



Tellerchen

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Romanian

Easy
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Once upon a time something very extraordinary happened. If it had not happened, it would not be told.

There was once a husband and wife. The husband had a son by a former marriage, and the wife had a daughter by her first husband. This wicked woman could not bear the sight of her husband's son. One day she said: "Husband! If you don't send that boy away, I can't eat at the same table with you any longer."

"But where shall I send him, wife? Let him stay till he is a little older, then he will set up housekeeping for himself."

"I mean just what I told you—choose."

When the man saw that he could do nothing with his wife, he said to the boy: "My dear son, you see I am growing old. I can no longer do work enough to need no assistance. Your mother won't have you here. So go wherever the Lord may lead you to earn your daily bread, and, if it is His will, I'll come to see you now and then if I can."

“I see, dear father, that my step-mother can’t bear the sight of me, yet I don’t know why. I have never been disobedient to her, but have always done every thing she told me; still, it is all in vain, she can’t endure me. So I will go and work wherever God may guide me. I shall be able to earn my daily bread, for I’m a stout, capable lad. But come and see me if you can, father, for I feel as if I should die of longing for you.”

“Go and prosper, my dear son; may the Lord help you.”

“May we have a happy meeting, dear father.”

And the poor boy, with tears streaming down his cheeks, left his father’s house. He walked on till at last he met a rich man, to whom he hired himself as a servant. He remained in service seven years, and his master was well satisfied, but suddenly such a longing for his father seized upon him that he could bear it no longer. He told his employer that he was going to see his parents, and his master said:

“Boy, you have worked on my farm seven years, and served me well. Does the place no longer suit you, or have you been offered higher wages elsewhere, that you want to leave me?”

“No indeed, master. But I long to go home,—I feel as if I wanted to see my father again. If you think you still owe me any thing, please settle my account.”

“Well, my boy, one can’t keep a servant by force, and you fixed no rate of wages when you came to me. As a reward for the services you have rendered, you may choose from my herds two head of horned cattle and ten smaller ones.”

When the boy heard this, he hardly knew what to do with himself in his delight at the thought of having earned so much by his labor. He went among the herds and flocks, looking up and down, and wondering which animals he should choose. He did not want to take the best ones, because he thought his services were not worth so much. But neither did he want to select the worst, he could not make up his mind to that. So he chose from those of medium value. He did the same with the horned cattle. But in searching his eyes fell upon an ox, which also gazed longingly at the youth. So he took this ox and a cow.

Now he had no other thought in his mind except to go to his parents, believing that his step-mother would no longer look askance at him. So he bade his master good-by and went away. Just think, the ox was bewitched, but the boy did not know it. He named the animal Tellerchen.

He reached home. His father died of joy and came to life again when he saw his son, who had grown tall and handsome, and so sensible too. But the wicked old step-mother behaved like seven evil demons,—nay, like the witch she was. The youth staid in his father's house, helped him work in the fields, drove the cattle to pasture, and made himself very useful. Whenever he went to the pasture with the cattle his mother gave him a cake; but it was made of ashes, and he could not eat it. What was he to do? At noon, instead of having something to eat like every body else, he sat under the shade of a tree and wept over his lot, but he could not bring himself to tell his father, lest he should make trouble between him and his wife. He had no comfort at home, no companions abroad, and so he grew sad and thoughtful. One day, when he was crying with hunger, and even the herdsmen who had left their oxen were eating, Tellerchen suddenly began to speak and said:

“Master, don't grieve any longer, throw the ash-cake away, seize my right horn, and eat and drink what you will find there.”

“Why, Tellerchen,” replied the youth, “there must be witchcraft about you too. Where was such a thing ever heard of, and how long have you been able to talk?”

“Mind what I tell you. I see you are an excellent lad, and I am sorry you should weep your youth away. Just try my advice, and you'll see that it will be profitable to you.”

And it was. The youth seized Tellerchen's right horn. Behold what happened! He drew out a roll as white as snow, and a glass of wine which would have made any one's mouth water. The lad ate and drank.

The step-mother noticed that the youth's face had grown fuller, that he was in good spirits, and did all his work cheerily. Instead of seeing him grow thinner day by day, as she had expected, he constantly gained flesh. She soon discovered that Tellerchen must be at the bottom of the mystery, for she perceived that the boy took much better care of him than of the other cattle. How should she manage to find out what he did and ate in the woods? She secretly sent her daughter after him, and ordered her to watch what the youth did while pasturing the cattle. The girl followed her step-brother without his knowledge, watched him, returned to her mother and said, "Mother, what I have seen to-day is beyond telling!"

"You met the Wood Witch?"

"A wrong guess," the daughter replied.

"You have seen a wizard, a dragon, or a griffin?"

"No indeed! Heaven forbid!"

"Or did a handsomer, richer, and more sensible youth follow you?"

"What an idea! But it's useless for you to rack your brains, you can't guess."

"Then tell me what you saw, and don't chatter about it any longer."

"Mother, my step-brother's ox is enchanted."

"Didn't I always say that there was something the matter with the accursed beast?"

"If you could have seen how he hugged and kissed him, sometimes on the right and sometimes on the left cheek, mother. I really felt as though my heart would stop beating. Then directly after he seized his right horn and pulled out some white rolls and wine, which he devoured as if the wolves were after him. I tell you my mouth watered when I saw him eat so greedily. Yet what amazed me still more was to hear the ox talk. I stood with my mouth wide open, staring at him."

"Never mind, I'll get even with him."

The step-mother did not like the ox, and urged her husband to have him slaughtered, neither more nor less. All night long she teased him about it. The poor old man told her that the animal was not his, but his son's, that he

was a fine beast and might yet be very useful to them. But she would not listen, and never stopped talking until he had promised to kill the ox. Luckily the youth was awake and heard it all. As soon as morning dawned he went to Tellerchen to curry and clean the animal as he always did, but began to weep, and told the ox the fate in store for him. Tellerchen told him he must stand outside the house on the bench by the door, and when the people were chasing him, to catch him and take him to the shambles, he must jump on his back as he passed by. This was done, and after the ox had escaped he took his master to a forest far more beautiful than any the boy had ever seen. There they built huts, and lived as if they were in clover, for the grass in the surrounding meadows was so tall that a man might have lost himself in it, and was always so green and blooming that it made excellent pasturage.

One day, when the youth was sitting comfortably before his hut, playing on the flute, while the ox grazed at some distance, up came an enormous bull, so fat that his hide seemed ready to burst.

“Why did you come here, youngster, with your Tellerchen, to drink my water and feed on my grass?” he asked.

“I didn’t know that this was your property,” answered the youth, “Tellerchen brought me here.”

“Then tell him he must come to the Gold Bridge to-morrow and fight with me.” After saying this, he went away.

When the ox came home at night he found the youth more sorrowful than ever before. “What ails you, master, that you stand there as if you were stupefied?” asked the ox.

“What ails me?” replied the youth. “Why, I’m in a fine fix!” And he repeated all that the bull had said.

“Never mind, master, don’t worry about it, leave that to me.”

Early the next morning the ox left the lad in the hut and set off to the Gold Bridge to fight with the bull; he fought till he had pushed him under the bridge, and then came back home safe and sound.

Two days after another bull came, somewhat smaller than the first one. After saying the same things the other had said, he summoned Tellerchen to fight at the Silver Bridge. The ox again found his master weeping, soothed him as he had done before, and went to fight the second bull and hurl him under the bridge.

After several days a third bull appeared, a feeble, unsightly, ugly, dirty animal, and said to the boy: “Who gave you leave to come here with your Tellerchen to drink my water and spoil the grass in my meadows?”

“What business is it of yours?” replied the youth pertly.

“If it isn’t my business, whose affair should it be?” replied the bull. “Whichever of you two will dare to fight with me may come to-morrow to the Copper Bridge.”

“Don’t worry,” replied the youth carelessly, “we will come.”

When Tellerchen returned from the pasture in the evening, his master, with great amusement, told him every thing that had happened.

“Your mirth is out of place,” replied the ox, “for my time has now come. The bull, sick and emaciated as he was, will overpower me. Watch our battle to-morrow, for I will not let you fight with him; you are young and delicate, and still have a great deal to see in the world. When you perceive that he is conquering me and about to push me under the bridge, rush forward and seize my left horn, but don’t open it till you have reached home.”

When the youth heard this, he began to weep so that he could not be quieted, and grieved so much all night long that he had no sleep.

Early the next morning he went with Tellerchen to the Copper Bridge, where the puny-looking bull awaited them. They began the struggle, and fought and fought until toward the afternoon. Sometimes the ox gored the bull, at others the bull the ox, and the victory still remained undecided. But when the afternoon was nearly over the ox’s strength failed, and, while the bull was carrying him off and in the very act of hurling him under the bridge, the boy rushed up and wrenched off his left horn.

He wept,—Heaven knows how bitterly the poor lad wept by the bridge. But seeing that his Tellerchen did not come out again from under the bridge and it was growing dark, he set off with his horn, and a heart bleeding with grief. He spent the night on a hill. The next day hunger vexed him, and thinking he should find something to eat in the horn Tellerchen had left him, he opened it.

What, I beg to ask you, do you suppose happened then! Whence came the countless multitude of all sorts of cattle? How could he drive them home? and to get them back into the horn again was impossible. He owned this to himself and began to weep bitterly. While thus lamenting, lo and behold! a dragon came up to him and said:—

“What will you give me, boy, if I put all these beasts back into the horn for you?”

“Half of them,” replied the lad.

“I’ve no fancy for *that*,” said the dragon, “I want something else.”

“Tell me what it is, and I’ll see.”

“When you love life best I am to be allowed to come and take the dearest thing you have, to devour it.”

The lad, without exactly knowing what he was doing, agreed.

The dragon rapped three times with its tail and put all the cattle back in the horn, which the boy then took and went to his father, whom he found alone. No one knew what had become of the old woman and her daughter, they had vanished from the house.

When the peasant saw his son grown into a youth he almost lost his senses with joy, but managed to calm himself. His son opened the horn, and instantly the fields and surrounding country were so filled with cattle that every body was bewildered.

“Do all these flocks and herds belong to you?” asked the old man.

“All, father. What shall we do with this multitude of beasts.”

“Relieve the sorrows of the widows and the poor,” he replied.

The youth followed his father’s advice. There was no day the Lord bestowed on which he did not render some service to those who needed aid. So it happened that not a single pauper was left in the neighborhood. News of the wealth and benevolence of the old man’s son reached the imperial court, and as the emperor had a very clever and beautiful daughter, he sent to ask the youth to become her suitor.

When the young man heard that the emperor wanted him for a son-in-law he was greatly astonished. But, on

being summoned to the court, he went there and behaved with so much good sense and dignity that the sovereign was not at all sorry he had cast his eye upon him. The princess liked him because he was a handsome, proud, spirited Roumanian youth. Then, after having agreed among themselves, a wedding was celebrated whose fame spread through the whole country. The young man's father was there too.

After the dances and amusements of the marriage were over and every body had gone home, the old man, according to ancient custom, placed in the room where the emperor's son-in-law and his bride were to sleep a roll of snow-white bread. Then he, too, went to rest.

What happened during the night? The emperor's son-in-law suddenly saw the dragon, which, with one jaw on the upper cornice of the door and the other on the threshold beneath, told the young fellow it had come to settle their account and he must now give up to be devoured the bride sleeping beside him, whom he loved like the apple of his eye.

The old man's son, who had long since forgotten the settlement, did not know what to do. He dared not rush upon the dragon and kill it, because he knew that they had made this bargain; his father had often told him that, when a man has given his word, he has also pledged his soul. Yet his heart would not let him yield up his beloved wife for the dragon to devour. While he was torturing himself in trying to think what he could do to neither break his promise nor give up his bride, the bread on the table began to jump about and said:

"Hi, dragon, I've been sowed, grew up, was mowed down and fastened into a bundle, yet I bore it, do you now bear your trouble, too, and go into the depths of the sea."

The dragon stood waiting. The bread went on:

"Then I was carried to the barn, horses trampled on me, I was winnowed and taken to the mill. Bear your troubles as I've borne mine, and go, that we may hear your name no more."

The dragon still waited, and its tongue darted about in its mouth like lightning. The emperor's son-in-law and his bride remained perfectly quiet. The bread spoke again:

"Then I was ground, taken home, sifted, kneaded with water, put into the oven, and baked till my eyes almost started out of my head, yet I bore it. Do you bear it too, you accursed dragon, and may you burst."

The noise that echoed through the air, as the dragon burst, was so loud that every body in the palace awoke.

Men came running to the spot, what did they see? A monster of a dragon, burst and split open. It was so huge that all shrank away in terror.

Afterward they took the carcass, carried it out of the palace, and gave it to the ravens. Then the emperor's son-in-law related the whole affair. When the people in the palace heard it, they all thanked God for having worked such a miracle and permitted the emperor's children to escape safe and sound. Then they lived in peace and happiness and did good every where, and if they have not died, they may be alive now.

Into the saddle then I sprung, This tale to tell to old and young.

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