THE KING WHO NEVER SLEPT

The King Who Never Slept

There was, in the past, a king who never slept.

He wanted to. But he couldn't.

Whenever he was just dropping off, something would happen.

A duck would quack. Or the plaster would crack.

A fly would buzz.

Or a pin would drop.

A man would shiver. Or a dog would scratch itself. Or a kitten would lick its whiskers.

Someone would go thump, bump, or plump. Or something would go plink, plank, or plop.

The king would get mad and would jump from his bed.

"Be still!" he would cry. "I can't rest with this quacking and cracking! I can't stand this scratching and licking! I won't put up with this thumping, bumping, and plumping—this plinking, planking, and plopping!"

The king sent for his trusted men.

"Go into the land," he said to his men, "and tell them to be still. I am the king, and I won't be bothered in this manner."

So a hush fell, and the land was still. There was not so much as a whisper.

No one could hammer. No one could thump, bump, plump, plink, plank, or plop. And so no one could do his job, and not a thing got done.

The mothers couldn't sing to the children. And the children couldn't skip or hop. They couldn't do anything that was fun.

It was a sad land. But the king was king, and you had to do what he wanted.

"That's better," said the king.

He crept back into his bed. And he was just dropping off when a sudden clap of thunder crashed in the sky.

The king jumped up.

"What was that?" he yelled.

"That?" said one of his men. "Why, that was thunder."

"Thunder?" said the king. "Well, don't just stand there. Shut it off."

But the king's men couldn't shut off the thunder.

He was so mad that his men shivered.

"Stop that shivering!" he said. "Go into the land and get me someone who can shut off the thunder. Tell them that the one who shuts it off shall have a chest of silver."

The men went. But no one could do as the king had asked. Not for a chest of silver.

"Go back," said the king. "Tell them that the one who shuts off the thunder shall have two chests of silver."

But no one could do it. Not for two chests of silver.

"Tell them seven chests of silver," said the king.

But still no one could do it. Not for anything.

"There's no help for it," said the king. "I'll have to do it myself."

He sent his men to bring him a ladder.

"And be prompt," he said.

The men were back in a wink with a stepladder.

"No, no," said the king. "I want a big ladder. I want the biggest ladder there ever was."

So the men added one ladder to another ladder. They did that till they had the biggest ladder there ever was.

"That's better," said the king.

He tested the ladder and stepped up on it.

"I'll be back in a bit," he said. "I'll be back when I have shut off the thunder."

And he went up the ladder into the sky, rung after rung.

He went up. But he has yet to come back.

It could be that he will never come back. It could be that he is stuck up there.

No one can tell.

But when the king had left, a duck began to quack. A dog scratched itself, and a kitten licked its whiskers.

The children began to skip and hop. And after a bit, the land was filled with quacking and scratching and licking and ticking. And thumping and bumping and plumping. And plinking and planking and plopping.

In fact, it still is.