

Joe White

“Mirror, mirror, in my hand, who’s the fairest in the land?” Shimmering in the morning light, the King’s mirror coughed politely. The king was unnerved. Normally his mirror replied instantly.

“Mirror?” he asked nervously.

“Well, sire, a boy has grown up deep in the forest. He’s only young, but he’s very dashing!”

The king erupted into a rage. His face turned purple and little flecks of spit formed at the corners of his mouth. From that moment on, the mirror tried to hide the truth. Each time the king asked, he would tell him of the boy in the woods. Eventually, he was forced to give the king a name. Joe White.

For many years, Joe White had grown up in a small cottage with his father. Even though strange things often happened - grannies being eaten by wolves, small blond girls stealing from angry bears - Joe and his father lived a peaceful life. One day, Joe’s father went out to collect apples and never returned. Left to fend for himself, the boy turned to the woodland creatures for comfort. A stranger walking past would have often seen him dancing around with bluebirds and small deer. Unfortunately, this kind of thing puts people off. In the end, Joe was left alone much of the time. In fact, the only friends he had were a small troupe of seven travelling jesters who stayed with him in the cottage and performed their japes at the king’s castle.

Over the years, the king’s anger became toxic. It slowly poisoned his soul until his hatred of the handsome boy was all he could think about. It wasn’t long before he hatched a fiendish plot to get rid of his nemesis.

Much like the king, Joe was very vain: he had been known to comb his hair a hundred times a day. On a spring day, the kind where the dew shimmers with an iridescent shine on the grass, the king made his way to the cottage in the woods. He was dressed as an old beggar. Silently, he crept up to the cottage door and knocked politely.

“Good day sir,” said Joe kindly as he invited the old man in. “How may I help you?”

“Young man, I am lost and alone in this big forest. I am hungry. I couldn’t help but smell your wonderful broth cooking on the stove and wondered if I might join you in a meal?”



His father had always raised him to be kind to everyone, and so Joe accepted. In exchange for the meal, the beggar offered Joe a solid gold comb. Excitement overcame the young man and raced over to his mirror to try out his new toy. Unfortunately, the king had gone to great lengths to imbibe the comb with poison. Within seconds, it had taken effect.

Later that day, when the jesters returned home from their shift at the palace, they found Joe lying in front of his mirror, his skin snow-white and cold.

RETRIEVAL

1. How does the king’s mirror normally respond?
2. Who did Joe live with in the cottage?
3. Give one example of a strange thing that happened near where they lived.
4. What was Joe cooking when the stranger arrived?
5. What was the king dressed as?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What image does the word “shimmering” bring to your mind?

I

How does the king feel about the news of a dashing young boy? How do you know?

P

What do you think would happen next if this were a fairy tale?

E

Explain how the author tells you that the king’s anger grew over time.

V

Find the definition of “imbibe”.