

The old man made young again

In the time when our Lord still walked this earth, he and St. Peter stopped one evening at a smith's and received free quarters. Then it came to pass that a poor beggar, hardly pressed by age and infirmity, came to this house and begged alms of the smith. St. Peter had compassion on him and said, "Lord and master, if it please thee, cure his torments that he may be able to win his own bread." The Lord said kindly, "Smith, lend me thy forge, and put on some coals for me, and then I will make this ailing old man young again." The smith was quite willing, and St. Peter blew the bellows, and when the coal fire sparkled up large and high our Lord took the little old man, pushed him in the forge in the midst of the red-hot fire, so that he glowed like a rose-bush, and praised God with a loud voice. After that the Lord went to the quenching tub, put the glowing little man into it so that the water closed over him, and after he had carefully cooled him, gave him his blessing, when behold the little man sprang nimbly out, looking fresh, straight, healthy, and as if he were but twenty. The smith, who had watched everything closely and attentively, invited them all to supper. He, however, had an old half-blind crooked, mother-in-law who went to the youth, and with great earnestness asked if the fire had burnt him much. He answered that he had never felt more comfortable, and that he had sat in the red heat as if he had been in cool dew. The youth's words echoed in the ears of the old woman all night long, and early next morning, when the Lord had gone on his way again and had heartily thanked the smith, the latter thought he might make his old mother-in-law young again likewise, as he had watched everything so carefully, and it lay in the province of his trade. So he called to ask her if she, too, would like to go bounding about like a girl of eighteen. She said, "With all my heart, as the youth has come out of it so well." So the smith made a great fire, and thrust the old woman into it, and she writhed about this way and that, and uttered terrible cries of murder. "Sit still; why art thou screaming and jumping about so?" cried he, and as he spoke he blew the bellows again until all her rags were burnt. The old woman cried without ceasing, and the smith thought to himself, "I have not quite the right art," and took her out and threw her into the cooling-tub. Then she

screamed so loudly that the smith's wife upstairs and her daughter-in-law heard, and they both ran downstairs, and saw the old woman lying in a heap in the quenching-tub, howling and screaming, with her face wrinkled and shrivelled and all out of shape. Thereupon the two, who were both with child, were so terrified that that very night two boys were born who were not made like men but apes, and they ran into the woods, and from them sprang the race of apes.

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