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The Good Little Devil and Other Tales

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The Giant Who Wore Red Socks

There was once a giant who always wore bright-red socks. He was three storeys tall and lived underground.

One fine day, he said to himself:

"It's boring to stay a bachelor! Let me take a look around up there and see if I can get myself a wife."

No sooner said than done: he knocked a big hole in the ground above his head... but unfortunately, instead of popping up out among meadows, he ended up in the middle of a village.

In this village there was a young girl whose name was Mireille and who loved eating soft-boiled eggs. That particular morning, she was in fact sitting down with an egg in its egg cup, getting ready to crack it open with a teaspoon.

At the first tap of the spoon, the house began to shake.

"Gosh! Have I suddenly got stronger?" Mireille wondered.

At the second tap of the spoon, the house began to move.

"If I go on like this," she thought, "I shall bring the house right down. Perhaps it would be better if I stopped."

But since she was hungry, and she really did love soft-boiled eggs, she decided to go on all the same.

At the third tap that Mireille gave her egg, the whole house flew into the air, like a champagne cork, and, in its place, poking out of the ground, appeared the giant's head.

The young lady was herself thrown into the air. Luckily she landed in the giant's hair, so she wasn't at all hurt.

But now, running his fingers through his hair in order to shake the rubble out, the giant felt her wriggling there:

"Goodness!" he thought. "What have I got in there? Feels like some kind of creature!"

He pulled the creature out and peered at it:

"What are you?"

"I am a girl."

"What is your name?"

"Mireille."

"Mireille, I love you. I want to marry you."

"First put me down, and then I'll give my answer."

The giant put her back on the ground and Mireille ran away as fast as her legs could carry her, screaming: "Aaaaaaaaah!"

"What did she mean by that?" wondered the giant. "That's not an answer!"

All the same, he finished pulling himself out of the ground. He was just straightening his trousers when the village mayor and vicar came along. They were both very angry.

"What on earth is this? A fine way to go about your business! Popping out of the ground like this, plumb in the middle of a residential area... Where exactly do you think you are?"

"I do apologize," replied the giant, "I didn't do it on purpose, I promise."

"And poor Mireille!" exclaimed the vicar. "Her house is quite ruined!"

"If that's all," said the giant, "then it isn't so terrible. I'll rebuild it myself!"

And there and then, he spoke the following magic words:

"By the power of my bright-red socks, let Mireille's house be set aright!"

Instantly, the house became just as it had been before, with all its walls, doors, windows and furniture, its dusty corners and even its spiderwebs! Mireille's soft-boiled egg was back in its egg cup, piping hot all over again, ready for her to eat it!

"That's better," said the vicar, calming down. "I see you're not bad at heart. Now, be on your way."

"One moment, please," said the giant. "I want to ask you something."

"What now?"

"I would like to marry Mireille."

"That's impossible," the vicar replied.

"Impossible? Why?"

"Because you are too tall. You will never fit inside the church."

"It is true that the church is very small," said the giant. "What if I blow some air inside to make it a little bigger?"

"That would be cheating," said the vicar. "The church must stay as it is. It is you who must shrink."



"I would like nothing better! How should I go about shrinking?"

There was a silence. The mayor and the vicar exchanged looks.

"Listen," said the vicar, "I like you. Let me send you to see the great Chinese wizard. While you are away, I will speak to Mireille. Come back in one year and she will be ready to marry you. But take care! She will not wait longer than a year!"

"And where does your Chinese wizard live?"

"In China."

"Thank you."

And the giant set off. It took him three months to reach China and another three months to find the wizard. He spent this time learning to speak Chinese. Standing, at last, before the wizard's house, he knocked at the door. The wizard answered the door and the giant said to him:

"Yong cho-cho-cho kong kong ngo."

Which in Chinese means: "Are *you* the great wizard?" To which the wizard replied, in a slightly different tone:

"Yong cho-cho-cho kong kong ngo."

Which means: "Yes, it's me. So?"

(Chinese is like that: you can say almost everything with a single sentence, as long as you change the intonation.)

"I would like to be shrunk," said the giant, still in Chinese.

"Fine," said the Chinese wizard, also in Chinese, "wait a minute."

He went inside, then came back with a cup full of magic potion. But the cup was too small: the giant couldn't even see it. So the wizard vanished inside again and came back with a bottle. But the bottle was too small: the giant couldn't even pick it up.

Then the wizard had an idea. He rolled his big barrel of magic potion out of the front door, then set it upright and opened it up at the top. The giant drank from the barrel just as we drink from a glass.

When he had finished drinking, he waited. Now, not only did he stay the same size but, from being bright red before, his socks turned green. The great Chinese wizard had simply given him the wrong magic potion.

Then the giant got very angry and yelled very loudly:

"Yong cho-cho-cho kong kong ngo!"

Which means: "Are you trying to make a fool of me?"

The wizard apologized and came back with another barrel, which the giant drank and his socks went red again, as they had been before.

"Now, shrink me," said the giant to the Chinese wizard, still in Chinese.

"I do apologize," said the wizard, "but I've run out of potion."

"Now what am I going to do?" cried the giant, in a desperate tone.

"Listen," said the Chinese wizard, "I like you. Let me send you to see the great Breton wizard."

"And where does your Breton wizard live?"

"In Brittany."

So the giant went on his way, saying:

"Yong cho-cho-cho kong kong ngo."

Which means "Thank you!" And the Chinese wizard watched him go, calling after him:

"Yong cho-cho-cho kong kong ngo!"

Which means: "My pleasure. *Bon voyage*!"

Three months later, the giant landed in Brittany. It took him yet another month to find the Breton wizard.

"What do you want?" asked the Breton wizard.

The giant replied:

"Yong cho-cho-cho kong kong ngo."

"Pardon?"

"Forgive me," said the giant, "I thought I was still in China. I meant to say: could you make me smaller?"

"That's very easy," said the Breton wizard.

He went into his house, then came out again with a barrel of magic potion.

"Here, drink this."

The giant drank it but, instead of shrinking, he began to grow, and was very soon twice as tall as before.

"Oh I am sorry!" said the wizard. "I must have picked up the wrong barrel of potion. Just stay there, I won't be a second."

He disappeared, and came back with another barrel.

"Here, drink this one," he said.

The giant drank and... so it proved. He shrank back to his usual height.

"This is not enough," he said. "I need to be as small as a man."

"Ah, that small? I'm sorry, that's not possible," said the wizard, "I'm all out of potion. Come back in six months."

"But I can't!" exclaimed the giant. "I must return to my fiancée within the next two months!"

And, saying this, he began to cry.

"Listen," said the wizard, "I like you, and besides, this is my fault. In view of this, I shall give you a good recommendation. Let me send you to see the Pope of Rome."

"And where does he live, this Pope of Rome?"

"In Rome."

"Thank you very much."

One month later, the giant arrived in Rome. It took him another fortnight to find the Pope's house. Once he had found it, he rang the doorbell. After a few seconds, the Pope came to the door.

"Sir... What can I do for you?"

"I want," the giant said, "to become as small as a man."

"But I am not a wizard!"

"Have pity on me, Mr Pope! My fiancée is expecting me in a fortnight!"

"What then?"

"Well, if I'm still too tall then, I won't be able to get inside the church in order to marry her!"

Hearing this, the Pope felt sorry for the giant:

"That would be sad!" he said. "Listen, my friend, I like you. I shall try to do something for you."

The Pope went into his house, picked up the telephone and dialled these three letters: HVM.

Perhaps you know, when you dial O, you are put through to the Operator. But what you may not know is that when you dial HVM, you come through to the Holy Virgin Mary. If you don't believe me, wait for a day when your parents are out, and try it!

Indeed, after a few moments, a gentle voice could be heard:

"Hello? Holy Virgin here. Who is speaking?"

"It's me, the Pope!"

"You? Ah, how lovely! And what do you want?"

"Well, it's like this: I have a giant here, who would like to become as small as a man. In order to get married, as far as I understand..."

"And does this giant of yours wear bright-red socks with special powers?"

"So he does, Holy Virgin! How did you know?"

"Well, you see, I just know!"

"Really, Holy Virgin, you are a marvel!"

"Thank you, thank you... Now, tell your giant that he should leave his red socks at the laundrette and go and soak both his feet in the sea, while calling my name. He shall see what happens next!"

"Thank you, Holy Virgin."

"That's not all! As I predict that he will still have a few problems, tell him that, afterwards, he can have three wishes, which will come true straight away. But he must be careful! Three wishes, no more!"

"I will tell him."

And the Pope repeated to the giant what the Holy Virgin Mary had told him.

Later that day, the giant handed his red socks in at the laundrette, then he went to the very edge of the sea, paddled his bare feet in the blue water, and began to call out:

"Mary! Mary! Mary!"

Pouf! He lost his footing and fell over straight away. He had become as small as a man. He swam back to shore, dried himself in the sun and went back to the laundrette.

"Good morning, madam. I've come to pick up my red socks."

"I don't have any red socks here."

"But you do! The pair of red socks, about three metres long..."

"Ah you mean: the two red sleeping bags?"

"They're socks I tell you!"

"Listen," said the laundrette assistant, "call them what you will, but when I see a sock that I can lie down in, I call it a sleeping bag!"

"Never mind, please give them back to me!"

But when he tried to put his red socks on, the poor man realized that they now came up above his head. He began to cry:

"What is to become of me? I am no longer a giant and, without my magic red socks, I'm nobody! If only they too could be shrunk down to my size!"

No sooner had he said this than his red socks shrank too, and he was able to put them on. His first wish was granted.

Very happy, he put his shoes back on and thanked the Holy Virgin, after which he thought about going back to the village where he had started out.

However, since he was no longer a giant, he could not walk all the way back to Mireille's village. Moreover, he didn't have the money to take a train. Once more he burst into tears:

"Alas! And I've only got a fortnight to get back to my fiancée! If only I could be near her!"

No sooner had he said this than he found himself in Mireille's dining room, just as the young lady herself was about to crack open a soft-boiled egg. As soon as she saw him, she jumped up and threw her arms around him:

"The vicar explained everything," she said. "I know all about what you have done for me, and now I am in love with you. In six months' time, we shall be married."

"Only in six months' time?" asked the man in red socks.

But then he had a sudden thought—that he still had his third wish to make, and so he said aloud:

"Let today be our wedding day!"

No sooner had he said this than he was stepping out of the church, in bright-red socks and a fine black suit, with Mireille at his side, all dressed in white.

From that day onwards, they lived very happily together. They have many children and the former giant, their father, earns enough for the whole family by building houses, which is easy for him, thanks to the magical powers of his bright-red socks.

