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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Bronze Ring

Once upon a time, there was a king who lived in a palace surrounded by a large garden. Nothing would grow in the garden and it looked quite neglected. An old wise man advised the king to hire a gardener. It should be someone from a family that had been known for generations for their work. After forty days, a suitable young man was found, and it soon became apparent that he definitely knew what he was doing. Within a year, flowers and fruit could be harvested from the garden. The king was very pleased, and the gardener

was rewarded with beautiful gifts.



The gardener had a son, a very handsome young man with the most pleasant manners. Every day he brought the best fruits from the

garden to the king and the most beautiful flowers to his daughter. The princess was beautiful and when she turned sixteen, the king decided it was time for her to marry. The king thought that the son of the prime minister would be the perfect husband for her.

"Father," said the princess, "I will never marry the son of the minister." "Why not?" asked the king. "Because I love the son of the gardener," answered the princess. When the king heard this, he was very angry at first. He thought that the son of the gardener was not worthy of his daughter.

The king therefore asked for advice from the wise men of the council. "This is what you should do," they said. "To get rid of the gardener, you must send both young men to a very distant land. The one who returns first will marry your daughter."

The king followed this advice and the son of the minister was offered a beautiful horse and a bag full of gold coins. The son of the gardener did not get such luxury. He was given an old horse and a bag full of copper coins. Everyone thought he would never return from his journey. On the day of departure, the princess sought out her beloved son of the gardener and gave him a bag full of jewels. "Make good use of it," she said. "Come back soon and claim our marriage."

The two young men left the city together, but the son of the minister galloped on his good horse and was soon lost behind the farthest hills. One day, he reached a fountain where a woman in rags was sitting on a stone. The old woman greeted him, but the son of the minister did not answer. "Have pity on me," said the woman. "I am dying of hunger. I've been here for three days, and no one has given me anything."

"Leave me alone, old witch," the young man cried. "I can do nothing for you," and then he quickly galloped away on his horse. That same evening, the son of the

gardener found the old woman at the fountain. She greeted the young man and asked him for some food. "Take my copper coins, good woman," he said, "and climb aboard, and I will take you to the city."

And so the son and the old woman rode to the capital of a mighty kingdom. There, the son of the gardener heard a group of soldiers in the streets shouting, "Our king is old and sick! He will give a great reward to anyone who can heal him and restore the strength of his youth."

Then the old beggar woman spoke to the young man: "I know how you will receive your reward. Go to the southern gate. You will find three dogs there. One is white, one is black, and one is red. You must kill them and then burn them, collecting the ashes of each dog separately. Take them to the palace and announce that a famous doctor from Albania has come to cure the king and restore the strength of his youth. The king's doctors will initially see you as a fraud, but you will overcome them and eventually reach the king. The king will feel reborn and feel twenty years younger. For your reward, you must demand the bronze ring that has the power to give you everything you desire."

The son of the gardener followed the old woman's instructions, and everything happened exactly as she had said. "How can I reward you?" the king asked. The son of the gardener asked for the bronze ring, and the king gave it to him.

The young man said goodbye to the old woman and took the bronze ring. He asked the king for a ship of gold with masts of silver and sails of brocade. The crew

of the ship had to consist of twelve young men with a noble appearance. The ship had to be loaded with diamonds, rubies, and emeralds.

Immediately, a ship appeared at sea that looked exactly like the description the son of the gardener had given. He boarded and continued his journey. Shortly thereafter, he arrived in a great city where he settled in a beautiful palace.

After a few days, he met the son of the minister, who had spent all his money and earned money as a carrier of fabric and waste. The son of the gardener recognized him and asked him who he was. The son of the minister did not recognize the son of the gardener and said, "I am the son of a minister of a great kingdom, but I have lowered myself to a poor man who has to carry clothes and waste to earn some money."

The son of the gardener said, "Listen, even though I know nothing more about you, I am willing to help you. I will give you a ship to take you back to your own country on one condition." The son of the minister accepted his help and voluntarily had the bronze ring burned onto his back. The son of the gardener promised to prepare a ship for him with which he could sail back to his own country.

When he went outside, he took the bronze ring and said, "Bronze ring, obey your master and prepare a ship whose half-rotted wood will be painted black. Make the sails of rags and let the crew consist of old, sick men." The son of the minister climbed aboard the old ship and set sail for his own country. Despite the deplorable condition in which he returned, they received him in the

kingdom with joy. "I am the first to return," he said to the king. "Now fulfill your promise and give me the princess in marriage."

So they immediately began to prepare for the wedding festivities. As for the poor princess, she was sad and angry enough about it. The next morning, at dawn, a magnificent ship with all its sails anchored in front of the city. The king happened to be standing at the window of the palace at that time.



"What is this strange ship," he exclaimed,

"with a golden hull, silver masts, and silk sails, and who are the young men like princes who are manning it? Go immediately and invite the captain of the ship to come to the palace." His servants obeyed him, and soon a bewitchingly handsome young prince entered, dressed in rich silk, adorned with pearls and diamonds.

"Young man," said the king, "you are welcome, whoever you may be. Do me the favor of being my guest while you stay in my capital." The son of the gardener, who was not recognized by the king, accepted the offer. The king told him that he had arrived just in time to attend his daughter's wedding. When he showed who the future groom would be, the stranger said, "Your Majesty, I cannot allow this marriage. The man you see as your future son-in-law is one of my servants. I hired

him when I was in a large city. He was walking around in rags, earning his living as a carrier of fabrics and waste. I felt sorry for the man and took him in as a servant."

"That's impossible!" exclaimed the king. "He's the son of my minister." "Do you want me to prove what I say? This young man returned on a ship that I equipped for him, a non-seaworthy ship with a black, battered hull and an old and sick crew."

"That's entirely true," said the king. "It's a lie," cried the minister's son. "I don't know this man!" "Your Majesty," said the young captain, "order your daughter's fiancé to be undressed, and see if the mark of my ring is not branded on his back."

The king was about to give this order when the minister's son, to save himself from such humiliation, admitted that the story was true. "And now, sir," said the young captain, "don't you recognize me?" "I recognize you," said the princess. "You are the son of the gardener whom I have always loved, and I want to marry you."

"Young man, you will be my son-in-law," exclaimed the king. "The wedding festivities have already begun, so you will marry my daughter today."

And on that same day, the son of the gardener married the beautiful princess.