

Princess Mouseskin

Once upon a time, there was a king who had three daughters. He desired to find out which of the three loved him the most. So he called them forth, and posed the question to each: "How much do you love me?" The first said that she loved him more than the whole kingdom. The second that she loved him more than all the jewels and pearls in the world. When the third daughter declared that she loved him more than salt, he flew into a rage. Then he ordered his servant to carry the little girl into the woods and kill her.

Yet when they reached the lonely wood, the servant told her that he was devoted to her and would not have killed her under any circumstance. He was delighted to agree to her plan: that he make her a tunic of mouseskins, and leave her to make her own way. When it was done, the girl wrapped herself in it and went straight to the neighboring king and asked for employment. She had cut her hair short, and said she was a boy, and the king believed her, and took her on as his personal servant. Now it was the king's habit, when taking his boots off at night, to throw them at his serving boy's head. One night, the king asked the lad in mouseskins where he had come from. The youth replied: "From the country where one doesn't toss boots at people's heads!" From that moment, the king was suspicious of the boy, and set the other servants to spying on him. When they discovered a ring in the mouseskin boy's chamber, they brought it to the king. It was of such value that they thought [s]he had stolen it. The king called Mouseskin to him and asked how she obtained the ring. That's when she realized that she could not hide herself any longer. She unwrapped the mouseskin, and her golden hair streamed down. As she stepped out of the skin, he could see she was beautiful, indeed so beautiful that he immediately took off his crown, put it on her head, and declared her to be his wife.

A grand wedding was celebrated and all of the neighboring kings, including Mouseskin's very own father, were invited. But although the guests were entertained with the most delicious wines, the most graceful dancers, and the most elegant dishes, the food itself seemed to have no taste. One king became irritated and said: "I'd rather die than eat such food!" No sooner had he uttered those words than his

daughter, the new Queen, came to his side. That is when she said: "Well, now you say you can't live without salt, but when I said I loved you more than salt, you wanted to have me killed." And all of a sudden, the grumpy old king realized that this young woman was none other than his youngest daughter, who he had believed to be long dead. In joy, he kissed her, and begged her forgiveness. Now that he had found her again, she was more dear to him than his kingdom and all the jewels in the world.

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