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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Silver Horseshoes

Once upon a time there lived a king who wanted a son-in-law who would be a good soldier as well as a good husband, so he put his daughter, the Princess, who, of course, was very beautiful, in a tower on top of a high mountain. Then he sent out word all over his kingdom and to all the other kingdoms that to the youth who could get to the top of the tower he would give the Princess for a wife.

But when the youths came from far and near they found the mountain was slippery as glass, and their horses slipped back faster than they could climb.

In a kingdom far from where the King lived was a poor prince whose father had lost all his lands and money in wars, so that when he died he left the Prince nothing but the castle and a black horse.

One day the Prince was feeding his horse and thinking of the Princess on top of the high mountain in the tower, and he spoke his thought out loud.

"If only I had some clothes fit to be seen," he said, "I would try to reach the Princess in the tower, and this poverty would be at an end. And you, my beauty, would have oats in plenty then," patting the horse on the neck.

"Why don't you try, master?" said the horse.

The Prince was surprised to hear the horse speak, but still he had heard of such things happening, and he

answered, saying: "I have no clothes; besides, many others have tried, and no horse is able to climb the mountain."

"Master, go to the witch that lives in a cave in the middle of the woods at midnight and get my shoes," said the horse. And then he fell to eating his scanty dinner and said no more.

The Prince thought there was nothing to lose by doing as the horse told him, so that night he went to the woods to find the witch. The woods he found easily, but to find the cave was a different matter. First he met a fox, and he asked the way to the cave of the witch.

"Oh, master," said the fox, "take my advice and go home; no good will come to you if you find it."

But the Prince would not give up the quest, so he asked a wolf that he met next where the cave was located in the woods.

The wolf ran away, saying: "You better go home. That cave will bring only harm to any one who finds it."

The Prince was not to be frightened and on he went, and an owl was the next one he saw. "Where is the cave the old witch lives in?" he asked.

"Hoot! hoot!" said the owl, flapping his wings. "Be off, man, while there is time. Don't go near that cave if you value your life," and off flew the owl, leaving the Prince no wiser than before.

After going deep into the woods—in fact, he was at the very center and did not know it—the Prince stood still and listened.

A sound reached his ear which seemed like the clatter of horses' hoofs, and the Prince went in the direction from which the sound came.

All at once he found himself in front of the cave for which he had searched so long, and, looking in, he saw the old witch prancing about in the craziest manner. She would climb the side of her cave with as much ease as she could walk across the floor, and then, giving a spring, she would walk on the top of the cave, her head hanging down toward the floor.

While the Prince was looking and wondering at this strange performance he noticed something shining on her feet, and when he looked closer, to his surprise he saw that the witch had on her feet silver horseshoes. Then he knew what his black horse had said was worth listening to—he was to get the shoes the old witch was wearing.

But then he thought: "She has on only two; I must have four. I wonder where are the other two."

Just then a black cat came dancing into the cave, and on her hind feet the Prince saw the other two shoes he wanted. Such dancing and climbing the Prince had never seen as was done by the old witch and her black cat.

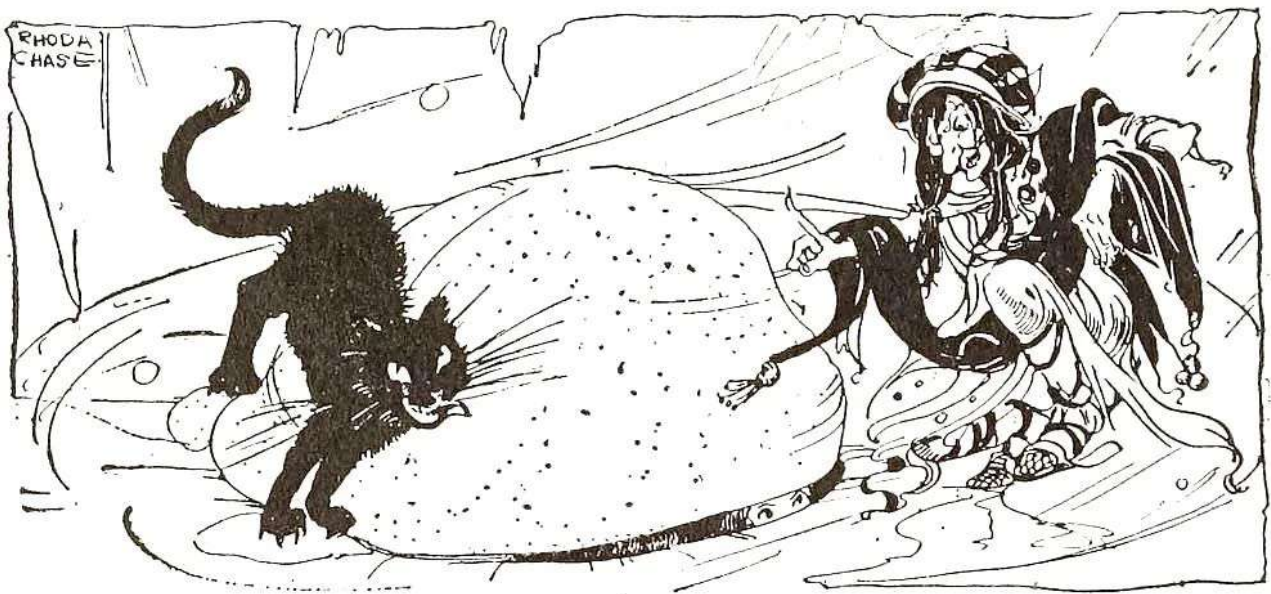
The silver shoes seemed to take them anywhere and they could do anything while they wore them.

After a while the witch and the black cat grew weary and took off the shoes, and the Prince saw them lift up a stone in the middle of the cave and drop the four silver horseshoes into a hole and then drop the stone again.

After the witch and the black cat were fast asleep in one corner of the cave the Prince crept in softly and lifted the stone. At the bottom of a deep hole he saw the horseshoes, and he was wondering how he could get them when he felt a push from behind and down he went into the hole, landing at the bottom where the shoes were.

The old witch had awakened and had pushed him in, and the Prince could hear her and the cat jumping about and laughing with glee that they had trapped him.

When the Prince found himself in the hole under the cave where the old witch lived he thought his end had come. It was as dark as a dungeon. The only thing he could see was the glitter of the silver horseshoes. While he stood looking at them and thinking how the old witch and her cat jumped about, and wondering what she would do with him, he suddenly was struck with an idea.



He would put on the shoes, one on each foot, and take the other two in his hands.

No sooner did he think it than he did it, and, giving a spring, up he went, the stone flying off the top of the hole as he touched it with his hands holding the silver horseshoes.

Into the cave he jumped, and the old witch and her black cat sprang at him, but he had only to run, and, without touching the ground, away he flew through the forest, the old witch and her cat after him.

Sometimes they would almost catch him, for the witch had jumped on her broomstick and the cat sat on behind her, and they flew over trees and bushes as well as the Prince.

The Prince knew he was lost if they caught him, and finally decided to turn around and run toward them, thinking he might be able to knock the witch off her broomstick and so stop their flight.

No sooner did he turn than the shining silver shoes cast a ray of light on the old witch and her cat and like magic they tumbled[Pg 34] off the broomstick, and away went the stick higher and higher in the air until it disappeared; and on the ground where the cat and the old witch fell the Prince saw two stones, one big and the other smaller and almost black, so he knew he was rid of his enemies and could get out of the forest safely with the silver horseshoes.

The black horse danced with delight when he saw the shoes, and stood still until they were fastened on his feet; then he pranced about and shook his head in a very knowing manner, though he did not speak again, and the Prince mounted him and rode away, forgetting all about his shabby coat.

The black horse trotted along like any other horse until they came to the mountain on top of which the Princess lived in the tower; then the Prince felt himself gliding up the mountain, past all the other youths who were vainly trying to climb to the top.

Up and up they went until the Prince found himself by the tower. When he looked at the height he knew his troubles were not at an end. He looked around for some way to scale the wall, but it was as smooth as glass.

While he stood looking at the top he saw something [Pg 35] white slowly coming down the wall from a little window.

Down it came until the Prince could see that it was a piece of white thread, and on the end of it was a little golden curl.

The Prince untied it and kissed it, then, looking up at the window, he kissed his hand, for he knew that somewhere in the tower the Princess had been looking for the Prince who was to come for her, and had seen him.

He was more anxious than ever to reach the Princess, but how could he climb those slippery walls?

How? And then he thought of the silver shoes that the witch had walked on the top of the cave with, and he took them off his horse and tied one on each foot and took one in each hand.

Placing his hands on the wall of the tower, he walked up as easily as if he were walking on the ground, and in a few minutes was at the little window above.

The Princess smiled when she saw him, and then he saw that the window which looked so small to him from the ground was really a door.

He stepped in and knelt at the feet of the blushing Princess, who said, "I shall be glad to leave here, but how can I get to the ground?"

"In my arms," answered the bold Prince, and, picking her up, he stepped out on the smooth wall again, easily reaching the ground with the Princess.

He placed her in front of him on his horse and rode down the mountain, at the bottom of which a crowd was waiting for him, and the King also, for it had been noised abroad that a youth had been seen to climb the mountain and the people wanted to see him.

"Well done, my son," said the King, riding up to greet them. "You will make a good soldier, for you have shown that you can overcome obstacles to gain that which you desire. Come home; the wedding feast is prepared." So the Prince gained a princess for a wife, a father-in-law who admired his courage, and was happy ever after.

