

The Jumpers

Hans Christian Andersen

Once upon a time a flea, a grasshopper, and a jumping goose wanted to see which one could jump the highest; so they invited the whole world, and even a few others, to come to a festival to watch the test. They were three famous jumpers indeed, and they all met together in a big room.

"I'll give my daughter to the one who jumps the highest," said the King. "It seems so stingy to have these fellows jump for nothing."

The flea was the first to be introduced. He had such beautiful manners and bowed right and left, for he had noble blood in him, and besides, he was accustomed to move in human society, and that makes a great difference.

The grasshopper was next. He was certainly heavier than the flea, but he was equally well mannered, and wore a green uniform, which was his by right of birth. He explained that he belonged to a very ancient Egyptian family and that everyone thought a great deal of him in the country where he was then living. They had brought him in out of the fields, and put him in a three-storied card house, all made of picture cards with the colored side inwards.

The doors and windows were cut out of the body of the Queen of Hearts.

"I sing so extremely well," he explained, "that sixteen native grasshoppers who have been singing since childhood and still haven't any house of cards to live in grew even thinner with jealousy than they were before when they heard about me."

So both the flea and the grasshopper had now explained who they were, and they felt sure they were quite good enough to marry the Princess.

The jumping goose didn't say anything, but the company decided that meant he was thinking a great deal, and when the court dog sniffed at him, he reported that the jumping goose was certainly of good family. The old councilor, who had received three decorations to keep him quiet, declared that he knew that the jumping goose was gifted with magic power; you could tell by his back if the winter would be severe or mild, and that was more than you could say even for the man who writes the almanac.

"I'm not saying anything," the King remarked, "but I have my opinion of these things."

Now it was time for the trial. The flea jumped first, and he went so high that nobody could see him. So they all said he hadn't jumped at all, but had only been pretending. And that was a cheap thing to do.

The grasshopper only jumped half as high as the flea, but he jumped right into the King's face! And the King said it was disgusting.

The jumping goose stood still for a long time, lost in thought, and people began to wonder if he could jump at all.

"I hope he isn't sick," said the court dog, and gave him another sniff. Then suddenly, plop! the jumping goose jumped sideways right into the lap of the Princess, who was sitting on a little golden stool near by.

At once the King said, "To jump up to my daughter is the highest jump that can be made. But it takes brains to get an idea like that, and the jumping goose has shown that he does have brains. He is a pretty clever fellow."

And that's how the jumping goose won the Princess.

"I don't care a bit," said the flea. "I jumped the highest. She can have that old goosebone,

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with his stick and his wax. In this world real merit is very seldom rewarded. A fine physique is what people look at nowadays."

So the flea went away to fight in foreign service, and it is said that he was killed.

The grasshopper settled down in a ditch and pondered over the way of the world, and he too said, "Yes, a good physique is everything. A good physique is everything." Then he chirped his own sad little song, from which I've taken this story. The story may just possibly not be true, even if it is printed here in black and white.

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