

HOW A SHEPHERD BOY WON THE KING'S DAUGHTER

Once upon a time there lived a king who claimed that he had never told a lie. All day long he heard his courtiers saying “that is not true – you’re a liar” and he grew very displeased. One day he called them to him.

“You surprise and displease me,” he said. “Any stranger who overheard you would think I ruled over the kingdom of liars. This must cease. You never hear me say ‘that is not true’ or ‘you are a liar’: if anyone did I would give him my daughter’s hand in marriage.”

A young shepherd heard the King’s words and said to himself: “Very well, I will wed the King’s daughter, if he is a man of his word!”

The old King liked to listen to stories and hear gwerziou and soniou (ballads and songs) being sung; very often after supper he would sit down at the great fireplace in the kitchen and enjoy the songs and tales told by his servants.

“What about you, little one, have you nothing for us?” said the King to the shepherd boy one evening.

“Oh yes, your Majesty,” said the shepherd boy.

“Let us hear it then,” said the King.

“Well, one day I was out walking in the forest when I saw a fine hare,” said the shepherd boy. “It ran in front of me and I threw a ball of soot at its forehead. The soot stuck to it but it didn’t stop. Soon it ran straight into another hare. The ball of soot stuck their foreheads together, so they could not free themselves and I caught them with the greatest ease.



What do you think of that, your Majesty?"

"Strange, but not impossible," said the King. "Have you anything else for us?"

"Before I came to your court, Sire, I worked for my father, the miller. One day I loaded my donkey so heavily that it broke his spine."

"The poor animal!" cried the King.

"I went to a nearby hedge and cut myself a hazel stick. I put it in his back in place of a spine, and he leapt up and carried his load to the mill."

"That is very strange," said the King, "but what happened next?"

"The next morning – and it was the month of December – I was surprised to see that branches, leaves and even hazelnuts had grown on the stick left poking out, and when I took my donkey out of the stable the branches kept on growing so fast, and so, so high, that they soon touched the sky."

"That is strange indeed," said the King, "but what happened next?"

"Goodness, when I saw that, I began to climb the branches and soon reached the moon."

"That is certainly very strange," said the King, "but what happened next?"

"When I reached the moon I saw some old women winnowing oats and I watched them for a long while; when I wanted to go back to earth I found that my donkey had walked away, and the hazel stick was gone. What was I to do? I started knotting together the oat husks and before long I had a fine rope."

"Very strange," said the King. "What happened next?"

"Alas, my rope was too short and I had to let go. I fell head first and landed on a rock sticking up out of the ground. I sank down into it up to my shoulders."

"Very strange," said the King. "What happened next?"

"I managed to wrench all but my head free, so I ran off to find an iron lever to prise it out."

"Very, very strange," said the King. "What happened next?"

"When I got back with the lever I found that a wolf was eating my head. I gave it such a heavy blow that I squashed it flat and out shot a letter."



“Very, very, very strange,” said the King, “but what happened next?”

“In this letter, your Majesty, it was written that your grandfather had once worked for my grandfather, the miller.”

“You lie through your teeth, son of a dog!” cried the King, and sprang to his feet.

“Look out, your Majesty, I have won your daughter's hand,” said the shepherd boy.

“What do you mean?” asked the King.

“Have you forgotten that you promised to give your daughter to the man who caught you saying ‘You are a liar’?”

“Very true, and the King must not break his word,” replied the old man. “I will give you my daughter and you shall be betrothed today and married in a week.”

And this is how a shepherd boy won the King's daughter.