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The man who stood all night in the river

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Once upon a time there was a king who had a daughter, and he said he would give his daughter in marriage to the man who would take off his clothes and stand a whole winter's night in the river. "If he come out alive", he said, "I will marry my daughter to him, and if he dies, why, he is gone."

Many men tried, and died, till one day a man went in and came out alive. The king said to him, "A great many others have died, how have you come out alive?" The man replied, "A fire was burning on the hillside, I kept my heart fixed on that fire, and so I came out alive."

The king said, "You warmed yourself at the fire!" The man replied, "King! I was in the river, and the fire was on the hill; how then could I warm myself? Thou art king, thou art mighty, let God do me justice."

The king turned him away and came back to his home. He called to his daughter to bring him some food. She replied, "Your food is not ready yet." After a while the king again asked for his food, and again his daughter said, "Your food is not ready yet." Then a third time he demanded his food, and his daughter said: "My Lord the King! the griddle is on the house-top, and the fire is in the yard; as soon as the griddle heats I will cook your food."

The king said: "The griddle is on the housetop, and the fire down below? How, then, can the griddle get hot?"

Then his daughter said: "That man was in the river, and the fire was on the hill: how then could he warm himself at the fire? Thou art king, and kings should keep their word. Thou madest a promise with thy mouth and with thy tongue. Do not do such injustice, but have fear of God."

Then the king said: "Thou, my daughter, hast proved me to be false!" and thereupon he gave his daughter in marriage to the man.



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