

551 Water of Life

(previously The Sons on a Quest for a Wonderful Remedy for their Father).

A sick king can only be healed by a wonderful remedy [H1324, D1500.1.18] (water of life [H1321.2], rejuvenating apples, phoenix bird [H1331.1], etc.). Whoever brings it [H1210.1] will inherit the kingdom. His three sons go on a quest. The two elder haughty ones are diverted from their goal.

The youngest is single-minded and friendly towards old men (dwarf, eagle) who show him the way and give advice. With their help he reaches a magic castle that opens only for one hour. He appeases the animal guards (dragon, etc.) and finds everyone else asleep. He locates the fountain of life (golden apple tree) and takes the remedy [H1242]. He sleeps with a beautiful woman (princess) [N711.3, T475.2] and leaves his name (identification token) with her [H81.1]. When he leaves the castle it closes (sinks). On his way back he rejuvenates (releases) the helpful old men and receives magic objects in return.

At home his unsuccessful brothers secretly exchange a common (poisoned) remedy for his healing one [K2211, W154.12.3]. They give it to the king [K1932] and he recovers. These brothers slander the youngest and the king orders him to be killed. With the help of his magic objects he is able to escape this sentence.

Meanwhile the beautiful woman in the magic castle has given birth to a boy and has discovered the name of the intruder. She arrives at the head of an army and demands the father of her son [H1381.2.1]. The haughty brothers pretend it is they. They accompany her, riding beside the golden cloth (path) which the princess has spread, but they find that the gate at its end is closed. The youngest brother appears in rags, rides down the middle of the golden cloth toward the castle (is recognized by his tokens), and the gate opens for him. He marries the woman [L161] and becomes the ruler of the kingdom. The old king learns what really happened.

Combinations: This type is usually combined with episodes of one or more other types, esp. 314, 531, 780, and also 300, 301, 313, 314, 505, 530, 550, 554, 567, 590, and 968.

Remarks: This type occurs often in combination with Type 550, so many variants cannot be assigned to one or the other.