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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Tinker's Giant

The Tinker of Wraye was never done with boasting. He would not be afraid, not he, if he should meet a lion in the road. And as for highwaymen, let one attack him.

Alas, poor rogue, he'd ride his way no more!

Yet some folks started at a creaking hinge or squeaking mouse. Bah, let them send for the Tinker!

If he had been at home, the farmer's ram would never have had a chance to frighten little Bess, the sexton's child. For half a penny, he would take that ram right by the horns, though not this day, for he must go to mend Dame Durham's pans. And he was never late. If he had said he'd come upon a certain day, then come he would.

The King's word was not surer than the Tinker's.

He had seen the King once upon a time, and he, the Tinker, was the taller man and of a bigger bulk.

"It is true, I do assure you," said the Tinker. "The King is not so large of bulk as I. And I'm a better trencherman than he. There's none eats heartier than I, and eating makes a body stout, aye, and strong, too. The wrestler at the fair who threw seven men hath not a stronger arm than mine."

If walking were the talk, then were the Tinker's legs the swiftest ever known. If anyone slept well, the Tinker had slept sounder. Saw you a hare, the Tinker had seen two! Week in, week out, he boasted loud and

long, and he might be boasting yet had it not been for the great-headed giant.

It was a Saturday night and late when the Tinker came upon the giant waiting in the lane through which he needs to pass. What the giant's body was like, the Tinker could not tell, for it was a black night, but his great round head with fiery eyes and grinning mouth was all too plain to see.

As high above the Tinker's head as the church steeple is above the church, it glowered through the darkness. At sight of it, the Tinker fell to shivering and shaking as if he had an ague on him.

He dared not go forward, and he dared less to turn his back upon the fearsome thing, and to stand still was worst of all.

There was nothing to do but to speak the giant fair, if only the Tinker could find the proper words to say.

"Good sir, your lordship, honored knight, most worshipful and gentle giant," said he, but the great-headed giant neither moved nor spoke.

"I wish you good even," cried the Tinker. "Though 'tis a cold night for your grace, a cold night, a windy night, a dark night, an awesome night, a Saturday night," said he, his teeth chattering as he spoke.

But the great-headed giant answered never a word. 'I am but a poor Tinker following my trade. Had you a leaking pan, I'd mend it for you with the best,' quavered the Tinker, backing off all the more. For the life of him, he could not keep his eyes from the giant's monstrous head.

Saw ever a man the like before! Such eyes, such nose, such mouth!

"Let me pass," cried the Tinker, and, gathering up what courage he had left, he was about to try for home when through the giant's grinning mouth, he spied a tongue of flame that wagged this way and that.

"Help, help!" cried the Tinker, and his very terror giving strength to his trembling legs, he sprang past the giant and sped toward home as fast as ever ran a hare.

As he ran thus in the dark, he stumbled upon a man who was making strange gurgling sounds as though he were in pain or full of mirth, perhaps.

The Tinker was for passing him without speaking, but he had not gone a step when the man hailed him. And who should it be but Hal, the miller's son.

"Oh, Hal! Oh, lad! Oh, Hal, good lad!" cried the Tinker.



"Speak softly and let us haste away ere the giant comes upon us."

"A giant!" said Hal. "In all my life, I've seen no giant. Good Tinker, lead me to the sight."

"But this giant is a different kind from other giants," cried the Tinker. "His tongue is made of fire. I do declare I

saw it shining through his mouth. Come, let us 'scape him while we may."

'Nay, nay," said Hal. "You are brave, and I am not afraid with you. What say you? Let us kill a giant as did Welsh Jack. It will be a famous deed."

"Wait, wait; let's first give warning to the town," said the Tinker, clinging to Hal's arm.

But the more he cried out, the more Hal persisted, till at last, for very shame, the Tinker went with him. And the two soon spied the giant waiting in the lane.

"Shall I strike first or you?" asked Hal. "I am not weak, but you art strong as seven, I know, for I have heard thee tell it half a hundred times. Speak up, will you strike the blow?" he said.

"Nay, nay! Not I!" the Tinker cried.

"Then loose thy hold," said Hal, "and let me go." And shaking himself free from the Tinker, he dealt the giant such a blow that off fell his fiery head and rolled into the ditch.

"Ha!" cried the Tinker, "we have finished him." And he was for taking the giant's head into the town without delay.

"Nay, let it cool till morn," said Hal, as cool himself as ice; and bidding the Tinker hold his peace till he should give him leave to speak, he started home straightway. But miller's son or no miller's son, the Tinker was up and boasting as soon as the town stirred next morn.

"Come you," said he, "and see what I and the miller's son have done. Welsh Jack hath never slain a greater giant than we. You never knew that there were giants now? Nor I, until I spied him in the lane. Flames came from his mouth, aye, and from nose and eyes."

A crowd collecting by this time, the Tinker led the way till they came to an old sign-post that had stood in the lane since the oldest man in the village was a child. And hanging on the post, they spied a ragged coat that waved and flapped in every breeze.

"Why, 'tis the coat the farmer's scarecrow wore," cried one among the crowd. "How came it here?"

"And look you in the ditch. What's this half-broken thing with eyes and nose and mouth?" another called.

"Oh! that's the pumpkin that I sold but yesterday to Hal, the miller's son, the saucy wag!" said Farmer Brown. And he fell laughing.

"And here's a candle-end he begged from my good wife last night! The merry rogue!" said Goodman Grimes.

"But where's the giant's head? And what's the jest?" the Tinker cried, as one and then another of the crowd began to roar with mirth.

"Go ask the miller's son," said they, laughing the more. But from that day to this, the Tinker has not asked; and if what they tell be true, the people of Wraye hear no more of his boasting.