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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The whirlwind

In a far-off country, beyond the sea and the mountains, there lived a king and queen, with a beautiful daughter, who was called Princess Ladna. A great many princes came to woo her; but she liked only one of them, called Prince Dobrotek; so they confessed their love for one another to the king, who gave his consent, and the wedding-day was fixed. Now among the princess's rejected suitors there was one, who though he had changed himself into the shape of a prince, in order to come to court and make love to her, really was an ugly dwarf, only seven inches high, but with a beard more than seven feet long, and a great hump on his back. He was so offended with the princess for refusing him, that he determined to carry her off; so he watched his opportunity.

As the young couple, with all their followers and their guests, were leaving the palace to go to church, a violent wind began to blow, a regular whirlwind, raising a column of sand, and lifting the princess off her feet. She was carried up over the clouds, to the top of some inaccessible mountains, and dropped down into a magnificent palace, with a golden roof, and a high wall all round.

After a while the princess woke up from the fainting-fit into which she had fallen. She looked round the splendid apartment in which she was, and came to the

conclusion that some young and handsome prince must have carried her off.

In the room there was a table ready spread; all the plates and dishes, as well as the knives, forks, and spoons, were of silver and gold; and the dinner itself was so good, that in spite of her grief and terror, she could not refrain from tasting it; and she had no sooner tasted, than she ate, till her appetite was appeased.

Then the doors opened, and there came in a company of servants, bearing a great chair, in which sat the ugly dwarf, with the long beard and the great hump.

The dwarf now began to pay his court to the princess, and explain how he had carried her off in the guise of the whirlwind, because he loved her so much. But she would not listen to him, and gave him a sounding slap with her open hand right in his face, so that sparks danced before his eyes. Of course he was in a great passion; but for love of her he managed to keep his temper, and turned round to leave the room. But in his haste he caught his feet in his long beard, and was thrown down on the threshold, and in his fall he dropped his cap, which he was holding in one hand.

The servants helped him again into the chair, and carried him out; but the princess jumped up, locked the door, and took up the cap that was lying on the ground. She put it on; and went to the glass to see how she looked in it. But what was her surprise to find that she could not see herself, till she took it off! So she came to the wise conclusion that this was an invisible cap; at which she was highly delighted; she put on the cap again, and began to walk about the room.

The door opened once more with a loud noise, and the dwarf came in with his long beard thrown back and twisted all round his hump, to be out of the way. But not seeing either his cap, or the princess, he guessed what had happened; so full of wild despair he began to rush madly about the room, knocking himself against the tables and chairs, while the princess made her escape through the door, and ran out into the garden. The garden was very extensive, and full of beautiful fruit-trees; so she lived upon these fruits, and drank the water of a spring in the garden for some time. She used to make fun of the dwarf's impotent rage.

Sometimes when he rushed wildly about the garden, she would tease him by taking off the invisible cap, so that he saw her before him, in all her beauty; but when he made a rush after her she would put it on again, and become invisible to him; she would then throw cherry-stones at him, come close to him, and laugh loudly: and then run away again.

One day, when she was playing about in this manner, her cap got caught in the boughs of a tree, and fell upon a gooseberry bush. The dwarf saw it, and seized hold of the princess with one hand, and of the cap with the other. But just then—from the summit of the mountain, above the garden itself, was heard the sound of a trumpet-challenge, three times repeated.

At this the dwarf trembled with rage; but first breathing upon the princess, he put her to sleep with his breath, then placed his invisible cap on her head. Having done this he seized his two-edged sword, and flew up into the clouds, so as to strike the knight who

had challenged him from above, and destroy him at one stroke.

But where did this knight come from?

When Princess Ladna had been carried off on her wedding-day by the whirlwind, there was the greatest consternation among all the bystanders. Her distracted father and her bridegroom rushed about in all directions, and sent courtiers everywhere in search of her; but the princess had been neither seen nor heard of, nor was any trace left of her.

The king (very unnecessarily) told Prince Dobrotek that if he did not get back his daughter, the princess, he would not only put him to death, but would reduce his whole country to ashes. He also told all the princes there that whoever should bring back his daughter should have her to wife, and receive half of his kingdom into the bargain.

When they heard this they all got to horse, and galloped in various directions; among them Prince Dobrotek.

He went on for three days, never stopping for food or rest; but on the fourth day, at dusk, he felt overcome by sleep; so he let his horse go free in a meadow, and himself lay down on the grass. Then all at once he heard a piercing shriek, and straight before him beheld a hare, and an owl perched upon it—its claws digging into the poor creature's side.

The prince caught up the first thing that lay near him, and aimed at the screech-owl, so truly that he killed it

on the spot, and the hare ran up to him, like a tame creature, licked his hands, and ran away.

Then the prince saw that the thing he had thrown at the owl was a human skull. And it spoke to him, in these words:

"Prince Dobrotek, I thank you for what you have done for me. When I was alive I committed suicide, and was therefore condemned to lie unburied at this cross-way, till I should be the means of saving life. I have lain here for seven hundred and seventy-seven years; and Heaven knows how much longer I should have had to remain, if you had not chanced to throw me at the screech-owl, and so saved the life of the poor hare. Now bury me, so that I may lie peacefully in the ground at this same place, and I will tell you how to summon the Grey Seer-horse, with the golden mane, who will always help you in case of need. Go out into a plain, and without looking behind you, call out:

"Grey Seer-horse, with golden mane! Like a bird—and not like steed, On the blast—and not the mead, Fly thou hither unto me!"

Thus having spoken, the head was silent; but a blue light shot up from it towards the sky; it was the soul of the deceased, which having now expiated its sin by its long imprisonment in the skull, had attained heaven.

The prince then dug a grave, and buried the skull. He then called out:

"Grey Seer-horse, with golden mane! Like a bird—and not like steed, On the blast—and not the mead, Do thou hither fly to me!"

The wind rose, the lightning flashed, the thunder roared, and the wonderful horse with the golden mane appeared. He flew as fast as the storm-wind, flames shot from his nostrils, sparks from his eyes, and clouds of smoke from his mouth. He stood still, and said in human tones:

"What are your commands, Prince Dobrotek?"

"I am in trouble; I wish you to help me."

And he told him all that had occurred.

"Creep in at my left ear," said the horse, "and creep out again at the right."

So the prince crept in at the horse's left ear, and came out again at the right one, all clad in golden armour. He also found himself miraculously increased in strength, so that when he stamped on the ground it trembled; and when he shouted a storm arose, which shook the leaves from the trees.

Then he asked the horse:

"What is to be done next?"

"Your betrothed, Princess Ladna," said the horse, "was carried off by the seven-inch-high dwarf, with the seven-foot-long beard; he is a powerful magician; he dwells beyond the seven seas, among inaccessible mountains. He can only be conquered by the All-Cutting Sword, which sword is jealously guarded by his own brother, the Giant-Head, with basilisk eye. To this Giant-Head we must therefore go."

Prince Dobrotek mounted on horseback, and they flew like an arrow, over lands and seas, high mountains and wide oceans. They stopped at length upon a wide

plain strewn with bones, before a moving mountain. And the horse said:

"This moving mountain, which you see before you, is the giant's head with the basilisk eyes; and the bones strewn so thickly hereabouts prove how deadly his looks are—so be careful. He is now asleep from the heat of the sun; but only two steps before him lies the sword, with which alone you can conquer your enemy. Lie down along my back, so that his glance cannot reach you through my neck and mane; but when you get near to it, lay hold of the sword; when you have it you will not only be safe from his basilisk glances, but you will even have the giant's head at your mercy."

And the horse drew near lightly, and the prince bent down, and secured the wonderful sword; but he shouted so loud that the Giant-Head woke up, sniffed hard, and looked about with his bloodshot eyes; and seeing the wonderful sword in the prince's hand, he called out:

"Sir knight! are you weary of the world, that you court speedy death?"

"You need not boast like that, you empty head!" replied Prince Dobrotek. "Your looks cannot hurt me now; and you shall die by this All-Cutting Sword! But I would first know who, and what you are."

"Then I confess, prince," replied the head; "that I am in your power; but be merciful to me, for I am worthy of pity. I am a knight of the race of giants, and were it not for the envy of my brother, I should still have been happy. He was the black sheep of our family, and was born an ugly dwarf, with a long beard; and my

handsome giant-like proportions caused him to hate me bitterly. His only good point is his great strength, and it all resides in his long beard, and so long as it is not cut he cannot be conquered, and this can only be done by that sword, which you now hold.

"One day, being bent upon my destruction, he said to me:

"Brother, do not refuse to help me. I have read in my books of magic that beyond the mountains, on a plain lies buried a certain sword, whereby a knight, seeking for his betrothed, shall compass the destruction of us both; let us therefore go and dig it up, so that we shall escape the threatened doom!"

"To this I agreed. I took a hundred-year-old pine—torn up from its roots—on one arm, and carried my brother on my other. We set out; he showed me the spot, and I dug up the sword, on this same plain. Then we began to quarrel about who should possess it. After a long dispute he said:

"We were best decide it by lot, brother. Let each of us lay his ear to the ground, and whoever first hears the sound of the evening bell shall have the sword."

"So he laid his ear to the ground, and I mine. I listened; but heard nothing; and he meantime, having got hold of the sword, crept up to me, and cut my head from my shoulders.

"My headless trunk, left unburied, rotted away, and the grass grew over it; but my head, endowed with supernatural life by the malicious dwarf, my brother, was left here, with charge to guard this sword, and kill every one who came near with my deadly glance. After

many centuries you have won it; so I implore you to cut off his seven-foot beard, and make him into mince-meat; and avenge me."

"You shall be avenged," said the prince; "and at once. Grey Seer-Horse, carry me to the kingdom of the dwarf magician, with the seven-foot-long beard."

So they set off at once, flying with lightning speed through the air, over the seas and over the forests. In an hour or two they halted on the summit of a high mountain, and the horse said:

"These mountains are the kingdom of the dwarf magician, who carried off your betrothed, and they are both now in the garden; challenge him to fight."

Prince Dobrotek sounded a challenge three times, and the dwarf, as we have seen, flew up into the air, so as to swoop down upon his antagonist, unperceived of him. All at once the prince heard a murmuring sound above him, and he saw when he looked up, the dwarf soaring above him, like an eagle in the clouds—for he had the magic power of increasing his size and strength—with his sword drawn, ready to fall upon him.

The prince sprang aside, and the dwarf came down, with such an impetus, that his head and neck were rammed into the ground.

The prince dismounted, seized the dwarf by the beard, wound it about his left hand, and began to sever it with the All-Cutting Sword.

The dwarf saw that he had to do with no feather-bed knight; so he tugged with all his strength, and flew up again into the clouds; but the prince, holding fast with his left hand to the beard, kept on severing it with his

sword, so that he had nearly cut half of it through; and the dwarf became weaker and weaker the more hair he lost, so he began to cry for mercy.

"Drop down to the ground, off which you took me," said the prince.

The dwarf dropped down slowly, but the prince cut off the remainder of his beard and threw him—when thus deprived of his charms and his strength alike—on to the ground, wreathed the severed beard round his own helmet, and entered the palace.

The invisible servants of the dwarf, seeing their master's beard, wreathed about the prince's helmet, threw open all the doors to him at once.

He went through all the rooms; but not finding his princess anywhere, went into the garden, traversing all the paths and lawns, and calling her name. He could find her nowhere.

But thus running from one place to another he chanced to touch the invisible cap; he caught hold of it, and pulled it away from where it was, on the head of the princess, and saw her at once in all her loveliness, but fast asleep.

Overcome with joy, he called her by her name; but she had been cast into such a deep sleep by the dwarf's poisonous breath, that he could not rouse her.

He took her up in his arms, put the invisible cap into his pocket, also picking up the wicked dwarf, whom he carried along with him. He then mounted his horse, flew like an arrow, and in a few minutes stood before the Giant-Head, with the basilisk eyes.

He threw the dwarf into its open jaws, where he was ground at once into powder; the prince then cut up the monstrous head into small pieces, and scattered them all over the plain.

Thus having got rid of both the dwarf and the giant, the prince rode on with the sleeping princess, upon the Golden-Mane horse, and at sunset they came to the same cross-roads, where he had first summoned him. "Here, prince, we must part," said the Golden-Mane; "but here in the meadow is your own horse, and it is not far to your own home, so creep into my right ear, and come out at my left."

The prince did as he was told, and came out as he was before. His own horse recognized him, and came running with a joyful neigh to meet his master.

The prince was tired out with the long journey, so, having laid down his betrothed wife, still sleeping, on the soft grass, and covered her up from the cold, he laid down himself and went to sleep.

But that very night, one of Princess Ladna's rejected suitors, riding that way, saw by the light of the moon those two asleep, and he recognized in them the princess, and the prince, his fortunate rival. So first stabbing the latter through with his sabre, he carried off the princess, and bore her on horseback before him to her father.

The king welcomed him rapturously, as his daughter's deliverer. But when he found, to his dismay, that he could not awake her, with all his caresses, he asked the supposed rescuer what this meant.

"I do not know, Sir King," replied the knight. "After I had overtaken and slain the great enchanter, who was carrying off the princess, I found her as she is now, sound asleep."

Prince Dobrotek meanwhile, mortally wounded, had just strength enough left to summon the Wonderful Grey Horse, who came instantly; and seeing what was the matter, flew off to the top of the mountain of Everlasting Life. On its summit were three springs—the Water of Loosening, the Water of Healing, and the Water of Life. He sprinkled the dead prince with all three; Prince Dobrotek opened his eyes, and exclaimed: "Oh! how well I have slept!"

"You were sleeping the sleep of death," returned the Golden-Mane; "one of your rivals killed you sleeping, and carried off your princess home to her father, pretending to be her deliverer, in the hope of gaining her hand. But do not be afraid; she is still asleep, and only you can awaken her, by touching her forehead with the beard of the dwarf, which you have with you. Go then to her; I must be elsewhere."

The Golden-Mane vanished, and the prince, calling his own horse, and taking with him his invisible cap, betook himself to the court of his loved one's father.

But when he drew near he found that the city was all surrounded by enemies, who had already mastered the outer defences, and were threatening the town itself; and half of its defenders being slain, the rest were thinking of surrender.

Prince Dobrotek put on his invisible cap, and drawing his All-Cutting Sword, fell upon the enemy.

They fell to right and left as the sword smote them on each side, till one half of them were slain, and the rest ran away into the forest.

Unseen by anyone the prince entered the city, and arrived at the royal palace, where the king, surrounded by his knights, was hearing the account of this sudden attack, whereby his foes had been discomfited; but by whom no one could inform him.

Then Prince Dobrotek took off his invisible cap, and appearing suddenly in the midst of the assembly, said: "King and father! it was I who beat your enemies. But where is my betrothed, Princess Ladna, whom I rescued from the wizard dwarf, with the seven-foot beard? whom one of your knights treacherously stole from me? Let me see her, that I may waken her from her magic sleep."

When the traitor knight heard this he took to his heels; Prince Dobrotek touched the sleeping princess's forehead with the beard, she woke up directly, gazed at him fondly with her lovely eyes, but could not at first understand where she was, or what had happened to her.

The king caught her in his arms, pressed her to his heart, and that very evening he married her to Prince Dobrotek. He gave them half his kingdom, and there was a splendid wedding, such as had never been seen or heard of before.