

St. George and the Dragon: Stories From The Faerie Queen

By Jeanie Lang

Long, long ago, before the things that happened were written down in history books, a spiteful fairy came into the castle of an English king. She saw a beautiful baby-boy, the king's little son, lying asleep, and, out of mischief, she ran away with him and left her own ugly little fairy baby there instead.

But when she had stolen the baby, she could not be troubled to take care of him. So she laid him down in the furrow of a ploughed field.

Soon a ploughman, with his horses, came that way. He was a kind man, and he lifted the baby up off the cold brown earth and carried him home to his cottage. He called him Georgos, and brought him up as if he were his own boy.

When Georgos was a big boy he did not care to be a ploughman. He wished to be a knight and fight for people who were not as strong as he was. So he went to the court of the Faerie Queen, and she took him for one of her knights. She called him George, and gave him armour all shining with silver and with a red cross on his shield and on his breast.

You have heard the story of Una, so you know that it was George of the Red Cross who left the fairy court to fight for her and to be her knight.

There was no sadder knight to be found in all Fairyland than George of the Red Cross, after the wicked magician had made him think that Una was false and bad. With a heavy heart he rode away from the magician's cottage in the grey dawn, with the dwarf sadly following him. As he went through the woods he met a knight riding with a beautiful lady in red robes that sparkled with jewels. The lady's horse was all decked out with gold, and from its bridle hung golden bells.

Although she was so beautiful, she was really a wicked witch, who was never so happy as when she was making men fight and kill each other.

When she saw George coming, she said to the knight with whom she rode, 'Here comes a knight! you must fight with him.' So the knight rode furiously at George, and George met him as fiercely, and both their spears splintered as they crashed against each other. Then, with their swords they cut and thrust and hacked. The knight cut through a piece of George's helmet by the fury of one blow, but George gave him such a stroke in return, that his sword went through the steel helmet right into the knight's head, and he fell dead.

When the witch saw him fall, she galloped away, screaming with fear. George rode after her and begged her not to be afraid, but the witch pretended to cry bitterly. She told him she did not cry for sorrow that the knight was dead, but only because she was frightened. She said that the knight who lay there had wished to marry her, but that she did not love him, and liked George much better.

The witch looked so beautiful, with her red robes and splendid jewels, and pretended so well to be simple and good, that George believed all that she said.

'Do not be afraid,' he said, 'I will take care of you, and be your friend.'

So he did not think of Una any more, but rode away happily with the witch, who said her name was Fidessa.

In the middle of the day, when the sun had grown very hot, they rested in the shade of two great trees.

The spreading branches of the trees were overgrown with grey moss, and their green leaves were never still, but whispered and trembled as if the wind was blowing on them. George thought he would make a garland of these fresh leaves to put on Fidessa's dark hair. He plucked a little branch, and, as he broke it, red drops of blood trickled down from the place where it was broken.

Then a sad voice spoke out of the tree, and told him that the trees were not really trees, but a knight and a lady, who had been bewitched by the magic of a wicked witch.

The witch who had done it was Fidessa, and when Fidessa heard the tree speak, she was afraid that George would find her out. But George was too simple and too true to think that beautiful Fidessa could be so wicked. He was very sorry for having hurt the tree-man, and with some earth plastered up the place that bled.

Then he and Fidessa hurried away from the place of the shivering trees.

When they had ridden for a long time they came to a gorgeous palace where only bad people stayed. Fidessa made George come with her into the palace, and while they stayed there she got some of the wicked knights of the palace to fight with George and try to kill him. But George was braver and stronger than any of these knights, and instead of their killing him, he killed them.

One day Fidessa went from home, and, while she was away, Una's dwarf, who had never left George, went wandering through the palace.

In a dark and horrible dungeon he found many knights, and kings, and ladies and princes shut up as prisoners.

The dwarf ran and told George, and the Red Cross Knight, fearing that he also would be made a prisoner and cast into the dungeon if he stayed longer in the enchanted palace, rode away. The wounds he had got in his last fight were still unhealed, so that he could not go fast.

When Fidessa got back and found him gone, she rode after him as fast as ever she could. When she found him he was resting, with his armour off, on the mossy grass by the side of a sparkling fountain. He was peacefully listening to the sweet song of birds, and to the tinkling water, when Fidessa's red robes showed through the trees.

She talked to him so cunningly that soon she persuaded him to think that she loved him very much and meant him nothing but kindness.

Now the witch knew that the water of the fountain was magic water, and if any one drank it all his strength would leave him. So she made George lie down on the sandy gravel and drink. In one minute his strength all went from him and he was no stronger than a tiny boy.

No sooner had this happened than there walked out from amongst the trees an enormous ugly giant. In his hand, for a club, he carried a big oak-tree that he had pulled out of the earth by the roots. When he saw George he rushed at him like an earthquake, and smote him such a mighty blow that George fell fainting to the ground. Then the giant picked him up as if he had been a helpless little baby, and carried him away, and threw him into the darkest dungeon of his castle in the woods.

Una's dwarf, who had hidden in the bushes and seen all that happened, ran away, lest the giant should kill him.

But Fidessa, the wicked witch, made friends with the giant, and he made her his wife. He gave her a robe of purple and gold to wear, and put a splendid gold crown on her head. And to make people more afraid of her than they were already, he gave her a horrible beast with seven heads and a long scaly tail of brass to ride on.

For months and months George was a prisoner in the gloomy dungeon. The light never came into it, nor any air. He was chained with heavy iron bands, and was given scarcely anything to eat or to drink. His face grew white and thin, and his eyes grew hollow. His strong arms became only skin and bone, and his legs were so feeble that he could not stand. He looked more like a shadow than a man.

One day, as he lay on the floor of the dungeon, feebly moaning and longing to die, the door burst open.

A knight in shining armour of diamonds and gold stood before him, and before George could speak to him, there ran into the dreary cell, like a sunbeam in the dark, his own beautiful Una. Una nearly cried for joy at seeing her knight again, and for sorrow because he looked so terribly ill.

She told him that Prince Arthur, the knight who had saved him, had cut off the giant's head, and slain the seven-headed monster, and made Fidessa prisoner.

Then Prince Arthur tore off Fidessa's robe of purple and gold, and her golden crown and all her sparkling jewels. And all her beauty faded away, and she looked like the hideous, wicked old witch that she really was.

George shrank away from her in horror, and wondered how she could ever have made him forget Una, or have made him think that she herself was good and beautiful.

And Fidessa, frightened at being found out, ran away and hid herself in a dark cave in the lonely desert.

Then Una took George, who was now no stronger than a little child who has been ill, to an old house not far away from the giant's castle. It was called the House of Holiness.

There lived there a good old lady and her three good and beautiful daughters, and they helped Una to nurse George until he grew strong again.

And as he grew stronger, from the rest and their care and the dainty food they gave him, those ladies of the House of Holiness taught the young knight many things.

He learned to be more gentle than he had been before, and never to be proud nor boastful, and to love nothing that was not wholly good. He learned, too, not to hate any one, nor to be angry or revengeful, and always to be as generous and as merciful as he was brave.

When he was quite strong once more, he went from the House of Holiness to a place where an old hermit stayed, and from him George learned still more of what was good.

George had always thought that he was a fairy's son, but the hermit told him the story of how the bad fairy had stolen him from his father's castle when he was a baby. And although George loved his Faerie Queen and the fairy knights and ladies, he was glad to think that he was the son of an English king.

The old man told him that if, all through his life, he was true, and brave, and merciful and good, one day he should be called a saint. And he would be the saint who belonged especially to all Englishmen and Englishwomen, and to English boys and girls.

*'Saint George shalt thou callèd be,
Saint George of Merry England, the sign of victory.'*

Then did George, his shining armour with its red crosses, and his sharp sword and glittering spear buckled on again, ride away once more with Una, to kill the dragon and set free the king and queen.

It was a dreary country that they rode through, for the dragon had laid it all waste, but from far away they saw the tower of brass shining in the sun.

As they drew nearer they saw a watchman on the top of the tower gazing across the plain. Day after day for a long, long time he had looked for Una to come back with a knight to slay the dragon. When he saw Una and George crossing the plain, he ran and told the king and queen, and the old king climbed up to the top of the tower to see for himself that the good news was true.

As they drew near the tower, George and Una heard a hideous roaring sound. It filled all the air and shook the ground like an earthquake. It came from the dragon, that was stretched out in the sun on the side of a hill.

When it saw the knight in gleaming armour riding towards it, it roused itself joyfully up to come and kill him, as it had killed all the other knights.

George made Una go to a high piece of ground, from whence she could see the fight, and where she would be out of danger, and then rode to meet the terrible beast.

Half running and half flying, with its great ugly wings, the dragon came swiftly towards him. It was so big that its shadow looked like the dark shadow of a mountain on a valley. Its body was monstrous and horrible and vast, and was all swelled out with rage. It had scales all over it that shone like brass, and that were as strong as steel. Its wings were like big sails, and when it flapped them and clashed its scales, the sound was like the sound of a great army fighting. Its long tail was spotted red and black, and at the end of it two sharp stings stuck out. It had cruel long claws, and its gaping jaws had each three rows of iron teeth, all stained and wet with the blood of the people it had eaten last. It had eyes like flames, and its breath was fire and smoke.

When it rushed at George, George rode hard at it with his spear. But no spear was ever made that was strong enough to pierce that dragon's scales. The spear glanced off from its ugly, speckled breast, but the dragon, furious at the hard thrust that George had given him, lashed out with its tail so furiously that both the horse and his rider were thrown to the ground. Lightly they rose up again, and again George smote with his spear.

Then the dragon, spreading its wings, rose from the ground like a giant bird, and seizing George and his horse in its claws, flew away with them. Right across the plain it flew, then, finding them heavy, it dropped them on the ground. As it did this, George thrust with his spear under the dragon's stretched-out wing, and made a great gaping wound. The spear broke, but the spear-head stuck in the wound, until the dragon, mad with rage and pain, plucked it out with its teeth.

Then did fire and smoke rush out more terribly than before from the jaws of the furious dragon. It lashed its long tail so savagely that it folded in its coils George's foaming horse. The frantic horse, in its struggles to get free, threw George on the ground amongst the horrible blood. But George sprang to his feet, and with his sharp sword struck again and again at the dragon's head.

The sword could not pierce it, but the dragon, annoyed at George's fierce attack, thought it would fly out of his reach. But when it tried, the wound George had made in its wing prevented it.

Then its rage at George grew fifty times more furious. It roared till the whole land shook, and it sent out from its inside such blazing flames that George's face was scorched and his armour grew so hot that it burned into his flesh.

George was so tired and so faint and sore, that when he was burned as well, he feared that the end had come. The dragon saw his faintness, and smiting him a tremendous blow with its great tail, it threw him down, and George fell backwards into a pool of water. Now this pool of water was a magic spring. When George fell into it, all his faintness and weariness vanished.

Una, who feared he was dead, saw him spring out of the water even fresher and stronger than he had been at the beginning of the fight.

The dragon could not believe its eyes, and thought that George must be a new knight who had come to fight it.

Before it had got over its surprise, George struck its head so fiercely with his sword, which still dripped from the magic water, that he made a great wound.

The dragon, roaring like a hundred lions, struck at George with the stings on the end of its tail. One of them went right through George's shield, and through his armour, and firmly stuck in his shoulder. Though George was faint with the pain it caused, he hit the dragon's tail such a blow that he hewed off five joints and left only the ugly stump.

Mad with rage, the dragon, belching out smoke and fire, and giving fearful cries, seized George's silver shield in its claws and tried to drag it from him. Again and again, and yet again, George struck at it with his sword. At last he hit the joint and cut the paw clean off. Even then, so tight was the grip that the claws had got, that it still hung bleeding from the shield.

Then was the dragon's rage so frightful, that the flames and smoke from its mouth were like the flames and smoke that pour out of a burning mountain. All the sky was darkened, and as George shrank back in horror from the burning, choking, smelling darkness, his foot slipped in the mire, and he fell.

Now there grew in that land a magic tree, all hung with fruit and rosy apples. From the trunk of the tree there flowed a little stream of sweet balm that could cure even deadly wounds and make weak people strong. The dragon was afraid of this tree and its magic stream, and dared not go near it.

All night George lay as if he were dead, and Una, on the hillside, waited with a heavy heart for morning to come.

He lay so close to the magic tree that the dragon dared not come near him, but it thought that he must have died of his wounds.

When the black night had rolled away and daylight spread over the land, George arose from his sleep. His wounds were all healed by the magic balm, and he was stronger than before.

When the dragon rushed at him with its great fierce mouth gaping wide, George thrust his sword down its throat and wounded it so terribly that it rolled over like a huge mountain in an earthquake. The ground shook as it fell, and the last breaths that it drew stained the beautiful morning sky, like smoke from a furnace.

At first it seemed to Una too good to be true that the dragon was dead. But when the last of the black smoke had cleared away, and the monster lay quite still, she knew that George had won the fight and slain the dragon.

The watchman on the brazen tower had also seen the dragon fall, and so the king had the gates of brass, that had been closed for so long, thrown wide open.

With sounds of trumpets and shouts of joy the king and queen and their people came out to greet George and Una, and to thank George, who had saved them and their land from the horrible dragon.

The people crowded round the dead body of the monster. The children wished to look at it closely, and when a bold little boy took hold of its claws, his mother screamed with fright, and dragged him back. So long had they been in terror of their savage enemy, that even when it lay dead they still feared that it might do them some harm.



There never was a happier wedding than the wedding of Una and George, the Red Cross Knight, nor was there ever any bride more beautiful than Una.

Her dress was spotless, like a white lily. It was not made of silver nor silk, yet like silver and silk it shone and glistened. Her golden hair hung round her happy face, and her face was like the freshest flower of May.

Fairy music rang through the air, and there was nothing but happiness in the land on the day that Una wedded brave George of Merry England.

The Sword in the Stone – Chapter III

by T. H. White

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The boy slept well in the woodland nest where he had laid himself down, in that kind of thin but refreshing sleep which people have when they begin to lie out of doors. At first he only dipped below the surface of sleep, and skimmed along like a salmon in shallow water, so close to the surface that he fancied himself in air. He thought himself awake when he was already asleep. He saw the stars above his face, whirling on their silent and sleepless axis, and the leaves of the trees rustling against them, and he heard small changes in the grass. These little noises of footsteps and soft-fringed wing-beats and stealthy bellies drawn over the grass blades or rattling against the bracken at first frightened or interested him, so that he moved to see what they were (but never saw), then soothed him, so that he no longer cared to see what they were but trusted them to be themselves, and finally left him altogether as he swam down deeper and deeper, nuzzling into the scented turf, into the warm ground, into the unending waters under the earth.

It had been difficult to go to sleep in the bright summer moonlight, but once he was there it was not difficult to stay. The sun came early, causing him to turn over in protest, but in going to sleep he had learned to vanquish light, and now the light could not awake him. It was nine o'clock, five hours after daylight, before he rolled over, opened his eyes, and was awake at once. He was hungry.

The Wart had heard about people who lived on berries, but this did not seem practical at the moment, because it was July, and there were none. He found two wild strawberries and ate them greedily. They tasted nicer than anything, so that he wished there were more. Then he wished it was April, so that he could find some birds' eggs and eat those, or that he had not lost his goshawk Cully, so that the hawk could catch him a rabbit which he would cook by rubbing two sticks together like the base Indian. But he had lost Cully, or he would not have lost himself, and probably the sticks would not have lighted in any case. He decided that he could not have gone more than three or four miles from home, and that the best thing he could do would be to sit still and listen. Then he might hear the noise of the haymakers, if he were lucky with the wind, and he could hearken his way to the castle by that.

What he did hear was a faint clanking noise, which made him think that King Pellinore must be after the Questing Beast again, close by. Only the noise was so regular and single in intention that it made him think of King Pellinore doing some special action, with great patience and concentration—trying to scratch his back without taking off his armour, for instance. He went toward the noise.

There was a clearing in the forest, and in this clearing there was a snug cottage built of stone. It was a cottage, although the Wart could not notice this at the time, which was divided into two bits. The main bit was the hall or every-purpose room, which was high because it extended from floor to roof, and this room had a fire on the floor whose smoke came out eventually from a hole in the thatch of the roof. The other half of the cottage was divided into two rooms by a horizontal floor which made the top half into a bedroom and study, while the bottom half served for a larder, storeroom, stable and barn. A white donkey lived in this downstairs room, and a ladder led to the one upstairs.

There was a well in front of the cottage, and the metallic noise which the Wart had heard was caused by a very old gentleman who was drawing water out of it by means of a handle and chain. Clank, clank, clank, went the chain, until the bucket hit the lip of the well, and "Drat the whole thing!" said the old gentleman. "You would think that after all these years of study you could do better for yourself than a by-our-lady well with a by-our-lady bucket, whatever the by-our-lady cost.

"By this and by that," added the old gentleman, heaving his bucket out of the well with a malevolent glance, "why can't they get us the electric light and company's water?"

He was dressed in a flowing gown with fur tippets which had the signs of the zodiac embroidered over it, with various cabalistic signs, such as triangles with eyes in them, queer crosses, leaves of trees, bones of birds and animals, and a planetarium whose stars shone like bits of looking-glass with the sun on them. He had a pointed hat like a dunce's cap, or like the headgear worn by ladies of that time, except that the ladies were accustomed to have a bit of veil floating from the top of it. He also had a wand of lignum vitae, which he had laid down in the grass beside him, and a pair of horn-rimmed spectacles like those of King Pellinore. They were unusual spectacles, being without ear pieces, but shaped rather like scissors or like the antennae of the tarantula wasp.

"Excuse me, sir," said the Wart, "but can you tell me the way to Sir Ector's castle, if you don't mind?"

The aged gentleman put down his bucket and looked at him.

"Your name would be the Wart."

"Yes, sir, please, sir."

"My name," said the old man, "is Merlyn."

"How do you do?"

"How do."

When these formalities had been concluded, the Wart had leisure to look at him more closely. The magician was staring at him with a kind of unwinking and benevolent curiosity which made him feel that it would not be at all rude to stare back, no ruder than it would be to stare at one of his guardian's cows who happened to be thinking about his personality as she leaned her head over a gate.

Merlyn had a long white beard and long white moustaches which hung down on either side of it. Close inspection showed that he was far from clean. It was not that he had dirty fingernails, or anything like that, but some large bird seemed to have been nesting in his hair. The Wart was familiar with the nests of Spar-hawk and Gos, the crazy conglomerations of sticks and oddments which had been taken over from squirrels or crows, and he knew how the twigs and the tree foot were splashed with white mutes, old bones, muddy feathers and castings. This was the impression which he got from Merlyn. The old man was streaked with droppings over his shoulders, among the stars and triangles of his gown, and a large spider was slowly lowering itself from the tip of his hat, as he gazed and slowly blinked at the little boy in front of him. He had a worried expression, as though he were trying to remember some name which began with Choi but which was pronounced in quite a different way, possibly Menzies or was it Dalziel? His mild blue eyes, very big and round under the tarantula spectacles, gradually filmed and clouded over as he gazed at the boy, and then he turned his head away with a resigned expression, as though it was all too much for him after all.

"Do you like peaches?"

"Very much indeed," said the Wart, and his mouth began to water so that it was full of sweet, soft liquid.

"They are scarcely in season," said the old man reprovingly, and he walked off in the direction of the cottage.

The Wart followed after, since this was the simplest thing to do, and offered to carry the bucket (which seemed to please Merlyn, who gave it to him) and waited while he counted the keys—while he muttered and mislaid them and dropped them in the grass. Finally, when they had got their way into the black and white home with as much trouble as if they were burgling it, he climbed up the ladder after his host and found himself in the upstairs room.

It was the most marvellous room that he had ever been in.

There was a real corkindrill hanging from the rafters, very life-like and horrible with glass eyes and scaly tail stretched out behind it. When its master came into the room it winked one eye in salutation, although it was stuffed. There were thousands of brown books in leather bindings, some chained to the book-shelves and others propped against each other as if they had had too much to drink and did not really trust themselves. These gave out a smell of must and solid brownness which was most secure. Then there were stuffed birds, popinjays, and maggot-pies and kingfishers, and peacocks with all their feathers but two, and tiny birds like beetles, and a reputed phoenix which smelt of incense and cinnamon. It could not have been a real phoenix, because there is only one of these at a time. Over by the mantelpiece there was a fox's mask, with GRAFTON, BUCKINGHAM TO DAVENTRY, 2 HRS 20 MINS written under it, and also a forty-pound salmon with AWE, 43 MIN., BULLDOG written under it, and a very life-like basilisk with CROWHURST OTTER HOUNDS in Roman print. There were several boars' tusks and the claws of tigers and libbards mounted in symmetrical patterns, and a big head of Ovis Poli, six live grass snakes in a kind of aquarium, some nests of the solitary wasp nicely set up in a glass cylinder, an ordinary beehive whose inhabitants went in and out of the window unmolested, two young hedgehogs in cotton wool, a pair of badgers which immediately began to cry Yik-Yik-Yik-Yik in loud voices as soon as the magician appeared,

twenty boxes which contained stick caterpillars and sixths of the puss-moth, and even an oleander that was worth sixpence—all feeding on the appropriate leaves—a guncase with all sorts of weapons which would not be invented for half a thousand years, a rod-box ditto, a chest of drawers full of salmon flies which had been tied by Merlyn himself, another chest whose drawers were labelled Mandragora, Mandrake, Old Man's Beard, etc., a bunch of turkey feathers and goose-quills for making pens, an astrolabe, twelve pairs of boots, a dozen purse-nets, three dozen rabbit wires, twelve corkscrews, some ants' nests between two glass plates, ink-bottles of every possible colour from red to violet, darning-needles, a gold medal for being the best scholar at Winchester, four or five recorders, a nest of field mice all alive-o, two skulls, plenty of cut glass, Venetian glass, Bristol glass and a bottle of Mastic varnish, some satsuma china and some cloisonné, the fourteenth edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica (marred as it was by the sensationalism of the popular plates), two paint-boxes (one oil, one water-colour), three globes of the known geographical world, a few fossils, the stuffed head of a cameleopard, six pismires, some glass retorts with cauldrons, bunsen burners, etc., and a complete set of cigarette cards depicting wild fowl by Peter Scott.

Merlyn took off his pointed hat when he came into this chamber, because it was too high for the roof, and immediately there was a scamper in one of the dark corners and a flap of soft wings, and a tawny owl was sitting on the black skull-cap which protected the top of his head.

"Oh, what a lovely owl!" cried the Wart.

But when he went up to it and held out his hand, the owl grew half as tall again, stood up as stiff as a poker, closed its eyes so that there was only the smallest slit to peep through—as you are in the habit of doing when told to shut your eyes at hide-and-seek and said in a doubtful voice:

"There is no owl."

Then it shut its eyes entirely and looked the other way.

"It is only a boy," said Merlyn.

"There is no boy," said the owl hopefully, without turning round.

The Wart was so startled by finding that the owl could talk that he forgot his manners and came closer still. At this the bird became so nervous that it made a mess on Merlyn's head—the whole room was quite white with droppings—and flew off to perch on the farthest tip of the corkindrill's tail, out of reach.

"We see so little company," explained the magician, wiping his head with half a worn-out pair of pyjamas which he kept for that purpose, "that Archimedes is a little shy of strangers. Come, Archimedes, I want you to meet a friend of mine called Wart."

Here he held out his hand to the owl, who came waddling like a goose along the corkindrill's back—he waddled with this rolling gait so as to keep his tail from being damaged—and hopped down to Merlyn's finger with every sign of reluctance.

"Hold out your finger and put it behind his legs. No, lift it up under his train."

When the Wart had done this, Merlyn moved the owl gently backward, so that the boy's finger pressed against its legs from behind, and it either had to step back on the finger or get pushed off its balance altogether. It stepped back. The Wart stood there delighted, while the furry feet held tight on his finger and the sharp claws prickled his skin.

"Say how d'you do properly," said Merlyn.

"I will not," said Archimedes, looking the other way and holding tight.

"Oh, he is lovely," said the Wart again. "Have you had him long?"

"Archimedes has stayed with me since he was small, indeed since he had a tiny head like a chicken's."

"I wish he would talk to me."

"Perhaps if you were to give him this mouse here, politely, he might learn to know you better."

Merlyn took a dead mouse out of his skull-cap—"I always keep them there, and worms too, for fishing. I find it most convenient"—and handed it to the Wart, who held it out rather gingerly toward Archimedes. The nutty curved beak looked as if it were capable of doing damage, but Archimedes looked closely at the mouse, blinked at the Wart, moved nearer on the finger, closed his eyes and leaned forward. He stood there with closed eyes and an expression of rapture on his face, as if he were saying Grace, and then, with the absurdest sideways nibble, took the morsel so gently that he would not have broken a soap bubble. He remained leaning forward with closed eyes, with the mouse suspended from his beak, as if he were not sure what to do with it. Then he lifted his right foot—he was right-handed, though people say only men are—and took hold of the mouse. He held it up like a boy holding a stick of rock or a constable with his truncheon, looked at it, nibbled its tail. He turned it round so that it was head first, for the Wart had offered it the wrong way round, and gave one gulp. He looked round at the company with the tail hanging out of the corner of his mouth—as much as to say, "I wish you would not all stare at me so"—turned his head away, politely swallowed the tail, scratched his sailor's beard with his left toe, and began to ruffle out his feathers.

"Let him alone," said Merlyn. "Perhaps he does not want to be friends with you until he knows what you are like. With owls, it is never easy-come and easy-go."

"Perhaps he will sit on my shoulder," said the Wart, and with that he instinctively lowered his hand, so that the owl, who liked to be as high as possible, ran up the slope and stood shyly beside his ear.

"Now breakfast," said Merlyn.

The Wart saw that the most perfect breakfast was laid out neatly for two, on a table before the window. There were peaches.

There were also melons, strawberries and cream, rusks, brown trout piping hot, grilled perch which were much nicer, chicken devilled enough to burn one's mouth out, kidneys and mushrooms on toast, fricassee, curry, and a choice of boiling coffee or best chocolate made with cream in large cups.

"Have some mustard," said the magician, when they had got to the kidneys.

The mustard-pot got up and walked over to his plate on thin silver legs that waddled like the owl's. Then it uncurled its handles and one handle lifted its lid with exaggerated courtesy while the other helped him to a generous spoonful.

"Oh, I love the mustard-pot!" cried the Wart. "Wherever did you get it?"

At this the pot beamed all over its face and began to strut a bit, but Merlyn rapped it on the head with a teaspoon, so that it sat down and shut up at once.

"It is not a bad pot," he said grudgingly. "Only it is inclined to give itself airs."

The Wart was so much impressed by the kindness of the old man, and particularly by the lovely things which he possessed, that he hardly liked to ask him personal questions. It seemed politer to sit still and to speak when he was spoken to. But Merlyn did not speak much, and when he did speak it was never in questions, so that the Wart had little opportunity for conversation. At last his curiosity got the better of him, and he asked something which had been puzzling him for some time.

"Would you mind if I ask you a question?"

"It is what I am for."

"How did you know to set breakfast for two?"

The old gentleman leaned back in his chair and lighted an enormous meerschaum pipe—Good gracious, he breathes fire, thought the Wart, who had never heard of tobacco—before he was ready to reply. Then he looked puzzled, took off his skullcap—three mice fell out—and scratched in the middle of his bald head.

"Have you ever tried to draw in a looking-glass?" he asked.

"I don't think I have."

"Looking-glass," said Merlyn, holding out his hand. Immediately there was a tiny lady's vanity-glass in his hand.

"Not that kind, you fool," he said angrily. "I want one big enough to shave in."

The vanity-glass vanished, and in its place there was a shaving mirror about a foot square.

He then demanded pencil and paper in quick succession; got an unsharpened pencil and the Morning Post; sent them back; got a fountain pen with no ink in it and six reams of brown paper suitable for parcels; sent them back; flew into a passion in which he said by-our-lady quite often, and ended up with a carbon pencil and some cigarette papers which he said would have to do.

He put one of the papers in front of the glass and made five dots. "Now," he said, "I want you to join those five dots up to make a W, looking only in the glass."

The Wart took the pen and tried to do as he was bid.

"Well, it is not bad," said the magician doubtfully, "and in a way it does look a bit like an M."

Then he fell into a reverie, stroking his beard, breathing fire, and staring at the paper.

"About the breakfast?"

"Ah, yes. How did I know to set breakfast for two? That was why I showed you the looking-glass. Now ordinary people are born forwards in Time, if you understand what I mean, and nearly everything in the world goes forward too. This makes it quite easy for the ordinary people to live, just as it would be easy to join those five dots into a W if you were allowed to look at them forwards, instead of backwards and inside out. But I unfortunately was born at the wrong end of time, and I have to live backwards from in front, while surrounded by a lot of people living forwards from behind. Some people call it having second sight."

He stopped talking and looked at the Wart in an anxious way.

"Have I told you this before?"

"No, we only met about half an hour ago."

"So little time to pass?" said Merlyn, and a big tear ran down to the end of his nose. He wiped it off with his pyjamas and added anxiously, "Am I going to tell it you again?"

"I do not know," said the Wart, "unless you have not finished telling me yet."

"You see, one gets confused with Time, when it is like that. All one's tenses get muddled, for one thing. If you know what is going to happen to people, and not what has happened to them, it makes it difficult to prevent it happening, if you don't want it to have happened, if you see what I mean? Like drawing in a mirror."

The Wart did not quite see, but was just going to say that he was sorry for Merlyn if these things made him unhappy, when he felt a curious sensation at his ear. "Don't jump," said the old man, just as he was going to do so, and the Wart sat still. Archimedes, who had been standing forgotten on his shoulder all this time, was gently touching himself against him. His beak was right against the lobe of the ear, which its bristles made to tickle, and suddenly a soft hoarse voice whispered, "How d'you do," so that it sounded right inside his head.

"Oh, owl!" cried the Wart, forgetting about Merlyn's troubles instantly. "Look, he has decided to talk to me!"

The Wart gently leaned his head against the smooth feathers, and the tawny owl, taking the rim of his ear in its beak, quickly nibbled right round it with the smallest nibbles.

"I shall call him Archie!"

"I trust you will do nothing of the sort," exclaimed Merlyn instantly, in a stern and angry voice, and the owl withdrew to the farthest corner of his shoulder.

"Is it wrong?"

"You might as well call me Wol, or Olly," said the owl sourly, "and have done with it.

"Or Bubbles," it added in a bitter voice.

Merlyn took the Wart's hand and said kindly, "You are young, and do not understand these things. But you will learn that owls are the most courteous, single-hearted and faithful creatures living. You must never be familiar, rude or vulgar with them, or make them look ridiculous. Their mother is Athene, the goddess of wisdom, and, although they are often ready to play the buffoon to amuse you, such conduct is the prerogative of the truly wise. No owl can possibly be called Archie."

"I am sorry, owl," said the Wart.

"And I am sorry, boy," said the owl. "I can see that you spoke in ignorance, and I bitterly regret that I should have been so petty as to take offence where none was intended."

The owl really did regret it, and looked so remorseful that Merlyn had to put on a cheerful manner and change the conversation.

"Well," said he, "now that we have finished breakfast, I think it is high time that we should all three find our way back to Sir Ector.

"Excuse me a moment," he added as an afterthought, and, turning round to the breakfast things, he pointed a knobby finger at them and said in a stern voice, "Wash up."

At this all the china and cutlery scrambled down off the table, the cloth emptied the crumbs out of the window, and the napkins folded themselves up. All ran off down the ladder, to where Merlyn had left the bucket, and there was such a noise and yelling as if a lot of children had been let out of school. Merlyn went to the door and shouted, "Mind, nobody is to get broken." But his voice was entirely drowned in shrill squeals, splashes, and cries of "My, it is cold," "I shan't stay in long," "Look out, you'll break me," or "Come on, let's duck the teapot."

"Are you really coming all the way home with me?" asked the Wart, who could hardly believe the good news.

"Why not? How else can I be your tutor?"

At this the Wart's eyes grew rounder and rounder, until they were about as big as the owl's who was sitting on his shoulder, and his face got redder and redder, and a breath seemed to gather itself beneath his heart.

"My!" exclaimed the Wart, while his eyes sparkled with excitement at the discovery. "I must have been on a Quest!"

Jack and the Beanstalk

Excerpt from *The Red Fairy Book* by Andrew Lang

Jack Sells the Cow

Once upon a time there was a poor widow who lived in a little cottage with her only son Jack. Jack was a giddy, thoughtless boy, but very kind-hearted and affectionate. There had been a hard winter, and after it the poor woman had suffered from fever and ague. Jack did no work as yet, and by degrees they grew dreadfully poor. The widow saw that there was no means of keeping Jack and herself from starvation but by selling her cow; so one morning she said to her son, 'I am too weak to go myself, Jack, so you must take the cow to market for me, and sell her.'

Jack liked going to market to sell the cow very much; but as he was on the way, he met a butcher who had some beautiful beans in his hand. Jack stopped to look at them, and the butcher told the boy that they were of great value, and persuaded the silly lad to sell the cow for these beans.

When he brought them home to his mother instead of the money she expected for her nice cow, she was very vexed and shed many tears, scolding Jack for his folly. He was very sorry, and mother and son went to bed very sadly that night; their last hope seemed gone.

At daybreak Jack rose and went out into the garden.

'At least,' he thought, 'I will sow the wonderful beans. Mother says that they are just common scarlet-runners, and nothing else; but I may as well sow them.'

So he took a piece of stick, and made some holes in the ground, and put in the beans.

That day they had very little dinner, and went sadly to bed, knowing that for the next day there would be none and Jack, unable to sleep from grief and vexation, got up at day-dawn and went out into the garden.

What was his amazement to find that the beans had grown up in the night, and climbed up and up till they covered the high cliff that sheltered the cottage, and disappeared above it! The stalks had twined and twisted themselves together till they formed quite a ladder.

'It would be easy to climb it,' thought Jack.

And, having thought of the experiment, he at once resolved to carry it out, for Jack was a good climber. However, after his late mistake about the cow, he thought he had better consult his mother first.

Wonderful Growth of the Beanstalk

So Jack called his mother, and they both gazed in silent wonder at the Beanstalk, which was not only of great height, but was thick enough to bear Jack's weight.

'I wonder where it ends,' said Jack to his mother; 'I think I will climb up and see.'

His mother wished him not to venture up this strange ladder, but Jack coaxed her to give her consent to the attempt, for he was certain there must be something wonderful in the Beanstalk; so at last she yielded to his wishes.

Jack instantly began to climb, and went up and up on the ladder-like bean till everything he had left behind him—the cottage, the village, and even the tall church tower—looked quite little, and still he could not see the top of the Beanstalk.

Jack felt a little tired, and thought for a moment that he would go back again; but he was a very persevering boy, and he knew that the way to succeed in anything is not to give up. So after resting for a moment he went on.

After climbing higher and higher, till he grew afraid to look down for fear he should be giddy, Jack at last reached the top of the Beanstalk, and found himself in a beautiful country, finely wooded, with beautiful meadows covered with sheep. A crystal stream ran through the pastures; not far from the place where he had got off the Beanstalk stood a fine, strong castle.

Jack wondered very much that he had never heard of or seen this castle before; but when he reflected on the subject, he saw that it was as much separated from the village by the perpendicular rock on which it stood as if it were in another land.

While Jack was standing looking at the castle, a very strange-looking woman came out of the wood, and advanced towards him.

She wore a pointed cap of quilted red satin turned up with ermine, her hair streamed loose over her shoulders, and she walked with a staff. Jack took off his cap and made her a bow.

'If you please, ma'am,' said he, 'is this your house?'

'No,' said the old lady. 'Listen, and I will tell you the story of that castle.'

'Once upon a time there was a noble knight, who lived in this castle, which is on the borders of Fairyland. He had a fair and beloved wife and several lovely children: and as his neighbours, the little people, were very friendly towards him, they bestowed on him many excellent and precious gifts.

'Rumour whispered of these treasures; and a monstrous giant, who lived at no great distance, and who was a very wicked being, resolved to obtain possession of them.'

'So he bribed a false servant to let him inside the castle, when the knight was in bed and asleep, and he killed him as he lay. Then he went to the part of the castle which was the nursery, and also killed all the poor little ones he found there.

'Happily for her, the lady was not to be found. She had gone with her infant son, who was only two or three months old, to visit her old nurse, who lived in the valley; and she had been detained all night there by a storm.

'The next morning, as soon as it was light, one of the servants at the castle, who had managed to escape, came to tell the poor lady of the sad fate of her husband and her pretty babes. She could scarcely believe him at first, and was eager at once to go back and share the fate of her dear ones; but the old nurse, with many tears, besought her to remember that she had still a child, and that it was her duty to preserve her life for the sake of the poor innocent.

'The lady yielded to this reasoning, and consented to remain at her nurse's house as the best place of concealment; for the servant told her that the giant had vowed, if he could find her, he would kill both her and her baby. Years rolled on. The old nurse died, leaving her cottage and the few articles of furniture it contained to her poor lady, who dwelt in it, working as a peasant for her daily bread. Her spinning-wheel and the milk of a cow, which she had purchased with the little money she had with her, sufficed for the scanty subsistence of herself and her little son. There was a nice little garden attached to the cottage, in which they cultivated peas, beans, and cabbages, and the lady was not ashamed to go out at harvest time, and glean in the fields to supply her little son's wants.

'Jack, that poor lady is your mother. This castle was once your father's, and must again be yours.'

Jack uttered a cry of surprise.

'My mother! oh, madam, what ought I to do? My poor father! My dear mother!'

'Your duty requires you to win it back for your mother. But the task is a very difficult one, and full of peril, Jack. Have you courage to undertake it?'

'I fear nothing when I am doing right,' said Jack.

'Then,' said the lady in the red cap, 'you are one of those who slay giants. You must get into the castle, and if possible possess yourself of a hen that lays golden eggs, and a harp that talks. Remember, all the giant possesses is really yours.' As she ceased speaking, the lady of the red hat suddenly disappeared, and of course Jack knew she was a fairy.

Jack determined at once to attempt the adventure; so he advanced, and blew the horn which hung at the castle portal. The door was opened in a minute or two by a frightful giantess, with one great eye in the middle of her forehead.

As soon as Jack saw her he turned to run away, but she caught him, and dragged him into the castle.

'Ho, ho!' she laughed terribly. 'You didn't expect to see me here, that is clear! No, I shan't let you go again. I am weary of my life. I am so overworked, and I don't see why I should not have a page as well as other ladies. And you shall be my boy. You shall clean the knives, and black the boots, and make the fires, and help me generally when the giant is out. When he is at home I must hide you, for he has eaten up all my pages hitherto, and you would be a dainty morsel, my little lad.'

While she spoke she dragged Jack right into the castle. The poor boy was very much frightened, as I am sure you and I would have been in his place. But he remembered that fear disgraces a man; so he struggled to be brave and make the best of things.

'I am quite ready to help you, and do all I can to serve you, madam,' he said, 'only I beg you will be good enough to hide me from your husband, for I should not like to be eaten at all.'

'That's a good boy,' said the Giantess, nodding her head; 'it is lucky for you that you did not scream out when you saw me, as the other boys who have been here did, for if you had done so my husband would have awakened and have eaten you, as he did them, for breakfast. Come here, child; go into my wardrobe: he never ventures to open that; you will be safe there.'

And she opened a huge wardrobe which stood in the great hall, and shut him into it. But the keyhole was so large that it admitted plenty of air, and he could see everything that took place through it. By-and-by he heard a heavy tramp on the stairs, like the lumbering along of a great cannon, and then a voice like thunder cried out;

'Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum,
I smell the breath of an Englishman.
Let him be alive or let him be dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.'

'Wife,' cried the Giant, 'there is a man in the castle. Let me have him for breakfast.'

'You are grown old and stupid,' cried the lady in her loud tones. 'It is only a nice fresh steak off an elephant, that I have cooked for you, which you smell. There, sit down and make a good breakfast.'

And she placed a huge dish before him of savoury steaming meat, which greatly pleased him, and made him forget his idea of an Englishman being in the castle. When he had breakfasted he went out for a walk; and then the Giantess opened the door, and made Jack come out to help her. He helped her all day. She fed him well, and when evening came put him back in the wardrobe.

The Hen That Lays Golden Eggs

The Giant came in to supper. Jack watched him through the keyhole, and was amazed to see him pick a wolf's bone, and put half a fowl at a time into his capacious mouth.

When the supper was ended he bade his wife bring him his hen that laid the golden eggs.

'It lays as well as it did when it belonged to that paltry knight,' he said; 'indeed I think the eggs are heavier than ever.'

The Giantess went away, and soon returned with a little brown hen, which she placed on the table before her husband. 'And now, my dear,' she said, 'I am going for a walk, if you don't want me any longer.'

'Go,' said the Giant; 'I shall be glad to have a nap by-and-by.'

Then he took up the brown hen and said to her:

'Lay!' And she instantly laid a golden egg.

'Lay!' said the Giant again. And she laid another.

'Lay!' he repeated the third time. And again a golden egg lay on the table.

Now Jack was sure this hen was that of which the fairy had spoken.

By-and-by the Giant put the hen down on the floor, and soon after went fast asleep, snoring so loud that it sounded like thunder.

Directly Jack perceived that the Giant was fast asleep, he pushed open the door of the wardrobe and crept out; very softly he stole across the room, and, picking up the hen, made haste to quit the apartment. He knew the way to the kitchen, the door of which he found was left ajar; he opened it, shut and locked it after him, and flew back to the Beanstalk, which he descended as fast as his feet would move.

When his mother saw him enter the house she wept for joy, for she had feared that the fairies had carried him away, or that the Giant had found him. But Jack put the brown hen down before her, and told her how he had been in the Giant's castle, and all his adventures. She was very glad to see the hen, which would make them rich once more.

The Money Bags

Jack made another journey up the Beanstalk to the Giant's castle one day while his mother had gone to market; but first he dyed his hair and disguised himself. The old woman did not know him again, and dragged him in as she had done before, to help her to do the work; but she heard her husband coming, and hid him in the wardrobe, not thinking that it was the same boy who had stolen the hen. She bade him stay quite still there, or the Giant would eat him.

Then the Giant came in saying:

'Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum,
I smell the breath of an Englishman.
Let him be alive or let him be dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.'

'Nonsense!' said the wife, 'it is only a roasted bullock that I thought would be a tit-bit for your supper; sit down and I will bring it up at once.' The Giant sat down, and soon his wife brought up a roasted bullock on a large dish, and they began their supper. Jack was amazed to see them pick the bones of the bullock as if it had been a lark. As soon as they had finished their meal, the Giantess rose and said:

'Now, my dear, with your leave I am going up to my room to finish the story I am reading. If you want me call for me.'

'First,' answered the Giant, 'bring me my money bags, that I may count my golden pieces before I sleep.' The Giantess obeyed. She went and soon returned with two large bags over her shoulders, which she put down by her husband.

'There,' she said; 'that is all that is left of the knight's money. When you have spent it you must go and take another baron's castle.'

'That he shan't, if I can help it,' thought Jack.

The Giant, when his wife was gone, took out heaps and heaps of golden pieces, and counted them, and put them in piles, till he was tired of the amusement. Then he swept them all back into their bags, and leaning back in his chair fell fast asleep, snoring so loud that no other sound was audible. Jack stole softly out of the wardrobe, and taking up the bags of money (which were his very own, because the Giant had stolen them from his father), he ran off, and with great difficulty descending the Beanstalk, laid the bags of gold on his mother's table. She had just returned from town, and was crying at not finding Jack.

'There, mother, I have brought you the gold that my father lost.'

'Oh, Jack! you are a very good boy, but I wish you would not risk your precious life in the Giant's castle. Tell me how you came to go there again.'

And Jack told her all about it.

Jack's mother was very glad to get the money, but she did not like him to run any risk for her. But after a time Jack made up his mind to go again to the Giant's castle.

The Talking Harp

So he climbed the Beanstalk once more, and blew the horn at the Giant's gate. The Giantess soon opened the door; she was very stupid, and did not know him again, but she stopped a minute before she took him in. She feared another robbery; but Jack's fresh face looked so innocent that she could not resist him, and so she bade him come in, and again hid him away in the wardrobe.

By-and-by the Giant came home, and as soon as he had crossed the threshold he roared out:

'Fe, fa, fi-fo-fum,
I smell the breath of an Englishman.
Let him be alive or let him be dead,
I'll grind his bones to make my bread.'

'You stupid old Giant,' said his wife, 'you only smell a nice sheep, which I have grilled for your dinner.'

And the Giant sat down, and his wife brought up a whole sheep for his dinner. When he had eaten it all up, he said:

'Now bring me my harp, and I will have a little music while you take your walk.'

The Giantess obeyed, and returned with a beautiful harp. The framework was all sparkling with diamonds and rubies, and the strings were all of gold.

'This is one of the nicest things I took from the knight,' said the Giant. 'I am very fond of music, and my harp is a faithful servant.'

So he drew the harp towards him, and said:

'Play!'

And the harp played a very soft, sad air.

'Play something merrier!' said the Giant.

And the harp played a merry tune.

'Now play me a lullaby,' roared the Giant; and the harp played a sweet lullaby, to the sound of which its master fell asleep.

Then Jack stole softly out of the wardrobe, and went into the huge kitchen to see if the Giantess had gone out; he found no one there, so he went to the door and opened it softly, for he thought he could not do so with the harp in his hand.

Then Jack stole softly out of the wardrobe, and went into the huge kitchen to see if the Giantess had gone out; he found no one there, so he went to the door and opened it softly, for he thought he could not do so with the harp in his hand.

Then he entered the Giant's room and seized the harp and ran away with it; but as he jumped over the threshold the harp called out:

'MASTER! MASTER!'

And the Giant woke up.

With a tremendous roar he sprang from his seat, and in two strides had reached the door.

But Jack was very nimble. He fled like lightning with the harp, talking to it as he went (for he saw it was a fairy), and telling it he was the son of its old master, the knight.

Still the Giant came on so fast that he was quite close to poor Jack, and had stretched out his great hand to catch him. But, luckily, just at that moment he stepped upon a loose stone, stumbled, and fell flat on the ground, where he lay at his full length.

This accident gave Jack time to get on the Beanstalk and hasten down it; but just as he reached their own garden he beheld the Giant descending after him.

'Mother I mother!' cried Jack, 'make haste and give me the axe.'

His mother ran to him with a hatchet in her hand, and Jack with one tremendous blow cut through all the Beanstalks except one.

'Now, mother, stand out of the way!' said he.

The Giant Breaks His Neck

Jack's mother shrank back, and it was well she did so, for just as the Giant took hold of the last branch of the Beanstalk, Jack cut the stem quite through and darted from the spot.

Down came the Giant with a terrible crash, and as he fell on his head, he broke his neck, and lay dead at the feet of the woman he had so much injured.

Before Jack and his mother had recovered from their alarm and agitation, a beautiful lady stood before them.

'Jack,' said she, 'you have acted like a brave knight's son, and deserve to have your inheritance restored to you. Dig a grave and bury the Giant, and then go and kill the Giantess.'

'But,' said Jack, 'I could not kill anyone unless I were fighting with him; and I could not draw my sword upon a woman. Moreover, the Giantess was very kind to me.'

The Fairy smiled on Jack.

'I am very much pleased with your generous feeling,' she said. 'Nevertheless, return to the castle, and act as you will find needful.'

Jack asked the Fairy if she would show him the way to the castle, as the Beanstalk was now down. She told him that she would drive him there in her chariot, which was drawn by two peacocks. Jack thanked her, and sat down in the chariot with her.

The Fairy drove him a long distance round, till they reached a village which lay at the bottom of the hill. Here they found a number of miserable-looking men assembled. The Fairy stopped her carriage and addressed them:

'My friends,' said she, 'the cruel giant who oppressed you and ate up all your flocks and herds is dead, and this young gentleman was the means of your being delivered from him, and is the son of your kind old master, the knight.'

The men gave a loud cheer at these words, and pressed forward to say that they would serve Jack as faithfully as they had served his father. The Fairy bade them follow her to the castle, and they marched thither in a body, and Jack blew the horn and demanded admittance.

The old Giantess saw them coming from the turret loop-hole. She was very much frightened, for she guessed that something had happened to her husband; and as she came downstairs very fast she caught her foot in her dress, and fell from the top to the bottom and broke her neck.

When the people outside found that the door was not opened to them, they took crowbars and forced the portal. Nobody was to be seen, but on leaving the hall they found the body of the Giantess at the foot of the stairs.

Thus Jack took possession of the castle. The Fairy went and brought his mother to him, with the hen and the harp. He had the Giantess buried, and endeavoured as much as lay in his power to do right to those whom the Giant had robbed.

Before her departure for fairyland, the Fairy explained to Jack that she had sent the butcher to meet him with the beans, in order to try what sort of lad he was.

'If you had looked at the gigantic Beanstalk and only stupidly wondered about it,' she said, 'I should have left you where misfortune had placed you, only restoring her cow to your mother. But you showed an inquiring mind, and great courage and enterprise, therefore you deserve to rise; and when you mounted the Beanstalk you climbed the Ladder of Fortune.'

She then took her leave of Jack and his mother.

Each man was clad in Lincoln green, and a fine show they made, seated upon the sward beneath that fair, spreading tree. Then one of them, with his mouth full, called out to Robin, "Hulloa, where goest thou, little lad, with thy one-penny bow and thy farthing shafts?"

Then Robin grew angry, for no stripling likes to be taunted with his green years.

"Now," quoth he, "my bow and eke mine arrows are as good as shine; and moreover, I go to the shooting match at Nottingham Town, which same has been proclaimed by our good Sheriff of Nottinghamshire; there I will shoot with other stout yeomen, for a prize has been offered of a fine butt of ale."

Then one who held a horn of ale in his hand said, "Ho! listen to the lad! Why, boy, thy mother's milk is yet scarce dry upon thy lips, and yet thou pratest of standing up with good stout men at Nottingham butts, thou who art scarce able to draw one string of a two-stone bow."

"I'll hold the best of you twenty marks," quoth bold Robin, "that I hit the clout at threescore rods, by the good help of Our Lady fair."

At this all laughed aloud, and one said, "Well boasted, thou fair infant, well boasted! And well thou knowest that no target is nigh to make good thy wager."

And another cried, "He will be taking ale with his milk next."

At this Robin grew right mad. "Hark ye," said he, "yonder, at the glade's end, I see a herd of deer, even more than threescore rods distant. I'll hold you twenty marks that, by leave of Our Lady, I cause the best hart among them to die."

"Now done!" cried he who had spoken first. "And here are twenty marks. I wager that thou causeth no beast to die, with or without the aid of Our Lady."

Then Robin took his good yew bow in his hand, and placing the tip at his instep, he strung it right deftly; then he nocked a broad clothyard arrow and, raising the bow, drew the gray goose feather to his ear; the next moment the bowstring rang and the arrow sped down the glade as a sparrowhawk skims in a northern wind. High leaped the noblest hart of all the herd, only to fall dead, reddening the green path with his heart's blood.

"Ha!" cried Robin, "how likest thou that shot, good fellow? I wot the wager were mine, an it were three hundred pounds."

Then all the foresters were filled with rage, and he who had spoken the first and had lost the wager was more angry than all.

"Nay," cried he, "the wager is none of thine, and get thee gone, straightway, or, by all the saints of heaven, I'll baste thy sides until thou wilt ne'er be able to walk again." "Knowest thou not," said another, "that thou hast killed the King's deer, and, by the laws of our gracious lord and sovereign King Harry, thine ears should be shaven close to thy head?"

The History of Tom Thumb

Author Unknown

In the days of King Arthur, Merlin, the famous enchanter, was out on a journey, and stopped one day at the cottage of an honest ploughman to ask for refreshment. The ploughman's wife brought him some milk in a wooden bowl, and some brown bread on a wooden platter.

Merlin could not help observing that, although everything within the cottage was particularly neat and in good order, the ploughman and his wife had the most sorrowful air, so he questioned them about the cause of their distress, and learned that they were miserable because they had no children. The poor woman declared that she would be the happiest creature in the world if she had but a son, although he were no bigger than his father's thumb. Merlin was very much amused at the thought of a boy no bigger than a man's thumb; and as soon as he returned home he sent for the Queen of the Fairies and related to her the desire of the ploughman and his wife to have a son the size of his father's thumb.

The Queen of the Fairies promised that their wish should be granted. And so it happened one day that the ploughman's wife had a son exactly of the size of his father's thumb. While the mother was sitting up in bed, admiring the child, the Queen of the Fairies appeared, and kissed the infant, giving it the name of Tom Thumb, and summoned several fairies to clothe her little favorite.

Tom never grew any bigger; but, as he grew older, he became very cunning and sly, which his mother did not sufficiently correct him for; so that, when he was old enough to play with the boys for cherry-stones, and had lost all his own, he used to creep into the other boys' bags, fill his pockets, and come out again to play. But one day, as he was getting out of a bag of cherry-stones, the boy to whom it belonged chanced to see him.

"Ah, ah! my little Tom Thumb," said the boy, "have I caught you at your bad tricks at last? Now I will pay you off well for thieving."

Then drawing the string tight round his neck, and shaking the bag heartily, the cherry stones bruised Tom's limbs and body sadly, which made him beg to be let out, and promise never to be guilty of such doings any more.

Shortly afterwards Tom's mother was making a batter pudding, and, that he might see how she mixed it, he climbed up to the edge of the bowl, but his foot happening to slip he fell over head and ears into the batter, and his mother not observing him, stirred him into the pudding and popped it all into the pot to boil. The hot water made Tom kick and struggle; and his mother, seeing the pudding jump up and down, thought it was bewitched. A tinker was going by just at the time, so she gave him the pudding, and he put it into his budget and walked away. As soon as Tom could get the batter out of his mouth he began to cry aloud; this so frightened the poor tinker that he flung the pudding over the hedge. The pudding being broken by the fall Tom was released, and walked home to his mother, who gave him a kiss and put him to bed.

Tom Thumb's mother once took him with her when she went to milk the cow; it being a very windy day, she tied him with a needleful of thread to a thistle. The cow, liking his oak-leaf hat, took him and the thistle up at one mouthful. While the cow was chewing the thistle, Tom, terrified at her great teeth, cried out, "Mother! mother!"

"Where are you, Tommy, my dear Tommy?" said the mother.

"Here, mother; here in the red cow's mouth."

The mother began to cry and wring her hands; but the cow, surprised at such odd noises in her throat, opened her mouth and let him drop out. His mother clapped him into her apron and ran home with him.

Tom's father made him a whip of barley-straw to drive the cattle with, and one day in the field Tom slipped into a deep furrow. A raven flying over picked him up with a grain of corn, and flew with him to the top of the giant's castle by the seaside, where he left him. Old Grumbo, the giant, came out soon afterwards, to walk upon his terrace, and Tom, frightened out of his wits, managed to creep up his sleeve. Tom's motions made the giant uncomfortable, and with a jerk of his arm, he threw him into the sea. A great fish then swallowed him. The fish was soon after caught, and sent as a present to King Arthur. When it was cut open, everybody was delighted with little Tom Thumb, who was found inside. He became the favorite of the whole court, and by his merry pranks often amused the King and Queen.

The King, when he rode on horseback, frequently took Tom in his hand; and if a shower of rain came on, the tiny dwarf used to creep into the King's waistcoat pocket and sleep till the rain was over. The King now questioned him concerning his parents; and when Tom informed his majesty they were very poor people, the King led him into his treasury, and told him he should pay them a visit and take with him as much money as he could carry.

Tom soon got rested at his mother's house, but could not travel because it had rained; his mother therefore took him in her hand and carried him back to King Arthur's court. There Tom entertained the King and Queen and nobility at tilts and tournaments, at which he exerted himself so much that he brought on a fit of sickness. At this juncture the Queen of the Fairies came in a chariot drawn by flying mice, and placing Tom by her side she drove through the air till they arrived at her palace. After restoring him to health, the Queen commanded a fair wind, and, placing Tom before it, blew him straight back to the court of King Arthur. But just as Tom should have alighted in the courtyard, the cook happened to pass with the King's great bowl of his favorite dish, furmenty, and poor Tom fell plump into the middle of it, and splashed the hot furmenty into the cook's eyes. Down went the bowl. "Oh, dear," cried Tom. "Murder! murder!" bellowed the cook; and away ran the King's nice furmenty into the kennel. The cook was a cross fellow and swore to the King that Tom had done it out of some evil design; so he was tried for high treason and sentenced to be beheaded. When the judge delivered this dreadful sentence it happened that a miller was standing by with his mouth wide open, so Tom took a good spring and jumped down his throat, unperceived by all, even by the miller himself.

As Tom could not be found the court broke up, and away went the miller to his mill. But Tom did not leave him long at rest, he began to roll and tumble about, so that the miller thought himself bewitched, and sent for a doctor. When the doctor came, Tom began to dance and sing. The doctor was as much frightened as the miller, and sent in great haste for five more doctors.

While all these were talking the miller began to yawn, and Tom, taking the opportunity, made another bold jump and alighted on his feet in the middle of the table.

The miller, provoked to be thus tormented by such a little creature, caught hold of Tom and threw him out of the window into the river. A large salmon swimming by snapped him up in a moment.

The salmon was soon caught and sold in the market to the steward of a great lord. The grandee, thinking it an uncommonly fine fish, made a present of it to the King, who ordered it to be dressed immediately. When the cook cut open the salmon he found poor Tom inside, and ran with him directly to the King; but the King being busy, desired that he might be brought another day.

The cook was resolved to keep him safely this time, so clapped him into a mouse-trap. There he was shut up for a whole week, when the King sent for him, forgave him for throwing down the furmenty, and ordered him new clothes, gave him a spirited mouse for a hunter, and knighted him.

Thus dressed and mounted, he rode a hunting with the King and nobility.

As they were riding by a farmhouse one day, a cat jumped from behind the door, seized the mouse and little Tom, ran off with them both, and was just going to devour the mouse when Tom boldly drew his sword and attacked the cat with great spirit. The King and his nobles, seeing Tom in danger, went to his assistance, and one of the lords bravely saved him just in time, but poor Tom was sadly scratched by the claws of the cat.

The Queen of the Fairies came and took him again to Fairyland, where she kept him some years; after which, dressing him in bright green, she sent him flying once more through the air to the earth. King Thunstone now reigned in the place of King Arthur. The people flocked far and near to look at Tom Thumb, and the King, before whom he was carried, asked him who he was and where he lived. Tom answered:

“My name is Tom Thumb,
From the fairies I come;
When King Arthur shone,
This court was my home.
In me he delighted,
By him I was knighted.
Did you ever hear of
Sir Thomas Thumb?”

The King was so charmed with this address that he ordered a little chair to be made, and also a palace of gold a span high, with a door an inch wide, for little Tom to live in. He also gave him a coach, drawn by six small mice.

This made the Queen angry, because she had not a new coach too; therefore, resolving to ruin Tom, she complained to the King that he had behaved very insolently to her. The King sent for him in a rage. Tom, to escape his fury, crept into a large, empty snail-shell, and there lay for some time, when, peeping out of the shell, he saw a fine butterfly on the ground. He ventured forth and got astride the butterfly, which took wing, and mounted into the air with little Tom on his back. Away he flew straight to the King's court.

The King, Queen, and nobles all strove to catch the butterfly. At length poor Tom slipped from his seat, and fell into a sweet dish called white-pot, where he was found, almost drowned. The Queen vowed he should be punished, and he was secured once more in a mouse-trap, when the cat, seeing something stir, and supposing it to be a mouse, patted the trap about till she broke it and set Tom at liberty.

Soon afterwards a spider, taking poor Tom for a big fly, made a spring at him. Tom drew his sword and fought valiantly, but the spider's poisonous breath overcame him.

King Thunstone and his whole court went into mourning for little Tom Thumb. They buried him under a rose-bush, and raised a nice, white marble monument over his grave.