

THE WIDOW'S SON AND THE THREE DOGS

Once upon a time there lived a young man who took his mother's goat out every day to graze. One day an old woman passed by, followed by three dogs.

"Will you give me your goat, in exchange for my dogs?" she said.

"Oh no," said the young man. "I know my goat is only small, but she gives us milk, and what would I do with three dogs?"

The next day the old woman came to him again.

"Have you changed your mind?" she said.

"No," said the young man. "Keep your animals, and I will keep mine."

The next day the old woman came to him again.

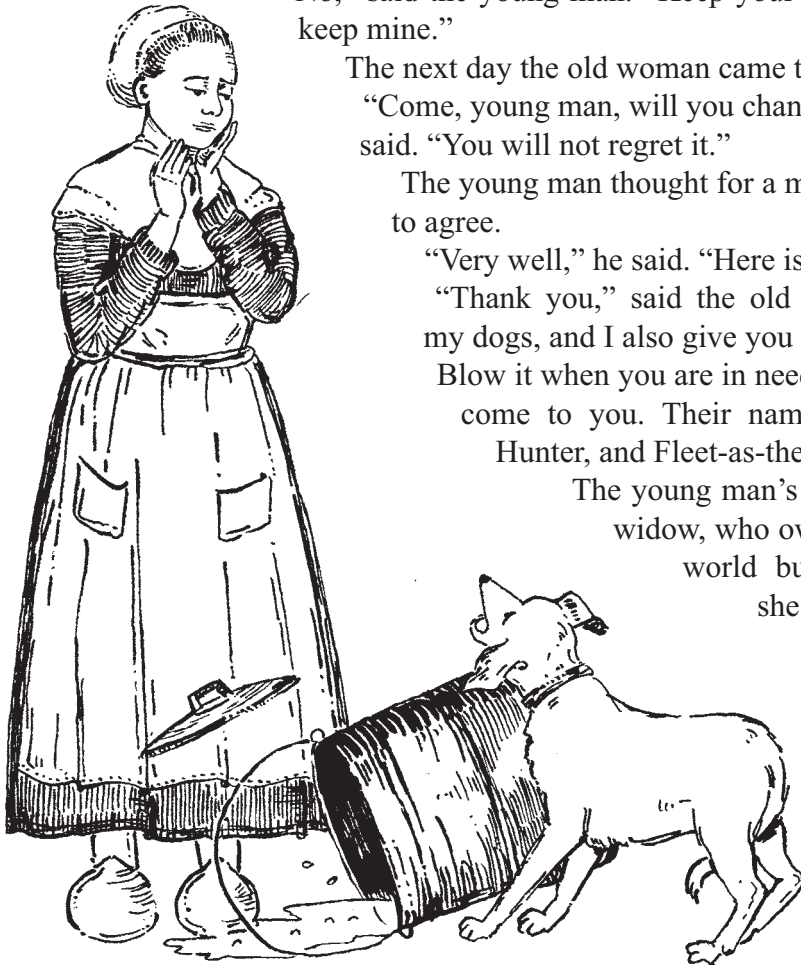
"Come, young man, will you change your mind?" she said. "You will not regret it."

The young man thought for a moment and decided to agree.

"Very well," he said. "Here is my goat."

"Thank you," said the old woman. "Here are my dogs, and I also give you this golden whistle. Blow it when you are in need, and the dogs will come to you. Their names are Break-Iron, Hunter, and Fleet-as-the-Wind."

The young man's mother was a poor widow, who owned nothing in the world but her goat. When she heard of her son's strange bargain she flew into a rage and seized a stick. Immediately, Break-Iron leapt at it and bit it through as if it were a piece of straw.



The Widow's Son and the Three Dogs

“Since you have given away our goat, I cannot feed you,” she said. “Go out into the world and see if your dogs can provide for you.”

“As you please, Mother,” said the young man. He left the house where his mother and sister lived and went with his dogs to a nearby forest. It was full of animals, but after three months the dog called Hunter had killed them all.

The young man decided to go to a forest outside Paris. He had heard that this too was full of animals, but people were afraid of it, because no one who entered it ever returned. He was curious to see it for himself, so he and his sister set out for Paris together. She would keep house for him, while he went out hunting.

When they reached the edge of the forest the young man was surprised to see that the branches were so tangled that the sunlight could not pass through. As he began to make his way into the forest he heard a voice saying:

“Do not go any further, your life is in great danger!”

“Bah,” he said, “I have my three dogs.”

He found an empty house for his sister in a clearing, and then went hunting in the forest. He saw many animals, but not a single person.

He had arranged with his sister that when she had made the midday meal, she should ring a bell to tell him it was ready. That day, however, midday came and went, and he did not hear the bell.

“Can anything have happened?” he said. “Let me hurry home!”

Something had indeed happened. That morning, when his sister was tidying the rooms of the mysterious house, twenty-four giants appeared. They were all so strong that they could lift up an ox as if it were nothing.

“Who are you, and what are you doing in our home?” they cried.

“Forgive me,” said the poor girl. “It is all my brother’s doing.”

“Truly,” said one of the giants, “you are too pretty to die, but you must help us to punish your impudent brother.”

So saying he threw several handfuls of poison into the soup that was cooking over the fire, and then he and his companions hurried away. No sooner had they gone, but the young man and his three dogs entered the kitchen. Break-Iron sniffed the air, and leapt at the cooking pot. It rolled over spilling all the soup.

“What has happened, sister?” asked the young man.

“I was busy tidying the house,” said the girl. “That is why dinner was not ready on time.”

Next morning the twenty-four giants returned.

"Is your brother dead?" they said to the girl.

"No, Break-Iron smelt the poison, and spilt the soup," she said.

"No matter, we will try something else. In the corner of this room is a chair which freezes whoever sits in it. Tell your brother to sit there while dinner is being prepared, and we will see to the rest."

The giants left, and the girl rang the bell. Her brother soon arrived with his dogs, but when Break-Iron saw the chair he growled and crunched it to pieces.

When the giants found out what had happened they grew very angry. They decided on a new plan, and persuaded the girl to help them.

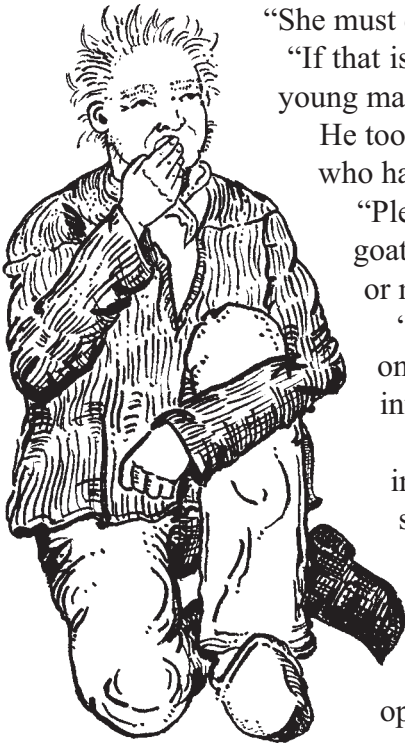
The next day, when the young man came home he found his sister in bed.

"Alas, my brother, I am very ill," she said. "I feel that I am about to die. Please fetch me a physician."

The young man hurried out and came back with a physician. However, the physician was really one of the twenty-four giants.

"I know what is wrong with this young woman," he said. "But I only know one cure for her."

"What is it?" said the young man. "I would go to the end of the earth to find it."



"She must drink goat's milk," said the giant.

"If that is all, I will fetch it immediately," said the young man.

He took his dogs and returned to the old woman who had given them to him.

"Please take your dogs and give me back my goat," he said. "I must have some goat's milk, or my sister will die."

"As you please," said the old woman. "I only hope your kind heart does not get you into trouble."

When the young man came to the house in the woods the twenty-four giants were standing in the doorway.

"So here you are," they said. "We have a bone to pick with you."

They seized him and threw him into a deep pit, and rolled a stone over the opening.

The Widow's Son and the Three Dogs

He lay there a long while, and scarcely knew if he were alive or dead. How he wished he had not given back his dogs! Suddenly he remembered his golden whistle.

He blew it, and soon heard the sound of joyful barking. The stone was crunched to pieces by Break-Iron, and Fleet-as-the-Wind carried him up out of the pit.

He returned to the castle, and walked through the rooms, looking for his sister. At last he found her, in the midst of celebrations for her betrothal to one of the giants.

“Never let it be said that treachery did anyone any good, not even you!” he cried, and set his dogs on them. They could not defend themselves, and the giants and his sister were swiftly slain.

Filled with sorrow, the young man left the castle in the wood, and walked to Paris.

In the city, he was surprised to see everyone in mourning.

“What is the matter?” he asked.

“Don’t you know?” cried the people. “There is a seven-headed dragon on yonder hill. It has eaten all the maidens in the city, but no man can slay it. Today it is the turn of the King’s daughter.”

“Very good,” said the young man. “My dogs and I are looking for a difficult task. We shall see if this dragon is truly invincible.”

He could not be dissuaded, and he and his dogs set out from the city. He soon met the King’s daughter, walking up the hill to the dragon.

“Turn back, my poor friend,” she said. “Only one need die.”

“Where I come from, young men do not let maidens be slain,” he replied. “May God protect us both, Princess.”

They reached the top of the hill and he called to his dogs.

“Now Hunter – it is up to you!” The dog called Hunter ran off like a streak of lightning, and chased the dragon out of its cave. It had seven heads and was breathing fire. Its tail swept along the ground, and was over twenty yards long.

“Now, Fleet-as-the-Wind!” said the young man.

The dog called Fleet-as-the-Wind ran at the dragon and began to dart round and round it, biting it all over. After a quarter of an hour the dragon was exhausted.

“Now it is our turn, Break-Iron,” cried the young man, and he rushed at the dragon, sword in hand. Soon the terrible creature lay dead.

The Princess had looked on from afar, and now she came running up.

“How can I thank you?” she said. “Take this handkerchief embroidered

with my name; wherever you show it they will know you as the Princess's deliverer. Take this vial of water too – it can bring the dead back to life. My father will also want to reward you."

"Thank you, Princess," said the young man. "I will make use of this water straight away."

He cut off the dragon's seven tongues, wrapped them in the handkerchief, and returned to the giants' house in the forest. Ever since his sister had died, he had felt unhappy, and he longed to see her alive again. When he arrived at the giants' home, he found her where she was lying and bent and dropped a little of the water on her face. She awoke as if from a long sleep, and stood up, as well as ever. The young man then dropped water on the faces of the twenty-four giants.

They awoke, shook themselves, rubbed their eyes, and asked for something to eat and drink.

"Young man," they said. "You have justly punished us for the wrong we did you. From now on we will stand by you to the death."

About a year after this, news reached them that the Princess was to marry her deliverer. The young man wanted to know if this was true, and he and his dogs and the giants set out for Paris.

Now, when the Princess had been left behind on the hill, a knight who had been hiding close by, had come up to her. He had cut off the dragon's seven heads, and made the princess promise to tell everyone that he was her deliverer. He had come before the King, and their marriage had been arranged.



The Widow's Son and the Three Dogs

When the young man arrived in Paris and saw the preparations for the wedding he grew very angry. He told the giants to attack the guard, and ordered Fleet-as-the-Wind to knock over the tables, while Break-Iron tore the dishes from the servants' hands.

The King called the young man to him, and indignantly asked him who he was.

"Tell me, your Majesty," said the young man. "Is he who took the dragon's tongues the Princess's deliverer, or is it he who took the dragon's heads?"

"It is he who has the dragon's seven tongues," said the King.

"Then I am the Princess's deliverer," said the young man, and he showed the King the tongues wrapped in the Princess's handkerchief.

The impostor was led away, and the young man was married to the Princess. When the King died he became king in his place, and he ruled for many years with the aid of the giants. They became his chief advisors, and he was always protected by his dogs, Hunter, Break-Iron, and Fleet-as-the-Wind.

Told by Mathurin Guilleray, tailor in Noyal-Pontivy