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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Three Princes and Their Animals

Once upon a time, there were three princes who lived together with their step-sister. One day, the brothers went on a hunt together. They walked through a dense forest where they saw a large grey wolf with three cubs. Just as they were about to shoot, the wolf spoke: "Don't shoot me, and I will give each of you one of my cubs. It will be a loyal friend to you."

So the princes continued on their way, each with a small wolf following them.

Shortly after, they saw a lioness with three cubs. She also begged the princes not to kill her, and in exchange, gave each prince a cub. The same thing happened with a fox, a hare, a wild boar, and a bear, until each prince was followed by a fair number of young animals.

Towards evening, they came to an open space in the forest where three birch trees grew at the intersection of three paths. The eldest prince took an arrow and shot it into the trunk of one of the birch trees.

Turning to his brothers, he said, "Let's all mark one of these trees before we go our separate ways. When one of us returns to this place, he must walk around the trees of the other two, and if he sees blood flowing from the mark in the tree, he will know that that brother is dead."

The princes did as the eldest brother had asked and marked the trees with their arrows. Then they went their separate ways after asking their step-sister which brother she wanted to go with.

"With the eldest," she replied, and she went with him.

The prince and his step-sister reached a castle that had been conquered by a band of robbers. The prince walked up to the door and knocked. As soon as it was opened, the young animals rushed in and killed the robbers. The men were taken to a cave,

but one of them was not dead, he just pretended to be.

The prince and his step-sister moved into the castle.

The next morning, the prince went on a hunt. Before he left, he told his step-sister that she could go into every room in the house except the cave where the dead robbers lay. But she did it anyway, and when she opened the door of the cave, the thief, who had only pretended to be dead, sat up and said to her: "Don't be afraid. Do what I tell you, and I will be your friend. If you marry me, you will be much happier with me than with your brother. When your brother comes back from the forest with his animals, you must go to him and say, 'Brother, you are very strong. If I were to tie your thumbs behind your back with a strong silk cord, could you pull yourself free? And if you see that he can't, call me.'"

When the brother came home, the step-sister did what the robber had instructed her to do and tied her brother's thumbs behind his back. But he freed himself with one jerk and said to her: "Sister, that cord is not strong enough for me."

The next day, he went back to the forest with his animals, and the thief told her to take an even stronger cord to tie his thumbs. But again he freed himself, although it was not as easy as the first time.

The third day, upon his return from the forest, he agreed to have his strength tested for the last time. So, she took a very strong cord, which she had made on the advice of the robber. This time, although the prince pulled and tugged with all his might, he could not break the cord. So, he called out to her and said, "Sister, this time the cord is so strong that I cannot break it. Come and release me."

But instead of coming, she called the robber, who rushed into the room waving a knife, intending to attack the prince.

But the prince said, "Before I die, I would like to blow my hunting horn three times: once in this room, once on the stairs, and once in the courtyard."

The robber agreed, and the prince blew the horn. The sound alerted the young animals, and they rushed to the prince's aid. They seized the robber, who could not escape, and this time he was truly dead.

Then the prince turned to his stepsister and said, "I will not kill you, but I will leave you here alone." He chained her up, placed a large bowl in front of her, and said, "I will not see you again until you have filled this bowl with tears of remorse."

After that, the prince left the castle with his animals and went on his way.

On his journey, he stopped at an inn to eat. As he sat in the inn, he saw that everyone was very sad. He asked what was wrong. The innkeeper said, "Today our princess will die. She is being sacrificed to a terrible, nine-headed dragon."

Then the prince said, "Why should she die? I am very strong. I will save her."

He went to the spot on the coast where the dragon would meet the princess. The prince soon saw

movement in the distance in the water, and there came the nine-headed dragon swimming. The young fox whipped his tail in the water, causing the salt water to get in the dragon's eyes. The other animals did the same with all of the dragon's eyes, so he couldn't see anything for a moment. Then the prince rushed forward with his sword and killed the dragon.

The princess thanked the prince and asked him to come with her to her father's palace. Her father, the king, gave him half of his kingdom as a reward and also allowed him to marry the princess.

One day, shortly after his wedding, the prince was walking

through the forest at

night,

followed by

his faithful animals. It

became dark,

and he lost

the path that led to the palace. In the distance, he



saw the light of a fire. He walked towards it and found an old woman who was raking sticks and dried leaves together and burning them on a clearing in the woods.

Because he was very tired and the night was very dark, the prince decided not to wander any further. He asked the old woman if he could spend the night by her fire.

"Of course, you may," she replied. "But I am afraid of your beasts. May I touch them with my stick? Then I will no longer be afraid of them."

"Yes, that's fine," said the prince. And she stretched out her staff and touched the animals with it, and in an instant, they and the prince turned into stone.

Shortly thereafter, the youngest brother of the prince arrived at the crossroads with the three birch trees. When he saw blood trickling from the cut in the tree of the eldest prince, he knew his brother must be dead. So he set off, followed by his animals, and arrived at the city where his brother

had ruled, and where the princess he had married lived. The people were all in great sorrow because their prince had disappeared. Until they saw the youngest brother! They thought it was their own prince and they were overjoyed and told him how they had searched everywhere for him. Even the king thought it was his son-in-law. But the princess knew it wasn't her husband and begged him to go into the forest with his animals and search for his brother until he found him.

So the youngest prince went in search of his brother, and he too became lost in the forest. It became night and he also came to the clearing between the trees where the fire burned and where the old woman was raking sticks and leaves into the flames. He also asked her if he could spend the night by the fire, because it was too late and too dark to return to the city.

And she replied: "You certainly may. But I am afraid of your animals. May I touch them with my stick? Then I will no longer be afraid of them."

He said it was okay, because he didn't know she was a witch. So she stretched out her staff and in an

instant, the animals and their master were turned to stone.

Shortly thereafter, the second brother returned from his wanderings and arrived at the crossroads where the three birch trees grew. When he walked around the trees, he saw that blood was flowing from the cuts in the bark of two of the trees.

Then he too set off for the city where his brother had ruled, and his faithful animals followed him. Once again, the people thought it was their own prince and brought him to the king's palace. The princess saw that he was not her husband and she also asked this brother to search for her husband and bring him home.

He gathered his animals and went into the forest. There he lay his ear to the ground to listen for the sound of his brother's animals. He thought he heard something, but it was so faint that he couldn't tell which direction it came from. So he blew on his hunting horn and listened again. The sound seemed to come from the direction of a fire in the forest. He went there and saw an old woman raking sticks and leaves into the fire.

He asked her if he could spend the night by her fire. But she told him that she was afraid of his animals and he had to let her touch them with her stick first.

He replied: "Absolutely not, no one touches my animals except myself." He took her stick and touched the fox with it, and in an instant, the animal turned to stone. Then he knew she was a witch, and he said: "If you do not immediately bring my brothers and their animals back to life, I will turn you into stone with your own stick, or I will let my animals loose on you."

The witch was frightened and took a branch from a young oak, burned it to white ash, and scattered the ash on the stones around her. Immediately after, the two brothers and their animals stood around her.

Then the three princes set off together to the city. And the king didn't know who his son-in-law was, but the princess knew exactly who her husband was. There was great joy throughout the land and everyone lived happily ever after.