

THE CENTREFOLD STORY

THE PRINCESS WHO BECAME A MAN

A Danish folk tale collected by Evald Tang Kristensen and translated by Stephen Badman

Out of 6 books worth of stories which Steve sent I had to choose one to be the Centrefold story. Difficult! Some were not possible because they were too long, others were very short so I thought I could use some of them at other times. This one leapt out because it's a close relation to a story I tell—The Armless Maiden. Both are equally horrific and opportunities to tell them are few and far between. But I feel there is a huge psychological depth in them and they repay the task of telling or listening. There are many English traditional songs about cross-dressing—female soldiers, sailors and even a female servingman! This one has a definite X certificate!

There was once a king who had a beautiful wife and daughter. When the princess grew to be a woman her mother died and everyone counselled the king to marry again so that he might have a son to inherit the kingdom.

“I’ll not marry again unless I find someone as good and beautiful as my queen,” said the king.

However much the king looked, such a one was not to be found.

One day, the princess took it into her head to try on her mother’s clothes and dressed herself in one of her gowns. As she stood admiring herself in front of the mirror, her father came into the room and saw her; she was the image of his wife. He decided, then and there, that he would marry her, for she was so like her mother.

“We can’t marry, Father,” said the princess. “It’s not right.”

The king would not see sense; he insisted that he marry his own daughter and however much she pleaded with him to change his mind, he was not to be moved and set the day for the wedding. She knew then that she had to run away.



She left the palace under cover of dark and sought refuge in the woods, but before the sun was up, she heard the belling of her father’s two bloodhounds close on her trail. When she saw them closing in, she cut off both her breasts and threw

them to the hounds. They each ate a breast before running back the way they had come. The princess gathered moss to staunch her wounds and travelled deeper into the woods.

She walked until she came to a small hut made of branches and roofed with twigs and leaves; an old man came out to greet her.

“Come inside, child. It’s easy to see that you are unwell.”

The princess followed him into the hut where he tended to her wounds.

“You have no choice other than to stay here,” said the old man, “and I will teach you all I know.”

As soon as the princess’s wounds had healed well enough for her to be up and about, the old man took her into the woods where he gave her a gun. He taught her how to shoot and before long, she became an accomplished marksman; the clothes she had worn as a princess were no longer of any

use to her and she wore men's clothing.

There came a time when the old man felt that she was ready to leave the safety of the woods.

"I've taught you everything I know," he said. "It's time for you to make your own way in the world. The royal palace is just on the other side of the woods; you should go there and ask if they need a gamekeeper. It's a job that would serve you well, but if ever you find yourself in trouble, think of me."

He gave her the best of his clothes and she left.

She was taken on at the palace as the court gamekeeper and was appreciated for her manner as much as for her skills as a woodsman. The king's daughter found him engaging and invited him up to the palace where they became friends and eventually grew to love one another and wished to marry. The Red Knight wanted the princess for himself and was so envious of the gamekeeper that there was nothing he wouldn't do to cause him harm.

As much as he would have liked to, The Red Knight couldn't prevent the princess and the gamekeeper from celebrating a large and magnificent wedding; though he did have a plan. On the wedding night, before the bridal couple retired to their chambers, he hid under their bed to listen to what they might say to one another. When the couple went to bed, the gamekeeper admitted to the princess that she was not a man, but was herself a princess. They promised one another that they would live happily together as they were without anyone knowing their secret. The Red Knight had heard enough and crept silently from the room.

The Court entered the bridal chamber in the morning to congratulate the newlyweds.

"It's heartening to see that a couple of the same sex can love one another," said The Red Knight.

No one paid any notice, except the king and when they were alone together, he asked him what he'd meant by his comment.

"The princess's husband is a woman," said The Red Knight. "It's easy enough to prove. Appoint a day for the court to assemble in the palace grounds where they will bathe in the river."

The king took his advice and the following day, the court assembled at the river bank. The king and everyone bar the newlywed undressed and waded into the water.

"Come on," said the king, "undress and get in the water. This is no time for false modesty."

She remembered the parting words of the old man and thought of him.

Suddenly, a stag leapt into the water.

"Grab it, grab it!" shouted the king.

The stag leapt out of the water and disappeared around a hill followed by the gamekeeper who had still not undressed.

When he rounded the hill, the old man was waiting.

"From this moment on, you are a man and may bathe with the court, but you must promise me one thing in return: you will give me your first born child."

The prince had no choice. When he went back to his wife and told her what had happened she was deeply saddened, but there was nothing to be done; a promise was a promise.

A year later, the princess gave birth to a healthy boy which the prince took to the hut in the woods where he's arranged to meet the old man.

"Bring the child here," said the old man.

He pointed to a chopping block and axe.

"Rest the child on the block and take hold of one of its legs."

The prince did as instructed and watched in horror as the old man grabbed the child by its other leg. He picked up the axe and chopped the child between its legs up to its navel.

"Did that cause you pain?" he asked.

"Yes."

"It pained me just as much when I saw you that day in your mother's dress and your father desired to marry you."

He brought the axe down and split the child from navel to neck.

"Did that cause you pain?"

"Yes."

“It pained me just as much when you needed to cut off your breasts and throw them to your father’s dogs.”

He chopped the child’s head in two.

“Did that cause you pain?”

“Yes.”

“Wait here,” he said.

The old man picked up the two halves of the child and went into the hut; he returned shortly afterwards carrying a large dish with its lid firmly in place.

“Here’s a dish to take home to your wife. On no account must you remove the lid until you give it to her.”

When he came home and gave her the dish, she lifted its lid.

Her child lay at the bottom of the dish as whole and alive as it ever had been.

The prince, the princess and their child, led full and happy lives from that moment on.



ONE LINERS

Two blondes walk into a building ... you'd think at least one of them would have seen it.

Phone answering machine message: ‘If you want to buy marijuana, press the hash key...’

I went to buy some camouflage trousers the other day but I couldn't find any...

I went to the butchers the other day and I bet him 50 quid that he couldn't reach the meat off the top shelf. He said, 'No, the steaks are too high.'

Somebody actually complimented me on my driving the other day. They left a little note on the wind-screen. It said, 'Parking Fine.' That was nice.'

A man walked into the doctors, he said, 'I've hurt my arm in several places'. The doctor said, 'Well don't go there anymore!'

A small, two-seater Cessna plane crashed into a cemetery. Search and rescue workers have recovered 2826 bodies so far and expect that number to climb as digging continues into the night.