

The Man with Seven Faces

There was once a man named Nobody. Nobody lived nowhere in particular, for he was so poor he didn't even have a blanket to warm himself at night. His circumstances caused him no end of grief, though he was not one without ambition. He dreamt of turning his beggar's clothes into rich furs and living in a palace instead of whatever bush he could climb under each night. While Nobody lived just outside the gates of a great city, he was never allowed in to try to make these dreams a reality.

One day, a traveler came walking to the city and passed by poor Nobody. Taking pity on him, for the traveler could see that this beggar was in need of charity, the traveler stopped to talk. "My good sir," said the traveler to Nobody as he sat outside the gates of the city. "you look as if you could use a favor. What can I do for you? If it is within my power, I shall do it." Now Nobody quickly got the measure of the traveler. No riches lived in those pockets, and the traveler's boots seemed hard worn, so Nobody did not believe much help could be gained despite the good wishes.

"I doubt there is much you could do for me, kindly traveler," sighed Nobody sadly. "These beggars rags are all I shall know for my face is known to the guards of this city and I am not to be allowed in. They fear I shall beg and rob the people behind these walls, though I would not dare such a thing in my wildest dreams. If you could give me a new face and a life beyond begging, I would take it without question." laughed Nobody, sure that the traveler would simply shrug and continue into the city.

The traveler, however, looked at Nobody thoughtfully for a moment before nodding with a smile. "You are in luck then. I have not just one new face for you, but seven." said the traveler. Before Nobody knew it, the traveler reached into a bag and produced seven finely made masks. "These are no ordinary masks." remarked the man. "They are so cunningly made that once you put one on, nobody will know you wear a mask at all. It will move as you do and will look to all others as if it is your very own face. However, here I must give you warning." said the traveler gravely. "Do not wear a mask too often lest you lose yourself beneath it."

Nobody glanced at the masks in his hand as if they were gold. The guards at the city gate wouldn't recognize him and he could finally get inside and have a chance to make a life for himself. Nobody looked up to thank the traveler yet found nothing but an empty road before him. The traveler had gone without so much as a boot print left behind in the dust. Excitedly, Nobody sat down to examine the fine masks he had been given.

The first mask was of a fine-looking young man with eyes that shone with power. The second resembled that of a rich, bearded merchant with a sneer resting on his lips. The third was a portly face with drool gracing one of the many chins. The fourth mask was a thin-faced man with sunken cheeks and a wicked glint in his eye. The eyes of the fifth were like those of the fourth, yet rested in a face both beautiful and terrifying. The sixth was an unremarkable and

plain face with dull eyes. The seventh and final mask was a terror to behold; there was a fire in the eyes and a snarl on the lips of a powerful looking face.

The masks unnerved Nobody, though he could not deny that he greatly desired to try them all. After some consideration, he picked up the first mask and put it on. Instantly he felt transformed and powerful. With this he could not only ask, but command the guards to let him inside the city, and he knew it would happen. Nobody put his plan into action at once and strode up to the guards, confidently demanding to be let inside. Fearing that this was perhaps a nobleman who had seen hard times on the road, the guards of the city opened the gates to him quickly.

Nobody walked through the city confidently with his mask firmly in place. Eyes turned to him as he walked the streets. He was amazed at how well people treated him with his new face. Before long, a man in rich silks addressed him. "Oh, what a shame it is that those such as we cannot even travel the country safely." remarked the man, thinking Nobody to be a rich lord who had been robbed on the road. "Come with me, my fine sir. You shall stay in my household until you can send messages and gather your wealth here." said the man in silk as he hustled Nobody off.

The rich man dressed Nobody in clothes of rich silk and fur, fed him with the finest foods, and allowed Nobody to stay in his extremely large home. Before long, the sun fell below the horizon and night settle on the city. The rich man set aside a room for Nobody to sleep in. As he was preparing for bed, Nobody removed the mask in the privacy of his room. He felt a great sense of relief upon removing the mask. He then noticed that, strangely, his nose seemed to be a bit thinner than it was before; it was shorter as well. With a shrug, for a thinner nose is not such a terrible thing, he went to bed.

The next morning, and each one thereafter, Nobody put on one of his masks when he went out into the city. He began each day with the first mask he had used as he left the house, but found many uses for the others. Soon, there was no time at all that Nobody removed his masks, even as he slept. Sometimes he would even layer the masks one on top of the other and feel more powerful still.

Nobody used his masks to gain much in the city. His second mask, that of the bearded merchant, won many people to his side hoping for riches. The mask of the fat man seemed to put others at ease and give him gifts, while the fourth and fifth masks with the glint in their eyes brought him servants and power. The plain faced mask with the dull eyes encouraged others to underestimate him, while the final terrifying mask he found useful in bullying others into what he wanted done. Nobody's seven faces bought him many things in the city. However, the one thing that the masks didn't bring him was joy. The more he wore the masks, the less happy he became. All the company that a mask brought him faded away when he put on another, and he was lonely.

After many months, there came a day that Nobody decided to take off his mask. When he at last removed them and looked into a mirror, he saw the horror that they had caused. Nobody's face had completely disappeared. He quickly put a mask back on and knew that he dared not remove it again, for now who was he without the masks to hide behind? He truly was nobody without them.

The next day, who should approach Nobody but the traveler who gave him the masks at the city gate. "I see the masks have served you well." smiled the traveler. "You have the power, riches, and influence you desired. Are you happy now?" Nobody shook his head and explained to the traveler what had happened. "I did warn you." the traveler said. "I said you would lose yourself behind the masks if you weren't careful, and you seem to have done so."

"But what can I do?" begged Nobody. "I cannot remain faceless. What if something were to happen to the masks? I would be left without any identity at all!" The traveler sighed heavily and explained that if Nobody wanted to regain himself, he must put off and deny that which he had become. He must destroy the masks and return to who he had been. A beggar he had once been, and to one he must return if he were to regain his face. Nobody would have to rely on himself if he wished to improve his life further.

Nobody thought this over for days, trying in vain to think of a way to keep at least one mask for himself. At last, he felt he had no choice. Though it pained him greatly, Nobody built a fire in the home he had gained with his many faces and cast the masks into the flames. As each one was consumed, Nobody's face slowly returned until at last he looked just as he had before he wore any mask at all.

Nobody walked out of his fine house into the streets, and was promptly picked up by guards who said he had no business at all in that part of the city. He was cast out of the city into the dust. With a grin, he set off down the road away from the city that had caused him such grief. He would find a new place to live and would earn his place there on his own. He cared not for riches or power any longer, but wanted simply to belong somewhere that he could be himself. Nobody was going to be somebody happy.