



THE MOUSE BRIDE

Once upon a time, there was a king who had three very lazy sons. Growing up, all they would ever do was just lie about, yawning and never moving a finger to work. As they got older and it became time for them to get married and have their own families to take care of, they realized that they were comfortable at home and, given the option, would rather not look for wives or change anything about their lives. Why would they want to change anything, when they had a big palace to live in and servants to take care of them?

One day, the king decided that he had had enough of this behavior, so he called all three sons into his court. He held up three sprigs of thyme and said, “Each of you will go find a bride in the direction in which I throw a sprig. Whichever one of you finds the cleverest wife will get half the kingdom.” He threw the sprig for the eldest in the direction of a big farmstead, and so, too lazy to go any further, the son went to the rich farmer to ask for his daughter’s hand in marriage.

The second brother’s sprig was thrown in the direction of a peasant’s cottage, and, because he was just as lazy as his brother, he only went as far as the peasant’s house to find a wife.

The sprig meant for the youngest son, however, was thrown in the direction of

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the forest. Annoyed that he had to walk farther than his brothers, he wandered into the forest to look for his bride. As he walked through the forest, the path led him to a little hut hidden under a big pine tree. He opened the old door, not bothering to knock, of course, and went inside. The hut was very small, so he needed to bend down to pass through the little door. He looked around, looking for a person he might marry, but there was nobody inside except for a tiny grey mouse, who was sitting by the table with a candle, as if she were waiting for someone.

“Oh, hello,” the prince said, tiredly.

“What are you looking for here, young man?” the mouse asked.

“Oh, well, you see, my father threw a sprig of thyme and told me to go find a bride in the direction the sprig was pointing. It pointed me here, to the deep forest. But I don’t see how I’ll find a bride anywhere around here.”

“Why don’t you just marry me?” the mouse asked, matter-of-factly.

“You?” asked the prince in surprise.

“Yes,” the mouse said. “Me. I can cook, take care of the house, and I think you would be happy with me.”

The young man sighed, not wanting to point out that she was, you know, a mouse, but after a while he decided he was simply too tired to keep looking for a girl in the forest, so he proposed to the mouse and she accepted.

A few days later, the king was ready to give his sons’ brides the first task to test their smarts. Each bride, he decided, was to bake the best bread she could.

The brides of the two older sons didn’t wait and got to baking right away. The same day, the eldest brother brought the king rye bread made by his bride, and the middle son brought a barley loaf. The youngest son was worried, because he couldn’t imagine how a small grey mouse could make bread at all, but when he’d told her what the king wanted she’d just told him to relax and sent him off to sleep.

That night, she called on all her friends, also little grey mice, and they got to work making a loaf of almond bread unlike anything anyone at the court had ever tasted. In the morning, when the youngest son brought it bread to the king,

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he ate the whole thing, smacking his lips happily and declaring it to be the best bread that had been made.

For the second task, the king said, “Whichever bride makes the most beautiful shirt will earn her husband half the kingdom.” Immediately, the princes ran to their brides to tell them about this new task.

The eldest son’s bride made a lovely linen shirt decorated with lace. The middle son’s bride made a fine shirt from cotton and embroidered it with the royal emblem.

The youngest son was once again worried, and asked his mouse bride,

“Do you know how to make a shirt, or should I try to do it myself?”

“That’s a sweet offer, darling, but don’t worry,” the mouse said with a smile. “Go get some sleep, and I’ll have a shirt made by morning.”

As soon as the prince fell asleep, she called on her spider friends. A hundred of them crowded into her kitchen, and they spent the night drinking tea, spinning thread finer than cobwebs, and creating a beautiful silk shirt. Everyone in the palace agreed they’d never seen something quite so beautiful, and the king said, “Well, my son. I have to admit that your bride is very talented, and I should be very pleased to give half my kingdom to you. But first, I want to meet all of your brides.”

The eldest and the middle son were very upset about losing, but their brides were very beautiful and they were excited to bring them to the palace. Only the youngest wasn’t happy. He went to the hut in the forest, and when the mouse saw him she said,

“My dear, why are you so sad? Did they not like the shirt?”

“Oh no, they all loved it,” he sighed. “Nobody had ever seen a more beautiful garment. But tomorrow, I’m supposed to bring my bride to the court for everyone to see, and I don’t know what to do now.”

“Because I’m a mouse?” his bride asked.

“Yes. You see, I don’t mind, but I’m afraid my family won’t understand.”

“Don’t worry, dearest. Today was a difficult day, so why don’t you go and get some rest. I’ll sort the rest out.”

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In the morning, the youngest brother still didn't know what to do, so he decided he would simply bring his bride to the court and tell his father that he didn't care if she was a mouse. He carried his bride on a platter, and she sat in an eggshell carriage drawn by six lovely snails.

When they reached the bridge to cross the river and get to the palace, they met an old man with a walking stick. As soon as he saw the prince carrying a mouse in an eggshell drawn by snails, he started to laugh so hard he had to gasp for air. For fun, he knocked the platter out of the prince's hands and into the river. Furious, the young man leaped at the old man and grabbed him by the collar, ready to pummel him. How dare he treat his bride this way! But before he could do anything, six majestic horses and a golden carriage emerged from the water and drove up the hill to the bridge. It wasn't even wet, and a beautiful girl in a sparkling gown sat inside.

"Best to let the poor man go, my dear," she said. "Won't you join me, my darling? Come and join me, my husband. We really must be going, I don't want your father to think we've kept him waiting!"

The prince was almost as speechless as the old man, who immediately fainted from shock. How could this beautiful girl be that little mouse?

Still in shock, the prince climbed into the carriage.

"I'm sorry you found out this way!" his bride said. "You see, when I was very young an evil warlock cast a curse on me and turned me into a tiny gray mouse. Only a person willing to marry me, and who could love me even if I was a mouse, would be able to break the curse. If things had gone on as planned I would have transformed closer to the castle, but I suppose it was the fact that you wanted to defend me that got rid of the rest of the curse."

Soon enough, they arrived at the palace and everyone was in awe of the beautiful, talented princess, and the king, amazed that his lazy youngest son had found such a clever bride for himself, happily gave them his blessing and half the kingdom.