

The Jumpers

The flea, the grasshopper, and the hopping jack decided once to see which of them could jump the highest, and they invited the whole world—everyone who wished—to come and admire such a marvel. And so the three considerable jumpers gathered together in one room.

"I will give my daughter to whoever jumps the highest!" said the king. "It would be a shame for such fine fellows to jump for nothing!"

First came the flea. She behaved most charmingly and bowed on all sides: blue blood flowed in her veins, and she was altogether accustomed to dealing only with people, which certainly means something!

Then came the grasshopper. He was, of course, somewhat heavier in weight, but also very respectable in appearance and dressed in a green uniform—he had been born in a uniform, in fact. The grasshopper claimed to descend from a very ancient lineage, from Egypt, and therefore to be held in high esteem in these parts; he had been taken straight from the field and placed in a three-story house of cards, made entirely of picture cards turned face inward. The windows and doors in it had been cut into the body of the Queen of Hearts.

"I sing," said the grasshopper, "and so well that sixteen local crickets, who have chirped since birth and still have not been granted a house of cards, heard me and grew thin from vexation!"

Thus both the flea and the grasshopper believed they had sufficiently proved themselves suitable matches for the princess.

The hopping jack said nothing, but rumor had it that he thought a great deal instead. The court dog, as soon as he had sniffed him, declared that he came from a very good family. And the old court counselor, who had received three orders for his ability to remain silent, asserted that the hopping jack possessed a prophetic gift: from his back one could tell whether the winter would be mild or harsh, something that could not be known even from the back of the calendar-maker himself.

"For now I shall say nothing!" said the old king. "But I have my own considerations!"

Now it remained to jump.

The flea jumped, and so high that no one could follow her, and therefore everyone began to say that she had not jumped at all. Only this was unfair.

The grasshopper jumped half as high and landed squarely in the king's face, whereupon the king said that this was very bad indeed.

The hopping jack stood for a long time thinking, and in the end everyone concluded that he did not know how to jump at all.

"I do hope he does not feel ill!" said the court dog, and began sniffing him again.

Hop! And the hopping jack, with a little sideways leap, found himself right on the princess's knees, for she was sitting on a low golden stool.

Then the king said:

"To jump the highest is to reach my daughter; that is the point. But to think of this requires a head, and the hopping jack has proved that he has one. And moreover, one with brains!"

And the princess was awarded to the hopping jack.

"And yet I jumped the highest of all!" said the flea. "But never mind, let him keep his foolish jack with his stick and tar! I jumped the highest, but in this world one must have figure, only then will you be noticed!"

And the flea enlisted as a volunteer in a foreign army and, they say, met her death there.

The grasshopper returned to the ditch and began to ponder how the world is arranged. He too said:

"Figure, figure one must have!"

And he struck up a song about his sorrowful lot. From his song we have taken this story. Though, of course, it is probably invented, even if it has been printed.