



Ririro

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The Prince and the Ogre's Castle

Unknown writer

Once upon a time there lived an old King and Queen, who, although they had been married for many years, had no children to brighten their old age or to inherit their kingdom; and in the King's possession, as it happened, were a favourite mare and dog, who also had no offspring. Now both the King and the Queen were very anxious to have children of their own, and also to perpetuate the fine breed represented by the mare and the dog; so the King posted a notice all over his kingdom, offering a very large reward to any Lama or other holy personage who could secure to him and to his horse and dog the birth of children.

In response to this notice many Lamas and recluses presented themselves at the palace, and by means of prayers and religious ceremonies they endeavoured to obtain from the gods what the King and Queen desired; but all their efforts were in vain, and the years passed by without any offspring being born.

Now it chanced that in a neighbouring country there lived a terrible Ogre, who was an expert in magic and all the black arts; and it came to his ears that this King had offered a large reward if anyone could secure to him the birth of children for himself, his horse and his dog. So he disguised himself as a holy Lama, and coming up to the palace one day on foot, he asked for an interview with the King. The King, who had almost lost faith in Lamas of any kind, received him courteously, and asked him what he could do to help in the matter.

"Oh, King!" replied the supposed Lama, "I, you must know, am a great recluse, and as the result of many years of solitary meditation, I have become proficient in all the magic arts. I will undertake to secure for you and your horse and dog the birth of offspring as you desire. But I can only do so on one condition, which is as follows: three children will be born to you, three to the horse and three to the dog. They will all be of a miraculous nature, and will grow to their full powers in the course of three years. At the end of three years I will return here, and will claim from you one of each to follow me and serve me and to obey my orders in all matters."

The King gladly agreed to this condition, and asked the Lama how he should proceed in order to secure the desired result. The Lama replied:

"Here, oh King, are nine pills; three of these must be administered to the Queen,

three to the horse and three to the dog. In three months' time a child will be born to each, to be followed by two others at intervals of one month."

So saying, he handed the pills to the King and forthwith took his departure. The King accordingly administered the pills as directed, and after three months the Queen gave birth to a boy, the mare to a foal, and the dog to a pup, and these were followed by two others at intervals of one month as the Lama had predicted.

All the young ones grew apace, and at the end of the three years they had all attained to their full growth and powers, and punctually at the conclusion of the third year the Ogre, still disguised as a Lama, returned to the palace to demand his due.

The King and Queen, though reluctant to part with any of their children, resolved to abide by their bargain, and they consulted together as to which of the young Princes should be handed over to the Lama. After some consideration they decided that it would not be advisable to part with the eldest son, as he was heir to the throne, nor with the second, who would have to succeed to the kingdom should any accident or mischance befall his elder brother; so they resolved to send the youngest son, and with him the youngest horse and the youngest dog. These three accordingly were handed over to the Lama, who ordered the Prince to follow him, and started off at once to his own country.

After travelling for some considerable distance they arrived at the top of a high pass, whence the Ogre, pointing down to a great castle standing in the valley below, said to the young Prince:

"That is my house below there; I shall leave you here and you must go on down to the house. When you arrive there you will find a goat tied up near the door of the courtyard, and a bundle of straw lying near by. You pick up the bundle of straw and place it within reach of the goat. Then you must go into the farmyard, where you will find many fowls, and in one corner you will see an earthenware jar full of soaked grain, and you must sprinkle this grain for the fowls to eat. These two tasks I give you to-day, and you are on no account to enter my castle until I rejoin you in the evening."

So saying the Ogre went off in another direction, whilst the young Prince, riding on his horse and followed by his dog, went down to the Ogre's castle. When he reached the gateway he found, as the Ogre had predicted, a goat tied up and a bundle of straw lying in a corner of the courtyard. So he dismounted from his horse, and, picking up the bundle, he carried it near the goat and placed it on the ground. Scarcely had the bundle touched the ground when it became transformed into three great wolves, who, leaping upon the goat, devoured it in an instant, and then fled away to the hills.

The young Prince was very much astonished at seeing this, but being of a courageous spirit he did not allow the incident to frighten him, and proceeded to finish the remainder of his task. So he entered the yard where the poultry were kept, and proceeding to the corner where stood the jar of soaked barley, he took out a handful and scattered it amongst the fowls. As the grain touched the ground it was transformed instantly into three wild cats, who leapt fiercely upon the cocks and hens, and in a few moments, having destroyed them all, fled away into the hills.

The Prince's curiosity was now thoroughly aroused, and he determined, in spite of the Ogre's warning, to enter the house itself, and to discover what sort of place he had come to, so he pushed open the door of the castle and began wandering about all over the house. For some time he found nothing to interest him. The rooms were all well furnished and in good order, but he could find no trace and hear no sound of any living creature.

At last, after having explored the greater part of the building, he suddenly turned a corner in a passage, and saw in front of him a room whose walls were composed entirely of glass. Entering this room he saw in one corner a beautiful lady lying asleep on a couch with a flower behind her ear. The Prince was pleased at finding a human being in this desolate and mysterious castle, and, approaching the lady, he endeavoured to arouse her from her slumber. But all his efforts were in vain; she appeared to be in a sort of trance, and all he could do did not succeed in waking her.

At last in despair he took away the flower which was placed behind her ear, and as he did so she woke and sat up upon her couch, rubbing her eyes. As soon as she perceived the young Prince she was much astonished, and asked him what he was doing in the Ogre's castle. The Prince told her the whole story of his miraculous birth through the magic of the holy Lama, and how he was condemned to serve the Lama as his servant through the agreement which the King his father had made, and how he had carried out the two tasks which the Lama had given him that day.

On hearing this story the lady was very indignant, and spoke to him as follows:

"You must know, oh Prince," said she, "that the person whom you suppose to be a Lama is in reality a fearful and wicked Ogre. The only food of which he partakes is men's hearts, and this house is full of the lifeless bodies of his numerous victims. He, however, is unable to obtain any power over the body of a human being unless that being directly disobeys his orders. Thus it is his practice upon obtaining a fresh servant to set him strange tasks which terrify and repel him. These tasks grow daily more difficult and more odious, until at last one day the servant disobeys his orders, and forthwith his body is at the mercy of the Ogre, who devours the heart and places the lifeless body in a large

chamber at the back of this house. The process has evidently begun with you to-day. You have fulfilled all of his tasks without allowing yourself to be terrified by the strange portents which you have observed, but on his return he will no doubt set you further and more disagreeable duties to perform. I, you should know, am a Princess in my own country, and I was handed over to the Ogre by my parents about a year ago in circumstances very similar to your own. But when he had brought me to his castle, instead of destroying me as he does his other victims, he fell in love with me, and I have remained here as his wife ever since. But he is of a very jealous disposition, and never allows me to leave his castle; and for fear I should make my escape during his absence, he invariably, before going out, places an enchanted flower behind my ear which makes me fall into a trance, and I cannot awake until the flower is removed."

The young Prince was very much interested on hearing this story, and he begged the Princess to give him some further information about the Ogre's habits, in order that he might not unawares fall into his power, and might eventually be able to bring about the destruction of the monster.



"It is very difficult," replied the Princess, "for any human being to kill the Ogre, for he is of a supernatural nature, and even if you were to cut off his head he would come to life again at once, unless you could also destroy his 'mascot'—that is to say, the object upon the preservation of which his life in this world depends. Now the Ogre's mascot is very carefully concealed, and its existence and whereabouts are known to no person except myself. I, however, have discovered where it is, and I will reveal the secret to you later, but first I will tell you the method by which you may destroy the Ogre's body. You must know, then, that it is only possible for a human being to strike a mortal blow at the Ogre when his face is turned away. He knows this very well, and will never in any circumstances turn his back upon a man. Similarly, if he can make you turn your back to him he may be able to do you a mischief. When he comes in this evening and finds that you have fulfilled both the tasks he has set you, the first thing he will order you to do will be to walk three times round a great stove which stands in the centre of the kitchen; and if you obey his orders he will follow you from behind and will possibly do you some harm while your back is turned towards him. When he gives you these orders, then, you must not disobey, but you must tell the Ogre that it is so dark in the kitchen that you cannot see your way clearly, and you must ask him to precede you. This he is bound to do, and while he is going round the stove you may perhaps find an opportunity for stabbing him. If, however, you cannot succeed in doing so, and you both pass through this ordeal successfully, he will set you no further task to-

night, and I will ascertain from him during the evening what trial he has in store for you to-morrow."

The Prince thanked the young lady for all her good advice, which he promised to follow faithfully in every respect, and she then said to him:

"It is now near the time for the Ogre's return. I will lie down on the couch, and you must place the flower behind my ear just as it was before; and when I fall into a trance you must at once go out into the courtyard and wait the return of the Ogre, and mind you are careful not to let him know that you have been inside the castle."

So saying, the Princess lay down upon her couch, and the young man having placed the flower behind her ear she instantly fell into a deep trance. The Prince then went out into the courtyard and shortly after the Ogre arrived. He had now discarded his lama costume and appeared in his proper form, and riding up to the Prince he asked him in an angry tone whether he had carried out the orders he had received, and on the Prince replying in the affirmative, the Ogre ordered him to come into the kitchen. On entering the kitchen the Ogre pointed to a great stove standing in the centre, and said to the Prince:

"You must now walk three times round that stove."

"It is so dark in here," replied the Prince, "that I cannot see my way at all clearly. Will you please precede me and show me the way?"

The Ogre was very angry at hearing this, but he was unable to refuse, so he started off and ran round the stove three times, the Prince following closely at his heels. But he went so fast that the Prince, although he had his knife ready in his hand, was unable to catch him: and the Ogre, seeing that the Prince was not to be outwitted by this stratagem, went upstairs to his wife, leaving the young man locked up in the kitchen, where he spent the night alone.

Next morning the Ogre started off soon after daylight on his own business, and as soon as he was gone the Prince ran upstairs to the glass room, where he found the lady lying in a trance as before. He took the flower from behind her ear, and she immediately woke up and looked about her.

"Good-morning, Prince," said she. "How did you succeed last night? I hope you followed the instructions which I gave you."

The Prince described to her what had occurred, and she said:

"I have ascertained what the Ogre proposes to do when he returns this evening. He will seat himself in his chair of state in his great hall of audience and will order you to kow-tow to him three times, and if you do so he will seize an opportunity whilst you are lying on your face before him to do you some injury. I

twill not do, however, absolutely to disobey his orders; but you must explain to him that, being a Prince, you have never had to kow-tow to anybody and do not exactly know how to do it, and you must ask him to show you the proper way to proceed. He cannot refuse your request, and you must take the opportunity of stabbing him or cutting off his head whilst he is lying on his face before you. If you succeed in this come at once to me, and I will show you what else is necessary in order to bring about his complete destruction."

The Prince promised to obey the lady's orders, and after again sending her into a trance by placing the magic flower behind her ear, he returned to the courtyard and awaited the Ogre's return. Just before dusk the Ogre came back and as the Princess had predicted he proceeded at once to the great audience hall, and seated himself on his chair of state.

"Now," said he to the Prince, "you must kow-tow to me three times."

"I am very sorry," answered the Prince, "that I do not know how to do so. Being a Prince myself, I have never had to kow-tow to anybody; but if you will show me the proper manner in which to proceed I will do my best."

This reply made the Ogre very angry, but he was unable to refuse to do as the Prince had asked him. So the Prince took his seat on the Ogre's chair and the Ogre kneeling on the ground before him proceeded to kow-tow three times in the orthodox manner. As the Ogre's face touched the ground the first time the Prince drew his sword; as it touched the ground the second time he raised the sword above his head; and as it touched the ground the third and last time the Prince delivered a violent blow, completely severing the Ogre's head from his body. Leaving the body where it lay, the Prince ran up to the glass room as fast as he could, and having awakened the lady from her sleep, he told her what had happened.

"Well done!" said she. "The first part of your task is now accomplished; but as I told you before, it is still necessary to destroy the Ogre's mascot, or he will come to life again in a short time. What you must do now, therefore, is as follows: you must descend into the vaults below the castle, and having traversed nine dark subterranean chambers, you will come to a blank stone wall. You must rap three times on this wall with the hilt of your sword, exclaiming with each rap, 'Open, blank wall'; and as you pronounce these words for the third time the wall will fly asunder, and you will find yourself entering another subterranean chamber. In the centre of this chamber you will see a beautiful boy seated with a goblet of crystal liquid in his hand. This boy is the Ogre's mascot, and upon his existence depends the Ogre's life in this world. You must at once slay the boy, and taking the goblet very carefully in your hand, carry it upstairs to me. But be careful not to spill any of the liquid, as each drop means a man's life."

On receiving these instructions the Prince went down into the vaults at the basement of the castle, and having traversed nine great subterranean chambers, he found his progress stopped by a blank wall. Raising his sword he rapped three times with the hilt on the wall, exclaiming each time as he did so, "Open, blank wall." As he pronounced these words for the third time a grating sound was heard, and with a hollow clang the wall gave way for him.

Advancing a few paces the Prince found himself in a small dungeon, lighted only by the glimmer which issued from a goblet of crystal liquid held in the hand of a beautiful young boy, who was seated in the centre of the chamber. Without a moment's hesitation the Prince thrust his sword through the heart of the boy, and taking the goblet in his hand, he carried it upstairs to the Princess, being very careful on the way not to allow a single drop to be spilt.

When the Princess saw him entering her room with the goblet in his hand she was very much delighted. "Now," said she, "the Ogre is effectually destroyed, and can never more come to life in this world. All that now remains to be done is to restore to life his previous victims."

So saying she ordered the Prince, still carrying the goblet, to follow her, and she proceeded by many winding passages and staircases to a remote part of the great castle. Presently, opening a huge door, she entered a long, low, gloomy chamber, lighted only by a narrow window which looked out over the back part of the castle. When the Prince entered this chamber he was horrified to see that down both sides of it were stretched the bodies of many scores of men, women and children, who lay there fully dressed, but to all appearance quite lifeless.

"These," said the lady, "are the bodies of the Ogre's victims; he has eaten their hearts, but the bodies, as you see, remain unharmed, while the spirit of each one is compressed into a drop of crystal liquor with which that goblet is filled. You must now sprinkle the bodies with the liquid, giving one drop to each."

Accordingly the Prince passed down the rows of lifeless bodies, dropping as he went one drop of the magic liquid on each body; and as the liquor touched the body the life returned, and each person, as if awakened from a long sleep, moved and yawned, and finally sat up and began to talk and walk. In a few moments the transformation was complete, and the Ogre's victims, after thanking the Prince and Princess heartily for their good offices, returned to their own homes. The Prince himself bade farewell to the lady, and leaving her in possession of the Ogre's castle and all its belongings, he himself mounted upon his horse, and with his dog following at his heels, set out in search of further adventures.

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