

There was once a king with three daughters. The two older girls were jealous of the youngest, whom the King loved very dearly, and they spent much time and effort trying to destroy the King's love for her. They tried to win special favors and privileges from their father, never missing an opportunity to suggest that the youngest girl did not return his affection. Their evil jealousy would not let them rest.

At last the old king became troubled over the rumors he heard from the older daughters. He even became suspicious of the youngest girl. And one day when the three girls were with him, he could not refrain from putting their love to a test.

So he asked the oldest girl to tell him how much she loved him, and she replied:

"I value you, my father, as God in Heaven!"

Her answer pleased the King. He then asked the second daughter the same question, and she replied:

"Oh my father, I value you as my own life!"

This answer also pleased the King. And he turned now to the youngest daughter, asking her how she could describe her feelings. She answered:

"Oh my father, I value you as salt and bread."

The King was startled by this reply. Then he became angry that she cared no more for him than the humblest things on a poor man's table. His anger turned to fury that his youngest daughter, on whom he had lavished so much affection, thought so little of him in return. And he ordered his servants

to drive her out of his house. They did as they were told, and took her into the woods and abandoned her. Now, at last, the two older daughters were happy.

In the woods, the youngest daughter was miserable and frightened. She cried when she thought about home and the father she loved. She could not understand his anger, nor why she had been banished. She wandered about the woods hopelessly, and at last, in fear of the wild animals, climbed into a tall tree.

It happened that a king from another country at this moment was hunting in the woods. As he rode along on his horse, he heard his dogs barking in excitement. He hurried after them and found them surrounding the tree where the Princess was hiding. He looked upward, expecting to find a bear. Instead, he saw the beautiful face of the unhappy girl. He spoke to her kindly and asked her to come down.

He put the girl on his horse and took her to his castle. There he fed her and warmed her before a log fire. At last, overcome by his kindness, the Princess poured out her story. The King was impressed with her goodness as well as her beauty. He cared for her in his castle, and at last he asked her to marry him. The girl, too, had fallen in love, and she agreed.

So a date was set for the wedding, and invitations were sent to the royalty of the seven neighboring kingdoms. When the wedding day came, the royal guests arrived. Among them were the young Princess's father and two older sisters.

When they took their seats at the banquet table, wonderful food of all kinds was set before the guests. But none of the food was salted, and there was no salt on the table. Neither was there bread.

At last the girl's father could not refrain from commenting, and he said, "I don't understand, but it seems that the two most precious things are missing from this feast."

"Ah?" the Princess, now a Queen, replied. "What can you be speaking of?"

"Why," her father replied, "salt and bread."

"Yes," the girl said. "They are among the most precious things we know. And once because I valued my father as highly as these things I was driven out of his house to the woods to die."

When her father heard the words, he was overcome. He recognized her and embraced her with a cry of joy, thankful and happy that she was alive and well. He begged her forgiveness for his misunderstanding of her words of affection, and for having her driven away.

As for the older sisters, their plot against the youngest was now exposed, and it was their turn to be turned out of their father's house. From that day on, no more was ever heard of them. If they were ever rescued from the woods by hunting kings, nobody has ever heard about it. ❀