



THE THREE FEATHERS

Once upon a time, there was a kingdom ruled by an old king who had three sons. The two older brothers were skilful and smart. The third son, however, had always lagged behind his brothers and had a simple mind. The two often mocked him for what they perceived as his stupidity and backwardness.

One day the king, knowing he wouldn't be around much longer, sent for his three sons and told them: "The time has come to pass the royal sceptre on to one of you so that I can spend the rest of my life in peace. Whoever brings me the most beautiful carpet will become the king."

To make the task even more difficult, the king picked up three feathers and threw them up in the air. When they landed, he said: "Now each of you has to choose one feather and follow its direction." One feather was pointing east. The second shortly fluttered around and quietly settled on the ground, pointing to the west. The third feather falling right at the king's feet didn't show any direction.

The older brothers quickly chose the two feathers pointing east and west, laughing spitefully at the youngest, who now had to sit at home on his backside since the last feather didn't point in any direction. The two young men set off immediately, one heading east and the other west. The youngest son just

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flopped to the ground, still grasping his feather, thinking what to do. Brooding over his misfortune, he suddenly noticed an old trapdoor in the floor. It was all rusted and covered with dust as if no one had opened it in years. As soon as his brothers left and the king disappeared to take care of his royal duties from his chamber, the youngest decided to open the old trapdoor, revealing an old staircase full of cobwebs and dirt. He carefully climbed down the stairs until he came across a door, knocking heavily and waiting for someone to answer.

A minute later the door swung open and a huge, ugly frog emerged from behind it. "What does your heart desire, young man?" asked the frog.

"I... I'm... looking for... looking for the most beautiful carpet in the whole country," said the young prince shyly.

The frog took a long hard look at the prince, goggling him with her giant eyes, then turned around and with just one leap disappeared into the dark room behind the door. When she returned after a while, she was carrying a colourful carpet woven from the finest yarn ever imagined. The prince thanked her politely and went back upstairs to wait for his brothers.

The other two, certain the youngest brother wouldn't bring anything, hadn't bothered to look hard for any pretty carpets and both brought old and dusty rugs they found on their way home discarded by the road.

When all three brothers gathered in front of the king, everyone was shocked by the magnificent masterpiece the youngest presented to them.

"Well, I do have to keep my word," said the king. "My youngest's carpet is the most splendid of all and I will pass the crown on to him."

The older brothers instantly started objecting and arguing that the youngest is too dull to become the king. "Give us one more task to prove ourselves," suggested the two offended brothers in unison.

The king eventually agreed: "Whoever brings the most beautiful ring will be the king," he said, throwing three feathers up in the air again. They settled on the ground just as before. The youngest son yet again ended up with the feather pointing nowhere, ran down the stairs behind the trapdoor, hammered on the door and waited.

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The door flew open and the ugly frog asked: “What does your heart desire this time, young man?”

“I am... I’m looking for... for the most beautiful ring in the whole country,” said the prince.

The frog paused in thought for a bit, croaked and with just one leap disappeared back into the dark room, coming right back with the most magnificent ring the world had ever seen.

Once again, the older brothers could not be bothered with searching for a ring, thinking a piece of coiled, hammered and polished iron would most certainly do. The brothers gathered in front of the king. Setting his eyes upon the youngest prince’s ring, he knew right away that he had never seen such a gem in his life. “My youngest son brought the most exquisite ring if I am to be truly impartial, and thus the crown belongs to him.”

Spitting with anger, the older brothers started whining at once: “You can’t hand the kingdom to him, he is too dull to reign. Give us one last chance.”

“All right, one last task. Whoever brings the most beautiful bride will be the king,” said their father and flung the feathers up in the air. Yet again, they landed just as before and the youngest prince was left with the one pointing at the king’s feet. The malicious duo sneered at him, knowing there was no bride for him at the castle.

But the young lad went down the stairs and banged on the door.

The door swung open, revealing the ugly frog. “What does your heart desire, dear?”

“I... I am looking for the most beautiful bride in the world,” said the young prince timidly.

“All right, but first, you have to do something for me. Go to the king’s chamber and bring me a burning torch. I need a little bit of light here.”

The young prince didn’t hesitate and secretly sneaked into the royal chamber, stealing the torch burning the brightest and running back through the trapdoor. When he got downstairs, the whole room lit up and the lad found himself surrounded by countless golden chests, heaps of gems and piles of silk. At once,

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the ugly amphibian turned into the most beautiful bride he could have ever wished for.

She was, in fact, a bewitched princess cursed to spend her entire life in infinite darkness, her only chance for rescue being the light of a torch coming from the royal chamber. And thus the prince took his beautiful bride out of the black dungeon.

The king made up his mind without hesitation and handed the kingdom to his youngest son. The young lad wasn't the smartest of the lot but the old king knew that he would spare no effort to be a good king.