

THE TINDER-BOX

By Hans Christian Anderson

There came a soldier marching along the high road – *one, two! One, two!* He had his knapsack on his back and a sabre by his side, for he had been in the wars and now he wanted to go home. And on the way he met with an old witch: she was very hideous, and her under lip hung down upon her breast. She said, “Good evening, soldier. What a fine sword he have, and what a big knapsack! You’re a proper soldier! Now you shall have as much money as you like to have.”

“I thank you, old witch!” said the soldier.

“Do you see that great tree?” asked the witch; and she pointed to a tree which stood beside them. “It’s quite hollow inside. You must climb to the top, and then you’ll see a hole, through which you can let yourself down and get deep into the tree. I’ll tie a rope round your body, so that I can pull you up again when you call me.”

“What am I to do down in the tree?” asked the soldier.

“Get money,” replied the witch. “Listen to me. When you come down to the earth under the tree, you will find yourself in a great hall; it is quite light, for above three hundred lamps are burning there. Then you will see three doors; these you can open, for the keys are hanging there. If you go into the first chamber, you’ll see a great chest in the middle of the floor; on this chest sits a dog, and he’s got a pair of eyes as big as two tea-cups. But you need not care for that. I’ll give you my blue-checked apron, and you can spread it out upon the floor; then go up quickly and take the dog, and set him upon my apron; then open the chest, and take as many shillings as you like. They are of copper: if you prefer silver, you must go into the second chamber. But there you sits a dog with a pair of eyes as big as mill-wheels. But again, do not fear him. Set him upon my apron, and take some of the money.

“And if you want gold, you can have that too – in fact, as much as you can carry – if you go into the third chamber. But the dog that sits on the money-chest there has two eyes as big as the round towers. He is a fierce dog, you may be sure; but you needn’t be afraid, for all that. Only set him upon my apron, and he won’t hurt you; and take out of the chest as much gold as you like.”

“That’s not so bad,” said the soldier. “But what am I to give you, you old witch? For you will not do it for nothing, I fancy.”

“No,” replied the witch, “not a single shilling will I have. You shall only bring me an old tinder-box which my grandmother forgot when she was down there last.”

“Then tie the rope round my body,” cried the soldier.

“Here it is,” said the witch, “and here’s my blue-checked apron.”

Then the soldier climb up into the tree, let himself slip down into the hole, and stood, as the witch had said, in the great hall where the three hundred lamps were burning.

Now he opened the first door. Ugh! There sat the dog with eyes as big as tea-cups, staring at him. "You're a nice fellow!" exclaimed the soldier and he set him on the witch's apron, and took as many copper shillings his picket would hold, and then locked the chest, set the dog on it again, and went into the second chamber. Aha! There sat the dog with eyes as big as mill-wheels.

"You should not stare so hard at me," said the soldier; "you might strain your eyes." And he set the dog upon the witch's apron. And when he saw the silver money in the chest, he threw away all the copper money he had, and filled his pockets and his knapsack with silver only. Then he went into the third chamber. Oh, but that was horrid! The dog there really had eyes as big as towers, and they turned round and round in his head like wheels.

"Good evening!" said the soldier, and he touched his cap, for he had never seen such a dog as this before. When he had looked at him a little more closely, he thought, 'That will do,' and lifted him down to the floor, and opened the chest. Mercy! What a quantity of gold was there! He could buy with it the whole town, and the sugar sucking-pigs of the cake woman, and all the tin soldiers, whips and rocking-horses in the whole world. Yes, that was a quantity of money! Now the soldier threw away all the silver coin with which he had filled his pockets and his knapsack, and took gold instead: yes, all his pickets, his knapsack, his boots, and his cap were filled, so that he could scarcely walk. Now indeed he had plenty of money. He put the dog on the chest, shut the door, and then called up through the tree, "Now pull me up, you old witch."

"Have you the tinder-box?" asked the witch.

"Plague on it!" exclaimed the soldier, "I had clean forgotten that." So he went and brought it.

The witch drew him up, and he stood on the high road again, with pickets, boots, knapsack, and cap full of gold.

"What are you going to do with the tinder-box?" asked the soldier.

"That's nothing to you," retorted the witch. "You've had your money – just give me the tinder-box."

"Nonsense!" said the soldier. "Tell me directly what you're going to do with it, or I'll draw my sword and cut off your head."

"No!" cried the witch.

So the soldier cut off her head. There she lay! But he tied up all his money in her apron, took it on his back like a bundle, put the tinder-box in his pocket, and went straight off towards the town.

It was a splendid town! And he stayed at the very best inn, and asked for the finest rooms, and ordered his favourite dishes, for now he was rich, as he had so much money. The servant who had to clean his boots certainly

thought them a remarkably old pair for such a rich gentleman; but the soldier had not bought any new ones yet. The next day he procured proper boots and handsome clothes. Now our soldier had become a fine gentleman; and the people told him of all the splendid things which were in the city, and about the king, and what a pretty princess the king's daughter was.

"Where can one get to see her?" asked the soldier.

"She is not to be seen at all," they all said, "She lives in a great copper castle, with a great many walls and towers round about it: no one but the king may go in and out there, for it has been prophesied that she shall marry a common soldier, and the king can't bear that."

'I should like to see her,' thought the soldier; but he could not get permission to do so. So instead, he lived merrily, went to the theatre, drove in the king's garden, and gave much money to the poor; and this was very kind of him, for he knew from old times how hard it is when one has not a shilling. Now he was rich, had fine clothes, and gained many friends, who all said he was a rare one, a true cavalier; and that pleased the soldier well. But as he spent money every day and never earned any, he had at last only two shillings left; so he was obliged to give up the fine rooms in which he had dwelt, and had to live in a little garret under the roof, clean his own boots, and mend them with a darning needle. None of his friends came to see him, for there were too many stairs to climb.

It was quite dark one evening, and he could not even buy himself a candle, when it occurred to him that there was a candle-end in the tinder-box which he had taken out of the hollow tree into which the witch had helped him. He brought out the tinder-box and the candle-end; but as soon as he struck fire and the sparks rose up from the flint, the door flew open, and the dog who had eyes as big as a couple of tea-cups, and whom he had seen in the tree, stood before him and said, "What are my lord's commands?"

"What is this?" said the soldier. "That's a famous tinder-box, if I can get everything with it that I want! Bring me some money," said he to the dog; and *whisk!* The dog was gone, and *whisk!* He was back again, with a great bag full of shillings in his mouth.

Now the soldier knew what a capital tinder-box this was. If he struck it once, the dog came who sat upon the chest of copper money; and if he struck it twice, the dog came who had the silver; and if he struck it three times, then appeared the dog who had the gold. Now the soldier moved back into the fine rooms, and appeared again in handsome clothes; and all his friends knew him again, and cared very much for him indeed.

Once he thought to himself, 'It is a very strange thing that one cannot get to see the princess. They all say she is very beautiful; but what is the use of that, if she is always hidden in the great copper castle with the many towers? Can I not get to see her at all? Here is my tinder-box?' And so he struck a light, and *whisk!* Came the dog with eyes as big as tea-cups.

“It is midnight, certainly,” said the soldier, “but I should very much like to see the princess, only for one little moment.”

And the dog was outside the door directly, and before the soldier thought it, the dog came back with the princess. She sat upon the dog’s back and slept; and every one could see that she was a real princess, for she was so lovely. The soldier could not refrain from kissing her, for he was a thorough soldier. Then the dog ran back again with the princess. But when morning came, and the king and queen were drinking tea, the princess said she had a strange dream the night before, about a dog and a soldier – that she had ridden upon the dog, and the soldier had kissed her.

“That would be a fine story!” said the Queen.

So one of the old court ladies had to watch the next night by the princess’s bed, to see if this was really a dream, or what it might be.

The soldier had a great longing to see the lovely princess again; so the dog came in the night, took her away, and ran just as fast as he could. But the old lady put on her water-boots, and ran just as fast after him. When she saw that they both entered a great house, she thought, ‘Now I know where it is,’ and with a bit of chalk she drew a great cross on the door. Then she went home and lay down, and the dog came up with the princess, but when he saw that there was a cross drawn on the door where the soldier lived, he took a piece of chalk too, and drew crosses on all the doors in the town. And that was cleverly done, for now the lady could not find the right door, because all the doors had crosses upon them.

In the morning early came the King and Queen, the old court lady and all the officers, to see where it was the princess had been. “Here it is!” said the King, when he saw the first door with a cross upon it.

“No my dear husband, it is there!” said the Queen, who found another door which also showed a cross.

“But there is one, and there is one!” said all, for wherever they looked there were crosses on the doors. So they saw that would avail them nothing if they searched on.

But the Queen was an exceedingly clever woman, who could do more than ride in a coach. She took her great gold scissors, cut a piece of silk into pieces, and made a neat little bag; this bag she filled with fine wheat flour, and tied it on the princess’s back; and when that was done, she cut a little hole in the bag, so that the flour would be scattered along all the way which the princess should take.

In the night the dog came again, took the princess on his back, and ran with her to the soldier, who loved her very much, and would gladly have been a prince, so that he might have her for his wife. The dog did not notice at all how the flour ran out in a stream from the castle to the windows of the soldier’s house, where he ran up the wall with the princess. In the morning the King and the Queen saw well enough where their daughter had been, and they took the soldier and put him in prison.

There he sat. Oh, but it was dark and disagreeable there! And the said to him "Tomorrow you shall be hanged." That was not amusing to hear, and he had left his tinder-box at the inn. In the morning he could see, through the iron grating of the little window, how the people were hurrying out of the town to see him hanged. He heard the drums beat and saw the soldiers marching. All the people were running out, and among them was a shoemaker's boy with leather apron and slippers, and he galloped so fast that one of his slippers flew off, and came right against the wall where the solider sat looking through the iron grating.

"Halloo, you shoemaker's boy! You needn't be in such a hurry," cried the solider to him; "it will not begin till I come. But if you will run to where I lived, and bring me my tinder-box, you shall have four shillings; but you must put your best leg foremost."

The shoemaker's boy wanted to get the four shillings, so he went and brought the tinder-box, and – well, we shall hear now what happened.

Outside the town a great gallows had been built, and round it stood the soldiers and many hundred thousand people. The king and queen sat on a splendid throne, opposite the judges and the whole council. The solider already stood upon the ladder; but as they were about to put the rope around his neck, he said that before a poor criminal suffered his punishment an innocent request was always granted to him. He wanted very much to smoke a pipe of tobacco, and it would be the last pipe he would smoke in the world. The king would not say "No" to this; so the solider took his tinder-box and struck fire. One – two- three! – And there suddenly stood all the dogs – the one with eyes as big as tea-cups, the one with eyes as large as mill-wheels, and the one whose eyes were as big as round towers.

"Help me now, so that I may not be hanged," said the solider.

And the dogs fell upon the judge and all the council, seized one by the leg and another by the nose, and tossed them all many feet into the air, so that fell down and were all broken to pieces.

"I won't!" cried the King; but the biggest dog took him and the Queen, and threw them after the others.

Then the soldiers were afraid, and the people cried, "Little solider, you shall be our king, and marry the beautiful princess!"

So they put the solider into the king's coach, and all the three dogs darted on in front and cried 'Hurrah!' and the boys whistled through their fingers, and the solider presented arms. The princess came out of the copper castle, and became queen, and she liked that well enough. The wedding lasted a week, and the three dogs sat at the table too, and opened their eyes wider than ever at all they saw.