The Sea Hare

Once upon a time there was a king's daughter who had a hall high up under the battlements of her castle with twelve windows that looked out in all directions of the world, and when she climbed up and looked around, she could see her entire kingdom. From the first she could see more sharply than other people, from the second even better, from the third even more clearly, and so on until the twelfth, where she saw everything that was above and below the earth, and nothing could remain hidden from her. But because she was proud, wanted to submit to no one, and keep the rule to herself alone, she had it proclaimed that no one should become her husband who could not hide from her in such a way that it would be impossible for her to find him. But whoever tried it and she discovered him, his head should be struck off and put on a stake. There already stood seven and ninety stakes with dead heads before the castle, and for a long time no one came forward. The king's daughter was content and thought, "I shall now remain free for the rest of my life." Then three brothers appeared before her and announced that they wanted to try their luck. The eldest thought he would be safe if he crept into a lime pit, but she spotted him from the first window, had him dragged out, and his head struck off. The second crept into the cellar of the castle, but she spotted him too from the first window, and it was all over with him: his head came onto the ninety-ninth stake. Then the youngest stepped before her and asked her to give him a day to think it over, and also to be so gracious as to spare him twice if she discovered him: if he failed the third time, he would no longer care about his life. Because he was so handsome and begged so earnestly, she said, "Yes, I will grant you that, but you will not succeed."

The following day he thought for a long time about how he wanted to hide, but it was in vain. Then he took his rifle and went out hunting. He saw a raven and took aim at him; just as he was about to pull the trigger, the raven called out, "Don't shoot, I will repay you!" He lowered his rifle, went on, and came to a lake where he surprised a large fish that had come up from the depths to the surface of the water. When he had taken aim, the fish called out, "Don't shoot, I will repay you!" He let it dive under, went on, and met a fox that was limping. He shot and missed him, whereupon the fox called out, "Come here instead and pull the thorn out of my foot." He did so, but then wanted to kill the fox and skin him. The fox said, "Leave off, I will repay you!" The youth let him go, and as it was evening, he went home.

The next day he was supposed to hide, but however much he racked his brains over it, he did not know where to go. He went into the forest to the raven and said, "I let you live; now tell me where I should hide so that the king's daughter does not see me." The raven lowered his head and thought for a long time. Finally he croaked, "I've got it!" He fetched an egg from his nest, divided it into two parts, and shut the youth inside: then he made it whole again and sat on it. When the king's daughter stepped to the first window, she could not discover him, nor in the following ones, and she began to grow anxious, but in the eleventh she spotted him. She had the raven shot, the egg fetched and broken, and the youth had to come out. She said, "This once is forgiven you; if you do not do better, you are lost."

The next day he went to the lake, called the fish, and said, "I let you live; now tell me where I should hide so that the king's daughter does not see me." The fish considered, and finally called out, "I've got it! I will shut you inside my belly." He swallowed him and sank down to the bottom of the lake. The king's daughter looked through her windows; even in the eleventh she did not see him, and was dismayed, but finally in the twelfth she discovered him. She had the fish caught and killed, and the youth came to light. Everyone can imagine how he felt. She said, "Twice it has been forgiven you, but your head will surely come onto the hundredth stake."

On the last day he went out into the field with a heavy heart and met the fox. "You know how to find all the hiding places," he said, "I let you live; now advise me where I should hide so that the king's daughter does not find me." "A hard task," answered the fox, and made a thoughtful face. Finally he called out, "I've got it!" He went with him to a spring, dipped himself in, and came out as a market peddler and animal dealer. The youth too had to dip himself in the water, and was turned into a little sea hare. The merchant went into the town and showed the pretty little animal. A lot of people gathered to look at it. At last the king's daughter also came, and because she took great delight in it, she bought it and gave the merchant a lot of money for it. Before he handed it to her, he said to it, "When the king's daughter goes to the window, quickly creep under her braid."

Now came the time when she was to search for him. She went to the windows in turn from the first to the eleventh and did not see him. When she did not see him at the twelfth either, she was full of fear and anger and slammed it shut so mightily that the glass in all the windows shattered into a thousand pieces and the whole castle trembled.

She went back and felt the sea hare under her braid; she seized it, threw it to the ground, and cried, "Get out of my sight!" It ran to the merchant, and both hurried

to the spring, where they dipped themselves and regained their true forms. The youth thanked the fox and said, "The raven and the fish are utterly stupid compared to you; you know the right tricks, that's the truth!"

The youth went straight into the castle. The king's daughter was already waiting for him and submitted to her fate. The wedding was celebrated, and he was now the king and lord of the whole realm. He never told her where he had hidden the third time and who had helped him, and so she believed he had done everything by his own skill, and had respect for him, for she thought to herself, "He can do more than you!"