

## **Stith Thompson - The Folktale - pp153-154**

### **1. Princess Won by Cleverness**

One of the most usual situations in folktales is the contest for the hand of a princess. In the wonder tales the hero normally succeeds in this competition

through some marvelous help or through some supernatural power of his own.<sup>(2)</sup> But quite as interesting are those stories in which his success depends upon his quickness of wit. We have already noticed the tale in which the princess is to be given to the man who can make her speak (Type 945) and in which the hero so cleverly propounds a question that she is brought to speech in spite of herself. The silent princess is relatively rare in folktales; it is much more usual to find one who has never laughed. To cause such a woman to burst out in laughter will bring the hero not only her hand, but wealth and a share of the kingdom. Two of the stories involving this incident have several points in common and are occasionally confused, though the main action in each is clear.

The first of these is the tale of Dungbeetle (Type 559). It is so named because the help of this humble insect appears in nearly all versions of the narrative. When he hears that the princess has been offered to the man who can make her laugh, the hero sets out and, in the usual way of folktales, secures the help of grateful animals, or sometimes acquires magic objects, particularly a rope that binds and tightens and a magic fiddle which compels people to dance.<sup>(8)</sup> By employing these animals or objects, he succeeds in bringing the princess to laughter. But, instead of receiving her in marriage, he is thrown into a lions' den. By use of his magic or his helpers, he escapes. When again he has been refused the princess, he causes wasps to attack and drive out successive rivals on the bridal night. Eventually the princess recognizes his power and marries him.

This story appeared in Basile's *Pentamerone* and most versions conform rather closely to his telling of the tale. It seems to be known in all parts of Europe, but is not popular in any. It has also been reported from the Nuba of east Africa.

(1). These simple jests and anecdotes are discussed in the next chapter, pp. 188ff., where they are arranged in a logical series.

(2). For a detailed discussion of such suitor contests, see Motifs H331 and H335.

(3). All these motifs have been met before. For the help of the three animals, see Type 554. For the binding rope, see Types 564 and 569. For the magic fiddle, see Type 592. Two other tales containing it will be presently studied, Types 851 and 853.