

The Ear Of Corn And The Twelve Men

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
from *Ananzi Tales*

[This tale is imperfect at the beginning.]

Ananzi said to the King, that if he would give him an ear of corn, he would bring him twelve strong men. The King gave him the ear of corn, and he went away. At last he got to a house, where he asked for a night's lodging which was given him; the next morning he got up very early, and threw the ear of corn out of the door to the fowls, and went back to bed. When he got up in the morning, he looked for his ear of corn, and could not find it anywhere, so he told them he was sure the fowls had eaten it, and he would not be satisfied unless they gave him the best cock they had. So they were obliged to give him the cock, and he went away with it, all day, until night, when he came to another house, and asked again for a night's lodging, which he got; but when they wanted to put the cock into the fowl-house, he said no, the cock must sleep in the pen with the sheep, so they put the cock with the sheep. At midnight he got up, killed the cock, threw it back into the pen, and went back to bed. Next morning when it was time for him to go away, his cock was dead, and he would not take anything for it but one of the best sheep, so they gave it to him, and he went off with it all that day, until night-fall, when he got to a village, where he again asked for a night's lodging, which was given to him, and when they wanted to put his sheep with the other sheep, he said, no, the sheep must sleep with the cattle; so they put the sheep with the cattle. In the middle of the night he got up and killed the sheep, and went back to bed. Next morning he went for his sheep, which was dead, so he told them they must give him the best heifer for his sheep, and if they would not do so, he would go back and tell the King, who would come and make war on them.

So to get rid of him, they were glad to give him the heifer, and let him go; and away he went, and walked nearly all day with the heifer. Towards evening he met a funeral, and asked whose it was? one of the men said, it was his sister, so he asked the men if they would let him have her; they said no, but after a while, he begged so hard, saying he would give them the heifer, that they consented, and he took the dead body and walked away, carrying it until it was dark, when he came to

a large town, where he went to a house and begged hard for a night's lodging for himself and his sister, who was so tired he was obliged to carry her, and they would be thankful if they would let them rest there that night. So they let them in, and he asked them to let them sit in the dark, as his sister could not bear the light. So they took them into a room, and left them in the dark; and when they were alone, he seated himself on a bench near the table, and put his sister close by his side, with his arm round her to keep her up. Presently they brought them in some supper; one plate he set before his sister, and put her hand in it, and the other plate for himself, but he ate out of both plates. When it was time to go to bed, he asked if they would allow his sister to sleep in a room where there were twelve strong men sleeping, for she had fits, and if she had one in the night, they would be able to hold her, and would not disturb the rest of the house. So they agreed to this, and he carried her in his arms, because, he said she was so tired, she was asleep, and laid her in a bed; he charged the men not to disturb her, and went himself to sleep in the next room. In the middle of the night he heard the men calling out, for they smelt a horrid smell, and tried to wake the woman-first one man gave her a blow, and then another, until all the men had struck her, but Ananzi took no notice of the noise. In the morning when he went in for his sister and found her dead, he declared they had killed her, and that he must have the twelve men; to this the townsmen said no, not supposing that all the men had killed her, but the men confessed that they had each given her a blow-so he would not be satisfied with less than the twelve, and he carried them off to the King, and delivered them up.