



THREE TREES

In a small village lived a poor couple and their three sons. The two older ones were smart and cunning, but they were rather lazy. The youngest one, called Jock, wasn't the brightest of lads, but he had a heart of gold. However, no one paid much attention to him and therefore everyone considered him a fool.

One morning the father called his sons to him and said: "Sons of mine, you've grown into real men now. As you know, we're not exactly the richest family, we barely manage to scrape by. It would be best for you to go out into the world and look for a bit of luck and a nice woman to spend your days with."

The next morning all three of them set out into the world. They walked together for quite some time, not knowing where to until they reached a three-way fork. They stopped for a moment to consider which way to go.

The older brothers suggested they should split up and each take one of the roads. He chose for himself the widest most travelled road and told the youngest one to take the narrow path into the woods.

The younger brother listened and began working his way through the tall grass covering the path. He trudged through the thick dark forest, his body scratched all over from the branches, until a wide meadow opened before him. Three large trees were growing in the middle of the field. He set out towards them to enjoy a little rest in their shadow.

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As he was sitting there, looking around, suddenly he spotted a strange pile of rocks with what looked like an entrance. His curiosity pulled him towards it to take a look. His eyes weren't deceiving him, it really was an entrance! He went inside. But then, out of the blue, a crippling fear fell over him, his heart pounded like a drum. But his curiosity was stronger than his fear, and he continued through a narrow corridor. At the end of the corridor, he found a peculiar light and a glass door. He opened them and walked into a small room. In the middle, there was a table with food on it and a bed next to it. But there wasn't a living soul anywhere. The young boy was famished after his long journey, so he sat down at the table and dug in with zest. A small door by his side, which he hadn't noticed before, suddenly opened and a beautiful young maiden came in. She greeted the lad:

"Welcome, Jock, I'm so happy to finally meet you!"

Jock stared at her, unable to speak, trying to understand how she could even know his name. Then the girl offered him to lie in her bed and get some rest. She didn't need to tell him twice. Jock fell right onto the bed and soon he was sleeping like a log. When he woke up in the morning, there was breakfast waiting for him on the table and before long, the girl came to see him again.

"I need to ask you for something, Jock. If you could cut down those three trees on the meadow, you'd be generously rewarded," said the young woman.

"Sure, I can cut them down right now," agreed Jock and returned to the meadow. He began cutting the first tree, but the wood was so hard that the axe could barely scratch it. However, Jock wasn't going to give up and he continued to work on the tree day and night. In the meantime, the girl kept bringing him food and before he knew it a whole month had passed. When the first tree finally fell down, a third of the forest around them fell with it. A month later, when the second tree followed, another third of the forest was gone, and when the last tree cracked, the entire forest was lying on the ground, uprooted.

Then the girl asked him to chop the trees into logs, pile them up and set them on fire. Jock granted her this wish, too, doing everything just like the girl wanted.

When the bonfire was finally in flames and the fire blazed from every side, strange monsters suddenly appeared all around him. Jock started flicking them with a

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whip and every monster he struck jumped right into the fire. He fought them for seven days and seven nights until all the wood burnt down and the flames died out. Exhausted, Jock collapsed to the ground and immediately fell asleep.

He woke up after a few days in a white room, wearing clean white clothes. Scared and confused, Jock jumped out of bed. Then all of a sudden, a stranger came inside and said: "Good morning, your highness. Your wish is my command."

Jock just gaped, having no clue what was happening. Soon after that, another man came in with beautiful, hand-decorated clothes. When Jock put them on, thirteen women in white robes entered the room, each looking exactly like the rest. They all came to express their gratitude for releasing them from a curse. They told him to pick one of them to be his wife. At first he refused, but when they insisted, he said: "Well, if I am to choose one of you, let it be the one who took care of me all this time."

The girl standing in the middle jumped over to him and wrapped her arms around him in a loving embrace. The rest of the girls left the room and his chosen one told him everything about the trees and the forest, which was actually a kingdom under a terrible curse. He saved them from that curse and now they were going to make him their king.

Later she showed him every corner of the land and soon after that, they got married.

Because Jock didn't know the first thing about ruling a kingdom, they called for the wisest people from all over the country, who soon taught him everything a good king needed to know.

Jock became an impeccable king and the kingdom thrived under his rule. One day he decided he would visit his homeland and his family.

The king and his queen rode in a beautiful carriage and the whole army marched along with them. Jock also packed his old clothes, those he was wearing when he left home.

As they were approaching the village, Jock noticed his two brothers herding cattle in the field. He changed into his old clothes, jumped out of the carriage and ran towards them.

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“Look at him! Our fool is back. What brings you here after all this time?” they greeted their brother.

“I’ve returned,” said Jock, took a whip from his brother and started whipping it in the air. Suddenly the royal carriage stormed towards them with the army marching right behind. When the brothers saw the army, they took to their heels while Jock hopped back in the carriage and changed into his royal clothes. Then they continued to the village where the curious commoners were already gathering for such a noble visit, bowing and bringing them all sorts of delicacies. Even Jocks parents came to pay their tribute to the king and queen. When the king asked his mother about her sons, she wept and told him how she had lost her youngest one: “He left a long time ago, but nobody has seen him ever since.” The king tried to comfort her, telling her not to worry, that her son would surely soon return. Then the merrymaking finally began with everyone preparing a delicious feast for the guests. Unnoticed, the king sneaked back in the carriage to change his clothes again and just like that, he appeared at his parents’ door as good old Jock.

His mother burst into tears again, but this time they were tears of happiness because her beloved son had finally returned.

After they welcomed him, he went outside, saying he wanted to warm up a little by the fire. Soon he was back, this time wearing the royal gown. He sat down at the table to enjoy the feast and as they were eating, he took off his crown and his coat, revealing the old, ragged clothes he was wearing beneath. Everyone at the table nearly fainted when they finally realised their foolish Jock had become the king. He took his parents and brothers to live with him in the royal palace where they all lived happily together for the rest of their lives.