

# *The Devil's Sooty Brother*

Brothers Grimm

German

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*Intermediate*  
*7 min read*

A disbanded soldier had nothing to live on, and did not know how to get on. So he went out into the forest, and when he had walked for a short time, he met a little man who was, however, the Devil. The little man said to him, "Ails you, you seem so very sorrowful?" Then the soldier said, "I am hungry, but have no money." The Devil said, "You will hire yourself to me, and be my serving-man, you shall have enough for all your life? You shall serve me for seven years, and after that you shall again be free. But one thing I must tell you, and that is, you must not wash, comb, or trim yourself, or cut your hair or nails, or wipe the water from your eyes." The soldier said, "Right, if there is no help for it," and went off with the little man, who straightway led him down into hell. Then he told him what he had to do, he was to poke the fire under the kettles wherein the hell-broth was stewing, keep the house clean, drive all the sweepings behind the doors, and see that everything was in order, but if he once peeped into the kettles, it would go ill with him. The soldier said, "I will take care." And then the old Devil went out again on his wanderings, and the soldier entered upon his new duties, made the fire, and swept the dirt well behind the doors, just as he had been bidden. When the old Devil came back again, he looked to see if all had been done, appeared satisfied, and went forth a second time. The soldier now took a good look on every side; the kettles were standing all round hell with a mighty fire below them, and inside they were boiling and sputtering. He would have given anything to look inside them, if the Devil had not so particularly forbidden him: at last, he could no longer restrain himself, slightly raised the lid of the first kettle, and peeped in, and there he saw his former corporal shut in. "Old bird!" said he, "I meet you here? You once had me in your power, now I have you," and he quickly let the lid fall, poked the fire, and added

a fresh log. After that, he went to the second kettle, raised its lid also a little, and peeped in; his former ensign was in that.            old bird, so I find you here! you once had me in your power, now I have you.     He closed the lid again, and fetched yet another log to make it really hot. Then he wanted to see who might be sitting up in the third kettle     it was actually a general.            old bird, do I meet you here? Once you had me in your power, now I have you.     And he fetched the bellows and made hell-fire flare well up under him. So he did his work seven years in hell, did not wash, comb, or trim himself, or cut his hair or nails, or wash the water out of his eyes, and the seven years seemed so short to him that he thought he had only been half a year. Now when the time had fully gone by, the Devil came and said,            Hans, what have you done?            have poked the fire under the kettles, and I have swept all the dirt well behind the doors.”

“But you have peeped into the kettles as well; it is lucky for you that you added fresh logs to them, or else your life would have been forfeited; now that your time is up, will you go home again?” “Yes,” said the soldier, “I should very much like to see what my father is doing at home.” The Devil said, “In order that you may receive the wages you have earned, go and fill your knapsack full of the sweepings, and take it home with you. You must also go unwashed and uncombed, with long hair on your head and beard, and with uncut nails and dim eyes, and when you are asked whence you come, you must say, “From hell,” and when you are asked who you are, you are to say, “The Devil’s sooty brother, and my King as well.” The soldier held his peace, and did as the Devil bade him, but he was not at all satisfied with his wages. Then as soon as he was up in the forest again, he took his knapsack from his back, to empty it, but on opening it, the sweepings had become pure gold. “I should never have expected that,” said he, and was well pleased, and entered the town. The landlord was standing in front of the inn, and when he saw the soldier approaching, he was terrified, because Hans looked so horrible, worse than a scare-crow. He called to him and asked, “Whence comest thou?” “From hell.” “Who art thou?” “The Devil’s sooty brother, and my King as well.” Then the host would not let him enter, but when Hans showed him the gold, he came and unlatched the door himself. Hans then ordered the best room and attendance, ate, and drank his fill, but neither washed nor combed himself as the Devil had bidden him, and at last lay down to sleep. But the knapsack full of gold remained before the eyes of the landlord, and left him no peace, and during the night he crept in and stole it away. Next morning, however, when Hans got up and wanted to pay the landlord and travel further, behold his knapsack was gone! But he soon composed himself and thought, “Thou hast been unfortunate from no fault of thine own,” and straightway went back again to hell, complained of his misfortune to the old Devil, and begged for his help. The Devil said, “Seat yourself, I will wash, comb, and trim

you, cut your hair and nails, and wash your eyes for you,” and when he had done with him, he gave him the knapsack back again full of sweepings, and said, “Go and tell the landlord that he must return you your money, or else I will come and fetch him, and he shall poke the fire in your place.” Hans went up and said to the landlord, “Thou hast stolen my money; if thou dost not return it, thou shalt go down to hell in my place, and wilt look as horrible as I.” Then the landlord gave him the money, and more besides, only begging him to keep it secret, and Hans was now a rich man.

He set out on his way home to his father, bought himself a shabby smock-frock to wear, and strolled about making music, for he had learned to do that while he was with the Devil in hell. There was, however, an old King in that country, before whom he had to play, and the King was so delighted with his playing, that he promised him his eldest daughter in marriage. But when she heard that she was to be married to a common fellow in a smock-frock, she said, “Rather than do it, I would go into the deepest water.” Then the King gave him the youngest, who was quite willing to do it to please her father, and thus the Devil’s sooty brother got the King’s daughter, and when the aged King died, the whole kingdom likewise.

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