



How a Lad Stole the Giant's Treasure

Brothers Grimm

Scandinavian

Intermediate

14 min read

Author's note: This story is from Sweden

Once upon a time there lived a peasant who had three sons. The two elder ones used to go with him to the field and to the forest, and helped him in his work, but the youngest remained at home with his mother, to help her in the house. His brothers despised him for doing this, and whenever they had a chance they used him badly.

At length the father and mother died, and the sons divided the property among them. As might have been looked for, the elder brothers took all that was of any value for themselves, leaving nothing to the youngest but an old cracked kneading-trough, which neither of them thought worth the having.

“The old trough,” said one of the brothers, “will do very well for our young brother, for he is always baking and scrubbing.”

The boy thought this, as was only natural, a poor thing to inherit, but he could do nothing, and he now recognised that it would be no use his remaining at home, so he wished his brothers good-bye, and went off to seek his fortune. On coming to the side of a lake he made his trough water-tight with oakum, and converted it into a little boat. Then he found two sticks, and using these as oars rowed away.

When he had crossed the water, he saw a large palace, and entering it, he asked to speak with the king. The king questioned him respecting his family and the purpose of his visit.

“I,” said the boy, “am the son of a poor peasant, and all I have in the world is an old kneading-trough. I have come here to seek work.”

The king laughed when he heard this.

“Indeed,” said he, “you have not inherited much, but fortune works many a change.”

He took the lad to be one of his servants, and he became a favourite for his courage and honesty.

Now the king who owned this palace had an only daughter, who was so beautiful and so clever that she was talked of all through the kingdom, and many came from the east and from the west to ask her hand in marriage. The princess, however, rejected them all, saying that none should have her for his wife unless he brought her for a wedding-present four valuable things belonging to a giant who lived on the other side of the lake. These four treasures were a gold sword, three gold hens, a gold lantern, and a gold harp.

Many king’s sons and many good warriors tried to win these treasures, but none of them came back, for the giant caught them all and eat them. The king was very sorrowful, for he feared that at this rate his daughter would never get a husband, and so he would not have a son-in-law to whom to leave his kingdom.

The boy when he heard of this thought that it might be well worth his while to try to win the king’s beautiful daughter. So he went to the king one day, and told him what he meant to do. When the king heard him, he got angry, and said—

“Do you think that you, who are only a servant, can do what great warriors have failed in?”

The boy, however, was not to be dissuaded, and begged him so to let him go that at last the king grew calmer and gave him his permission. "But," said he, "you will lose your life, and I shall be sorry to miss you."

With that they parted.

The boy went down to the shore of the lake, and, having found his trough, he looked it over very closely. Then he got into it and rowed across the lake, and coming to the giant's dwelling he hid himself, and stayed the night there.

Very early in the morning, before it was light, the giant went to his barn, and began to thrash, making such a noise that the mountains all around echoed again. When the boy heard this he collected some stones and put them in his pouch. Then he climbed up on to the roof of the barn and made a little hole so that he could look in. Now the giant had by his side his golden sword, which had the strange property that it clanked whenever the giant was angry. While the giant was busy thrashing at full speed, the boy threw a little stone which hit the sword, and caused it to clank.

"Why do you clank?" said the giant. "I am not angry."

He went on thrashing, but the next moment the sword clanked again. Once more the giant pursued his work, and the sword clanked a third time. Then the giant got so angry that he undid the belt, and threw the sword out of the barn door.

"Lie there," said he, "till I have done my thrashing."

The lad waited no longer, but slipping down from the roof seized on the sword, ran to his boat, and rowed across the water. On reaching the other side he hid his treasure, and was full of glee at the success of his adventure.

The next day he filled his pouch with corn, put a bundle of bast-twine in his boat, and once more set off to the giant's dwelling. He lay hiding for a time, and then he saw the giant's three golden hens walking about on the shore, and spreading their feathers, which sparkled beautifully in the bright sunshine. He was soon near them, and began to softly lead them on, scattering corn for them out of his pouch. While they were picking the boy gradually led them to the water, till at last he got them into his little boat. Then he jumped in himself, secured the fowl with his twine, pushed out from the shore, and rowed as quickly as he could to the other side of the

water.

The third day he put some lumps of salt into his pouch, and again rowed across the lake. As night came on he noticed how the smoke rose from the giant's dwelling, and concluded that the giant's wife was busy getting ready his food. He crept up on to the roof, and, looking down through the hole by which the smoke escaped, saw a large caldron boiling on the fire. Then he took the lumps of salt out of his pouch, and threw them one by one into the pot. Having done this, he crept down from the roof, and waited to see what would follow.

Soon after the giant's wife took the caldron off the fire, poured out the porridge into a bowl, and put it on the table. The giant was hungry, and he fell to at once, but scarcely had he tasted the porridge when he found it too salt. He got very angry, and started from his seat. The old woman made what excuse she could, and said that the porridge must be good; but the giant declared he would eat no more of the stuff, and told her to taste it for herself. She did so, and pulled a terrible face, for she had never in her life tasted such abominable stuff.

There was nothing for it but she must make some new porridge. So she seized a can, took the gold lantern down from the wall, and went as fast as she could to the well to draw some water. She put the lantern down by the side of the well, and was stooping down to get the water, when the boy ran to her, and, laying hold of her by the feet, threw her head over heels into the well. He seized hold of the golden lantern, ran away as fast as he could to his boat, and rowed across the water in safety.

The giant sat for a long time wondering why his wife was away so long. At last he went to look for her, but nothing could he see of her. Then he heard a splashing in the well, and finding she was in the water, he, with a lot of work, got her out.

"Where is my gold lantern?" was the first thing he asked, as the old woman came round a little.

"I don't know," answered she. "Somebody came, caught me by the feet, and threw me into the well."

The giant was very angry at this.

"Three of my treasures," said he, "have gone, and I have now only my golden harp left. But, whoever the thief may be, he shall not have that; I will keep that safe under twelve locks."

While these things occurred at the giant's dwelling, the boy sat on the other side of the water, rejoicing that he had got on so well.

The most difficult task, however, had yet to be done, and for a long time he thought over how he could get the golden harp. At length he determined to row over to the giant's place and see if fortune would favour him.

No sooner said than done. He rowed over and went to a hiding-place. The giant had, however, been on the watch, and had seen him. So he rushed forward in a terrible rage and seized the boy, saying—

“So I have caught you at last, you young rascal. You it was who stole my sword, my three gold hens, and my gold lantern.”

The boy was terribly afraid, for he thought his last hour was come.

“Spare my life, father,” said he humbly, “and I will never come here again.”

“No,” replied the giant, “I will do the same with you as with the others. No one slips alive out of my hands.”

He then shut the boy up in a sty, and fed him with nuts and sweet milk, so as to get him nice and fat preparatory to killing and eating him.

The lad was a prisoner, but he ate and drank and made himself as easy as he could. After some time the giant wanted to find out if he were fat enough to be killed. So he went to the sty, made a little hole in the wall, and told the boy to put his finger through it. The lad knew what he wanted; so instead of putting out his finger he poked out a little peeled alder twig. The giant cut the twig, and the red sap ran out. Then he thought the boy must be yet very lean since his flesh was so hard, so he caused a greater supply of milk and nuts to be given to him.

Some time after, the giant again visited the sty, and ordered the boy to put his finger through the hole in the wall. The lad now poked out a cabbage-stalk, and the giant, having cut it with his knife, concluded that the lad must be fat enough, his flesh seemed so soft.

The next morning the giant said to his wife—

“The boy seems to be fat enough now, mother; take him then to-day, and bake him in the oven, while I go and ask our kinsfolk to the feast.”

The old woman promised to do what her husband told her. So, having heated the oven, she dragged out the boy to bake him.

“Sit on the shovel,” said she.

The boy did so, but when the old woman raised the shovel the boy always fell off. So they went on many times. At last the giantess got angry, and scolded the boy for being so awkward; the lad excused himself, saying that he did not know the way to sit on the shovel.

“Look at me,” said the woman, “I will show you.”

So she sat herself down on the shovel, bending her back and drawing up her knees. No sooner was she seated than the boy, seizing hold of the handle, pushed her into the oven and slammed the door to. Then he took the woman’s fur cloak, stuffed it out with straw, and laid it on the bed. Seizing the giant’s bunch of keys, he opened the twelve locks, snatched up the golden harp, and ran down to his boat, which he had hidden among the flags on the shore.

The giant soon afterwards came home.

“Where can my wife be?” said he. “No doubt she has lain down to sleep a bit. Ah! I thought so.”

The old woman, however, slept a long while, and the giant could not wake her, though he was now expecting his friends to arrive.

“Wake up, mother,” cried he, but no one replied. He called again, but there was no response. He got angry, and, going to the bed, he gave the fur cloak a good shake. Then he found that it was not his wife, but only a bundle of straw put in her clothes. At this the giant grew alarmed, and he ran off to look after his golden harp. He found his keys gone, the twelve locks undone, and the harp missing. He went to the oven and opened the door to see how the meat for the feast was going on. Behold! there sat his wife, baked, and grinning at him.

Then the giant was almost mad with grief and rage, and he rushed out to seek the lad who had done him all this mischief. He came down to the edge of the water and found him sitting in his boat, playing on the harp. The

music came over the water, and the gold strings shone wonderfully in the sunshine. The giant jumped into the water after the boy; but finding that it was too deep, he laid himself down, and began to drink the water in order to make the lake shallower. He drank with all his might, and by this means set up a current which drew the boat nearer and nearer to the shore. Just when he was going to lay hold of it he burst, for he had drunk too much; and there was an end of him.

The giant lay dead on the shore, and the boy moved away across the lake, full of joy and happiness. When he came to land, he combed his golden hair, put on fine clothes, fastened the giant's gold sword by his side, and, taking the gold harp in one hand and the gold lantern in the other, he led the gold fowl after him, and went to the king, who was sitting in the great hall of the palace surrounded by his courtiers. When the king saw the boy he was heartily glad. The lad went to the king's beautiful daughter, saluted her courteously, and laid the giant's treasures before her. Then there was great joy in the palace, that the princess had after all got the giant's treasures and so bold and handsome a bridegroom. The wedding was celebrated soon after with very much splendour and rejoicing; and when the king died the lad succeeded him, ruling over all the land both long and happily.

I know no more respecting them.

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