

The Little Old Man Made Young by Fire

At the time when our Lord still walked on earth, he and Saint Peter stopped one evening at a smith's and were gladly given lodging. Now it happened that a poor beggar, hard pressed by age and infirmity, came to this house and begged alms of the smith.

St. Peter had compassion and said, "Lord and master, if it please you, cure his ailments, that he may earn his own bread."

The Lord said gently, "Smith, lend me your forge and put some coals on for me, and then I will make this sick old man young again."

The smith was quite willing. Saint Peter pumped the bellows, and when the coal fire sparkled up large and high, our Lord took the little old man, pushed him into the forge in the middle of the red fire, so that he glowed like a rosebush, and praised God with a loud voice.

After that the Lord went to the quenching-tub, put the glowing little man into it so that the water closed over him, and after he had carefully cooled him, he gave him his blessing, when, behold, the little man sprang nimbly out, looking fresh, upright, healthy, and as if he were twenty years old.

The smith, who had watched everything closely and attentively, invited them all to supper. Now he had an old half-blind, hunchbacked mother-in-law. She went to the youth and asked earnestly if the fire had burned him much. He answered that he had never felt better, and that he had sat in the glowing coals as if he had been in cool dew.

The youth's words echoed in the the old woman's ears all night long, and early the next morning, after the Lord had gone on his way again and had heartily thanked the smith, the latter thought he might make his old mother-in-law young again in the same way, for he had watched everything very carefully, and it used the skills of his trade. Therefore he called to her, asking her if she, too, would like to go prancing about like an eighteen-year-old girl.

Because the youth had come out of it so well, she said, "With all my heart."

So the smith made a large fire, and pushed the old woman into it. She twisted about this way and that, uttering horrible cries of murder. "Sit still. Why are you screaming and jumping about so? I still have to blow the fire hotter," he cried, then pumped the bellows again, until all her rags were all afire.

The old woman cried without ceasing, and the smith thought to himself, "It's not going exactly right." Then he took her out and threw her into the quenching-tub. She screamed so loudly that the smith's wife upstairs and her daughter-in-law heard it, and they both ran downstairs, and saw the old woman lying in a heap in the tub, howling and screaming, with her face wrinkled and shriveled and all out of shape.

The two, who were both with child, were so terrified with this that that very night they gave birth to two boys who were not shaped like humans but like apes. They ran into the woods, and from them came the race of apes.