

# The Son of the King Who Feared Nothing

Once upon a time there lived a king's son who did not like life in his father's house, and since he feared nothing in the world, he thought: "Let me go wandering across the wide world to cheer my soul and see all sorts of wonders."

He took leave of his parents, set out on his journey, and traveled from morning till evening, caring not at all where the road might lead him.

It happened that he arrived at a giant's house, and being very weary, he sat down near the door to rest. Looking around him, the king's son saw in the yard the giant's toys: a pair of enormous balls and skittles as tall as a man.

After a little while, he felt like setting up those skittles and knocking them down with a ball, and he cried out joyfully whenever they fell, rejoicing with all his heart.

The giant heard the noise, looked out the window, and saw a man who was no bigger than other men, yet playing with his skittles.

"Worm!" exclaimed the giant. "How can you play with my skittles? Who gave you such strength?"

The king's son looked at the giant and said: "Oh, you fool! Do you think you are the only strong one in the world? Why, I—I can do anything, if only I have the will!"

The giant came down, began watching the game of skittles with amazement, and said: "Man! If you are truly such, then go and fetch me an apple from the tree of life." "And what do you need it for?" asked the king's son. "I do not need the apple for myself," answered the giant. "I have a bride who greatly desires to obtain it; but however much I have wandered across the wide world, I could never find that tree." "Well, then I shall find it!" said the king's son. "And I cannot understand what could prevent me from plucking that apple from the branch?" "Do you think it is easy?" asked the giant. "That garden, in which the tree grows, is surrounded by an iron grille, and before that grille lie rows of wild beasts guarding the garden, letting no one enter." "They will let me in!" said the king's son confidently. "Even if you do get into the garden and see the apple on the tree, obtaining it is still difficult: before that apple hangs a ring, and through that ring you must reach your hand if you wish to take and pluck the apple, and this has never yet been accomplished by anyone." "Well, I shall accomplish it," said the king's son.

He took leave of the giant, went over mountains and valleys, across fields and dales, and finally reached the enchanted garden.

And indeed: around it, along the grille, beasts lay in a continuous row; but they had bowed their heads and were asleep.

They did not wake even when the king's son approached them, and he stepped over them, climbed over the grille, and safely made his way into the garden.

In the middle of that garden stood the tree of life, and its red apples glowed brightly on the branches!

He climbed up the trunk, and just as he wanted to reach his hand toward one of the apples, he saw that a ring hung before that apple...

And without hesitation, without any effort, he thrust his hand through that ring and plucked the apple from the branch...

The ring tightly grasped his hand, and suddenly he felt tremendous strength throughout his whole body.

When the king's son climbed down from the tree with the apple, he no longer wished to climb back over the grille, but seized the large garden gate, shook it once—and the gate flew open with a crash.

He left the garden, and the lion lying before the gate woke up and ran after him, yet not wild, not fierce—he followed meekly behind him as behind his master.

The king's son brought the promised apple to the giant and said: "See, I obtained it without any trouble."

The giant, delighted that his desire had been fulfilled so quickly, hurried to his bride and gave her the apple she had so eagerly sought.

But his bride was a beautiful and clever maiden, and when she did not see the ring on his hand, she said: "I will not believe that you obtained this apple yourself until I see the ring on your hand." The giant said: "I need only go home and bring it," while thinking to himself that it would not be difficult to take by force from a weak man what he would not willingly surrender.

And so he demanded the ring from the king's son; but the latter would not give it up. "No, indeed! Where the apple is, there the ring must be too!" said the giant. "And if you do not give it to me willingly, then you must fight me for that ring!"

They wrestled for a long time, but the giant could in no way overcome the king's son, whose magical ring constantly increased his strength.

Then the giant resorted to cunning deceit and said to the king's son: "I have become very heated from our struggle, and so have you! Let us go bathe in the river and cool off before we begin fighting again."

The king's son, unaware of the treachery, went with the giant to the river, took off his clothes along with the ring from his hand, and plunged into the river.

The giant immediately seized the ring and ran away with it; however, the lion, having noticed the theft, instantly rushed after the giant, tore the ring from his hands, and brought it back to his master.

Then the giant quietly returned, hid behind an oak tree growing on the bank, and just as the king's son began dressing, he attacked him and gouged out both his eyes.

Thus the poor king's son found himself blind and helpless; and the giant approached him again, took him by the hand as if wishing to help him, but led him to the edge of a high cliff.

There the giant abandoned him, thinking: "Now, if he takes two more steps, he will fall to his death—then I shall take the ring from him."

But the faithful lion did not abandon his master; he firmly grasped him by his clothing and gently pulled him back from the cliff.

When the giant returned to rob the king's son, whom he believed dead, he realized his trick had failed. "Is it really impossible to destroy this weak little man!" he merely said, seized the king's son by the hand, and led him by another path to the edge of an abyss; but the lion, noticing the evil intent, saved the king's son from danger once again.

Approaching the very edge of the abyss, the giant released the blind man's hand and intended to leave him alone, but the lion pushed the giant so hard that he himself fell into the abyss and was dashed to pieces.

After this, the faithful animal again managed to pull its master away from the abyss and led him to a tree beside which flowed a pure, clear stream.

The king's son sat down by the stream, while the lion lay down on the bank and began sprinkling water from the stream onto his face with its paw.

As soon as two drops of that water moistened the king's son's eye sockets, he began to see a little again and suddenly spotted a bird flying very close to him that bumped into the tree trunk; then it descended to the water and dipped into it once

or twice—and already rose lightly, passing between the trees without touching them, as though the water had restored its sight.

In this the king's son saw the finger of God—he bent down to the stream's water, began washing his eyes in it and dipping his face into the water. And when he rose from the water, his eyes turned out to be as bright and clear as they had never been before.

The king's son thanked God for His great mercy and went with his lion to wander across the wide world. And it happened that he came to an enchanted castle. At the castle gates stood a maiden, slender and beautiful, yet completely black.

She spoke to him and said: "Oh, if only you could free me from the evil charms weighing upon me!" "And what must I do for that?" asked the king's son. The maiden answered him: "You must spend three nights in the great hall of the enchanted castle, and fear must not enter your heart. However much they torment you, you must endure everything without uttering a sound—then I shall be freed from the charms! Know also that your life will not be taken from you." "My heart knows no fear," answered the king's son, "I shall try, with God's help."

And he cheerfully entered the castle; and when it grew dark, he sat down in the great hall and began to wait.

Until midnight all was quiet; but at midnight a terrible noise arose in the castle, and from every corner numerous little devils appeared. They pretended not to see him, settled in the middle of the hall, kindled a fire on the floor, and began to play.

When one of them lost, he said: "Something is wrong! A stranger has slipped in here, and he is to blame for my losing." "Wait, I'll come right now, stove-devil!" said another.

And the shouting and noise and clamor kept increasing, and no one could hear them without terror...

But the prince sat perfectly calm, and fear did not take hold of him. Yet suddenly all the little devils leaped up from the ground at once and rushed upon him, and there were so many of them that he could not cope with them. They tore at him, dragged him across the ground, pinched, pricked, beat, and tortured him, but he did not utter a sound.

Toward morning they vanished, and he was so utterly exhausted that he could barely move.

When dawn broke, a black maiden entered the hall to him. She brought him a bottle of living water, washed him with that water, and he immediately felt a surge of new strength within himself, while all his pains ceased at once...

The maiden said to him: "You have endured one night safely, but two more still lie ahead of you."

Having said this, she departed, and he managed to notice that her feet had already turned white during that night.

On the following night the devils appeared again and resumed their game; then they attacked the prince once more and beat and tortured him even more cruelly than on the previous night, so that his entire body was covered with wounds.

But since he endured everything in silence, they finally had to leave him alone, and at daybreak the black girl came to him and healed him with living water.

And when she departed from him, he saw with joy that she had turned white up to the tips of her fingers.

Only one night remained for him to endure, but it was the most terrible of all!

The devils appeared again in a crowd...

"You are still alive!" they cried. "Then we must torture you so severely that your very soul will flee your body!"

They began to prick and beat him, to hurl him here and there, to drag him by his hands and feet as though intending to tear him apart: nevertheless he endured it all and did not utter a sound.

At last they vanished; but he lay completely powerless and motionless; he could not even raise his eyelids to look at the girl who entered and sprinkled him, pouring living water over him abundantly.

And suddenly all the pain in his body vanished as if swept away by a hand, and he felt fresh and healthy, as though awakened from a burdensome sleep; when he opened his eyes, he saw before him a girl—white as snow and beautiful as a clear day.

"Rise," she said, "and swing your sword three times above the staircase, and all the spells will vanish at once."

And when he did so, the entire castle was instantly freed from the enchantment, and the girl proved to be a wealthy queen. Servants appeared before them and announced that in the great hall the table was already set and the dishes served.

Then they sat down at the table, began to drink and eat together, and that same evening they celebrated their wedding with joy.