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READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Lost Half Hour

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Once upon a time, there was a widow who had three sons. The oldest two were reasonably smart, but Bobo, the youngest son, was very foolish. One day, Princess Zenza rode by the house and heard the widow berating her youngest son. She got off her horse and asked what was going on. When she heard that Bobo was so terribly dumb, she asked the widow if she could take him with her. She might find the boy's stupidity very amusing. Bobo went with her.

It quickly became apparent in the castle how foolish Bobo was. They gave him the strangest tasks to perform, making a fool of himself to the amusement of everyone in the castle. But Tilda, the kitchen maid, did not enjoy Bobo's constant humiliation due to his foolishness. Tilda was a sweet, beautiful girl with a good heart. She was also brought to the castle to stay there one day. "Don't let them constantly humiliate you," she said to Bobo.

One morning, Princess Zenza overslept by half an hour. She hurried to the castle garden where her servants were waiting with breakfast. "Good grief," she said, "I've lost half an hour this morning." Bobo heard this and said, "Your Highness, maybe I can find it for you?" The idea of finding a lost half hour made the princess laugh, and the whole court laughed with her. "Yes, let Bobo search for the lost half hour," they laughed. And so, Bobo was sent out into the wide world. Before leaving the castle, he said goodbye to Tilda. "The princess has lost half an hour, and I'm going to find it. I may have to travel the whole world," he proudly told her. Tilda didn't say much. She wished him luck and, when he wasn't looking, put a freshly baked currant bun in his saddlebag.



Bobo rode over the hills and through the land, stopping occasionally to ask passersby if they had seen a lost half hour. The first person he asked was an old

man. "A lost half hour?" said the old man. "I've lost something much worse. I've lost my reputation. Have you seen a lost reputation lying around here?" No, Bobo hadn't. Another day, he met a terrible man who answered his polite question with a lot of aggression. "A half hour?" he bellowed, "No, I haven't seen one! I'm looking for something I've lost myself. I've lost my patience! Have you seen a tantrum anywhere? Answer me, you fool! It's about the size of a watermelon and has sharp little points." When Bobo answered "no," the man screamed with rage. The horse was so startled that it took days to recover.

Bobo traveled on to Zizz, the capital of the Kingdom of the Seven Streams. There, he was greeted by the king. "I haven't seen your lost half hour," the king said to Bobo, "but since you're traveling the whole world, could you ask if anyone has news of my daughter? She was stolen by the fairies fifteen years ago. If you find her, I will reward you handsomely." So Bobo left the city of Zizz to continue his search. Three long years went by. By then, Bobo had become a handsome young man, but unfortunately still very foolish.

Bobo traveled from Fairyland on a boat to Iron Island, hoping to find the lost half-hour there. The journey was dangerous and the storm had wrecked the boat against the rocks. Nevertheless, Bobo managed to reach the shore, but the crew and the ship were gone. Bobo found himself all alone on a beautiful island with no house, road, or path in sight. Suddenly, he saw a small door in the bark of a big tree. Bobo opened the door and found a pair of clogs with a note above them that said: "PUT US ON". Bobo put on the clogs, and something miraculous happened. The clogs fit perfectly and felt very comfortable. They made Bobo walk in a certain direction. For two days, Bobo walked inland towards a big mountain until he arrived at a magnificent castle. Suddenly, a big bell struck seven. Bobo saw a boy on a black horse quickly gallop out of the castle and disappear into the woods. An old man with a white beard stood at the gate, and next to him were eleven young men. Bobo gathered courage, fell on his knees before the old man, and told him his story.

"You should thank the storm fairies," said the old man, "because they brought you here. I am Father Time, and these are my twelve sons, the hours. Every day, one after the other, they ride for an hour around the whole world. Seven has just left. I'll give you the lost half-hour, but you must take care of my sons' horses for a whole year." And so, Bobo took care of the hours' horses for a year. When the year was over, Father Time gave him a small ebony box. "The half-hour is inside," said the old man. "Don't try to look inside or open the box until the right moment comes. If you do, the half-hour will fly away and disappear forever."

Twelve o'clock had become good friends with Bobo during the year. He gave Bobo a cup of water. "Drink it all," he said. It was the water of wisdom that Twelve o'clock had given Bobo. And since he was no longer stupid, he

remembered the man who had lost his reputation, the man who had lost his patience, and the king whose daughter had been stolen by the fairies. Bobo asked Father Time for advice, for he is the one who knows everything. "The man who has lost his reputation should have a good conversation with his neighbors. That's how he'll get his reputation back. Tell the second man that his temper tantrum is lying in the grass, near where you met him. As for the king's daughter, that's Tilda, the kitchen maid in Princess Zenza's palace." Bobo thanked Father Time. Twelve o'clock rode him back to Fairyland on his horse, and they said goodbye to each other.

On the second morning of his journey home, he met the man with the lost reputation and gave him Father Time's advice. He did not see the man with the lost patience, but he did find the fit of anger, wrapped in a large melon covered in spikes. He took the terrible thing with him, hoping to find the angry owner. After that, he visited the king, Tilda's father. The king was so happy with the news that he gave Bobo several royal titles. Bobo became Lord of the Sapphire Hills, Marquis of the Mountains of the Moon, and Prince of the Valley of Golden Apples. With these titles, he became the greatest nobleman in all of Fairyland. The king had a carriage prepared to go with Bobo to Princess Zenza's to claim his missing daughter. Strangely, there were black mourning ribbons hanging from the trees in Princess Zenza's land. An old woman sat on the steps of one of the houses, weeping. "What's wrong, good woman?" asked the king.

The woman replied, "Three days ago, our kingdom was visited by a dragon. He asked Princess Zenza for a household helper to prepare his meals and clean his cave. He would burn the land if he didn't get one. But who is brave enough to run the household of a dragon? The kitchen maid, Tilda, volunteered to go with him. It's for her that we mourn. She was taken away by the dragon a half-hour ago."



"Quick," cried the king and Bobo, "let's hurry to the castle. Maybe she's still there, and we can save her." But they were too late. The dragon had taken Tilda away. Suddenly, Bobo thought of the half-hour. He was half an hour late, but he could get that half-hour back! Things would have to be exactly as they were half an hour earlier. He opened the lid of the ebony box. The clock hands buzzed back half an hour. And sure enough, there was beautiful Tilda standing in front of the castle, waiting for the dragon to come and get her. Bobo ran to her and stood by her side to defend her to the end.

The dragon approached and opened its large mouth. Bobo reached into his bag, took out the fit of anger, and threw it into the fiery breath. There was a huge

explosion. The dragon had exploded. Everyone began shouting, "Hooray! Hooray!" The king said that Tilda was his daughter and thus a real princess. Princess Zenza asked Bobo for forgiveness for treating him so miserably. Bobo forgave her.

A big feast was held. When the joy was over, Bobo and Tilda were married. They lived happily ever after.

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