



## THE DEVIL'S LAIR

Once upon a time, there lived a powerful king who had an exceptionally beautiful daughter. As the princess walked about the meadows one day, a terrible dragon came and kidnapped the terrified girl. The dragon was none other than the devil himself and he dragged the princess into Hell with him. The king was devastated when he heard the news. He declared he would reward anyone who would save his daughter from Hell with the whole kingdom and the princess's hand in marriage. Many came to try and find the way to Hell, but none succeeded, no matter how hard they tried.

One day, a brave son of a poor widow arrived. He stepped in front of the king to ask if he could try to rescue the princess as well. The king repeated his promise and the young lad set off on his way.

He kept asking everyone he met whether he was on the right path to Hell, but no one knew the answer – until finally, he chanced upon a dirty old woman, who looked so weak and feeble he didn't even think to ask her anything.

Instead, she came to him herself: "Where are you going, young man?"

"Oh, I am trying to find the way to Hell, but I don't know where it is," he replied.

"I see, my friend," said the woman, reaching under her arm. "Well, if you are heading to Hell, you're going to need this branch. On your way, you will meet a black rooster. You have to catch him and pull out one of his feathers. Then you

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will come across a black billy goat who will try to ram you with his horns. You will have to take a bristle from his chin. ”

The woman gave him the branch and before the boy had time to thank her, she quickly vanished. He wanted to go after her, but the branch stopped him and pushed him the opposite way. He followed the path the rod was showing him until he reached a farm with a black rooster standing in front of it. Once the fowl noticed the stranger with the branch, it started running around and waving its wings, trying to fly away. But our hero was faster and soon he caught the bird. It kept fighting back but the boy managed to pull out one of its feathers anyway. He stuck it in his hat and continued on his way.

He hadn't gone far before a black billy goat blocked the road. It lowered its head, the horns nearly touching the ground, and before our hero knew it, the goat rushed against him and knocked him down. But the boy wasn't going to give up that easily. He jumped to his feet and when the billy goat attacked him again, he grabbed the animal by its goatee and yanked almost a half of it out. The bleating goat quickly ran home. The lad picked the finest bristle and tucked it safely in his pocket. He hid the twig in his boot and walked on.

He walked and walked until he reached a large locked gate leading to Hell itself. But what was he supposed to do with a locked gate?

“Well,” he thought, “let's try the stick.”

When he banged it on the gate, it swung open and a doorman appeared under the arch.

“What do you want? You got a permit?” asked the hairy black creature.

The boy reached down to his pocket and showed the gatekeeper the black feather and the bristle from the billy goat. The doorman growled “fine” and stepped aside. Behind him were three tunnels.

“Where should I go now?” thought the boy, racking his brain. He asked the twig and it pointed him to the path in the middle, so he took it.

After a while, he reached a chamber with three young women inside.

“I came here to rescue you,” said the boy.

“Oh no!” said one of the girls. “The dragon will return any moment now. You will

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be in great danger if he finds you here!”

The boy tried proposing he would fight the dragon, but the girls told him now wasn't the time for a fight. They agreed he would sleep there for three nights, each night under the bed of a different girl. On the fourth day, when the dragon would fly away they would all escape together.

In the evening the dragon returned with a deafening noise, he sniffed and roared: “I'm smelling a human in here!”

“Oh, rubbish,” said one of the girls, trying to calm him down. “I was cooking a stew and it ran over, that's what you're smelling.”

The dragon cooled down, rested his head on his talons and soon fell deeply asleep. The next morning, he flew out to spend the whole day in the world up above. In the meantime, the boy with the girls merrily spent the day together and when dusk fell, the boy hid under the bed of the second girl.

Once again, the dragon returned with a loud rumble. He stepped inside the room, sniffed and roared: “I'm smelling a human in here!”

“Oh, nonsense!” said the second girl. “I butchered a calf today, that's what you're smelling.”

Again, the dragon calmed down, lay on the ground and soon he was snoring. He flew out the next morning and spent the whole day outside.

The day passed quickly again and when the evening crept up on them, the boy hid under the third bed.

Soon the dragon returned with a thundering noise, sniffing and shouting: “I'm sniffing and snuffing and smelling a human!”

“Oh,” laughed the third girl – the princess, “what in the world's come over you? My chicken died so I hung it in the pantry.”

The dragon calmed down, curled up in a ball and fell asleep. Before he left on the fourth day, he shouted he wouldn't come back for a few days.

The boy with the girls started packing for their journey and hastily left the dragons lair. They decided to take a carriage with magical horses back home and soon they were galloping away.

They left Hell behind and raced back to the kingdom. But suddenly the horses

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started rearing up and refused to continue. The black billy goat was blocking the road, bleating with its horns pointed at them: "Give me-e-e back my bristle."

The boy reached inside his pocket, threw out the bristle and the goat jumped aside. The horses ran on, but soon the black cock swooped down on their heads and crowed: "Cock-a-doodle-doo, give me back my feather!"

The boy quickly gave him the feather and they continued on their way. The old woman stopped them as well, asking for her twig back, but once they returned everything they ran smoothly all the way back to the castle.

The old king rejoiced when he finally held his daughter in his arms and he threw a grand feast to celebrate the couple's wedding. The boy's mother also arrived, and it was she herself who told me everything about her son's adventure.

The two other girls stayed in the palace with the young queen, so don't be shy and go see for yourself –one of them might be just ripe for marriage.