

They saw that the very handsome man had fallen in love with their youngest sister. When they heard that he was the same as “Bearskin,” they ran out of the house full of rage and jealousy.

Bearskin and his bride were wed. Together they lived in the house and were very happy.



BEARSKIN



By The Brothers Grimm



A LearningIsland.org
15 - Minute Book

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Bearskin/ Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm

Summary: A tale of a man who must wander for seven years, dressed in a bear skin.

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the Soldier asked the father if he would give him one of his daughters to be his wife. Immediately the two older sisters arose, and ran to their rooms to dress in their best clothes. Each thought she should be chosen.

As soon as the stranger found himself alone with his bride, he pulled out his half of the ring and threw it into a cup of wine. This he handed across the table.

She took it and drank. As soon as she saw the half ring laying at the bottom her heart beat rapidly. She produced the other half, which she wore round her neck on a ribbon. She held them together, and they joined each other exactly.

The stranger said, "I am your bridegroom, whom you first saw as Bearskin. Through God's mercy I have regained my human form, and am myself once more."

With these words he hugged and kissed her. At the same time the two eldest sisters entered in full costume.

Whether he liked it or not, the Evil One had to fetch water and wash the old Soldier. He combed his hair out, and cut his nails.

When this was done, the Soldier again looked like a brave warrior. Indeed he was much handsomer than before.

As soon as the Evil One had disappeared, Bearskin became quite light-hearted. He went into the nearest town and bought a fine velvet coat. Then he hired a carriage drawn by four white horses. In this he was driven to the house of his bride.

Nobody knew him. The father took him for some famous general, and led him into the room where his daughters were. He was made to sit down between the two oldest. They offered him wine, and heaped his plate with the choicest meat. They thought they had never seen anyone so handsome before.

The bride sat opposite him dressed in black. She did not open her eyes or speak a word. At last

BEARSKIN

Once upon a time there was a young fellow who enlisted as a soldier. He became so brave and courageous that he was always in the front ranks. As long as the war lasted all went well.

When peace came he got his discharge, and the captain told him he could go where he liked.

His parents had died, and he had no home to go to. He went to visit his brothers, and asked them to give him shelter until war broke out again.

But his brothers were hard-hearted. They said, “What could we do with you? We could make nothing of you. So they turned away from him.

The poor Soldier had nothing but his musket left, so he mounted this on his shoulder and set out. By and by he came to a great heath with nothing on it but a circle of trees. He sat down under these and sadly considered his fate.

“I have no money,” he thought. “I have learned nothing but soldiering. Since there is now peace, there is no need of me. I see shall have to starve.”

All at once he heard a rustling. As he looked around he saw a stranger standing before him. The man was dressed in a gray coat. He looked very stately, but had an ugly cloven foot.

“I know what you need,” said this being. “You shall have gold and other items, as much as you can spend. First, though, I must know whether you are a coward or not. I do not want to spend my money foolishly.”

“Take care!” said the second. “Bears are fond of sweets. If you please him he will eat you up, perhaps!”

“You must do his will,” said the eldest. “If you don’t he will begin growling!”

The second daughter then said, “The wedding will certainly be merry, for bears dance well!”

The bride kept silent. She would not be drawn from her purpose by all these taunts.

Meanwhile Bearskin wandered about in the world, doing good where he could. He gave to the poor and they prayed for him. Finally the last day of the seven years approached.

Bearskin went and sat down again on the meadow beneath a circle of trees. In a very short time the wind whistled, and the Evil One stood before him. He looked at him with a sad face. He threw the Soldier his old coat and demanded his gray one back.

“We have not gotten that far yet,” said Bearskin. “You must clean me first.”

It was a pity the man's face was covered with dirt and hair. It hid how happy these words made him.

Bearskin took a ring off his finger. He broke it in two, and, gave the youngest daughter one half. He kept the other half for himself.

On her half he wrote his name, and on his own he wrote hers. He begged her to keep it carefully.

Then he left, saying, "For three years longer I must wander about. If I come back again, then we will celebrate our wedding. If I do not, you are free, for I shall be dead. But pray to God that he will save my life."

When he was gone the poor bride clothed herself in black. Whenever she thought of her bridegroom she burst into tears.

From her sisters she got nothing but scorn and mocking. "Pay attention when he shakes your hand," said the oldest, "and you will see his beautiful claws!"

"I am not a coward!" replied the man. "You can put me to any test."

"Well, then," replied the stranger, "look behind you."

The Soldier turned and saw a huge bear, which eyed him very ferociously. "Oho!" cried he, "I will hit you on the nose. Then you will no longer be able to grumble".

Raising his musket, he shot the bear in the head. The bear tumbled in a heap upon the ground, and did not move.

Then the stranger said, "I see that you are not wanting in courage. There is still one test which you must meet."

"If it does not interfere with my future happiness," said the Soldier. He had recognized who the stranger was. "If it does not interfere with that, I shall not hesitate."

"That you must see for yourself!" said the stranger. "For the next seven years you must not

wash yourself, nor comb your hair or beard. Neither must you cut your nails.

Then I will give you this coat and cape, which you must wear during these seven years. If you die within that time you are mine, but if you live you are rich, and free all your life long.”

The Soldier thought about this a while. He remembered how often he had faced death. At last he agreed to accept the offer.

Then the Evil One pulled off the gray coat, and handed it to the Soldier. “At any time, if you reach in the pockets of your coat when you have it on, you will always find your hand full of money.”

Then also he pulled off the skin of the bear, and said, “That shall be your cloak and your bed. You must sleep on it, and not on any other bed. Because of this you will be called ‘Berskin.’” Immediately the Evil One disappeared.

The Soldier put on the coat, and dipped his hands into the pockets. There he found money.





Then he hung the bearskin around himself, and went about the world chuckling at his good luck. He bought whatever suited his fancy that money could buy.

For the first year his appearance was not very strange. In the second year he began to look like a monster. His hair covered almost all his face. His beard looked like a piece of dirty cloth. His nails were claws, and his body was so covered with dirt that you could plant seeds.

Whoever looked at him ran away. but he always gave the poor a gold coin so they prayed that he would not die during the seven years. Because he paid well, he always found a place to sleep.

In the fourth year he came to an inn where the landlord would not take him in. He refused to even give him a place in his stables, in case he frightened the horses.

But when Bearskin put his hand into his pocket and drew it out full of gold, the landlord gave in.

He gave him a place in the outbuildings, but not until he had promised that he would not show himself. The landlord was afraid the inn should gain a bad name.

That night Bearskin sat by himself, wishing that the seven years were over. Suddenly he heard a loud groan in the corner.

The old Soldier had a kind heart. He opened the door and saw an old man crying and wringing his hands.

Bearskin stepped nearer, but the old man jumped up and tried to escape. When Bearskin talked to him in a kind voice, he calmed down. Finally he told Bearskin why he was so upset.

He had slowly lost his money and he and his daughters would have to starve. He was so poor that he did not have the money to pay the host. He was sure the man would put him into prison.

“If that is your only worry, I have enough money,” replied Bearskin. He called for the

landlord and he paid him. Then he put a purse full of gold into the pocket of the old man.

The man was very grateful. He said to the Soldier, “Come with me. My daughters are all beautiful, so choose one of them for a wife. When they hear what you have done for me they will not refuse you. You are a very uncommon man, but they will soon fix you up.”

This speech pleased Bearskin, and he went with the old man. As soon as the oldest daughter saw him, she was so terrified that she screamed and ran away.

The second one stopped and looked at him from head to foot. At last she said, “How can I take a husband who does not look at all human? A bear would have pleased me better.”

But the youngest daughter said, “Dear father, this must be a good man who has helped you. If you have promised him a bride, your word must be kept.”