

## The Joke and the Witches

At the beginning of my story, it should be noted that there was a beautiful princess whose name was Anna Petrovna. Anna would have been a happy princess, if it weren't for her unsurmountable melancholia. Her apathy was so powerful that not once in her life had she ever laughed. The king Peter|being a kind kind of king who placed his priorities on the preciousness of his family|decided that his daughters happiness was more important than finding a powerful prince for her to marry, so he decided to hold a contest. This curious contest was strange and surprising: if anyone could crack a joke for her that was delightful enough that she were to laugh for once, they would be the one to marry her, maybe.

Albert, Steven, and Leo, who were, in turn, a carpenter, a fletcher, and a tailor, decided to try their best bits on the bride-to-be. If only they could have her heart, they would be successful. Albert was well liked, even though he was the type to often tell grand and gross gags. Either way, at the pub he always got the room in a raucous, so he was to go first.

Albert explained to the princess that in the olden days there was a poor man who could not contain his farting. "So often, he would fart, that all his friends would keep clips clamped to their noses when he walked by. The poor man wanted to go to a ball to try to woo a woman to wed. Unfortunately, he feared he would fart so much the whole dance would be shut down.

"The poor man decided to get three things: sap from a tree, wax from a candle, and a small section of leather to seal himself up so he would not fart. Then he went to the ball. Halfway through the evening a woman appeared wearing glass shoes. The two met eyes and quickly became enchanted. Before they could share a kiss, though, the woman ran off with no explanation.

"The poor man was really quite relieved, as the pressure had been building behind the patch he had fashioned. He ran off to the carpenter's shop next door and grabbed an awl. The poor

man used it to poke a small hole in the patch to relieve the pressure. And THAT," Albert said, "was how they invented the pipe organ!" and he let out a horrible howl of laughter.

The princess's reaction was revulsion, disdain, and disgust. She demanded Albert be tied at the ankles and tossed off a cliff into the sea for telling such a crude and vile story. Then she got very serious and made a solemn warning to the others, "if your joke is so nasty as that, I will demand the very same fate for you!" She said with a wrinkled face, "So, choose your words wisely." Steven was up next, he was one to get all his school mates chuckling, because his were often the lewd type of laugh.

"There once was a priest, eager as all, who had had enough of his celibacy and snuck away one day after mass and traveled to a brothel. He had stolen some money from tithe and decided to use it to pay for a fine maiden for the night.

"The woman that the priest had paid for hid behind a curtain and told him that she was very shy, because she had a lot of natural hair and he should return that night, when it was dark. He said he didn't mind and right now is fine. In response, she said that she is actually quite large and that the priest should return in the night. Again, the priest said he did not mind, and that right that moment would be fine. So the woman replied one more time, saying 'well I also have hot ugly breath, and sharp nails. It's so embarrassing for me that I really must insist that you return when at least the darkness may offer me confidence.' With that, the priest agreed.

"That night he returned and they had the mos-" Steven interrupted himself, sparing the princess the details, as he didn't want to be thrown off a cliff. "they had a very nice night. . . anyway, in the morning when the priest awoke, he turned round to find that it was not the woman he spoke to the day prior, but rather a bear!" and he let out a terrible and shrill shriek of laughter. "the priest fucked a bear!"

Again, the princess Anna had a bad reaction. She grew sick to her stomach. She couldn't stand to think of a priest doing those things. She wondered to herself how these men could be


capable of such corrupt stories. She demanded Steven fall to the same fate as Albert: Ankles tied, off the cliff. She looked narrowly at Leo and issues a careful warning, "your joke must not be so vile, or else."

"Have you heard of the two travelers, a man and a woman, who decided to combine their money to pay for a night at the inn?" he asked the princess, with a grin. She replied in the negative. "Very well, so these two people, a modest man and a comely woman, shared one room at an inn. In his humility, the man placed a long pillow in the middle of the singular bed in their room, to separate the two while they slept. She assured him it was unnecessary. She found the man quite lovely and wouldn't mind being right next to him in the night. But the man was so modest, that he insisted.

"In the night, she whispered to him, telling him to climb over the pillow and join her. 'I cannot' he replied. Again she asked, and again he said, 'I cannot climb over the pillow.' And so, they went to sleep. The next day, as they are leaving the inn and giving their goodbyes, a great gust of wind comes and snatches the woman's hat from her head and carries it over a wall. 'No worries, my fair maiden, I can climb the wall and fetch it for you.' Says the man. she replies, 'if you cannot climb over a pillow, you certainly cannot climb over an entire wall!'"

As Leo finished his joke, he gave a slight smile to the princess Anna, but held his composure. Anna considered the joke and the more she thought of it, the funnier it seemed to her. She let out a giggle that grew into a gregarious laughter. Leo was declared the victor, but before they would be married, the king declared Leo must pass another test.

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 HE KING was not interested in his princess marrying a poor tailor, so he wanted to be rid of Leo. For this reason, Leo would have to spend three nights locked in a house that has three wretched and wrinkly witches. Leo agrees and is taken into the nearby woods. Along the way, they pass a trail of candy

on the ground. They arrive at a smelly swamp where the witches have a hut. At the door, King Peter explains to the witches the bargain he and Leo have, but the king gives subtle hints that he wants things to go a certain way.

"I want you to kill him while he sleeps, wink wink," he said to them, right in front of Leo. The three witches were sisters: the youngest one was nearly blind, the middling one was nearly deaf, and the eldest one was nearly clever. The first night, the youngest was given the charge to do the killing. She grabbed an axe and stealthily snuck over to Leo's bed and, CHOP CHOP CHOP, smashed up the bed. With delight, the youngest witch felt Leo's blood splash all over him and went to bed with a smile on her face. Everyone alive now slept until the sunrise. The next day, they went to Leo's bed and there he was, sleeping on the rubble. It was utterly destroyed and was bathed in a dark red color, like that of the sea.

Later in the morning, at the breakfast bell, Leo walked in with his clothing stained red. "Good morning! Last night was such a peaceful night, all I could feel were some bugs trying to bite me. I think tonight I will need another blanket, to protect me from those minor annoyances!" Leo said. The witches were utterly confused, but had to hide their reactions.

He was lying, the night had been terrifying. When he overheard that the blind one would be killing him with an axe, he dragged a wine barrel from the cellar and placed it in his bed and slept in a dark corner.

The witches obliged his request for another blanket, as well as gave him a new bed, but filled it with the driest hay they could find, because the middle witch |who was nearly deaf| was going to set him on fire the next night.

In the night, this very thing happened, she crept up to the bed and, in the gloom, looked at his sleeping body. She carefully lit a match set Leo's bed aflame. Certainly, Leo was screaming in agony, his flesh must have been melting off. The witch, deaf as she was, watched the flames for a while before going to bed, to be sure that he didn't escape. Everyone alive now slept until

the sunrise. The witches woke to find Leo sleeping again on the rubble.

Later in the morning, at the breakfast bell, Leo walked in covered in ashes, but otherwise perfectly healthy. He said, "good morning. I had such a lovely dream last night, but I got just a little bit too warm, so tonight ill just use a sheet, so that I may be comfortable." The witches exchanged looks, baffled, bewildered, even bothered. The eldest became frustrated, furious that the fire didn't finish him. She was fuming all day.

Of course, Leo was lying again, while the witches were making the blanket for him, he had made a scarecrow and replaced himself in the dark with it before he could be burned up. He had hardly slept a single wink. The fire had filled the room with heat and Leo with fear.

The final night was to come, and it was the eldest who, in her fury, took it upon herself to try one last time. She had suspected he had been sneaking out before the attack, so she resolved to make sure he was there before doing the deed. So that night, after bed, she stalked up to him and placed her hand on his back to feel him breathing.

When she had felt his breathing, she took the knife she had hidden in her cloak and stabbed him in the back, over and over and over until his dead body was an unrecognizable mess of meat and bones. She grinned in delight. She was successful in reducing Leo to a pulp. Smiling from ear-to-ear, she went to bed. Everyone alive now slept until the sunrise. The witches woke to find a pile of bloody pulp in Leo's bed.

Later in the morning, at the breakfast bell, there appeared Leo, happy as a lamb. The eldest witch had no clue how he had survived. She thought about how everything had worked perfectly for her. She felt his breathing, she saw his pulp. Eventually though, it dawned on her: the youngest of the three never showed up to breakfast. The eldest witch had murdered her sister. Leo, in the evening, convinced the blind one that the furniture was rearranged and tricked her into sleeping in his own bed. Having murdered their own sister, the witches fell to the

ground and began to weep uncontrollably. They kept crying like this until King Peter arrived.

When he arrived, Leo left the house completely unscathed, and because the king had made the contest so publicly, he was forced to allow him to marry Princess Anna. Leo was delighted, and Anna found herself hopeful too. At the end of the story, the two were married, and they grew to love each other.

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