ask my beasts.” Then he blew his horn and called them, and asked if any of them knew where Whiteland lay. But there was no beast that knew.

So the man gave him a pair of snow-shoes.

“When you get on these,” he said, “you’ll come to my brother, who lives hundreds of miles off; he is lord over all the birds of the air. Ask him. When you reach his house, just turn the shoes so that the toes point this way, and they’ll come home of themselves.” So when the King reached the house, he turned the shoes as the lord of the beasts had said, and away they went home of themselves.

So he asked again after Whiteland, and the man called all the birds with a blast of his horn, and asked if any of them knew where Whiteland lay; but none of the birds knew. Now, long, long after the rest of the birds came

an old eagle, which had been away ten round years, but he couldn't tell any more than the rest.

"Well, well," said the man, "I'll lend you a pair of snow-shoes, and, when you get them on, they'll carry you to my brother, who lives hundreds of miles off; he's lord of all the fish in the sea; you'd better ask him. But don't forget to turn the toes of the shoes this way."

The King was full of thanks, got on the shoes, and when he came to the man who was lord over the fish of the sea, he turned the toes round, and so off they went home like the other pair. After that, he asked again after Whiteland.

So the man called the fish with a blast, but no fish could tell where it lay. At last came an old pike, which they had great work to call home, he was such a way off. So when they asked him he said:

"Know it? I should think I did! I've been cook there ten years, and to-morrow I'm going there again; for now the queen of Whiteland, whose king is away, is going to wed another husband."

"Well!" said the man, "as this is so, I'll give you a bit of advice. Hereabouts, on a moor, stand three brothers, and here they have stood these hundred years, fighting about a hat, a cloak, and a pair of boots. If any one has these three things he can make himself invisible, and wish himself anywhere he pleases. You can tell them you wish to try the things, and, after that, you'll pass judgment between them, whose they shall be."

Yes! the King thanked the man, and went and did as he told him.

"What's all this?" he said to the brothers. "Why do you stand here fighting for ever and a day? Just let me try these things, and I'll give judgment whose they shall be."

They were very willing to do this; but, as soon as he had got the hat, cloak, and boots, he said:

"When we meet next time, I'll tell you my judgment," and with these words he wished himself away.

So as he went along up in the air, he came up with the North wind.

"Whither away?" roared the North Wind.

"To Whiteland," said the King; and then he told him all that had befallen him.

"Ah," said the North Wind, "you go faster than I—you do; for you can go straight, while I have to puff and blow

round every turn and corner. But when you get there, just place yourself on the stairs by the side of the door, and then I'll come storming in, as though I were going to blow down the whole castle. And then when the prince, who is to have your Queen, comes out to see what's the matter, just you take him by the collar and pitch him out of doors; then I'll look after him, and see if I can't carry him off."

Well, the King did as the North Wind said. He took his stand on the stairs, and when the North Wind came, storming and roaring, and took hold of the castle wall, so that it shook again, the prince came out to see what was the matter. But as soon as ever he came, the King caught him by the collar and pitched him out of doors, and then the North Wind caught him up and carried him off. So when there was an end of him, the King went into the castle, and at first his Queen didn't know him, he was so wan and thin, through wandering so far and being so woeful; but when he shewed her the ring, she was as glad as glad could be; and so the rightful wedding was held, and the fame of it spread far and wide.

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