

The Poor Lad and the Wicked Princess

In the midst of a forest there once stood a little house and in it there lived a poor woman and her son.

They owned no land, because around them grew a dense grove of trees and so they had to buy their bread. One day when they had no bread in the house the woman sent her son to buy a loaf.

“Here is a bit of money,” she said. “Go and buy some bread.” So her son took the money and went off. He walked and walked until he saw a man leading a dog.

“Good day, Uncle!” he said.

“Good day,” was the reply.

“Where are you taking your dog?”

“I’m taking it into the forest because I’m going to hang it. It isn’t any use as a watch dog and only knows how to steal bread,” replied the man.

“Don’t hang it, Uncle! Why don’t you sell it to me?”

“Why not?” So the lad gave him the money his mother had given him to buy bread. He took the dog and let it home. When he arrived he mother asked, “Well, son. Did you buy the bread?”

“No, Mamma, I didn’t.”

“Why didn’t you?” she asked him.

“I gave the money for this dog,” the lad said.

So the mother gave him some more money and sent him once more for bread. He went off, when suddenly he saw a man carrying a cat.

“Good day, Uncle!” he said.

“Good day,” was the reply.

“Where are you going, Uncle?”

“I am taking this cat to the forest because I am going to hang it. It doesn’t catch mice and only steals bacon,” replied the man.

“Don’t hang it, Uncle. Why don’t you sell it to me?”

“Why not?” So the lad gave him the money his mother had given him to buy bread. He took the cat and went off home. When he arrived his mother asked him, “Well, son. Where is the bread?”

“I didn’t buy it,” was the reply.

“Well, what did you buy?”

“I gave the money for this cat,” the lad said.

“Well, here’s some more money. But take care you don’t buy something else again. There isn’t even a crust of bread in the house.” So off he went once more. Soon he came across a man beating a snake.

“Why are you beating the snake, Uncle? How about selling it to me?” said the lad.

“Buy it then,” replied the man. So the lad gave him the money. The man took it and went off.

Suddenly the snake spoke.

Thank you very much, laddie, for rescuing me. Accept this ring from me. When you meet anything, toss it from one hand to the other and immediately servants will come to do your bidding.”

The youth took the ring and returned home. As he approached the house he tossed the ring from one hand to the other and at once the servants of the snake appeared. “Bring me some bread,” he commanded. No sooner said than done. They brought so much bread that you could hardly believe your eyes! He entered the house and told his mother everything and said, “Now, Mamma, we won’t be poor any more!”

They lived a month or so in their new state. Whenever they wished for anything, the lad would toss the ring from one hand to the other and the servants would do everything.

One day he decided it was time to get married, so he said to his mother, "Go and see if you can get the princess to marry me." So she went to the princess and told her what she wanted. This is what the princess said to her: "If your son can make a pair of slippers that will be a perfect fit, I'll marry him."

The mother returned home and told her son what the princess had said. So he went outside, tossed the ring from one hand to the other and the servants came running. He said to them: "Before the day dawns I must have a pair of slippers sewn with gold and set with silver nails, and they must be a perfect fit for the feet of the princess."

Next day he rose. The slippers were ready, standing on the table. The mother took them and carried them to the princess. She put them on her feet and they were a perfect fit, and besides that they were very beautiful. Then the princess spoke. "Inform your son that he should make me a wedding gown and it should be neither long nor short, neither tight nor loose. In other words, it should be a perfect fit."

The mother returned home and related everything to her son. He went outside, tossed the ring from hand to hand and ordered the servants: "Make me a gown of material that shines like the sun and that should fit the princess perfectly." Then he went to bed.

In the morning he awoke and said to his mother, "Take the gown to the princess, please."

"But where is it?" she asked.

"Here it is, Mother." The gown was lying on a bench under some linen. The mother lifted it and there lay the gown, which shone like the sun. She took it and carried it to the princess.

“Here is your wedding gown,” she said to the princess. And when she raised the linen everything began to shine in the room. The princess put on the gown, stood before the mirror and was very pleased with her appearance. She walked around the room and it was as if the sun was shining.

“Well, my dear,” she said to the woman, “I’ll marry your son. But he must build a bridge from my palace to the church where we are to be married, and the bridge must be made of silver and gold!”

When the youth learned about this he went outside, tossed the ring and in a trice the servants appeared. So he said to them, “Make me before morning a bridge of silver and gold, from the palace of the princess to the church. And when I ride with the princess let there be apples, pears and many cherry trees all in bloom, and when we return, let them all be ripe with fruit.”

On the following day he awoke, went out and saw that a bridge spanned from the palace of the princess to the church and on both sides there was an orchard in full bloom. The princess agreed that the marriage should take place. So they rode off to get married and on both sides of the road the trees were blooming. When they returned, they saw that all the trees bore ripe fruit—apples, pears, cherries and also all sorts of fruit that ever existed on the earth.

They celebrated their wedding and began to live together. They had lived together a month or two when one day the princess said to her husband, “Tell me, darling, how did you manage to make those slippers and the gown? And how did you build such a bridge? And where did you get so much gold and silver?”

He replied, “I have a ring which, when I toss it from one hand to the other, produces a whole courtyard of servants. No matter what task I suggest, everything is done.”

“And where do you put this ring at night, my dear?”

“I place it under my pillow,” he said.

That night, the princess waited until her husband fell asleep, then she removed the ring from under his pillow. She tossed it from one hand to the other, and suddenly the snake's servants appeared. So she said to them, "Let horses and a carriage appear immediately. I am going to my brother's palace across the ocean. And let this place be changed into a stone pillar in which my husband will only be able to stand or lie down, and also let him wake up inside the pillar."

Suddenly the horses sprang up quickly and in a flash crossed over the ocean. In place of the palace there appeared a stone pillar and in it there wasn't a real window or door, only a teeny little window high up.

The following morning the poor fellow woke up and saw that there was no wife, no palace, no ring. To climb out of the pillar was impossible. And there was nothing to eat, so he would have to starve. Suddenly he heard something behind the wall that sounded like howling or yelping, and someone was scratching on the wall. It turned out to be the dog and cat whom he had rescued some time ago. They had run up the pillar, and the cat climbed up to the tiny window and said, "Don't worry, Master! You rescued me from death and we won't allow you to perish!"

The cat and dog swiped some bread and bacon, then the cat climbed up the wall and handed it all to him. Now he had enough to eat. Then the dog said to the cat, "Let's return to the sea. Maybe we'll manage to find that ring."

So off they went. They ran and ran until they reached the blue sea. The cat sat on the dog's back and off they swam until they reached the opposite shore. They saw that on the hill stood the palace where the brother of the princess lived. Said the cat, "You stay here on the beach and rest while I run to the palace. When I retrieve the ring I'll return and you'll take me across the water and I'll be able to rest then."

So they did that. The cat ran quickly to the palace on the high hill, jumped into the courtyard and started to wander around under the window. The princess, glancing out the window saw the cat and let him into the room. Evening set in, the princess lay down to sleep and put the ring under her pillow. She had just fallen asleep when the cat suddenly pulled the ring out from under her pillow, placed it in his mouth, jumped out the window and ran away. He arrived at the seaside, jumped onto the dog's back and off they swam.

In the middle of the ocean the cat wanted to tell the dog to swim faster. He no sooner opened his mouth than the ring fell out and into the water. They swam and swam until they reached the shore.

Said the dog to the cat, "Where's the ring?"

"I had it but I lost it," said the cat. "It dropped from my mouth."

"What shall we do now?" asked the dog.

"Let's go along the beach. Maybe we'll come across someone who will get it back from the sea." So they walked along until they saw a frog.

"Bring our ring back from the sea," they said. But the frog just plunged into the waters and disappeared.

They went still further until they saw another frog. "Bring our ring back from the sea," they said. But that frog also jumped into the waters and disappeared.

They kept on going until they noticed a very small frog jumping along. They caught it but the mother frog saw this and climbed out of the water and said, "Let go of my child and I'll bring your ring back from the sea!"

"Good," they said. "We'll hold him until you return the ring. When you bring it back, we'll let the frog go free."

The old frog dove into the sea, found the ring and brought it to them. They took it, freed the little frog and ran off home. When they arrived, the cat climbed up the pillar at once and returned the ring to his master, who tossed the ring from hand to hand. At once the servants appeared. He said to them, "Tear down the pillar and have my wife appear here immediately."

At once the stone pillar crumbled into pieces and the princess stood before him. When she saw her husband, owing to fear and rage she herself immediately turned to stone. The youth took the dog and cat and went with them to his mother, and together they began to live a prosperous life and never knew any more misery or sorrow.