

The king of the golden mountain

There was a certain merchant who had two children, a boy and a girl; they were both young, and could not walk. And two richly-laden ships of his sailed forth to sea with all his property on board, and just as he was expecting to win much money by them, news came that they had gone to the bottom, and now instead of being a rich man he was a poor one, and had nothing left but one field outside the town. In order to drive his misfortune a little out of his thoughts, he went out to this field, and as he was walking forwards and backwards in it, a little black mannikin stood suddenly by his side, and asked why he was so sad, and what he was taking so much to heart. Then said the merchant, "If thou couldst help me I would willingly tell thee." - "Who knows?" replied the black dwarf. "Perhaps, I can help thee." Then the merchant told him that all he possessed had gone to the bottom of the sea, and that he had nothing left but this field. "Do not trouble thyself," said the dwarf. "If thou wilt promise to give me the first thing that rubs itself against thy leg when thou art at home again, and to bring it here to this place in twelve years' time, thou shalt have as much money as thou wilt." The merchant thought, "What can that be but my dog?" and did not remember his little boy, so he said yes, gave the black man a written and sealed promise, and went home.

When he reached home, his little boy was so delighted that he held by a bench, tottered up to him and seized him fast by the legs. The father was shocked, for he remembered his promise, and now knew what he had pledged himself to do; as however, he still found no money in his chest, he thought the dwarf had only been jesting. A month afterwards he went up to the garret, intending to gather together some old tin and to sell it, and saw a great heap of money lying. Then he was happy again, made purchases, became a greater merchant than before, and felt that this world was well-governed. In the meantime the boy grew tall, and at the same time sharp and clever. But the nearer the twelfth year approached the more anxious grew the merchant, so that his distress might be seen in his face. One day his son asked what ailed him, but the father would not say. The boy, however, persisted so long, that at last he told him that without being aware of what he was doing, he had promised him to a black

dwarf, and had received much money for doing so. He said likewise that he had set his hand and seal to this, and that now when twelve years had gone by he would have to give him up. Then said the son, "Oh, father, do not be uneasy, all will go well. The black man has no power over me." The son had himself blessed by the priest, and when the time came, father and son went together to the field, and the son made a circle and placed himself inside it with his father. Then came the black dwarf and said to the old man, "Hast thou brought with thee that which thou hast promised me?" He was silent, but the son asked, "What dost thou want here?" Then said the black dwarf, "I have to speak with thy father, and not with thee." The son replied, "Thou hast betrayed and misled my father, give back the writing." - "No," said the black dwarf, "I will not give up my rights." They spoke together for a long time after this, but at last they agreed that the son, as he did not belong to the enemy of mankind, nor yet to his father, should seat himself in a small boat, which should lie on water which was flowing away from them, and that the father should push it off with his own foot, and then the son should remain given up to the water. So he took leave of his father, placed himself in a little boat, and the father had to push it off with his own foot. The boat capsized so that the keel was uppermost, and the father believed his son was lost, and went home and mourned for him.

The boat, however, did not sink, but floated quietly away, and the boy sat safely inside it, and it floated thus for a long time, until at last it stopped by an unknown shore. Then he landed and saw a beautiful castle before him, and set out to go to it. But when he entered it, he found that it was bewitched. He went through every room, but all were empty until he reached the last, where a snake lay coiled in a ring. The snake, however, was an enchanted maiden, who rejoiced to see him, and said, "Hast thou come, oh, my deliverer? I have already waited twelve years for thee; this kingdom is bewitched, and thou must set it free." - "How can I do that?" he inquired. "To-night come twelve black men, covered with chains who will ask what thou art doing here; keep silent; give them no answer, and let them do what they will with thee; they will torment thee, beat thee, stab thee; let everything

pass, only do not speak; at twelve o'clock, they must go away again. On the second night twelve others will come; on the third, four-and-twenty, who will cut off thy head, but at twelve o'clock their power will be over, and then if thou hast endured all, and hast not spoken the slightest word, I shall be released. I will come to thee, and will have, in a bottle, some of the water of life. I will rub thee with that, and then thou wilt come to life again, and be as healthy as before." Then said he, "I will gladly set thee free." And everything happened just as she had said; the black men could not force a single word from him, and on the third night the snake became a beautiful princess, who came with the water of life and brought him back to life again. So she threw herself into his arms and kissed him, and there was joy and gladness in the whole castle. After this their marriage was celebrated, and he was King of the Golden Mountain.

They lived very happily together, and the Queen bore a fine boy. Eight years had already gone by, when the King bethought him of his father; his heart was moved, and he wished to visit him. The Queen, however, would not let him go away, and said, "I know beforehand that it will cause my unhappiness;" but he suffered her to have no rest until she consented. At their parting she gave him a wishing-ring, and said, "Take this ring and put it on thy finger, and then thou wilt immediately be transported whithersoever thou wouldst be, only thou must promise me not to use it in wishing me away from this place and with thy father." That he promised her, put the ring on his finger, and wished himself at home, just outside the town where his father lived. Instantly he found himself there, and made for the town, but when he came to the gate, the sentries would not let him in, because he wore such strange and yet such rich and magnificent clothing. Then he went to a hill where a shepherd was watching his sheep, changed clothes with him, put on his old shepherd's-coat, and then entered the town without hindrance. When he came to his father, he made himself known to him, but he did not at all believe that the shepherd was his son, and said he certainly had had a son, but that he was dead long ago; however, as he saw he was a poor, needy shepherd, he would give him something to eat. Then the shepherd said to his parents, "I am verily your son. Do you know of no mark on my body by which you could recognize me?" - "Yes," said his mother, "our son had a raspberry mark under his right arm." He slipped back his shirt,

and they saw the raspberry under his right arm, and no longer doubted that he was their son. Then he told them that he was King of the Golden Mountain, and a king's daughter was his wife, and that they had a fine son of seven years old. Then said the father, "That is certainly not true; it is a fine kind of a king who goes about in a ragged shepherd's-coat." On this the son fell in a passion, and without thinking of his promise, turned his ring round, and wished both his wife and child with him. They were there in a second, but the Queen wept, and reproached him, and said that he had broken his word, and had brought misfortune upon her. He said, "I have done it thoughtlessly, and not with evil intention," and tried to calm her, and she pretended to believe this; but she had mischief in her mind.

Then he led her out of the town into the field, and showed her the stream where the little boat had been pushed off, and then he said, "I am tired; sit down, I will sleep awhile on thy lap." And he laid his head on her lap, and fell asleep. When he was asleep, she first drew the ring from his finger, then she drew away the foot which was under him, leaving only the slipper behind her, and she took her child in her arms, and wished herself back in her own kingdom. When he awoke, there he lay quite deserted, and his wife and child were gone, and so was the ring from his finger, the slipper only was still there as a token. "Home to thy parents thou canst not return," thought he, "they would say that thou wast a wizard; thou must be off, and walk on until thou arrivest in thine own kingdom." So he went away and came at length to a hill by which three giants were standing, disputing with each other because they did not know how to divide their father's property. When they saw him passing by, they called to him and said little men had quick wits, and that he was to divide their inheritance for them. The inheritance, however, consisted of a sword, which had this property that if any one took it in his hand, and said, "All heads off but mine," every head would lie on the ground; secondly, of a cloak which made any one who put it on invisible; thirdly, of a pair of boots which could transport the wearer to any place he wished in a moment. He said, "Give me the three things that I may see if they are still in good condition." They gave him the cloak, and when he had put it on, he was invisible and changed into a fly. Then he resumed his own form and said, "The cloak is a good one, now give me the sword." They said, "No, we will not give thee that; if

thou were to say, All heads off but mine,' all our heads would be off, and thou alone wouldst be left with thine." Nevertheless they gave it to him with the condition that he was only to try it against a tree. This he did, and the sword cut in two the trunk of a tree as if it had been a blade of straw. Then he wanted to have the boots likewise, but they said, "No, we will not give them; if thou hadst them on thy feet and wert to wish thyself at the top of the hill, we should be left down here with nothing." - "Oh, no," said he, "I will not do that." So they gave him the boots as well. And now when he had got all these things, he thought of nothing but his wife and his child, and said as though to himself, "Oh, if I were but on the Golden Mountain," and at the same moment he vanished from the sight of the giants, and thus their inheritance was divided. When he was near his palace, he heard sounds of joy, and fiddles, and flutes, and the people told him that his wife was celebrating her wedding with another. Then he fell into a rage, and said, "False woman, she betrayed and deserted me whilst I was asleep!" So he put on his cloak, and unseen by all went into the palace. When he entered the dining-hall a great table was spread with delicious food, and the guests were eating and drinking, and laughing, and jesting. She sat on a royal seat in the midst of them in splendid apparel, with a crown on her head. He placed himself behind her, and no one saw him. When she put a piece of meat on a plate for herself, he took it away and ate it, and when she poured out a glass of wine for herself, he took it away and drank it. She was always helping herself to something, and yet she never got anything, for plate and glass disappeared immediately. Then dismayed and ashamed, she arose and went to her chamber and wept, but he followed her there. She said, "Has the devil power over me, or did my deliverer never come?" Then he struck her in the face, and said, "Did thy deliverer never come? It is he who has thee in his power, thou traitor. Have I deserved this from thee?" Then he made himself visible, went into the hall, and cried, "The wedding is at an end, the true King has returned." The kings, princes, and councillors who were assembled there, ridiculed and mocked him, but he did not trouble to answer them, and said, "Will you go away, or not?" On this they tried to seize him and pressed upon him, but he drew his sword and said, "All heads off but mine," and all the heads rolled on the ground, and he alone was master, and once more King of the Golden Mountain.

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