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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Prince Hassan and the Ogre

Easter Monday, about seventeen thousand years ago, fell on Tuesday, the 1st of April; and, on that very day, the gallant young Prince Hassan, heir-apparent of All the Cashmeres, went out with hound and horn to hunt the deer. A fine buck was soon found; but as it went away twice as fast as the dogs could run after it, and the dogs ran twice as fast as the prince could gallop, and the prince galloped twice as fast as anybody else, you will not be surprised to hear that, after three hours' hard riding, his royal highness found himself quite alone; and moreover, on looking round him, he perceived that he was in a place where he had never been before,—a dismal valley closed in with rocks, and without a trace of a road to lead him home. To complete his misfortunes, his horse—from which he had dismounted for a moment—ran away on its own account; and, after serious reflection, he was obliged to conclude that he had lost his way, and didn't know what to do. Presently, however, he espied in the hill-side the mouth of a large cavern; and as he was exhausted with heat and thirst, he determined to enter it, in hopes of finding shelter and water. To his delight there was a cool spring rising just inside; but no sooner had he knelt down and taken a draught, than he heard a dreadful roar from the bottom of the cavern; and, looking up, he beheld a frightful ogre, who came up to him in two strides, and

caught him by the waist between his finger and thumb. This monster's head was as big as a haystack; his mouth was like a great oven, with rows of grinders like immense quartern loaves; his eyes were like the red lamps that you see on railways; and as for his nose, it was such an object that there really is nothing in the world ugly enough for me to compare it to. Few ogres are handsome; but this one was so horrid and nasty, even for an ogre, that none of the other ogres would live with him, and no ogress would marry him; so he was forced to sulk by himself in this solitary bachelor cavern. His name was Uglymuggimo; but the prince didn't know that.

"I'll teach you to come into my house and drink my water, without my leave," said the ogre in a dreadful voice; "all's fish that comes to my net; and I shall swallow you as you would an oyster,—if you had any in Cashmere."

So saying, he went to his cupboard and took out the pepper-castor and vinegar-cruet, each of which was the size of a sentry-box.

"I am sure I am very sorry to have offended you, sir," said the prince (though the ogre held him so tight that he could hardly speak), "I meant no harm; and as for swallowing me, I really think you had better not. I don't say this on my own account; but I am certain I'm not fit to eat; you will find me very nasty, you will, indeed."

"Ho, ho," said the ogre, "so much the better! The nastier things are, the more I like them! There's nothing that I can't swallow! Why, if you could bring me anything I couldn't swallow, I'd give you leave to cut off my head."

"Begging your honour's pardon," said the prince, "I think I have seen a great many things that a nice, clean, good-looking gentleman like you would never be able to swallow; and if you would just let me go home and look about me a bit, I feel sure I could bring you something of the sort,—and then I hope your honour would not forget what you said just now."

"Very well," said the ogre, after reflecting a little, "I don't mind letting you have a trial—indeed as I don't happen to want you just now, it will suit me very well. I will give you leave to try four times; but mind, you must give me your word of honour to come back here every day at noon; and unless you bring me something that I can't swallow, I shall swallow you yourself on the fourth day;—that's all."

Now, you must understand that the ogre did not say this out of any mercy for the prince; but the fact is, he liked best the things that it would make everybody else sick even to look at; and he thought this would be a good opportunity for getting a choice supply of all the dainties that he was so fond of, without any trouble; for he wanted some variety, and was tired of picking up dead dogs, and robbing the pigstyes.

The prince gave his word to come back very gladly, for he thought he should have no difficulty in bringing the ogre something that even he would find too horrible to swallow; and so the giant let him go, and showed him a backway out of the cavern, which, to his great surprise, opened on the cliffs just above his father's palace, to which he returned before he had been missed.

You may think that the ogre was rather simple for supposing that the prince would come back again to be eaten up after he had once got away; but he knew that no prince ever broke his word, you know, seventeen thousand years ago.

No sooner had he got home than Prince Hassan set about making a pudding, which he hoped the ogre would find too much for his stomach. He took fifty adders, fifty rats, a dozen old shoes, a hundred python's eggs (addled), and two scuttlefuls of rubbish out of the dusthole; over these he poured six bottles of blacking, tied it all up in a beggar's old shirt, and for water to boil it in, desired the Grand Mistress of the Slop-pails to bring him the dirty soap-suds from all the basins in the palace. With this precious mess he knocked at the ogre's back-door exactly at twelve o'clock the next day. "Well, my young gentleman, let us see what you have got here," said the monster, taking up the pudding; "it smells rather nice." And, to the dismay of the poor prince, instead of flinging it away in disgust, he popped it into his mouth and munched it up like a penny tart. "Ho, ho," he said, "not bad—not bad! Do you call that nasty? You must bring me something very different, if you expect me not to swallow it. Ho! come again tomorrow."

And then he took out an old pitchfork which he used as a toothpick, and went back to his den.

The next day the prince thought he would be very cunning, and bring the giant a meal that he did not expect. Since he seems so fond of nasty things, he said

to himself, I will try if I can't puzzle him by a dish of something very nice.

So he went round to all the pastrycooks in the town, and bought up all the twelfthcakes, the gingerbread, apricot-jam, and barley-sugar in their shops; and again, at twelve o'clock exactly, he knocked at Uglymuggimo's door.

When the ogre saw what was brought him, he fell into a furious passion.



"How dare you bring me such disgusting rubbish?" he roared out. "Is this proper food to set before a gentleman ogre? Take it away this instant; but—no! Stop!

You won't escape me that way. I will eat it; but if you dare to play me such a trick again, I will skin you alive and stick you in my mustard pot. I will make you envy the very frogs and flies that you used to catch when you were at school! I will!" Then, holding his nose and shutting his eyes, he thrust all the dainties between his enormous jaws, and swallowed them down with a great gulp. "Ho, ho," he said, you see that won't do either, my young friend. Come again to-morrow; and, remember, no more nonsense!"

This was a sad disappointment to Prince Hassan; and his only consolation was, that the expression of the giant's face raised some hopes that he was suffering from stomach-ache.

But, as he was returning home, he happened to pass the chemist's shop to which, in the days of his boyhood, his mamma used to send for black doses; for she made a rule of administering one to him the first Monday in every month, according to the ancient customs of the Court of Cashmere. The sight gave him new hopes. "I am saved!" he joyfully exclaimed; and immediately sent a herald round the town with a proclamation that all the rhubarb, all the jalap, all the castor oil, and all the senna-tea that could be found should be mixed together in a tub and brought to the palace. His orders were obeyed; and, on that happy night, no physic was taken in the whole city.

The next day at twelve o'clock exactly, the prince again went to the ogre's back door, taking his tub with him; but this time he was full of confidence.

"I have beat him this time, for certain," he said to himself; "if he were ten times an ogre he would never be able to swallow such a draught."

But, bless you! no sooner had the monster seen the horrid mixture than he tossed it off like a glass of lemonade, smacking his lips after it.

When the prince saw this, he began to despair; for he felt that his last chance was gone.

"Ho, ho," said the giant, with a dreadful grin, "don't be cast down. You have one more chance, you know; try again. Why don't you bring me such a thing as a tough old woman, now? Perhaps I shouldn't be able to swallow that: ho, ho!" And then he laughed in such a violent and vulgar way that he shook down six large trees.

"No, no," said the prince; "I see it would be no use; you had better take me at once and have done with it; I give up; you can swallow anything if you could swallow what I brought you just now. Besides, where should I find an old woman who would consent to take my place?"

"As for that," said the ogre, with an odious wink, "I should have thought a stout young man like you could have managed to persuade an old woman to come this way without much trouble. And as for my being able to swallow her, I don't know—I can't say—I am a little dainty sometimes—at any rate, it is worth your while to try, I should think; for remember, to-morrow is the fourth day! Ho, ho!"

So saying, he went back into his cave; and the prince heard him sharpening his knife and cleaning his frying-pan in a way that froze his marrow.

The unhappy young man now gave himself up for lost, and went home to the palace in the worst possible spirits. "I shall go a very different road this time tomorrow," thought he. However, he concealed his feelings as well as he could, not to distress his parents; for he was a dutiful son. All night he lay awake; and as soon as it was day he got up and went out to take a last walk in the country, and while away the time till the dreadful hour of noon. After walking some time, he came to a wretched, tumble-down old cottage; and looking in through the window (which was broken) he saw within an equally wretched and tumble-down old woman, dressed in rags, shivering with cold and lean with hunger.

"How now, Goody?" said he, walking into her miserable room through the broken door. "You don't seem over-comfortable here."

"Comfortable?" said she, in a cracked and wheezy voice, "I haven't known what that word means for these twenty years. I am old, and poor, and sick; I have got the ague, and the rheumatics, and the toothache, and the earache, and oh, such dreadful corns! I have nobody in the world to care for me; and I heartily wish I was dead, for I don't know what good I am here."

When the prince heard the old woman talk in this way, the wicked thought which the ogre had put into his head came back to him, and began to tempt him.

"Surely," he said to himself, "there can be no great harm in taking this poor wretched creature to the giant. Perhaps he won't like her, and then all will be well; but even if he does, of what value is her life, compared with

the chance of saving mine? I am young, happy, beloved; my death will plunge my parents, my family, the whole nation into grief; and then what plans I had for doing good! How prosperous the people would have been under my reign! Surely I ought not to allow a weak scruple to deprive the world of the immense advantages which depend on my life; and this old thing, if she has any right feeling, ought to be proud of such an opportunity of making herself useful. If she could do any good here, it would be different; but she says herself—

He was interrupted in these thoughts by a tapping at the broken window; and looking up, he saw a pretty white bird that had flown in.

“What is this?” said he to the old woman.

“Oh,” said she, “it is a pigeon that I picked up with a broken leg when it was young. I brought it home, and nursed it; and now it comes to me every day for such crumbs as I can give it.”

The prince’s heart fairly smote him.

“I take this as a lesson,” he said within himself; “I see now that everybody is of some use in this world; and what right have I to take any one away from his place, and determine he will not be missed? This worthy old soul has been able to do a kindness to a creature more helpless than herself:—I have had my share of comforts, and now I will bear my misfortunes for myself like a man, and not steal the life from another in the hope of saving my own.” “I beg your pardon, ma’am, though you don’t know what for; and pray accept my

purse, for which I am afraid I have not much further use."

Then the prince left the cottage; and as it was now getting near twelve o'clock, walked boldly towards the mountain. Meanwhile the ogre was expecting him very eagerly. The fact was, as perhaps you have guessed, that an old woman was a treat that he was particularly fond of; and he made sure that the prince would take the hint he had given him and provide one, to try and escape from being eaten up himself; for he was so mean and cruel an ogre that he had no idea that anybody could do a generous action, or sacrifice himself rather than be unjust. He had eaten very little breakfast, on purpose to have a good appetite for his luncheon; and there he sat, licking his lips, and watching the path by which the prince was to come; and you may fancy his rage and disappointment when he saw him coming.

"What!" he roared out, "no old woman? I must have one! Where is she? Bring her! Quick!"

"Sir," said the prince, as bravely as he could, "I have brought you no old woman; but you see I have kept my word, and come back myself."

"You!" cried the ogre. "You, indeed! What is a poor tender young thing like you, compared to a fine, tough, bony grandmother? Why haven't you brought me one, you villain? What have you been about? Are you such a goose that you couldn't find one ever since yesterday?"

"No," said the prince. "I did find one; but I didn't choose to bring her." And then he told the ogre all he had seen

at the cottage, and all he had thought, just as I have told it to you.

As he was telling his story, the giant got into such a fury that he could hardly contain himself.

"What!" he bellowed out, as soon as the prince had finished, "do you mean to tell me that you have been such a noodle, such a nincompoop, such a chicken-hearted baby, that when you had a chance of saving yourself at the expense of one poor old woman, you wouldn't do it? Nonsense! I'll not believe it! You must tell me some more likely story, for I can't swallow that!"

No sooner had he uttered these words, than there came a loud clap of thunder, and the monster turned as white as a sheet; and then there came a second clap, and the monster's knees began to tremble, and his teeth to chatter in his head; and then there came a third clap, and the roof of the cavern burst open, and the Lord Chief Baron of the Fairies came sailing in, seated on his great flying inkstand, drawn by twenty-four bats, with parchment wings, and traces of red tape.

"You wicked and nasty ogre," said his lordship, in a stern and awful voice, "you have spoken your own sentence, and I have come to see it put in execution. You told the prince that you would give him leave to cut off your head if he could bring you anything that you could not swallow; you have just confessed that he has; and now your hour is come!"

So saying, he drew forth the great Sword of Justice, eighteen feet long, which he always carried in his waistcoat-pocket, and presented it to the prince.

“Go,” he said, “meritorious youth; cut the head off that vile and hateful monster, and cast it out to the kites, wolves, and foxes.”

The prince took the sword with a respectful bow, and going up to the ogre, who was now rolling on the floor, and blubbering like a great coward, as he was, flourished the weapon thrice, and then brought it down with so fair a blow on the giant’s neck, that the head rolled from the shoulders; so there was an end of Uglymuggimo.

“Young man,” then said the Chief Baron of the Fairies, “I am pleased with your conduct on the whole, though you allowed a base thought to get the better of you for a moment: so if there is anything that you would like, mention it before the Court rises, and I will grant it you.”

“My Lord,” said the prince, again bowing respectfully, “I have more than I deserve already, and I wish for nothing further for myself; but if you could do anything to make that poor old woman more comfortable who taught me so good a lesson, I should be much obliged to you.”

“Very well,” said his lordship, “so be it; if you call upon her as you go home, I think you will see a change for the better.”

So the prince walked cheerfully down the hill again; but when he came to the old woman’s home, what do you think he saw? Instead of the wretched tumble-down old hovel that he had left, he saw the prettiest, neatest, white cottage you can imagine, covered with roses and honeysuckles; and walking in, he found the

old lady nicely dressed, sitting in a comfortable arm-chair, and looking as snug and happy as possible.

"Well, ma'am," said he, "how do you do, again? I hope you feel a little better than you did?"

"Oh, sir!" said she, "I am sure I don't know what has come over me! All my pains are gone; the house and everything seems grown new and fresh again; and, if I only had some nice young companion to live with me and look after me a bit, I should not envy the Queen of Cashmere herself."

No sooner had she said this, than the door opened, and a pretty little maiden, dressed in white, and walking rather lame, came in with a curtsey; and without saying a word, set about getting down the cups and saucers, and making the old lady some tea.

"Who and what are you, my dear," said the dame in astonishment, "and who sent you here?"

"Please, ma'am," said the little maiden, "I am the pigeon that you were so kind to. A fine little gentleman, sitting on a flying inkstand, touched me just now with a wand, which turned me into what you see; and then he told me to come and live with you for the rest of your days; which, I am sure, I shall be most happy to do."

So the prince went home very well contented; but he ever afterwards took care not to lose his way out hunting.