



# The Fish and the Ring

Once upon a time, there was a mighty baron in the North Country who was a great magician that knew everything that would come to pass. So one day, when his little boy was four years old, he looked into the Book of Fate to see what would happen to him. And to his dismay, he found that his son would wed a lowly maid that had just been born in a house under the shadow of York Minster. Now the Baron knew the father of the little girl was very, very poor, and he had five children already. So he called for his horse, and rode into York; and passed by the father's house, and saw him sitting by the door, sad and doleful. So he dismounted and went up to him and said: "What is the matter, my good man?" And the man said: "Well, your honour, the fact is, I've five children already, and now a sixth's come, a little lass, and where to get the bread from to fill their mouths, that's more than I can say."

"Don't be downhearted, my man," said the Baron. "If that's your trouble, I can help you. I'll take away the last little one, and you wont have to bother about her."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said the man; and he went in and brought out the lass and gave her to the Baron, who mounted his horse and rode away with her. And when he got by the bank of the river Ouse, he threw the little, thing into the river, and rode off to his castle.

But the little lass didn't sink; her clothes kept her up for a time, and she floated, and she floated, till she was cast ashore just in front of a fisherman's hut. There the fisherman found her, and took pity on the poor little thing and took her into his house, and she lived there till she was fifteen years old, and a fine handsome girl.

One day it happened that the Baron went out hunting with some companions along the banks of the River Ouse, and stopped at the fisherman's hut to get a drink, and the girl came out to give it to them. They all noticed her beauty, and one of them said to the Baron: "You can read fates, Baron, whom will she marry, d'ye think?"

"Oh! that's easy to guess," said the Baron; "some yokel or other. But I'll cast her horoscope. Come here girl, and tell me on what day you were born?"

"I don't know, sir," said the girl, "I was picked up just here after having been brought down by the river about fifteen years ago."

Then the Baron knew who she was, and when they went away, he rode back and said to the girl: "Hark ye, girl, I will make your fortune. Take this letter to my brother in Scarborough, and you will be settled for life." And the girl took the letter and said she would go. Now this was what he had written in the letter:

"Dear Brother,—Take the bearer and put her to death immediately.

"Yours affectionately,

"Albert."

So soon after the girl set out for Scarborough, and slept for the night at a little inn. Now that very night a band of robbers broke into the inn, and searched the girl, who had no money, and only the letter. So they opened this and read it, and thought

it a shame. The captain of the robbers took a pen and paper and wrote this letter:

“Dear Brother,—Take the bearer and marry her to my son immediately.

“Yours affectionately,

“Albert.”

And then he gave it to the girl, bidding her begone. So she went on to the Baron’s brother at Scarborough, a noble knight, with whom the Baron’s son was staying. When she gave the letter to his brother, he gave orders for the wedding to be prepared at once, and they were married that very day.

Soon after, the Baron himself came to his brother’s castle, and what was his surprise to find that the very thing he had plotted against had come to pass. But he was not to be put off that way; and he took out the girl for a walk, as he said, along the cliffs. And when he got her all alone, he took her by the arms, and was going to throw her over. But she begged hard for her life. “I have not done anything,” she said: “if you will only spare me, I will do whatever you wish. I will never see you or your son again till you desire it.” Then the Baron took off his gold ring and threw it into the sea, saying: “Never let me see your face till you can show me that ring;” and he let her go.

The poor girl wandered on and on, till at last she came to a great noble’s castle, and she asked to have some work given to her; and they made her the scullion girl of the castle, for she had been used to such work in the fisherman’s hut.

Now one day, who should she see coming up to the noble’s house but the Baron and his brother and his son, her husband. She didn’t know what to do; but thought they would not see her in the castle kitchen. So she went back to her work with a sigh, and set to cleaning a huge big fish that was to be boiled for their dinner. And, as she was cleaning it, she saw something

shine inside it, and what do you think she found? Why, there was the Baron's ring, the very one he had thrown over the cliff at Scarborough. She was right glad to see it, you may be sure. Then she cooked the fish as nicely as she could, and served it up.

Well, when the fish came on the table, the guests liked it so well that they asked the noble who cooked it. He said he didn't know, but called to his servants: "Ho, there, send up the cook that cooked that fine fish." So they went down to the kitchen and told the girl she was wanted in the hall. Then she washed and tidied herself and put the Baron's gold ring on her thumb and went up into the hall.

When the banqueters saw such a young and beautiful cook they were surprised. But the Baron was in a tower of a temper, and started up as if he would do her some violence. So the girl went up to him with her hand before her with the ring on it; and she put it down before him on the table. Then at last the Baron saw that no one could fight against Fate, and he handed her to a seat and announced to all the company that this was his son's true wife; and he took her and his son home to his castle; and they all lived as happy as could be ever afterwards.

# The Three Heads of the Well

Long before Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, there reigned in the eastern part of England a king who kept his Court at Colchester. In the midst of all his glory, his queen died, leaving behind her an only daughter, about fifteen years of age, who for her beauty and kindness was the wonder of all that knew her. But the king hearing of a lady who had likewise an only daughter, had a mind to marry her for the sake of her riches, though she was old, ugly, hook-nosed, and hump-backed. Her daughter was a yellow dowdy, full of envy and ill-nature; and, in short, was much of the same mould as her mother. But in a few weeks the king, attended by the nobility and gentry, brought his deformed bride to the palace, where the marriage rites were performed.

They had not been long in the Court before they set the king against his own beautiful daughter by false reports. The young princess having lost her father's love, grew weary of the Court, and one day, meeting with her father in the garden, she begged him, with tears in her eyes, to let her go and seek her fortune; to which the king consented, and ordered her mother-in-law to give her what she pleased. She went to the queen, who gave her a canvas bag of brown bread and hard cheese, with a bottle of beer; though this was but a pitiful dowry for a king's daughter. She took it, with thanks, and proceeded on her journey, passing through groves, woods, and valleys, till at length she saw

an old man sitting on a stone at the mouth of a cave, who said: "Good morrow, fair maiden, whither away so fast?"

"Aged father," says she, "I am going to seek my fortune."

"What have you got in your bag and bottle?"

"In my bag I have got bread and cheese, and in my bottle good small beer. Would you like to have some?"

"Yes," said he, "with all my heart."

With that the lady pulled out her provisions, and bade him eat and welcome. He did so, and gave her many thanks, and said: "There is a thick thorny hedge before you, which you cannot get through, but take this wand in your hand, strike it three times, and say, 'Pray, hedge, let me come through,' and it will open immediately; then, a little further, you will find a well; sit down on the brink of it, and there will come up three golden heads, which will speak; and whatever they require, that do." Promising she would, she took her leave of him. Coming to the hedge and using the old man's wand, it divided, and let her through; then, coming to the well, she had no sooner sat down than a golden head came up singing:

"Wash me, and comb me,  
And lay me down softly.  
And lay me on a bank to dry,  
That I may look pretty,  
When somebody passes by."

"Yes," said she, and taking it in her lap combed it with a silver comb, and then placed it upon a primrose bank. Then up came a second and a third head, saying the same as the former. So she did the same for them, and then, pulling out her provisions, sat down to eat her dinner.

Then said the heads one to another: "What shall we weird for this damsel who has used us so kindly?"

The first said: "I weird her to be so beautiful that she shall charm the most powerful prince in the world."

The second said: "I weird her such a sweet voice as shall far exceed the nightingale."

The third said: "My gift shall be none of the least, as she is a king's daughter, I'll weird her so fortunate that she shall become queen to the greatest prince that reigns."

She then let them down into the well again, and so went on her journey. She had not travelled long before she saw a king hunting in the park with his nobles. She would have avoided him, but the king, having caught a sight of her, approached, and what with her beauty and sweet voice, fell desperately in love with her, and soon induced her to marry him.

This king finding that she was the King of Colchester's daughter, ordered some chariots to be got ready, that he might pay the king, his father-in-law, a visit. The chariot in which the king and queen rode was adorned with rich gems of gold. The king, her father, was at first astonished that his daughter had been so fortunate, till the young king let him know of all that had happened. Great was the joy at Court amongst all, with the exception of the queen and her club-footed daughter, who were ready to burst with envy. The rejoicings, with feasting and dancing, continued many days. Then at length they returned home with the dowry her father gave her.

The hump-backed princess, perceiving that her sister had been so lucky in seeking her fortune, wanted to do the same; so she told her mother, and all preparations were made, and she was furnished with rich dresses, and with sugar, almonds, and sweetmeats, in great quantities, and a large bottle of Malaga sack. With these she went the same road as her sister; and coming near the cave, the old man said: "Young woman, whither so fast?"

"What's that to you?" said she.

“Then,” said he, “what have you in your bag and bottle?”

She answered: “Good things, which you shall not be troubled with.”

“Won’t you give me some?” said he.

“No, not a bit, nor a drop, unless it would choke you.”

The old man frowned, saying: “Evil fortune attend ye!”

Going on, she came to the hedge, through which she espied a gap, and thought to pass through it; but the hedge closed, and the, thorns ran into her flesh, so that it was with great difficulty that she got through. Being now all over blood, she searched for water to wash herself, and, looking round, she saw the well. She sat down on the brink of it, and one of the heads came up, saying:

“Wash me, comb me, and lay me down softly,” as before, but she banged it with her bottle, saying, “Take that for your washing.” So the second and third heads came up, and met with no better treatment than the first. Whereupon the heads consulted among themselves what evils to plague her with for such usage.

The first said: “Let her be struck with leprosy in her face.”

The second: “Let her voice be as harsh as a corn-crake’s.”

The third said: “Let her have for husband but a poor country cobbler.”

Well, she goes on till she came to a town, and it being market-day, the people looked at her, and, seeing such a mangy face, and hearing such a squeaky voice, all fled but a poor country cobbler. Now he not long before had mended the shoes of an old hermit, who, having no money gave him a box of ointment for the cure of the leprosy, and a bottle of spirits for a harsh voice. So the cobbler having a mind to do an act of charity, was induced to go up to her and ask her who she was.

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“I am,” said she, “the King of Colchester’s daughter-in-law.”

“Well,” said the cobbler, “if I restore you to your natural complexion, and make a sound cure both in face and voice, will you in reward take me for a husband?”

“Yes, friend,” replied she, “with all my heart!”

With this the cobbler applied the remedies, and they made her well in a few weeks; after which they were married, and so set forward for the Court at Colchester. When the queen found that her daughter had married nothing but a poor cobbler, she hanged herself in wrath. The death of the queen so pleased the king, who was glad to get rid of her so soon, that he gave the cobbler a hundred pounds to quit the Court with his lady, and take to a remote part of the kingdom, where he lived many years mending shoes, his wife spinning the thread for him.

# Master and Pupil

**T**here was once a man who had a son who was very clever at reading, and took great delight in it. He went out into the world to seek service somewhere, and as he was walking between some mounds he met a man, who asked him where he was going.

‘I am going about seeking for service,’ said the boy.

‘Will you serve me?’ asked the man.

‘Oh, yes; just as readily you as anyone else,’ said the boy.

‘But can you read?’ asked the man.

‘As well as the priest,’ said the boy.

Then I can’t have you,’ said the man. ‘In fact, I was just wanting a boy who couldn’t read. His only work would be to dust my old books.’

The man then went on his way, and left the boy looking after him.

‘It was a pity I didn’t get that place,’ thought he ‘That was just the very thing for me.’

Making up his mind to get the situation if possible, he hid himself behind one of the mounds, and turned his jacket outside in, so that the man would not know him again so easily. Then he ran along behind the mounds, and met the man at the other end of them.

‘Where are you going, my little boy?’ said the man, who did not notice that it was the same one he had met before.

‘I am going about seeking for service?’ said the boy.

‘Will you serve me?’ asked the man.

‘Oh, yes; just as readily you as anyone else,’ said the boy.

‘But can you read?’ said the man.

‘No, I don’t know a single letter,’ said the boy.

The man then took him into his service, and all the work he had to do was to dust his master’s books. But as he did this he had plenty of time to read them as well, and he read away at them until at last he was just as wise as his master—who was a great wizard—and could perform all kinds of magic. Among other feats, he could change himself into the shape of any animal, or any other thing that he pleased.

When he had learned all this he did not think it worth while staying there any longer, so he ran away home to his parents again. Soon after this there was a market in the next village, and the boy told his mother that he had learned how to change himself into the shape of any animal he chose.

‘Now,’ said he, ‘I shall change myself to a horse, and father can take me to market and sell me. I shall come home again all right.’

His mother was frightened at the idea, but the boy told her that she need not be alarmed; all would be well. So he changed himself to a horse, such a fine horse, too, that his father got a high price for it at the market; but after the bargain was made, and the money paid, the boy changed again to his own shape, when no one was looking, and went home.

The story spread all over the country about the fine horse that had been sold and then had disappeared, and at last the news came to the ears of the wizard.

‘Aha!’ said he, ‘this is that boy of mine, who befooled me and ran away; but I shall have him yet.’

The next time that there was a market the boy again changed himself to a horse, and was taken thither by his father. The horse soon found a purchaser, and while the two were inside drinking the luck-penny the wizard came along and saw the horse. He knew at once that it was not an ordinary one, so he also went inside, and offered the purchaser far more than he had paid for it, so the latter sold it to him.

The first thing the wizard now did was to lead the horse away to a smith to get a red-hot nail driven into its mouth, because after that it could not change its shape again. When the horse saw this it changed itself to a dove, and flew up into the air. The wizard at once changed himself into a hawk, and flew up after it. The dove now turned into a gold ring, and fell into a girl's lap. The hawk now turned into a man, and offered the girl a great sum of money for the gold ring, but she would not part with it, seeing that it had fallen down to her, as it were, from Heaven. However, the wizard kept on offering her more and more for it, until at last the gold ring grew frightened, and changed itself into a grain of barley, which fell on the ground. The man then turned into a hen, and began to search for the grain of barley, but this again changed itself to a pole-cat, and took off the hen's head with a single snap.

The wizard was now dead, the pole-cat put on human shape, and the youth afterwards married the girl, and from that time forward let all his magic arts alone.

# The King of Waterfalls

When the young king of Easaidh Ruadh came into his kingdom, the first thing he thought of was how he could amuse himself best. The sports that all his life had pleased him best suddenly seemed to have grown dull, and he wanted to do something he had never done before. At last his face brightened.

‘I know!’ he said. ‘I will go and play a game with the Gruagach.’ Now the Gruagach was a kind of wicked fairy, with long curly brown hair, and his house was not very far from the king’s house.

But though the king was young and eager, he was also prudent, and his father had told him on his deathbed to be very careful in his dealings with the ‘good people,’ as the fairies were called. Therefore before going to the Gruagach the king sought out a wise man of the countryside.

‘I am wanting to play a game with the curly-haired Gruagach,’ said he.

‘Are you, indeed?’ replied the wizard. ‘If you will take my counsel, you will play with someone else.’

‘No; I will play with the Gruagach,’ persisted the king.

‘Well, if you must, you must, I suppose,’ answered the wizard; ‘but if you win that game, ask as a prize the ugly crop-headed girl that stands behind the door.’

‘I will,’ said the king.

So before the sun rose he got up and went to the house of the Gruagach, who was sitting outside.

‘O king, what has brought you here to-day?’ asked the Gruagach. ‘But right welcome you are, and more welcome will you be still if you will play a game with me.’

‘That is just what I want,’ said the king, and they played; and sometimes it seemed as if one would win, and sometimes the other, but in the end it was the king who was the winner.

‘And what is the prize that you will choose?’ inquired the Gruagach.

‘The ugly crop-headed girl that stands behind the door,’ replied the king.

‘Why, there are twenty others in the house, and each fairer than she!’ exclaimed the Gruagach.

‘Fairer they may be, but it is she whom I wish for my wife, and none other,’ and the Gruagach saw that the king’s mind was set upon her, so he entered his house, and bade all the maidens in it come out one by one, and pass before the king.

One by one they came; tall and short, dark and fair, plump and thin, and each said ‘I am she whom you want. You will be foolish indeed if you do not take me.’

But he took none of them, neither short nor tall, dark nor fair, plump nor thin, till at the last the crop-headed girl came out.

‘This is mine,’ said the king, though she was so ugly that most men would have turned from her. ‘We will be married at once, and I will carry you home.’ And married they were, and they set forth across a meadow to the king’s house. As they went, the bride stooped and picked a sprig of shamrock, which grew amongst the grass, and when she stood upright again her ugliness had all gone, and the most beautiful woman that ever was seen stood by the king’s side.