

## Six soldiers of fortune

There was once a man who was a Jack-of-all-trades; he had served in the war, and had been brave and bold, but at the end of it he was sent about his business, with three farthings and his discharge. "I am not going to stand this," said he; "wait till I find the right man to help me, and the king shall give me all the treasures of his kingdom before he has done with me." Then, full of wrath, he went into the forest, and he saw one standing there by six trees which he had rooted up as if they had been stalks of corn. And he said to him, "Will you be my man, and come along with me?" - "All right," answered he; "I must just take this bit of wood home to my father and mother." And taking one of the trees, he bound it round the other five, and putting the faggot on his shoulder, he carried it off; then soon coming back, he went along with his leader, who said, "Two such as we can stand against the whole world."

And when they had gone on a little while, they came to a huntsman who was kneeling on one knee and taking careful aim with his rifle. "Huntsman," said the leader, "what are you aiming at?" - "Two miles from here," answered he, "there sits a fly on the bough of an oak-tree, I mean to put a bullet into its left eye." - "Oh, come along with me," said the leader; "three of us together can stand against the world." The huntsman was quite willing to go with him, and so they went on till they came to seven windmills, whose sails were going round briskly, and yet there was no wind blowing from any quarter, and not a leaf stirred. "Well," said the leader, "I cannot think what ails the windmills, turning without wind," and he went on with his followers about two miles farther, and then they came to a man sitting up in a tree, holding one nostril and blowing with the other. "Now then," said the leader, "what are you doing up there?" - "Two miles from here," answered he, "there are seven windmills; I am blowing, and they are going round." - "Oh, go with me," cried the leader, "four of us together can stand against the world."

So the blower got down and went with them, and after a time they came to a man standing on one leg, and the other had been taken off and was lying near him. "You seem to have got a handy way of resting yourself," said the leader to the man. "I am a runner," answered he, "and in order to keep myself from going too fast I

have taken off a leg, for when I run with both, I go faster than a bird can fly." - "Oh, go with me," cried the leader, "five of us together may well stand against the world."

So he went with them all together, and it was not long before they met a man with a little hat on, and he wore it just over one ear. "Manners! manners!" said the leader; "with your hat like that, you look like a jack-fool." - "I dare not put it straight," answered the other; "if I did, there would be such a terrible frost that the very birds would be frozen and fall dead from the sky to the ground." - "Oh, come with me," said the leader; "we six together may well stand against the whole world."

So the six went on until they came to a town where the king had caused it to be made known that whoever would run a race with his daughter and win it might become her husband, but that whoever lost must lose his head into the bargain. And the leader came forward and said one of his men should run for him. "Then," said the king, "his life too must be put in pledge, and if he fails, his head and yours too must fall." When this was quite settled and agreed upon, the leader called the runner, and strapped his second leg on to him. "Now, look out," said he, "and take care that we win." It had been agreed that the one who should bring water first from a far distant brook should be accounted winner. Now the king's daughter and the runner each took a pitcher, and they started both at the same time; but in one moment, when the king's daughter had gone but a very little way, the runner was out of sight, for his running was as if the wind rushed by. In a short time he reached the brook, filled his pitcher full of water, and turned back again. About half-way home, however, he was overcome with weariness, and setting down his pitcher, he lay down on the ground to sleep. But in order to awaken soon again by not lying too soft he had taken a horse's skull which lay near and placed it under his head for a pillow. In the meanwhile the king's daughter, who really was a good runner, good enough to beat an ordinary man, had reached the brook, and filled her pitcher, and was hastening with it back again, when she saw the runner lying asleep. "The day is mine," said she with much joy, and she emptied his pitcher and hastened on. And now all had

been lost but for the huntsman who was standing on the castle wall, and with his keen eyes saw all that happened. "We must not be outdone by the king's daughter," said he, and he loaded his rifle and took so good an aim that he shot the horse's skull from under the runner's head without doing him any harm. And the runner awoke and jumped up, and saw his pitcher standing empty and the king's daughter far on her way home. But, not losing courage, he ran swiftly to the brook, filled it again with water, and for all that, he got home ten minutes before the king's daughter. "Look you," said he; "this is the first time I have really stretched my legs; before it was not worth the name of running." The king was vexed, and his daughter yet more so, that she should be beaten by a discharged common soldier; and they took counsel together how they might rid themselves of him and of his companions at the same time. "I have a plan," said the king; "do not fear but that we shall be quit of them for ever." Then he went out to the men and bade them to feast and be merry and eat and drink; and he led them into a room, which had a floor of iron, and the doors were iron, the windows had iron frames and bolts; in the room was a table set out with costly food. "Now, go in there and make yourselves comfortable," said the king. And when they had gone in, he had the door locked and bolted. Then he called the cook, and told him to make a big fire underneath the room, so that the iron floor of it should be red hot. And the cook did so, and the six men began to feel the room growing very warm, by reason, as they thought at first, of the good dinner; but as the heat grew greater and greater, and they found the doors and windows fastened, they began to think it was an evil plan of the king's to suffocate them. "He shall not succeed, however," said the man with the little hat; "I will bring on a frost that shall make the fire feel ashamed of itself, and creep out of the way." So he set his hat straight on his head, and immediately there came such a frost that all the heat passed away and the food froze in the dishes. After an hour or two had passed, and the king thought they must have all perished in the heat, he caused the door to be opened, and went himself to see how they fared. And when the door flew back, there they were all six quite safe and sound, and they said they were quite ready to come out, so that they might warm themselves, for the great cold of that room had caused the food to freeze in the dishes. Full of wrath, the king went to the cook and scolded him, and asked why he

had not done as he was ordered. "It is hot enough there: you may see for yourself," answered the cook. And the king looked and saw an immense fire burning underneath the room of iron, and he began to think that the six men were not to be got rid of in that way. And he thought of a new plan by which it might be managed, so he sent for the leader and said to him, "If you will give up your right to my daughter, and take gold instead, you may have as much as you like." - "Certainly, my lord king," answered the man; "let me have as much gold as my servant can carry, and I give up all claim to your daughter." And the king agreed that he should come again in a fortnight to fetch the gold. The man then called together all the tailors in the kingdom, and set them to work to make a sack, and it took them a fortnight. And when it was ready, the strong man who had been found rooting up trees took it on his shoulder, and went to the king. "Who is this immense fellow carrying on his shoulder a bundle of stuff as big as a house?" cried the king, terrified to think how much gold he would carry off. And a ton of gold was dragged in by sixteen strong men, but he put it all into the sack with one hand, saying, "Why don't you bring some more? this hardly covers the bottom!" So the king bade them fetch by degrees the whole of his treasure, and even then the sack was not half full. "Bring more!" cried the man; "these few scraps go no way at all!" Then at last seven thousand waggons laden with gold collected through the whole kingdom were driven up; and he threw them in his sack, oxen and all. "I will not look too closely," said he, "but take what I can get, so long as the sack is full." And when all was put in there was still plenty of room. "I must make an end of this," he said; "if it is not full, it is so much the easier to tie up." And he hoisted it on his back, and went off with his comrades. When the king saw all the wealth of his realm carried off by a single man he was full of wrath, and he bade his cavalry mount, and follow after the six men, and take the sack away from the strong man. Two regiments were soon up to them, and called them to consider themselves prisoners, and to deliver up the sack, or be cut in pieces. "Prisoners, say you?" said the man who could blow, "suppose you first have a little dance together in the air," and holding one nostril, and blowing through the other, he sent the regiments flying head over heels, over the hills and far away. But a sergeant who had nine wounds and was a brave fellow, begged not to be put to so much shame. And the blower let him down

easily, so that he came to no harm, and he bade him go to the king and tell him that whatever regiments he liked to send more should be blown away just the same. And the king, when he got the message, said, "Let the fellows be; they have some right on their side."

So the six comrades carried home their treasure, divided it among them, and lived contented till they died.

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