Ririro
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

The Donkey Cabbage

Brothers Grimm

A young Hunter was walking boldly into the forest, whistling, with a merry, light heart. An ugly old woman stopped him. "Good day, dear Hunter! You seem so cheerful, but I'm hungry and thirsty. Could you spare me something?"

He felt sorry for her, searched his pockets, and gave her all he could spare. She said, "Listen well, dear Hunter. Because of your kind heart, I'm going to give you a present. Go on, and soon you will come to a tree where nine birds are fighting over a cloak. Aim your gun into the middle of them. They'll drop the cloak, and one bird will fall dead. Take the cloak. It's a wishing cloak: throw it over your shoulders, wish yourself anywhere, and you'll be there in a blink. And cut out the dead bird's heart and swallow it whole. Every morning after, you'll find a gold piece under your pillow."

The Hunter thanked her. *Splendid things, if they come true,* he thought. A hundred paces on, he heard shrieking in the branches above him and looked up. A swarm of birds was tearing at a cloth with beaks and claws, each one wanting it for himself. "Just as she said!" He raised his gun, fired into the middle, and feathers flew. The flock fled screaming, but one bird fell dead and the cloak fluttered down. He cut out the heart, swallowed it, and took the cloak home.

The next morning he lifted his pillow, and there lay a gold piece. The next morning, another. Soon he had a heap of gold. "What good is gold if I stay at home?" he thought. "I'll see the world." He said goodbye to his parents, slung his knapsack and gun over his shoulder, and set off.

One day he came out of a thick forest and saw a great castle on the plain. At a window stood an old woman, and beside her a beautiful girl. But the old woman was a witch. "Here comes a man with a treasure inside him," she said. "He has a bird's heart in his body, so there's a gold piece under his pillow every morning. We have more right to it than he does." She told her daughter how to coax the heart out of him, and threatened her when she hesitated. "If you don't obey, you'll regret it!"

When the Hunter saw the girl's lovely face, he told himself he was tired and would rest at this castle, since he had money to spare. He was welcomed and entertained, and before long he was so in love that he thought of nothing but her, and did whatever she wanted. "Now we need that heart," said the witch. "He

won't even feel it go." She brewed a drink and gave it to her daughter to hand to him. "Drink to me, my love," said the girl. He drank, and the bird's heart came up out of his mouth. The girl secretly swallowed it herself, and the gold coins began appearing under *her* pillow. He found none. But he was so bewitched that he didn't notice.

"We have the heart," said the witch, "and now we need the cloak."

"Let him keep it," said the girl. "He's lost his gold already."

The witch was furious. "A cloak like that is rare. I must have it." She beat her daughter and threatened her again. So the girl stood at the window one day, looking sadly into the distance.

"Why so sad?" asked the Hunter.

"Over there is the Granite Mountain, where precious stones grow. I long to go there, but who could fetch them? Only birds, never a man."

"If that's all that troubles you, it's easily mended," he said. He wrapped her in his cloak and wished them to the Granite Mountain, and in a flash they were sitting on it. Jewels sparkled everywhere, and they gathered the finest. But the witch had made the Hunter's eyes heavy. "Let's rest a moment," he said. "I'm so tired I can hardly stand." He laid his head in her lap and fell asleep. As soon as he was out, she unfastened the cloak, threw it over her own shoulders, left the jewels behind, and wished herself home.

When he woke, he was alone on the wild mountain. "Why is there so much faithlessness in the world?" he said, and sat down in despair.

Now the mountain belonged to fierce giants. He soon saw three striding toward him, so he lay down and pretended to be asleep. The first giant nudged him with his foot. "What kind of worm is this?"

"Squash him," said the second.

"Not worth the bother," said the third. "Let him live. He can't stay here. If he climbs higher the clouds will take him."



They left. The Hunter had heard every word. He climbed to the summit, and a passing cloud scooped him up and carried him through the sky. It sank down over a large walled vegetable garden and set him gently among the cabbages.

"If only I had something to eat," he said. "I see not a single apple or pear, nothing but vegetables. Well, I'll make do with a salad." He picked a head of

cabbage and ate a couple of mouthfuls. Suddenly he felt strange. Four legs began to grow, a thick head, two long ears. He had turned into a donkey! He was horrified, but he was still hungry, and the cabbage tasted wonderful to his new nature, so he kept eating. Then he found a different kind of cabbage and swallowed that, and felt another change. He was himself again.

He slept off his weariness. In the morning he picked a head of the bad cabbage and a head of the good one and put them in his pockets. "This will help me get even for being betrayed." He climbed the wall and set off to find the castle. A couple of days later he found it. He disguised himself so completely that his own mother wouldn't have known him, and knocked at the door asking for a bed.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" asked the witch.

"I'm a royal messenger," he said. "The King sent me to find the finest salad under the sun. I've found it, but the heat is making it wilt. I don't know whether I can carry it any farther."

The old witch wanted a taste. "Dear sir, let me try your wonderful salad."

"Why not? I have two heads. I'll give you one." And he gave her the bad one. She hurried to the kitchen to prepare it herself, and was so eager she nibbled a couple of leaves before it was even served. In an instant she became a donkey and ran out into the courtyard.

The maid came into the kitchen, saw the salad ready, and as she carried it upstairs, she tasted a few leaves out of habit. She became a donkey too and ran out to join the witch, and the dish fell on the floor. Meanwhile the "messenger" was sitting with the lovely girl, and as no salad came, she grew impatient. "Where is it?"

The cabbage has begun to work, he thought. "I'll fetch it myself." In the kitchen he saw two donkeys in the yard and the salad on the floor. "Two have had their share." He gathered up the leaves, put them on a dish, and brought them to the girl. "I've brought it myself, so you won't have to wait." She ate it, and she too turned into a donkey and ran out to the others.

He washed off his disguise so they would know him. "Now you'll get what you deserve for your faithlessness." He tied the three donkeys together and drove them to a mill. The miller leaned out. "What do you want?"

"I have three stubborn animals I don't want to keep. Feed them, stable them, and do exactly what I tell you with them, and I'll pay you well. The old donkey gets three beatings and one meal. The younger gets one beating and three meals. The youngest gets no beatings and three meals." (He couldn't bring himself to have the girl beaten.)

He went back to the castle and found everything he wanted there. A few days later the miller came. "The old donkey, the one with three beatings and one meal, has died. The other two are alive and fed three times a day, but they are so sad they can't last much longer."

The Hunter softened and put his anger aside. He told the miller to bring them back, and when they came, he fed them the good cabbage, and they became human again. The girl fell on her knees in front of him. "Forgive me! My mother forced me. It was against my will. I love you dearly. Your cloak is hanging in a cupboard, and I'll mix a drink to give you back the bird's heart."

But he changed his mind. "Keep it. It makes no difference. I'll take you as my dear wife."

They were married and lived happily together for the rest of their lives.

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