The sea-hare

There was once upon a time a princess, who, high under the battlements in her castle, had an apartment with twelve windows, which looked out in every possible direction, and when she climbed up to it and looked around her, she could inspect her whole kingdom. When she looked out of the first, her sight was more keen than that of any other human being; from the second she could see still better, from the third more distinctly still, and so it went on, until the twelfth, from which she saw everything above the earth and under the earth, and nothing at all could be kept secret from her. Moreover, as she was haughty, and would be subject to no one, but wished to keep the dominion for herself alone, she caused it to be proclaimed that no one should ever be her husband who could not conceal himself from her so effectually, that it should be quite impossible for her to find him. He who tried this, however, and was discovered by her, was to have his head struck off, and stuck on a post. Ninety-seven posts with the heads of dead men were already standing before the castle, and no one had come forward for a long time. The princess was delighted, and thought to herself, "Now I shall be free as long as I live." Then three brothers appeared before her, and announced to her that they were desirous of trying their luck. The eldest believed he would be quite safe if he crept into a lime-pit, but she saw him from the first window, made him come out, and had his head cut off. The second crept into the cellar of the palace, but she perceived him also from the first window, and his fate was sealed. His head was placed on the nine and ninetieth post. Then the youngest came to her and entreated her to give him a day for consideration, and also to be so gracious as to overlook it if she should happen to discover him twice, but if he failed the third time, he would look on his life as over. As he was so handsome, and begged so earnestly, she said, "Yes, I will grant thee that, but thou wilt not succeed."

Next day he meditated for a long time how he should hide himself, but all in vain. Then he seized his gun and went out hunting. He saw a raven, took a good aim at him, and was just going to fire, when the bird cried, "Don't shoot; I will make it worth thy while not." He put his gun down, went on, and came to a lake where he surprised a large fish which had come up from the depths below to the surface of the water. When he had aimed at it, the fish cried, "Don't shoot, and I will make it worth thy while." He allowed it to dive down again, went onwards, and met a fox which was lame. He fired and missed it, and the fox cried, "You had much better come here and draw the thorn out of my foot for me." He did this; but then he wanted to kill the fox and skin it, the fox said, "Stop, and I will make it worth thy while." The youth let him go, and then as it was evening, returned home.

Next day he was to hide himself; but howsoever much he puzzled his brains over it, he did not know where. He went into the forest to the raven and said, "I let thee live on, so now tell me where I am to hide myself, so that the King's daughter shall not see me." The raven hung his head and thought it over for a longtime. At length he croaked, "I have it." He fetched an egg out of his nest, cut it into two parts, and shut the youth inside it; then made it whole again, and seated himself on it. When the King's daughter went to the first window she could not discover him, nor could she from the others, and she began to be uneasy, but from the eleventh she saw him. She ordered the raven to be shot, and the egg to be brought and broken, and the youth was forced to come out. She said, "For once thou art excused, but if thou dost not do better than this, thou art lost!"

Next day he went to the lake, called the fish to him and said, "I suffered thee to live, now tell me where to hide myself so that the King's daughter may not see me." The fish thought for a while, and at last cried, "I have it! I will shut thee up in my stomach." He swallowed him, and went down to the bottom of the lake. The King's daughter looked through her windows, and even from the eleventh did not see him, and was alarmed; but at length from the twelfth she saw him. She ordered the fish to be caught and killed, and then the youth appeared. Every one can imagine what a state of mind he was in. She said, "Twice thou art forgiven, but be sure that thy head will be set on the hundredth post."

On the last day, he went with a heavy heart into the country, and met the fox. "Thou knowest how to find all kinds of hiding-places," said he; "I let thee live, now advise me where I shall hide myself so that the

King's daughter shall not discover me." - "That's a hard task," answered the fox, looking very thoughtful. At length he cried, "I have it!" and went with him to a spring, dipped himself in it, and came out as a stall-keeper in the market, and dealer in animals. The youth had to dip himself in the water also, and was changed into a small sea-hare. The merchant went into the town, and showed the pretty little animal, and many persons gathered together to see it. At length the King's daughter came likewise, and as she liked it very much, she bought it, and gave the merchant a good deal of money for it. Before he gave it over to her, he said to it, "When the King's daughter goes to the window, creep quickly under the braids of he hair." And now the time arrived when she was to search for him. She went to one window after another in turn, from the first to the eleventh, and did not see him. When she did not see him from the twelfth either, she was full of anxiety and anger, and shut it down with such violence that the glass in every window shivered into a thousand pieces, and the whole castle shook.

She went back and felt the sea-hare beneath the braids of her hair. Then she seized it, and threw it on the ground exclaiming, "Away with thee, get out of my sight!" It ran to the merchant, and both of them hurried to the spring, wherein they plunged, and received back their true forms. The youth thanked the fox, and said, "The raven and the fish are idiots compared with thee; thou knowest the right tune to play, there is no denying that!"

The youth went straight to the palace. The princess was already expecting him, and accommodated herself to her destiny. The wedding was solemnized, and now he was king, and lord of all the kingdom. He never told her where he had concealed himself for the third time, and who had helped him, so she believed that he had done everything by his own skill, and she had a great respect for him, for she thought to herself, "He is able to do more than I."

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