

# The Red Ettin

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There was once a widow that lived on a small bit of ground, which she rented from a farmer. And she had two sons; and by and by it was time for the wife to send them away to seek their fortune. So she told her eldest son one day to take a can and bring her water from the well, that she might bake a cake for him; and however much or however little water he might bring, the cake would be great or small accordingly, and that cake was to be all that she could give him when he went on his travels.

The lad went away with the can to the well, and filled it with water, and then came away home again; but the can being broken, the most part of the water had run out before he got back. So his cake was very small; yet small as it was, his mother asked him if he was willing to take the half of it with her blessing, telling him that, if he chose rather to take the whole, he would only get it with her curse. The young man, thinking he might have to travel a far way, and not knowing when or how he might get other provisions, said he would like to have the whole cake, come of his mother's malison what might; so she gave him the whole cake, and her malison along with it. Then he took his brother aside, and gave him a knife to keep till he should come back, desiring him to look at it every morning, and as long as it continued to be clear, then he might be sure that the owner of it was well; but if it grew dim and rusty, then for certain some ill had befallen him.

So the young man went to seek his fortune. And he went all that day, and all the next day; and on the third day, in the afternoon, he came up to where a shepherd was sitting with a flock of sheep. And he went up to the shepherd and asked him to whom the sheep belonged; and he answered:

“To the Red Ettin of Ireland

Who lives in Ballygan,

He stole King Malcolm's daughter,

The king of fair Scotland.

He beats her, he binds her,

He lays her on a hand;

And every day he strikes her

With a bright silver wand.

'Tis said there's one predestinate

To be his mortal foe;

But sure that man is yet unborn,

And long may it be so!"

After this the shepherd told him to beware of the beasts he should next meet, for they were of a very different kind from any he had yet seen.

So the young man went on, and by and by he saw a multitude of very dreadful, terrible, horrible beasts, with two heads, and on every head four horns! And he was sore frightened, and ran away from them as fast as he could; and glad was he when he came to a castle that stood on a hillock, with the door standing wide open to the wall. And he went in to the castle for shelter, and there he saw an old wife sitting beside the kitchen fire. He asked the wife if he might stay for the night, as he was tired with a long journey; and the wife said he might, but it was not a good place for him to be in, as it belonged to the Red Ettin, who was a very terrible monster with three heads, who spared no living man it could get hold of. The young man would have gone away, but he was afraid of the two-headed four-horned beasts outside; so he beseeched the old woman to hide him as best she could, and not tell the Ettin he was there. He thought, if he could put over the night, he might get away in the morning, without meeting with the dreadful, terrible, horrible beasts, and so escape.

But he had not been long in his hiding-hole, before the awful Ettin came in; and no sooner was he in, than he was heard crying:

"Snouk but! and snouk ben!

I find the smell of an earthly man;

Be he living, or be he dead,

His heart this night shall kitchen my bread.”

Well, the monster began to search about, and he soon found the poor young man, and pulled him from his hiding-place. And when he had got him out, he told him that if he could answer him three questions his life should be spared.

So the first head asked: “A thing without an end; what’s that?”

But the young man knew not.

Then the second head said: “The smaller the more dangerous; what’s that?”

But the young man knew not.

And then the third head asked: “The dead carrying the living? riddle me that.”

But the young man knew not.

So the lad not being able to answer one of these questions, the Red Ettin took a mallet from behind the door, knocked him on the head, and turned him into a pillar of stone.

Now on the morning after this happened the younger brother took out the knife to look at it, and he was grieved to find it all brown with rust. So he told his mother that the time was now come for him to go away upon his travels also. At first she refused to let him go; but at last she requested him to take the can to the well for water, that she might make a cake for him. So he went, but as he was bringing home the water, a raven over his head cried to him to look, and he would see that the water was running out. Now being a young man of sense, and seeing the water running out, he took some clay and patched up the holes, so that he brought home enough water to bake a large cake. And when his mother put it to him to take the half cake with her blessing, he took it instead of having the whole with her malison.

So he went away on his journey with his mother’s blessing. Now after he had travelled a far way, he met with an old woman who asked him if he would give her a bit of his cake. And he said, “I will gladly do that”; so he gave her a piece of the cake. Then the old woman, who was a fairy, gave him a magic wand, that might yet be of service to him, if he took care to use it rightly; and she told him a great deal that would happen to him, and what he ought to do in all circumstances; and after that, she vanished in an instant, out of his sight. Then he went on his way until he came up to the old man who was herding the sheep; and when he asked him to whom the sheep belonged, the answer was:

“To the Red Ettin of Ireland  
Who lives in Ballygan,  
He stole King Malcolm’s daughter,  
The king of fair Scotland.  
He beats her, he binds her,  
He lays her on a band;  
And every day he strikes her  
With a bright silver wand.  
But now I fear his end is near,  
And death is close at hand;  
For you’re to be, I plainly see,  
The heir of all his land.”

So the younger brother went on his way; but when he came to the place where the dreadful, terrible, horrible beasts were standing, he did not stop nor run away, but went boldly through amongst them. One came up roaring with open mouth to devour him, when he struck it with his wand, and laid it in an instant dead at his feet. He soon came to the Ettin’s castle, where he found the door shut, but he knocked boldly, and was admitted. Then the old woman who sat by the fire warned him of the terrible Ettin, and what had been the fate of his brother; but he was not to be daunted, and would not even hide.

Then by and by the monster came in, crying as before:

“Snouk but! and snouk ben!

I find the smell of an earthly man;  
Be he living, or be he dead,  
His heart this night shall kitchen my bread.”

Well, he quickly espied the young man, and bade him stand forth on the floor, and told him that if he could answer three questions his life would be spared.

So the first head asked: “What’s the thing without an end?”

Now the younger brother had been told by the fairy to whom he had given a piece of his cake what he ought to say; so he answered:

“A bowl.”

Then the first head frowned, but the second head asked:

“The smaller the more dangerous; what’s that?”

“A bridge,” says the younger brother, quite fast.

Then the first and the second heads frowned, but the third head asked:

“When does the dead carry the living? riddle me that.”

At this the young man answered up at once and said:

“When a ship sails on the sea with men inside her.”

When the Red Ettin found all his riddles answered, he knew that his power was gone, so he tried to escape, but the young man took up an axe and hewed off the monster’s three heads. Then he asked the old woman to show him where the king’s daughter lay; and the old woman took him upstairs, and opened a great many doors, and out of every door came a beautiful lady who had been imprisoned there by the Red Ettin; and last of all the ladies was the king’s daughter. Then the old woman took him down into a low room, and there stood a stone pillar; but he had only to touch it with his wand, and his brother started into life.

So the whole of the prisoners were overjoyed at their deliverance, for which they thanked the younger brother again and again. Next day they all set out for the king’s court, and a

gallant company they made. Then the king married his daughter to the young man who had delivered her, and gave a noble's daughter to his brother.

So they all lived happily all the rest of their days.

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