

# *The Forest Lad and the Wicked Giant*

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Brazilian

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*Intermediate*

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Once upon a time, there was a man who took his wife and tiny baby son into the deep forest to make their home. With his own hands he built the house out of mud, and he made for it a thatched roof from the grass of the forest. For food they depended upon the fruits of the forest and the beasts which they killed in the hunt. They lived like hermits, seeing no one.

As the baby son grew into a large strong boy he learned from his father all the secrets of the forest. He grew wise as well as strong. From his mother he heard stories of their former life in the great city which had been their home before they went to live in the forest. These were the tales he loved to hear best of all. Very often when his father went out into the forest to hunt the boy would beg to remain at home with his mother. While his father was away she would sit on the ground before their hut and unfold to the boy all her memories of their old life.

“Father,” said the lad one day after his father had returned from his hunting trip, “I am tired of living here in the forest all by ourselves. Let us return to the city to live.”

“Your mother has been telling tales to you,” replied his father. “I will see to it that she never mentions the city to you again. We left the city to save our lives. Let me never hear from you another word about returning to the

city.”

After that the lad was made to accompany his father when he went out hunting. There was no more opportunity to hear the tales he loved from his mother’s lips. Nevertheless he hid away in his mind all that his mother had told him of their old life; and at night, when the fierce storms in the forest or the sound of the wild beasts would not let him sleep, he often lay awake upon his mat on the floor of the hut, pondering over the stories she had told.

At last the father grew sick of a fever and died. Now that the lad and his mother were left alone in the forest the lad said, “Come, let us return to our home in the city. Let us not stay here alone in the forest any longer. I must live in my own life the tales you have told me of the festas and the dancing, the great tournaments, and the songs at night under the balconies of the fair maidens.”

The lad’s request was so urgent that his mother could not have refused him, even if she, in her own heart, was not longing for a return to the life of the city. Accordingly, they took all their possessions, which consisted only of a horse and a sword, and set out for the city.

The lad and his mother reached the city at nightfall. They went from one street to another, but saw no living being. They knocked and clapped their hands before all the doors of the city, but no one responded. At last they reached the street where their old home had been. The lad was delighted to see what a big handsome house it was. “No wonder my mother longed to return to a home like this,” he thought. “How could she ever have endured the rude hut in the depths of the forest?”

The doors of the beautiful house stood wide open. The lad and his mother entered, and passed from one room to another. His mother saw one room after another with everything unchanged. She recognized one object after another just as she had left it. There was one room in the house which was securely barred on the inside, however.

The lad and his mother spent the night in their old home. In the morning they again walked about the deserted streets of the city. They saw no one and heard no living sound. It was like a city of the dead. They grew hungry at length; and the lad went outside the city to seek for food in the forest, according to the custom which he had known all his life.

The mother returned to her old home to await the coming of her son. As soon as she went upstairs she saw that

the barred door was wide open. There in the hall stood the most enormous giant she had ever seen. The great halls of the house were high, but the giant could not stand up in them without stooping.

“Who are you and what are you doing in my house?” roared the giant in such a terrible voice that the house trembled.

The woman who had lived so many years in the forest was not easily frightened. “Who are you and what are you doing in my house?” she shouted at the giant in the loudest tones she could muster.

One might have expected that the giant would have killed her instantly, but on the contrary her bold answer pleased him exceedingly. He laughed so hard that he had to lean against the wall to keep from falling.

“So you think that this is your house, do you?” said the giant as soon as he could regain his voice. “Well, I’ll tell you what we can do. I like you, and we can share this house if you will consent to be my wife.”

“I am not alone,” said the lad’s mother as soon as she could recover from her surprise sufficiently to find words.

“My son is with me and I am expecting him any moment to return from the forest whither he has gone to procure food for us.”

“I can dispose of your son very quickly, just as I have destroyed all the inhabitants of this city,” said the giant with a frown.

“You cannot dispose of my son so easily as you may think,” replied his mother. “He has grown in the deep forest and is very strong, far stronger than the city dwellers. Besides his great strength, he is surrounded by the magic circle of his mother’s love.”

“I do not know what the magic circle of a mother’s love is like,” said the giant. “I don’t remember having seen one anywhere. Nevertheless I like you, and because I like you I will endeavour to dispose of your son as painlessly as possible. I believe you say you are expecting him any moment. Just lie down here and pretend that you are sick. When the boy comes in tell him that you have a terrible pain in your eyes. As you have lived long in the forest you will know that the best remedy for a pain in your eyes is the oil of the deadly cobra of the jungle. Send the lad out into the jungle to obtain this oil for you, and I promise you he will never return alive. I’ll go back into my room and bar the door so the boy will never see me, but I shall listen through the wall to know whether you carry out my command.”

At that very moment they heard the lad's footsteps and his gay voice at the door. The giant went inside his room and barred the door. The lad's mother lay down with a cloth over her eyes, moaning in loud tones. "The giant little knows the strength and skill of the lad whose mother I am," she said to herself as she smiled amidst her moans and groans.

"O dear little mother, what evil has befallen you during my absence?" asked the boy as he entered the room.

His mother complained of the pain in her eyes just as the giant had instructed. "The only thing which will cure me of this terrible affliction is the oil of the cobra," she said.

The boy well knew the dangers which attended securing the oil from the deadly cobra of the jungle, but never in his life had he disregarded a request from his mother. He at once set out for the jungle; and, in spite of the perils of the deed, he succeeded in obtaining the oil which his mother had requested.

On the way back to the city, the boy met a little old woman carrying a pole over her shoulder from which there hung, head downward, several live fowls which she was taking to market. It was really the Holy Mother herself who had come to aid the lad in answer to his mother's prayer.

"Where are you going, my lad?" asked the old woman. The boy told his story and showed the precious oil which he had obtained from the cobra. "The day is coming, the day is coming, my lad, when you will, in truth, need the cobra's oil," said the little old woman. "But that day is not today. Today hen's oil will serve your purpose just as well. You may kill one of my hens and use the hen's oil, but leave the cobra's oil with me so that I may keep it safely for you until the day when you will require it."

The boy heeded the advice of the little old woman and killed one of her hens. He left the cobra's oil with her and took the hen's oil in its place to his mother. Because his mother had nothing at all the matter with her eyes, the hen's oil cured them just as well as the cobra's oil. There was no one who knew the difference, except the boy and the little old woman.

When the boy had gone out the giant came in from his own room and said, "In truth your son is a brave lad. I did not dream that he would have the courage to go in search of the oil of the deadly cobra, much less succeed in his quest."

“You do not know the great love we bear each other,” said the lad’s mother.

“I am going to demand a new proof of your son’s strength and skill,” said the giant. “Tomorrow you must complain of the pain in your back and send the boy in search of the oil of the porcupine to cure it. This is my command.”

The next day the woman had to complain of a pain in her back just as the giant had commanded. There was nothing else which she could do. The boy at once went in search of a porcupine, and succeeded in slaying one and getting the oil.

On his way back to the city the lad again met the little old woman who was really Nossa Senhora. “Leave the oil of the porcupine with me, my son,” said she when she had heard his story. “I will keep it for you until the morrow when you will have great need of it. Today hen’s oil will serve your purpose just as well.”

Because the boy’s mother had nothing at all the matter with her back she was cured with the hen’s oil which the boy brought, just as easily as if it had been the porcupine’s oil. The giant came out of his room and said, “In truth, lad, you are a boy of great skill and strength.”

The boy had not seen the giant before and he was very much surprised. Before he even had time to recover from his amazement the giant had seized him and bound him securely with a great rope. “If you are really a strong boy you will break this rope,” said the giant. “If you are not strong enough to break it I shall cut you into five pieces with my sword.”

The boy struggled with all his might to break the great rope. It was no use. He was not strong enough. The giant stood by laughing.

When the lad’s mother saw that he could not break the rope she fell upon her knees before the giant and cried, “Do what you will to me, but spare my son!”

The cruel giant laughed at her request. When she saw that she could not keep him from slaying the boy, she said, “If you will not grant my large request I beg that you will listen to just a tiny, tiny, little one. When you cut my son into five pieces do it with his father’s sword which he has brought with him from the little hut in the forest where we used to live. Then bind his body upon the back of his father’s horse which he brought with him out of the forest and turn the horse loose, so it may travel, perchance, back to the forest from which I brought

my lad to meet this terrible death.”

The giant did as she requested, and the horse bore the slain boy's body along the road to the forest. Outside the city they met the little old woman who was really Nossa Senhora. She took the parts of the lad's body and anointed them with the porcupine's oil. Then she held them tight together. They stayed securely joined. “Are you lacking anything?” she asked the boy.

The boy felt of his legs, his arms, his ears, his nose, his hair. “I am all here except my eyesight,” he said. The little old woman anointed his eyes with the cobra's oil. His sight was immediately restored. Then he knew that the little old woman was indeed the Holy Mother. She vanished as he knelt to receive her blessing.

The boy in his new strength quickly hastened back to the city. It was night and the giant was asleep. He seized his father's sword and plunged it into the giant's body. The giant turned over without awakening. “The mosquitoes are biting me,” he muttered in his sleep.

The boy saw the giant's own enormous sword lying on the floor. It was so heavy he could barely lift it, but mustering all his strength he drove it into the giant's body. The giant died immediately.

“The magic circle of a mother's love, with the Holy Mother's help, will guard a lad against all perils,” said the boy's mother when she heard her son's story and saw the giant lying dead.

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