

A Riddle Tale:

The Fastest Runner

Once, there was a king who wished to know which of his relatives was fastest on his feet. So, sending forth his servants, he bade all those ones who thought themselves swift to meet on a great plain that was within his kingdom on an appointed day. A contest would be held. Not a race, for the king thought that too simple, but a test of skill as well as speed.

When the day arrived so did the relatives of the king who were to compete. They were his uncle, his cousin, and his niece, all of whom thought themselves the fastest of the family. The king stood upon a small mound holding a round stone in his hand.

“Here stand you all on this plain,” he cried, loudly enough to be heard by all his subjects whom had shown up to witness the event. “Each of you thinks he or she is the swiftest—now prove it. In my hand I hold a stone; when one of you is ready I will toss it into the air. Whoever performs the greatest feat of speed before it lands in my palm again, that person is the Fastest Runner.”

The king’s uncle stepped forward first, carrying several lengths of twine. He bent his back and arched his hands, and when the king tossed the stone up off he dashed. He sped out into the plain, caught and bound five cheetahs with his twine, and brought them back to the king just as the stone landed.

Next, the cousin of the king stepped up, shaking his arms in warm up and carrying a large sack, and when the king threw the stone skyward he sprinted away. He rushed out into the plain, stole all the honeycombs from seven hives before the bees even took notice, stuffing them inside his sack, and brought them back to the king just as the stone returned to his majesty’s palm.

Then the king’s niece stepped forth, carrying under her arm a sizeable clay vase, and when the king hurled high his stone she too ran off. She darted right into the plain, snatched up a single flower of every color, sticking them in her vase, and brought them back to the king just as the stone came down.

Now who was the fastest of the three?