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How The Giantess Guimara Became Small

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Once upon a time, a prince named D. João went hunting with a party of companions. Deep in the forest he became separated from his comrades and soon found himself completely lost. He wandered for a long time until at last he spied what looked like a mountain range on the horizon. He made his way toward it as fast as he could, and when he drew close he was astonished to discover it was really a vast high wall — the great wall that bounds the land of the giants.

The ruler of that country was an enormous giant whose head reached nearly to the clouds. His wife was nearly as enormous as he was, and their only child stood just as tall as her mother. Her name was Guimara.

When the giant spotted D. João far below him, he called out, "Little man! What are you doing down there?" D. João explained how he had come to be lost, and the giant said, "Your wanderings interest me. It is not often that little men like you pass this way. If you like, you may live in my palace and serve me." D. João accepted the offer and stayed on at the palace.



The giant's daughter Guimara was delighted with D. João. He was the first little man she had ever seen, and she fell deeply in love with him. Her father, however, was thoroughly disgusted at her lack of taste — he had hoped for a giant son-in-law. So he set about scheming to get D. João into trouble.

The next day he summoned D. João before him. "Little man," he said, "I am told you have been boasting among my servants that you could tear down my palace in a single night and set it all up again just as quickly."

"I never made any such boast, Your Majesty," replied D. João.

He went straight to Guimara and told her what her father had said. "I am an enchantress," said Guimara, smiling. "Leave it to me, and we shall give him a surprise."

That very night, Guimara and D. João tore down the giant's palace and raised it again exactly as it had stood before. The giant stared at it the next morning in

astonishment, and suspected at once that his daughter had had a hand in it.

He sent for D. João again. "Little man, they tell me you have been boasting that in a single night you could transform the Isle of Wild Beasts into a beautiful garden, full of flowers of every kind, with a silvery fountain playing at its centre."

"I never said any such thing, Your Majesty," replied D. João.

He told Guimara, and she laughed and said it would be wonderful fun to slip out that night and do exactly that.

So through the dark hours Guimara worked steadily, helping D. João remake the Isle of Wild Beasts into a garden of beautiful flowers, with a silvery fountain at its heart. When the giant saw it in the morning his astonishment curdled into fury, and his anger fell on both of them.

Guimara was so frightened by her father's terrible wrath that she resolved to run away with D. João. She urged him to take the finest horse from her father's stables.

At midnight Guimara crept from her room and ran to where D. João stood waiting with the horse — a magnificent creature that could cover a hundred leagues with each stride. They mounted and rode away into the dark.

By early morning, Guimara was missed at the palace, and soon D. João's disappearance and the theft of the finest horse were discovered too. The giant's wife told him to take another hundred-league horse and go after them at once. He did, and soon had nearly caught up with the two, for they had grown weary and stopped to rest.

Guimara spotted her father coming and acted swiftly. She turned herself into a little river, D. João into an old fisherman mending his nets on the bank, the horse into a willow tree, the saddle into a small boat, and the musket into a dragonfly hovering over the water.

The giant arrived at the river and called to the old fisherman, "Ho there — have you seen anything of a young man and a handsome young woman passing this way?"

The old fisherman paid him no attention, focused entirely on his nets. When he glanced up at last, he gestured toward the boat. "Three good fish this morning," he said. "Fine river, this."

The giant had no patience for talk of fish, and the dragonfly kept darting at his face. Thoroughly annoyed, he turned back home to consult his wife.

"You great fool," she said when she had heard the story. "Don't you see? Guimara turned herself into the river, D. João into the fisherman, the horse into a

tree, the saddle into the boat, and the musket into the dragonfly! Go after them at once!"

The giant set off again in pursuit, vowing this time he would not be tricked. But when Guimara next spied her father coming she had a new plan ready. She turned herself into a stone chapel, D. João into a padre at mass, the horse into a bell, the saddle into an altar, and the musket into a missal.

When the giant drew near the chapel he was completely deceived. "Holy padre," he called, "have you seen a young man and a handsome young woman pass this way?"

The padre continued his mass and intoned solemnly:

*I am a hermit padre,
Devoted to the Immaculate;
I do not hear what you say.
Dominus vobiscum.*

The giant could get no other answer from him. At last, baffled and defeated, he went home.

"Of all the fools in the world, you are the greatest!" his wife cried when she heard. "Guimara made herself into the chapel, D. João into the priest, the horse into the bell, the saddle into the altar, and the musket into the missal. Come — I am going with you this time, to make sure she plays no more tricks on you."

This time Guimara's parents had nearly overtaken the fugitives before she could act. They had almost reached D. João's own kingdom. Guimara threw a handful of dust into her parents' eyes, and such darkness fell around them that they could see nothing. She and D. João slipped away and crossed safely into his lands.

When they had first set out, Guimara had taken D. João's hands and said: "Whatever happens — do not forget me for even one single minute. Think of me all the time." He had promised faithfully, and he had kept his word through every danger on the road.

But when they rode at last into D. João's own kingdom, he was so overcome with joy — so glad to be home after all those strange and perilous adventures, so happy to find the rooms a manageable size again, so pleased to see the faces of his old friends — that for one brief moment, the thought of Guimara slipped entirely from his mind.

The moment he remembered, he turned to look at her. He could hardly believe his eyes. Instead of the towering giantess whose head had touched the clouds, she now reached only to his own shoulder. D. João was so astonished he had to

sit down in a chair and be fanned. He could not speak for eighteen minutes and a half — so thoroughly had the sight taken his breath away.

"It is a good thing you thought of me when you did," Guimara said quietly. "I was growing smaller and smaller with every moment. If you had waited another minute, I should have faded away entirely, and you would never have known what had become of me."

When Guimara became small, she lost her power as an enchantress entirely. Her lovely eyes always held a trace of sadness, because of that one little minute when D. João had forgotten her. She never returned to Giantland, but reigned as queen of D. João's kingdom for many years.

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