

# The Magician's Daughter

## synopsis

Two washerwomen remember the stories that the washing represents. In particular the story of why their king is called Nothing-At-All and why a sock has been made for four toes, not five. It started when the old king was at the wars. The queen gave birth to a son. She wanted her husband to play his part in naming the boy so she gave the baby the temporary name of Nothing-At-All.

On his way back from the wars the king and his army were stuck on the banks of a mighty river. A giant offered to carry the king and his army across the river. And the price? Why, "nothing at all". The king – not knowing that he had a son, let alone what he had been named – agreed. And was horrified, when he got home, to realise that he had unwittingly promised his son to the giant.

Ten years later the giant arrived at the palace to claim Nothing-At-All. The king and queen tried to trick the giant by giving him first the Henwife's son and then the Gardener's son. But each time the giant discovered the trick, threw the poor boy to the ground and returned to the palace. Finally the king and queen handed over Nothing-At-All and the giant took him back to his home. Now, the giant wasn't just a giant. He was a magician. He had a daughter. And he wanted Nothing-At-All as a friend for his daughter so she wouldn't be lonely.

What he hadn't foreseen was that they would grow to love each other. But they did. And one day the magician's daughter announced that they wanted to get married. The magician was furious and demanded that Nothing-At-All carry out a task. He set the boy to clean out his stables, in which was a pile of dung as high as a mountain. The boy was in despair but the magician's daughter summoned all the little creatures of the land and skies to help. They carried away the dung and the task was complete.

But the magician then demanded he drain a huge lake. With the help of the fishes and water creatures he succeeded. So the magician then set him to fetch seven eggs from a nest at the top of a tree that was seven miles high with no branches. The magician's daughter used her powers to make her fingers and the toes from one foot drop off and arrange themselves up the tree like branches. Nothing-At-All reached the eggs. But on the way down he dropped an egg and it smashed.

There was nothing for it but to run away. The magician pursued the couple. The magician's daughter used her magic to try to stop him following but his magic was more powerful. Until finally she asked Nothing-At-All to open her magic flask. A huge wave sprung up and carried the magician away.

Nothing-At-All went to try to find shelter and the magician's daughter climbed into a tree above a pond for safety's sake.

The first person he met was the Henwife, who recognised him straightaway. So she pretended to help him by giving him a glass of milk and sending him up to the castle. But the milk had a potion in it that sent him to sleep the moment he saw his parents.

No one could wake him. The king offered him in marriage to any pretty girl who managed to do so.

The Gardener's daughter was not very lovely. But she saw the magician's daughter in the reflection of the pond and thought it was herself that she was looking at. She decided she wasn't ugly at all and that she should try to wake the stranger. With the help of a magic song she woke Nothing-At-All and prepared to marry him.

Meanwhile the Gardener discovered the magician's daughter in the tree. She was sad because she thought Nothing-At-All had deserted her. But then she heard about the boy who had been asleep in the palace and realised what had happened.

She got to the palace just in time. Nothing-At-All at last remembered who he was and recognised his mother and father and the magician's daughter. They squeezed out the last drops from the magic flask to restore the magician's daughter's fingers and toes. But they were one drop short. And that is why the magician's daughter has only four toes on her left foot. And that is why there is a sock in the washroom that needs special attention.