

Faithful John: Grimm Brothers Fairy Tale #6

Once upon a time, there was an old king who was very sick. He thought, "I am going to die soon." Then said, "Have someone bring Faithful John here to me."

Faithful John was his favorite servant. (A "*servant*" is someone who works and lives in someone else's house doing their cooking and cleaning). He was called "Faithful John" because he was always faithful to the king for his whole life. ("*Faithful*" is when you always help and support someone, no matter what.)

When Faithful John came to the king's bed, the king said to him, "Faithful John, I feel sick and I think that I will die soon. The only thing I am worried about is my son. He is still young, and I worry that he doesn't yet know the best way to live. Please promise that you will teach him everything he should know, and be like a father to him after I am dead. If you promise me this, then I can die in peace."

Faithful John answered, "I will always be faithful to your son, and never leave him. I promise to always protect him, even if it costs me my life."

At this, the old king said, "Then I will die in comfort and peace," adding, "After my death, show him the whole castle -- show him all the rooms, halls, and storage places, and also show him all the treasures which are in the castle. But do not show him the last room at the end of the long hall, which has the picture of the Princess of the Golden Roof inside it. If he sees that picture, he will fall so in love with the princess that he will do anything for her, even if it means putting his own life in danger. You must protect him from that."

"I will," said Faithful John. "I promise I will do everything you have asked."

And so, after Faithful John had once more given his promise to the old king, the old king laid his head down on his pillow and died.

After the old king had been buried in the ground, Faithful John went and spoke to the new king, and said, "I will be faithful to you just like I was faithful to your father, even if it costs me my life."

Then Faithful John showed the new young king all around the castle, just like he had promised he would. He took him everywhere, up and down, and let him see all the treasures and wonderful rooms. But there was one room that he did not open, the one that had the dangerous picture of the Princess of the Golden Roof.

Now, this picture was hung on the wall directly opposite the door, so that if someone opened the door to this room, they would be looking directly at the picture. The picture was only a painting, but it was painted so well that it seemed alive. The princess in the painting looked like she was actually living and breathing, and she looked like the most beautiful thing in the whole world.

The young king noticed that Faithful John always walked passed this one door without opening it, and he said, "Why do you never open this one for me?"

Faithful John answered, "Because there is something in there that is terrible."

The king answered, "I have seen the whole castle except for this room, and now I want to know what is in this room also." The king tried to open the door, but it was locked. Then the king kicked the door, and tried to break the door open by force.

Faithful John grabbed the king, and held him back, saying, "I promised your father before his death that you would never see inside this room. Please, do not go inside. There is something terrible in this room. If you go inside, terrible things will happen to both you and me."

But the king did not agree. "No!" answered the young king. "If I do not go in, it will be even more terrible. I will always be wondering what is inside this room. I will think about it all the time. I will not be able to sleep. I must see with my own eyes what is inside. I will stay right here in this spot and I will not leave here until you unlock the door."

At this point, Faithful John realized that there was no other way. He was very sad, but he took the key out of his pocket, and opened up the door. After opening the door, Faithful John went in first, thinking that he could block the king's view of the picture. But it didn't do any good. The king stood on his tiptoes and saw the picture over Faithful John's shoulder. After seeing the girl's picture the king fell to the ground unconscious. ("*Unconscious*" means to be in a condition like sleeping).

Faithful John picked the young king up, and carried him to his bed. He stayed with the king until the king woke up again.

Once the king woke up, his first words were, "Oh, who is the beautiful girl in the picture?"

"That is the Princess of the Golden Roof," answered Faithful John.

The king said, "My love for her is so great that I will do anything to win her heart. You are my most faithful friend, Faithful John. You must help me."

Faithful John thought for a long time, because the truth was that it was very difficult even to get to see the Princess of the Golden Roof. But finally Faithful John had an idea. Faithful John said to the king, "The Princess of the Golden Roof loves gold more than anything. Everything around her is gold. Her tables, chairs, dishes, cups, bowls, and everything in her house is made of gold. Now, in your treasures, that you got from your father, you have 5 tons of gold." (A "*ton*" is about 1000 kilograms). "Take all your gold, and have it melted down, and then have the goldsmiths make wonderful objects out of it. Have the goldsmiths make your gold into the shape of birds, and wild animals, and fantastic beasts. The Princess will love these things very much, and we can use them to try to get her attention."

So, the king brought together all the goldsmiths in the kingdom. (A "*goldsmith*" is someone who can make things from gold.) The king gave the goldsmiths all of his gold, and had them work day and night until at last they had made the gold into the most wonderful and beautiful things. Then, the king put everything onto a ship. (A "*ship*" is a big boat.) Faithful John went on the ship, and disguised himself as a merchant. (A

“*merchant*” is someone whose job is to buy and sell things.) The young king also disguised himself as a merchant so that no one could recognize him. Then the king and Faithful John got into the ship, and they sailed across the sea for many days until they came to the city where the Princess of the Golden Roof lived.

Faithful John asked the king to stay behind on the ship and wait for him. "I will try to bring the princess back with me," said Faithful John. "You stay on the ship and make sure that everything is ready. Be sure to decorate the whole ship with gold."

Then Faithful John put some of the beautiful golden objects in a bag, and took one of the smaller boats, and went on to the shore and walked straight to the royal castle. When he entered the courtyard of the castle, he saw a beautiful girl getting water out of the well with a golden bucket. She was just turning around to carry away the water when she saw Faithful John and asked who he was.

Faithful John answered, "I am a merchant," and he opened up his bag to show her all the beautiful golden objects he had brought.

"Oh, what beautiful golden things," cried the girl, putting her bucket down and looking at the golden objects one after the other. Then the girl said, "The princess must see these things. She really loves golden things, and she will buy all you have." The girl took Faithful John by the hand and led him up the stairs to the Princess's room, for the girl was the princess's servant.

When the princess saw the golden objects, she was very happy and said, "They are so beautifully made that I will buy them all from you."

But Faithful John said, "I am only the servant of a rich merchant. The things that I have here are only a few of the things that my master has. In fact, all of our best and most beautiful things are back on our ship. They are the most beautiful and valuable things that have ever been made from gold."

The princess was very excited, and she wanted everything brought to her. But Faithful John said, "There are so many things that it would take many days to bring them all here from our ship. And even if we had enough days, there are so many things that we would need many rooms to put them in. Your house is not big enough."

This made the princess even more curious, and she wanted to see the things even more. So at last she said, "Take me to your ship. I will go there myself and see all these beautiful golden things."

So Faithful John happily brought her to the ship, and when she got to the ship, the king was able to see her for the first time, and when the king saw her, he thought that she was even more beautiful than the picture, and his heart grew so big that he thought it would break. The king brought the princess inside the ship, to see all of the beautiful golden things inside the ship's rooms. But Faithful John stayed behind on the deck of the ship. (The “*deck*” is the top floor of a ship that is not covered.) And once the princess had gone inside the ship, Faithful John ordered the ship to sail into the sea, saying to the crew, “Set all the sails and go as fast as you can.”

Meanwhile, the king and the princess were inside the ship, and the king was showing the princess all the wonderful golden things that the goldsmiths had made. There were many golden animals and golden beasts, and the princess wanted to look at each one. They spent many hours inside of the ship looking at the golden things, and the princess was so interested that she didn't notice that the ship was sailing away.

After the princess had seen everything, she thanked the merchant and wanted to go home. But when she came to the outside of the ship, she saw that it was on the high seas far from land, and speeding onward at full sail.

"Oh!" she cried in alarm "I've been tricked. I've been kidnapped by this merchant!"

Taking her by the hand, the king said, "I am not really a merchant. I am a king. I know I have tricked you into coming with me, but it is only because of my great love for you. The first time I saw your picture, I was so in love that I fell to the ground unconscious. I want you to marry me and to be my queen."

When the Princess of the Golden Roof heard this, she was comforted, and moreover she also fell in love with the king, and she agreed to marry him.

Meanwhile, Faithful John went to sit at the front of the ship, and began making music. While he was making music, Faithful John saw three ravens flying through the air towards them. (*"Ravens"* are a type of black bird. Some people believe that ravens have magical powers and can see the future.) The ravens were talking to each other, and Faithful John stopped making music so that he could listen to them. Faithful John actually could understand the language of birds, so he understood what the ravens were saying.

The first raven said, "Oh look, the king is carrying home the Princess of the Golden Roof."

"Yes," said the second raven, "but he doesn't have her yet."

The third one said, "Yes, he does. She is sitting beside him in the ship."

Then the first raven said, "What good will that do him? I can see the future, and when they reach land, a beautiful horse will come down to meet the king, and the king will want to ride it. But if the king rides it, the horse will fly into the sky, and take the king with him, and the king will never see his princess again."

"Oh no!" said the second raven. "Is there no hope then?"

"Well, there is a small hope," said the first raven. "If someone else quickly gets on the horse before the king does, there is a gun in its saddlebag. If someone takes the gun from its saddlebag, and shoots the horse dead, then the young king will be saved. But nobody knows that, and if anyone did know that, and told it to the king, he would be turned into stone."

Then the second raven said, "Actually, it's even worse than that. I can also see into the future, and even if the horse is killed, the king still will not be able to keep his princess. Because, when they go into the castle together, there is a beautiful shirt that

is lying on a table. It looks like it's made of gold and silver, but actually it is made of poison. If the king puts on the shirt, the shirt will burn him to death."

"Oh no!" said the third raven. "Is there no hope then?"

"Well, there is a small hope," said the second raven. "If someone is wearing gloves, and they pick up the shirt and throw it into the fire before the king can put it on, then the king will be saved. But nobody knows that, and if anyone did know that, and told it to the king, he would be turned into stone."

Then the third raven said, "Actually, it's even worse than that. I can also see into the future, and even if the shirt is burned up, the king will still lose his princess. After the wedding, when the dancing begins, and the young queen starts dancing, she will suddenly turn get sick and fall down as if she were dead. The only way to save her is for someone to kiss her on the mouth. But nobody knows that, and if anyone did know that, and told it to the king, he would be turned into stone."

After the ravens had spoken, they flew away. Faithful John had understood everything they said, but he didn't know what to do, and for a long time he was quiet and sad. If he kept everything a secret, then bad things would happen to the king. But if he tried to tell the king, then he would be turned into stone. Finally he said to himself, "I will save my king, even if it means dying myself."

What do you think will happen next?

When they landed, everything the ravens had said did indeed happen, and a beautiful horse came down to meet the king.

"Excellent!" said the king. "What a beautiful horse! He will carry me to my castle."

The king was about to get on the horse, when Faithful John pushed the king away, quickly jumped onto the horse, took the gun out from its saddlebag, and shot the horse dead.

Everyone was shocked. All the king's other servants (who were jealous of how much the king loved Faithful John), shouted, "You are a bad servant Faithful John! Why did you kill this beautiful animal that the king wanted to ride home to his castle?"

But the king said, "Be quiet and leave him alone. Faithful John is my most faithful servant. I'm sure he had a good reason for doing what he did."

Later, when everyone got back into the castle, there was a beautiful shirt lying on the table. "Ah, what a beautiful shirt," said the king. "This will be the perfect thing to wear at my wedding." The young king went towards the shirt, and was about to pick it up, but Faithful John pushed him away, picked up the shirt with gloves, carried it quickly to the fire, and burned it up.

The other servants again began to talk, "Look, now Faithful John is even burning up the king's wedding shirt."

But the king said, "I'm sure he had a good reason. Leave him alone. Faithful John is my most faithful servant."

Later, the wedding took place. When the dancing began, the princess also danced with everyone. Faithful John watched her carefully and kept a close eye on her face. Suddenly the princess's face turned white, and she fell to the ground as if she were dead. Faithful John ran quickly to her, picked her up, and carried her into an empty room. Then he put her down on the bed, and kissed her on the mouth. Immediately the princess started breathing again and woke up. But the young king had seen everything that had happened, and he did not understand why Faithful John had done it. "Faithful John," shouted the king, "Why did you kiss my wife?" But Faithful John stayed quiet, so the king grew angry and shouted, "Throw him into prison."

The next morning, the king decided that Faithful John would die. As Faithful John was taken to the place where he would be killed, he said, "Everyone who is sentenced to die is allowed to say some last words. May I too say some last words?" "Yes," answered the king. "You may say some last words."

Faithful John said, "I know you think that I betrayed you by kissing your queen. But you are wrong. I have always been faithful to you." And then Faithful John told the king the whole story about how he had heard the ravens talking at sea, and how he had done everything in order to save the king and the queen.

When the king heard this, and when he had understood everything, the king said, "Oh, Faithful John, forgive me. Forgive me."

But it was too late. For as Faithful John spoke his last words, he turned to stone. This was exactly what the ravens had said would happen--anyone who told the king the secrets would turn into stone.

The king and the queen were then extremely sad. And the king said, "Oh, what a bad king I am! Faithful John was very faithful to me. I should have rewarded him, but instead I did not trust him." The king then ordered the stone figure of Faithful John to be placed in his bedroom next to his bed. Every time that he looked at the stone figure, he cried, saying, "Oh, if only I could bring you back to life again, my dear Faithful John."

Many years passed. The king and the queen had two baby boys, and these babies grew into children. The queen loved them very much. Then, one day, when the queen was at church and the two children were sitting beside their father and playing, he again looked sadly at the stone figure and said, "Oh, if only I could bring you back to life again, my dear Faithful John."

Then the stone figure began to speak and said, "You can bring me back to life again if you will in return give up what is most important to you."

The king said, "For you, Faithful John, I will give up everything I have in the world."

The stone figure continued, "If you will cut off the heads of your two children with your own hand, then put their blood on me, I will return to life."

The king was horrified when he heard that he would have to kill his own dearest children, but he thought of how Faithful John had always been faithful to him, and how Faithful John had even died for him. And so, the king took out his sword, and with his own hands he cut off his children's heads. And then he took the blood from his children's heads, and put the blood all over the stone figure. And then, Faithful John came back to life, and once again stood before the king healthy and well.

Then Faithful John said to the king, "Now, you have been faithful to me. I will reward you for your faithfulness." Then Faithful John took the children's heads, and put them back on their bodies. And at the place where the necks had been cut, Faithful John rubbed their necks with his hands. And the children immediately became whole again, and went on playing as if nothing had happened.

The king was very happy. When he saw the queen coming, he hid Faithful John and the two children in the closet. When the queen came in the room, he said to her, "Have you been praying in the church?"

"Yes, she answered, "but I always think about Faithful John, and the sad thing that happened to him because of us"

Then he said, "Dear wife, we can give him his life again, but we must lose our two little children."

The queen turned white, and her heart was filled with terror, but she said, "Then we must do it. We owe it to Faithful John for his great faithfulness."

The king was happy to hear that she agreed with him, then he opened up the closet and out came Faithful John and the two children. The king said, "Good news. We now have Faithful John back, and we have our two little children back again as well." And then the king told his wife everything that had happened. And they all lived happily ever after.