

THE KINDHEARTED PRINCE

Once upon a time there lived in Paris, or thereabouts, a king, who had an only son. He brought him up with the greatest care, and as the child grew he became more and more handsome, like a rose tree that bears more blossoms every year. However, while the boy was still young he was stolen away by gipsies. His happy life in his father's court was soon forgotten, and he had to wander from fair to fair with the gipsy folk, dressed in rags, and earning what little he could.

When the leader of the gipsies was dying, he called the boy to him. "Your place is not among us, young man," he said. "You are the son of a king. Take this ring. If you show it to your father he will recognise you as his son."

The young prince set forth, with a hunk of brown bread in his pocket to feed him on his journey. He walked as long as the sun was in the sky, and the crickets sang in the corn. When night began to draw on, he saw a poor beggar seated on a milestone. He was holding out his hand to passers-by, and seemed to be very ill.



"Why are you sitting on that milestone?" asked the young man. "The passers-by cannot make you well. Come with me to the city and I will find some way to heal you. The physicians will refuse nothing to the son of the King."

He drew forth his ring, and showed it to the beggar.

“Look,” he said, “I will show this to my father and he will soon recognise me. Then I will be able to command whomever I please.”

The beggar arose and set off at the young man’s side. He was full of gratitude and thanked the Prince again and again. However, his intentions were evil.

They walked on for several days, and began to think that they must be near the capital. It was very hot and they stopped to drink from a clear, sparkling spring.

“God be thanked – ” said the Prince, “I am very thirsty.” He fell down onto his knees at the water’s edge and began to drink. The beggar sprang forward, took the ring, and pushed the young man into the spring.

Fortune protected the poor prince and he managed to scramble up the bank. He walked on with wet clothes, and eyes full of tears. He was wondering how he could recover his ring when he saw a crowd of ants. They were in great distress because a horse had trodden on their nest, and they were doing all they could to rebuild it. Their predicament moved the Prince’s heart, and he knelt down, and helped the tiny creatures to repair their home.

This time his kindness met with the gratitude it deserved. The ants formed a circle around him and their queen bowed gracefully and began to speak.

“Handsome young man, my people and I do not forget. No matter where you are, if you call on us we will come to your aid.”



The Prince walked on and soon came to a pond, where some ducks were making a loud commotion. One of them had broken its wings and feet, and was being swept away by the current. The Prince lifted it out of the water and set it down on the bank. The ducks were amazed at this act of kindness from a man, and one who seemed to be their leader began to speak.

“A father never forgets a kindness done to his son,” he said. “Wherever you are, O Prince, if you are in need, the King of the ducks will come to your aid.”

The Prince walked on towards the walls of the capital, which could now be seen against the sky. Suddenly he saw a magnificent steed struggling to free itself from its chain, with which it was entangled.



“If I do not help the poor creature, it will harm itself,” said the Prince. He ran over to the horse and set it free.

“Thank you,” said the steed. “I belong to the King, your father, and if you are ever in need I will do all I can to serve you.”

The Prince thanked him and walked on until he reached the city.

“If I could only see the King,” he thought, “maybe he would recognise me without the ring.”

His wish was soon granted. When he entered the palace he caught sight of the King, surrounded by a splendid entourage. A young man walked by his side; he was wearing the ring and the Prince recognised him as the beggar.

“Sire,” he cried, “that man is an impostor. The ring he wears was stolen. I am your real son.”

The King looked angry and the beggar ground his teeth.

“If you wish to be believed, you must pass three tests,” said the King. “Otherwise you shall not leave here alive. My most beautiful crown has fallen into a pond, and no one can find it for me, for they say the pond is bottomless. You must retrieve it!”

The poor prince went to the edge of the pond and began to weep. What was he to do? Suddenly he remembered the promise of the King of the ducks.

“King of the ducks, King of the ducks,” he cried, “come to my aid.”

Immediately the pond was covered with ducks. They arrived from all sides, some on foot, some through the air, and began to dive into the water. Soon one appeared with the crown in its beak.

The King was filled with surprise and joy.

“Truly, young man, your powers are great,” he said. “Let us see if you can pass the second test. In my barn I have a hundred sacks of corn, which have been gnawed through by rats. You must gather together the grains, and put them in new sacks before sunset.”

The young man went to the barn and called:

“Queen of the ants, Queen of the ants, come to my aid.”

The words had barely passed his lips before ants began to cover the ground, never were so many seen at once. They gathered together the corn, grain by grain and filled the new sacks in an hour. All the young man had to do was fasten up the tops.



The King was once again filled with amazement.

“Truly, there is no one like you,” he said. “I hope you

can pass your third test. This year has been very dry and all my people are thirsty. I wish you to make three springs in this meadow, at which they can quench their thirst.”

The young prince raised his voice and called:

“King’s horse, King’s horse, come to my aid.”

When the King’s horse heard these words it burst out of its stable and ran like lightning to the Prince’s side. The young man mounted its back and in three leaps, the fiery steed had reached the other side of the meadow. At the spots where it had touched the ground there bubbled up springs of sweet, clear water. The thirst of all the people, and even of their animals, could now be quenched.

This time all the King’s doubts were removed.

“These tests have proved that you are my real son,” he said. “Let the beggar be chased from the city like a thief.”

The command was carried out, and the kind-hearted prince ruled for many years in great happiness, over the people in his care.

