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The Devil Who Took to Himself a Wife

R.H. Busk

Ages and ages ago, in the days when the devil was still free to roam the earth, the head devil called all the others together and announced a competition: whoever showed himself the boldest and cleverest would be set free to live among human beings.

They all did wild and terrible things, and the winner was given his liberty. He went up into the world and decided to live like the children of men. He found a handsome, fashionable wife.

It was a disaster almost immediately. She spent all his money, refused to keep house, would take no correction, and was never satisfied unless she was out somewhere. He reproached her for extravagance. She reproached him for stinginess. Daily quarrels. Constant misery.

At last he said: "I'm going back to Hell, which is a considerably quieter place than a house with you in it. But I'll do you a good turn first. I'm going to possess a certain queen. You dress up as a doctor, come and pretend to cure her, and I'll come out on your signal. The king will be so grateful he'll give you enough money to live on comfortably for years."

He didn't mention that once she'd earned that one payment, he had no intention of actually going back to Hell. He just planned to wander off and enjoy himself elsewhere.

The wife followed his directions, found the right queen, performed the "cure," and received a sack of coins. News of her miraculous skill spread rapidly.

The devil had by now taken up residence in a certain king, and the king's court, having heard of the famous doctor who'd cured the queen, sent for the wife and told her she must cure this case too — or face execution.

Shut up alone with the king, she found the devil in an excellent mood.

"No," he said pleasantly. "I'm very comfortable in here and I intend to stay."

"They'll kill me if I can't get you out."

"Can't help that, I'm afraid," he said.

She scolded him. She raged at him. She went on at such volume and with such ferocity that he fled the king's body simply to escape her voice.



Rewarded again, her fame grew further still.

The third time, the devil was inside a queen, perfectly happy, and absolutely refused to leave.

"Let them take your head," he said. "That's the end of it."

"A fine husband," she replied, her voice rising, "to say that to a wife!"

She stormed. She thundered. She went on for so long and with such power that the devil could not bear it a moment longer. And this time, rather than possess any more kings or queens or anyone else at all, he went straight back to Hell — and never came out again for the rest of time, for fear of running into her.

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