

The Fool of the Family

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Spell and Define: (1) *bounty*, liberality (2) *courteous*, gracious and polite (3) *glistened*, shone, glittered (4) *meditating*, pondering

1. A certain man had two sons. The elder passed for a clever youth: the younger, called Dumling, though the favorite of his mother, was thought to be half-witted. In fact, his father and elder brother were in the habit of calling him "the fool of the family."

2. When Dumling had grown to be fifteen years old, his father became tired of supporting the "simpleton:" so he gave the lad twenty German shillings, and sent him out into the world to seek his fortune.

3. With a light heart young Dumling trudged forth, jingling the coins in his pouch, and meditating how he should spend so much money. Before long he met a fisherman carrying a basket on his back. "Ho, master, and what have we here?" said Dumling.

"Nothing that you can buy," said the fisherman gruffly. But when he heard the money clinking he declared that in his basket he had the most wonderful turbot in the world.

4. "Mr. Fisherman," said Dumling, when he had peeped in at the beautiful fish, "will you sell your fish for twenty shillings?"

"For want of a better price, yes," replied the fisherman; and the lad eagerly counted out his twenty shillings, and took the turbot.

5. Journeying on, Dumling caught sight of a fine palace, and stopped a countryman to ask who lived there.

"The king," answered the man, "and a courteous and liberal king he is."

"Is he, indeed?" thought Dumling: "I will take him my fish, and see what he will give me for it."

6. Without delay he made his way to the gate of the palace, and knocked. The gate was opened by a fat porter, who asked him what his business was. "My business is with your master," said Dumling, who knew little of the ways of great men's houses. "I bring a present for the king."

7. "Ah, indeed!" answered the porter, still delaying to open the door. "Don't you know that it is the custom of this court that I should see a present before it goes to my lord the king?"

8. So at last Dumling opened his basket. Now, when the porter saw the beautiful fish, his eyes glistened, and he declared that by the custom of the court half must be his before the bearer could go farther.

"Pray let me pass," said Dumling; "and whatever the bounty of the king bestows on me, you shall have half."

9. On this promise the porter opened the door, and permitted him to enter the hall. But here he was stopped by the chamberlain, who, when he had looked into the basket, said that half was due to him before the gift could be brought before the king, for such was the custom of the court.

10. "Fair sir, I quarrel not with your customs," said Dumling; "and, though I have already promised half my reward to the porter, I will give you the share which is left, if you will only bring me into the king's presence."

11. Then the chamberlain led him in, and the lad laid his present before the king. "By my crown," said the king, "it is a fair gift. I accept it gladly. And now what reward shall I give you for your trouble? Ask boldly and wisely, and you shall not have to complain."

12. The porter and chamberlain now went up to Dumling, and whispered to him to ask for a bag of gold, or a rich office at court, for their lord would not say him nay.

"I will ask none of these things," said the youth aloud; and bending before the king he thus spoke up: "Your majesty, I ask no reward but a sound beating."

13. Every one was astonished at hearing this strange request, and the king most of all. But when he saw that Dumling would not change his mind, he ordered him to be tied up, and an hundred lashes to be well laid on.

14. "But hold!" quoth Dumling as the scourger was baring his brawny arm: "I have partners in this business. I gave away one half of this reward to the porter, and the other half I promised to the chamberlain, before they would allow me to bring my gift to the king. It is only right that they should receive what I have promised them."

"And thou shalt keep faith with them as I with thee," vowed the king, when he learned how his servants dealt with strangers.

15. So the porter and the chamberlain were tied up in Dumling's place, and each received his share of the recompense, fairly counted out; the spectators, who well knew the greed and insolence of these officials, laughing heartily at the justice of the reward.

16. As for Dumling, the king was so much pleased with the lad's cleverness that he took him into his own service. Thus "the fool of the family" made his fortune: thenceforward no one thought of calling him a simpleton, and all the world spoke nothing but good of him.

Excercises:

1. What expression is equivalent to "passed for"? (1); What word means "half-witted"? (1 & 2); What word means considering with himself? (3); What word means generous? (5); What word means generosity? (8); What word means the same as "present"? (7 & 9)
2. Explain "gruffly" (3); "with a light heart" (3); "fair" (11); "would say him nay" (12); "brawny arm" (14); "quoth" (14); "thou shall keep faith with them as I with thee" (14)
3. Give synonyms of "clever" (1); "tired" (2); "courteous" (5); "permitted" (9); "ordered" (13)
4. Form nouns by adding suffixes to these verbs and adjectives: clever; declare; rich; strange; buy; scourge.
5. Copy, and supply the punctuation marks: ---
Fair sir I quarrel not with your customs said Dumling
6. Copy, and use synonyms for the italicised words: ---
 - a) The *elder* passed for a very *clever* *youth*.
 - b) When the porter *saw* the *beautiful* fish, his eyes *glistened*, and he *declared* that half the fish must be his.