

Long long ago there was a brave king. He took care of his people well and whenever they faced any danger he was ready to protect them from it.

But he was no match for the new danger the subjects faced from a giant who took up a position near a forest and began eating up people. Someone saw him from a distance and ran and informed the king. The king immediately despatched a battalion of his ablest fighters. But none of them came back. The giant went on creating havoc in the lives of the people.

The whole kingdom was in the grip of terror. The king was upset, but he knew that he could not just leave matters at that. He chose a hundred able soldiers, armed them to the teeth and marched against the giant.

As he approached the forest, the giant's laughter was heard. That made half of the soldiers take to their heels. Then, as soon as the giant came out of the forest, the other half followed suit.

The king felt very bad, but kept standing there. He did not try to use his weapons against the giant because he knew that they would be of no avail.

"Bravo, your majesty! I have met a true man at last. You ought to be rewarded for your courage. What do you want?" asked the giant.

"Stop eating my people," said the king.

"That's not easy. But if you can give me work enough to do, I'll forget eating. Mind you, you must give me continuous work."

The king was very happy at the condition. It amounted to a double boon—the giant would stop eating his subjects on the one hand and work for their benefit on the other hand!

"What if you cannot do the work I give you?" he asked.

"Then I'll leave your kingdom!" said the giant.

Tamil Folk Story

A Hairy Tale

Narrated by Panjalai Ammal

A Farm Labourer in Olandai-Keerapalayam

Recorded into English by P. Raja

The king returned to the capital with the giant and asked him to rebuild the city walls which were crumbling.

The giant left, but before the king had taken off his helmet he returned and said: "Done. Next?"

The king could not believe his ears. He climbed to the castle roof and looked at the city walls. They looked new.

"Good. Would you mind clearing all the silt and filth from the ponds, wells and rivers in our kingdom?" asked the king.

The giant went out of his sight in a few bounds. The king heaved a sigh of relief and sat for dinner.

He had just put something in his mouth when the giant was back.

"Done. Next?"

The king began to dread these words. "There are a few hills to the north of the town. Will you please make stone houses out of them?"

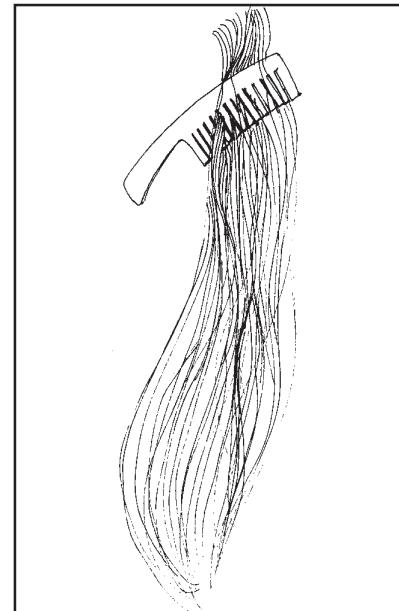
The giant nodded and left for the site. The king sat pensive. He had no taste for food.

"Why don't you eat?" asked the queen.

"How can I? He will be here before I get up. Then he will be back once every minute. How am I going to sleep? What work can I give him?"

The queen smiled. "You leave the task to me," she said. And she was only able to say that much when the giant came back.

"Here is your next work," said the queen, plucking a long hair from her own head and handing it over to the giant. "Make a hundred shreds of it



lengthwise. When you have done this, report to me, and my maids will give you plenty more. Then you have to build a castle of those shreds of hair for me. Go up to the roof and carry on with your work."

Through the whole night the giant tried to tear the hair lengthwise. By morning he had succeeded in dividing it into just two shreds.

He wiped his forehead and palmed his tired eyes and went down and banged on the queen's door.

"Done?" the queen asked, peeping through the window

"I am leaving your kingdom," the giant said ruefully.

"What about the castle of hair?"

"Did I not say that I am leaving your kingdom?" The giant belied and he ran away and he was never seen again. □