



The Poor Boy

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Advanced
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Once upon a time something happened. If it hadn't happened, it wouldn't be told.

There was once a poor widow, so poor that even the flies would not stay in her house, and this widow had two children, a boy and a girl. The boy was such a brave fellow that he would have torn the snakes' tongues out of their mouths, and the girl was so beautiful that the emperor's sons and handsome princes of every land were waiting impatiently for her to grow up, that they might go and court her. But when the girl had reached her sixteenth year, the same thing befell her that happens to all beautiful maidens—a dragon came, stole her, and carried her far away to the shore of another country. From that day the widow loved her son hundreds and thousands of times better than before, because he was now her only child and the sole joy she had in the world. She watched him like the apple of her eye and would not let him go a single step away from her. But much as she loved him she was cheerless and sad, for, dear me! a boy is only a boy, but a girl is a girl, especially when she is beautiful.

The boy, seeing his mother so melancholy, tried to grow stronger and stronger, and counted the days before he should be large enough to go out into the world and seek his sister, little Rosy Cheeks, along untrodden paths filled with thorns. When he had reached his eighteenth year he made himself a pair of calf-skin sandals with steel soles, went to his mother, and said:—

“Mother, I have neither rest nor peace here so long as I see you so sick and sorrowful from constantly thinking

of my sister; I have determined to go out into the wide world and not return till I can bring news of her. I don't know whether I shall find her, but at least I hope so, and that hope I leave with you for your consolation."

When the widow heard these words she was forced to struggle with her feelings ere she answered: "Well, my son, my child! Do what you can not help doing; when you return I shall see you again, and if you don't come back I shall not weep for you, because the journey you have in view is a long one; therefore if you are absent a long time there will always be the hope of your return."

After saying this she mixed three loaves for him with her own milk, one of meal, the second of bran, and the third of ashes from the hearth. The lad put the loaves into his knapsack, bade his mother farewell, and went out into the world like a poor boy to whom all roads are equally long, all bridges equally wide, and who does not know what direction to take. At the gate he stood still, cast one glance to the east, one to the west, one to the north, and one to the south, then took a handful of dust from under the threshold of the door, scattered it on the wind, and turned his steps in the direction that it was carried by the breeze.

The Poor Boy walked and walked, further and further, through many a rich country, till he came to a moor on which no grass grew and no water flowed. Here he stopped and pulled out his three loaves. He began with the one made of meal, because it was the handsomest, and as he ate it his strength increased and his thirst was quenched. Again the Poor Boy walked on, journeying across the wide moor a whole long summer day until nightfall, when he reached a vast forest as extensive as the heath he had passed, but which was dense, gloomy, and forsaken even by the winds. When he entered the wood, he saw by the trunk of a tree an old woman with a bent figure and a wrinkled face. The Poor Boy, who for so long a time had seen no human countenance and heard no human speech, was greatly delighted and said merrily:—

"Good luck, mother! But how do you happen to come here, and what are you doing in this wilderness of a forest?"

"Your words are kind!" replied the old woman sighing. "Alas, age has brought me down to this; I wanted to walk a little distance and can go no further because my feet will no longer carry me."

When the Poor Boy heard this he pitied the old woman, went up to her, and asked whence she came, where she was going, and on what business she was bent. The luckless fellow did not know that this person was no other than the Wood Witch, who waits on the edge of forests and meets those who wander in these desolate regions, in order to delude them with fair words and then lead them to destruction. When he saw her so feeble, the boy

remembered his three loaves, and, as if he were going home the very next day, thought he would share his provisions with her that she might get a little strength.

“I thank you,” replied the Wood Witch, who had other designs upon him in her mind; “but see, I have no teeth to chew your dry bread. If you want to do any thing to help me, take me on your back and carry me, I live close by.”

“But just taste it,” said the boy, who in his kindness of heart wanted to do her some good. “It is only hunger that has made you so weak, and if this doesn’t help you I’ll carry you as you wish.”

When the Wood Witch saw the loaf made of meal she gazed at it with delight; there was something about it—I don’t know what—that made even the Wood Witch long for a morsel. And as she bit into it her heart grew softer. After she had eaten three mouthfuls she felt as if she were a human being, like the rest of us, with her heart in the right place and a gentle temper.

“Learn, my son,” she said to him, “that I am the Wood Witch, and know very well who you are, whence you come, and where you are going. It is a great task you have before you, for your sister is in the other world, which inhabitants of this earth can reach only in one way.”

“And what is that?” asked the Poor Boy impatiently.

The Wood Witch looked doubtfully at him.

“I don’t advise you to take it,” she said, “it would be a pity to lose your young life. But who knows, perhaps you’ll have good luck; I see that you have a tender heart, and whoever has that can bring many things to pass; besides, I know you—you will have no rest till you have found her. So learn—far away from here, after you have crossed six moors and six forests, you will meet on the edge of the seventh forest, which extends to the frontiers of the next world, an old witch; this witch has a drove of horses, and among them is an enchanted horse which can carry you to the other shore. But this steed can be obtained only by the person who knows how to choose it from the whole drove, after he has served the old witch for a year.”

This was what the Poor Boy had wanted to know. He lost no more time, thanked the Wood Witch for her explanations, and set off, keeping straight through the dense forest, because his road was long and he was in a hurry. The Poor Boy walked like one who goes on a good errand, and hurried like a person who wants to get home early. How far he walked and how much he hurried any one can imagine, who remembers how long a

time he himself required to cross a single moor and a single forest. But, when his strength failed, he bit off a piece of his loaf and instantly revived again.

As he came out of the sixth forest and passed near the clear waves of a brook, he saw a wasp struggling in the water and pitied the insect. So he took a dry branch and held out one end of it to the wasp, that it might crawl up on it and then use its wings. But this wasp happened to be the queen of all the wasps in the woods, and when she found herself saved by the boy's kindness she flew upon his shoulder and said:

“Wherever you go, may good-luck be your companion. Please pull out a hair from under my right wing and take good care of it, for who knows whether it will not prove useful to you some day. If you need me, shake this hair and I'll come to you, in whatever part of the world you may be.”

The Poor Boy pulled out the hair, put it carefully away, and journeyed on. Who knows how far he walked before he came to a great lake, on whose shore he saw a fish flapping on the dry land. He pitied the poor creature, which had scarcely a breath of life left, so he picked it up and tossed it into the water. But this fish was king of all the fishes, and had jeweled scales and golden fins. It swam once around the lake, breathed two or three times to recover its strength, and then came back to the boy and said:

“Wherever you go, may good-luck be your companion. Please pull off a scale from under my right fin and keep it carefully, who knows whether it may not be useful to you some day. If you ever need me, rub this scale and I'll come to you wherever you may be, as far as the water extends around the earth.”

The Poor Boy took the scale, put it carefully away, and journeyed on. Who knows how far he walked ere he reached the seventh moor, where no grass grew and no water flowed. There he found in his path a mole which had been surprised above ground by the daylight, and was now groping piteously about in its blindness, unable to find its burrow where its children were starving, though it was only one jump away. The youth pitied the mole, too, took it and carried it to its hill.

“Wherever you go,” said the mole, “may good-luck be your companion. Please take a claw from my right paw and keep it carefully; who knows whether it may not be useful to you some day. But if you need me, scratch on the ground with this claw and I will come to you in whatever part of the earth you may be.”

The Poor Boy took the claw, put it carefully away, and went on again over the endless moor toward the invisible forest that lay on the frontiers of the other world. How many days and nights he journeyed over this moor

heaven only knows; but one morning, when he woke, he saw in the distance, as far off as if it were in the other world, a streak of light like the fire shepherds build at the entrance of the fold. This was the home of the witch who had the enchanted horse.

The Poor Boy was greatly delighted when he found himself so near the end of the world, and his joy increased till, on the evening of the third day, he reached the enchantress's house. Oh, dear! there he was, in the midst of the moor, just at the edge of the forest, which stretched far beyond his sight in the dusk of twilight, upon a wide plain covered with green grass, through which flowed streams of clear water, but in the middle of this plain rose a number of tall poles, on each of which was a human skull. The witch's hut stood in the midst of these poles, with a tall poplar in front of it, and on the right and left a willow tree. This proved that the Wood Witch was right—life here was by no means merry. The Poor Boy plucked up his courage and approached to enter the hut, which stood as if deserted in the middle of the moor.

The old witch sat on a high three-legged chair in the entry, but before her stood a huge kettle on a big tripod, over a fire that burned without smoke. In one hand she held the shin-bone of a giant, which she used to stir the herbs stewing in the caldron. When the Poor Boy bade her good evening, she eyed him from top to toe.

“Welcome, my hero! I've expected you a long time, for this caldron has long been rattling and telling me continually that you were on the way.”

The lad was much pleased with this kind reception, for the old woman did not seem to him at all peevish, as she looked kindly at him and spoke in a gentle voice. She, too, was glad, because she had again laid hands on a man, for the poles bearing human skulls protected her from the malicious elves, who could not pass through them; and there was still one piece of ground large enough for three heads, where poles had not yet been put.

They now agreed that the Poor Boy should watch the drove a whole year, and in payment receive the horse he himself should choose; but if he should lose the drove he was to give up his head to the witch. The old woman instantly stuck a pole in the ground and put the hero's hat on it. Then the youth ate something, that he might not go with the drove to the pasture hungry. While the boy was eating, the witch led the mares behind the hut and began to beat them with the giant's shin bone, telling them not to drink any water during the night, nor allow the others to do so, because the water from the springs in the plain would put them to sleep, and the old woman wanted the herd to graze all night. The boy knew nothing about this.

When he came to the pasture with the drove he was attacked by so great a thirst, that he would have walked

from morning till night to find a drop of water; so to quench it he lay down by a spring and drank, and even while drinking he fell asleep.

When in the first gray dawn of the next morning he woke from his slumber, the drove had vanished, leaving no trace anywhere! It is only necessary to remember that the lad's cap was already hanging on the pole to understand how great was his despair. But he gazed around him in every direction without discovering even a sign of a horse; the morning twilight was fast vanishing, and he stood utterly forsaken, not knowing which way to turn. Then he recollected the service he had once rendered the wasp, and thought that a wasp flies so fast that it might discover the drove and bring him news of their hiding-place, so he took the hair he had pulled from under the wasp's right wing and shook it. Quick as thought a buzzing noise was heard from every direction—it grew louder and louder, till one might have thought the world was going to ruin. Good gracious! There came one wasp after another, one swarm behind another, whole ranks, great clouds of wasps of all sizes, all ready to circle the earth and obey the Poor Boy's commands.

“Have no anxiety,” said the Wasp Queen; “if the drove still remains on the earth, we'll bring the horses back to you ere sunrise.”

Then every thing became quiet, because the wasps flew off to every quarter of the globe and scattered all over the world. Ere long a cloud of dust appeared in the distance, swept with mad haste over the wide plain in the midst of the moor, and the drove of horses, urged by the wasps' stings, dashed up so swiftly that the earth fairly groaned under their hoofs. The Poor Boy thanked the wasps for their help, and then went to the hut as if nothing had happened.

The old woman looked askance at him, said he had done well, and then beat the mares again, ordering them to hide carefully at night. That evening the lad would eat nothing, because he thought the witch's food had caused his terrible thirst the night before; but when he went with the drove to the pasture, a burning, consuming thirst seized upon him as soon as he saw the clear water, and wherever he went springs bubbled from under his feet. At last he could no longer control himself, and relying upon the aid of the wasps, lay down beside a spring and had scarcely drunk when he instantly fell asleep. This time he woke later than on the night before, because he had gone to sleep later, so he was later in shaking the hair he had pulled out from under the wasp's wing, and the swarms of wasps were later in coming to seek and drive the horses home.

But what did the youth see? Ere long one swarm after another returned, each bringing news that the drove

could not be found on the surface of the earth and must have hidden somewhere in the sea.

The sun was about to rise. The Poor Boy took the fish-scale, rubbed it, and suddenly there appeared in the springs at his feet a school of tiny fish, that filled every channel, and asked what were his wishes and commands. He told them what he desired and instantly all the waters on the earth, rivers, lakes, and seas, began to swell and dash, while the wasps flew off to be ready to pounce upon the drove as soon as the fish forced the horses to appear.

The Poor Boy had scarcely time to collect his horses and take them home when the sun rose.

The old woman looked angrily at him, but said again that he had done well, and gave the mares a still more terrible beating; for the year consisted of three days, and if they did not hide successfully that night the hero might demand his wages.

The Poor Boy knew this too. So he began to eat his meal-loaf as he went with the drove to the pasture, and whenever he bit off a piece his strength increased and his thirst was quenched. Yet, whenever he saw the springs or heard the water rippling over the pebbles, he grew thirsty again, and so devoured the whole of the meal-loaf. He ought now to have taken the bran loaf, but did not venture to do so because he still had a long journey before him, and was afraid of being without food. Therefore he again relied on the aid of the wasps and fishes, lay down by a spring, and as soon as he had drunk fell asleep.

When he awoke it was broad daylight, though the sun had not yet risen. He shook the hair, but the wasps came with the tidings that the drove was not on the surface of the earth, he rubbed the fish-scale, but the fishes said the horses were not under the water either; so, in his despair, he seized the mole's claw and scratched on the ground with it.

Then you should have seen the wonder! The wasps buzzed, the fish searched all the water in the world, and the moles began to rummage the earth, furrowing it in every direction as if they meant to make it into pap. When the first sunbeams touched the top of the poplar before the hut, the drove dashed like hunted ghosts to the Poor Boy; if the horses tried to go into the water the fish scared them back, if they tried to hide themselves in the ground the claws of the moles drove them out, and so they were forced to go wherever the wasps guided them.

The Poor Boy thanked his friends for their help, and returned home just as the sun shone upon the hut. The old

woman looked angrily at him, but said nothing.

But now trouble came. The year was over, and the Poor Boy began to rack his brains because he did not know which horse in the drove he ought to choose. That's the way with over-hasty people. The Wood Witch could probably have told him this, too, if he had not left her so quickly. Now he went to work hap-hazard. Still, he thought, whatever he might hit upon he should not fare badly, for on a long journey it was better at any rate to be on horseback than on foot. Besides, he had seen the old witch's horses run and knew that they were fine animals, no worthless jades. So he went through the drove, and as he walked noticed a sick filly, which he pitied because it looked so neglected, but he did not think of choosing it. But, no matter how much he turned and twisted, he always stopped beside this animal, for he was very kind-hearted and told himself that, even if he could not make much use of it, he could at least do the poor creature some service.

"Who knows," he said, "if I should comb, brush, and curry it, perhaps it may yet make a good horse!"

So he chose it, and resolved to take with him the pouch containing the comb, brush, and curry-comb, in order to carefully tend his horse.

The old witch turned green with spite when she heard that the youth had chosen this steed, for it was the very one. But what could she do? She was obliged to keep her promise. She merely advised him to select another, better animal, telling him that he would soon be without a horse, and that good work deserved good wages, but at last she gave it to him.

Still, a witch always remains a witch, and when the Poor Boy had mounted, taken leave of her, and ridden off, she went to the big caldron, took it off and mounted the tripod, then she changed herself in face and figure and hurried after with the speed of curses, to catch him, kill him, and get her horse back. The Poor Boy felt that something terrible was pursuing him, and set spurs to his steed.

"It's no use to spur me," said the horse, "we can't outrun her, so long as we are on her lands. But throw the comb behind you, to put an obstacle in her way."

Now the Poor Boy knew that he had chosen wisely when he took the sick filly. So he drew the comb out of the bag, flung it behind him, and it instantly became a long, high fence, which the witch could not climb over, so she was obliged to go a long way round, and he thus gained a start.

“Throw down the brush,” said the horse, when it again heard the trampling of the tripod near them.

The rider threw the brush, which turned into a dense growth of reeds, through which the old hag forced her way with much difficulty and many a groan.

“Throw the curry-comb,” cried the horse for the third time. When he had flung that down, the Poor Boy looked back and saw a whole forest of knives and swords, and among them the witch trying to get through and being cut into mince-meat.

When they reached the seventh forest, where the witch’s kingdom ended, the sick horse shook itself and became a handsome, winged steed, whose like was never seen before or since.

“Now hold fast,” said the horse, “I am going to carry you as never hero went from this world to the other, for I, too, have a sister there whom I seek.”

The Poor Boy was dazed by the swiftness with which the horse flew over the forest and alighted in the other world through a large opening in another part of the woods. When he recovered his senses, he found himself on the shore of the other world with the horse, which now shook itself a second time, changed into a handsome prince with long, curling locks, and said:

“Wherever you go, may good luck be your companion, for you have released me from the spell the Wood Witch laid upon me. Learn that I am the son of the Red Emperor and set out to seek my sister, but on the edge of the forest I met the Wood Witch, who complained that she could walk no further and begged me to carry her on my back; but when, out of pity, I let her get on my shoulders, she changed me into a horse and condemned me to retain that form until a hero took pity on me and mounted me, that I might carry him to the other world, there I was to regain my human form.”

The Poor Boy was greatly overjoyed to find himself no longer alone. He took the bran loaf, broke it in halves, and gave one portion to the prince, that they might be brothers till death. The prince tasted the bread, and as he ate his strength and his love increased. They told each other their experiences, and then went on their way.

Far, far off, just at the end of the coast-line, rose shining buildings, which must be the dragons’ palaces. The country here was so beautiful, that one would have gladly traveled through it forever, it was so radiant with light, so green, so rich in flowers, birds of beautiful plumage, and tame, sportive animals. And in this country

men never grew old, but remained exactly the same age as when they entered it, for here there were no days, the sun neither rose nor set, but the light came of itself, as if from a clear sky. The dragons, however, were nowhere to be seen, and the two brothers for life continued their way. After they had walked as far as a three-days' march, they reached the beautiful palaces and paused before them, because they were so marvelously lovely, with high towers, and walls built of stones as soft as velvet, covered with plates of snow that had been dried in the sun. But they seemed empty and deserted.

The Poor Boy and the prince entered, went through all the rooms filled with costly ornaments, and, seeing no one, thought that the dragon must surely have gone hunting and determined to wait for him. But they were surprised that they did not find their sisters here. Each stretched himself on one of the beautiful divans and was going to rest, when suddenly both started up, amazed by what they heard.

Dear me! It was a song, so touching that it would have softened the very stones; it made those who listened feel as if they were in heaven, and the notes were in a woman's voice. The two companions did not listen long, but hurried off in the direction from which the sound came.

This is what they saw—in one part of the palace was a glass tower, and in this tower sat a girl spinning, singing, and weeping, but her tears, in falling, were instantly changed to pearls. This maiden was so beautiful that, if she had been in the world, two men would have killed each other for her sake. When the heroes beheld her, they stood motionless and gazed longingly at her, but the girl stopped spinning, and neither sang nor wept, but looked at them in amazement.

She was not the sister of either youth, but as usually happens in such cases, the Poor Boy supposed she was the prince's sister, and the prince thought she was the sister of the Poor Boy.

"I'll stay here," said the Poor Boy, "and you can go on, deliver my sister, and marry her."

"No, I'll stay here," replied the prince, "you can go on and release my sister, for this maiden shall be my wife."

Now came trouble! When they understood that the lovely girl was the sister of neither, the handsome heroes seized their swords and were on the point of fighting as men do fight when they are obliged to divide any thing.

"Stop," said the fair girl, "don't attack each other. It is better first to discover whether I am really what I seem to you, or, after all, only a shadow! I am the Bodiless Maiden, who will not obtain form in this world until the dragon has stolen me from the other shore. I shall then be as you see me now, shall spin, sing, and weep,

because I shall think of my mother who is spinning, singing, and weeping; and your sisters, who were stolen by the two older brothers of the dragon who rules this palace spin, sing, and weep, too.”

On hearing this, the two heroes wanted to set off at once, in order to lose no more time on the way.

“Stop, don’t be over hasty,” said the Bodiless Maiden. “You probably think that you will conquer the dragons by mere will? Great deeds await you. The old she-dragon put me here, that I might constantly spur on her youngest son, because it is written that all three brothers are to be married at the same time. The two older brothers keep your sisters prisoners, but can not wed them till the youngest son has stolen me. Whenever he comes home from hunting, he stops there where you are standing, gazes longingly at me, then arranges his weapons and feeds his horse with red-hot coals, but can’t set out yet because my hour has not come. So stay and conquer him here, that he may not steal me while you are on your way, for you would then be too late in reaching your sisters. Yet mind one thing; you can not conquer him outside of his court-yard, because he is invisible. So, when he comes home, he throws his club at the gate with so much force that the earth quakes, the walls fall down, and any mortals who might be inside are buried alive. If you feel that you have strength enough to hold the gates on their hinges, so that they can not give way when he hurls the club against them, stay, otherwise go, in God’s name, for it would be a pity to lose your young lives.”

The Poor Boy and the prince looked at each other, understood that the deed must be done, and resolved to stay. While the Poor Boy went to the gates to hold them, the prince drew his sword and awaited the dragon in the middle of the court-yard. You can perceive that this was no joke.

Very little time passed, when suddenly, crash! the club struck against the iron-barred gates so that one might have believed the world was falling to pieces. The Poor Boy thought the muscles of his heart would crack in two under the terrible strain, and the walls would crumble to their foundations—but he held the gates on their hinges. When the dragon saw that the palace did not fall down, he stood still in surprise.

“What does this mean?” he said. “I must have grown very weak since yesterday.” He did not suspect what awaited him.

When, with some difficulty, he opened the gate, he did not notice the Poor Boy, but went straight toward the prince, who stood in mortal terror in the middle of the court-yard, for, after all, what would you expect? A dragon is a dragon, and not a girl in woman’s clothes.

We won't linger over the story any longer, we know what always happens when dragons and princes meet. They began the battle. The prince was a hero, but the dragon was the youngest of three brothers! They fought with swords, who knows how long? then, when they saw that neither could conquer the other in that way, they fought hand to hand, while the Poor Boy held up the palace, that it might not fall down on their heads.

When the Poor Boy saw that his strength was failing and neither was conquering the other, he called loudly: "Seize him and throw him on the ground, I can hold out no longer."

The prince grasped the dragon, summoned up all his strength, and hurled him on the ground so that his bones cracked and he lay senseless; then he hastily took to flight, ran through the half-open gate, and pulled the Poor Boy after him; the walls fell, the huge splendid palaces toppled down, and, as it were, buried the dragon alive. Nothing remained standing except the glass tower, now empty and deserted. The Bodiless Maiden had vanished from it the very moment that there was no longer any one who could have stolen her from the other world.

The two comrades thanked the Lord that they had been able to accomplish their task so far, and journeyed on, walking and walking, till they reached the palace of the second dragon. Already in the distance they saw the glass tower and heard the wailing song; but the Poor Boy's heart beat higher, because the nearer he approached the more distinctly he recognized his sister's voice. When they reached the beautiful great palace and saw the girl in the glass tower, both rushed up to break into the turret and clasp her in their arms.

But affairs could not be managed so easily. The girl in the glass tower, who was really the Poor Boy's sister, looked at them in surprise; but when he told her that he had come to rescue her from the dragon's claws, she replied that she did not know him, and that neither in face nor form did he bear any resemblance to her brother. Great was the Poor Boy's grief when he saw that his sister wanted to have nothing to do with him, though for her sake he had crossed so many moors and encountered so many dangers, but his sorrow became still greater when she began to complain that she was dying of love for the dragon. Every day, she said, he came and gazed ardently at her, yet day after day kept her a prisoner and did not marry her. Still, this was endurable to the Poor Boy, because she was only his sister; but when the prince saw the girl, heard her voice, and perceived her love for the dragon, he became perfectly frantic.

“Well then, if you won’t come, we’ll carry you off by force!” he said, ready to take the whole palace on his back and fly with it to the other shore.

“Gently, gently,” said the girl; “if it came to that, I need only pull a nail out of this glass wall to bring the whole palace toppling down upon your heads. But I pity your youth, and advise you not to stay here long, because my betrothed husband might catch you, and you will have no one to mourn for you.”

The Poor Boy now took his ash-cake from his knapsack and said: “Sister, just taste this bread, and then say that I am not your brother.”

She held out her hand and the glass walls opened; but after she had taken the bread and tasted it she felt that it had been mixed with her own mother’s milk, and was seized with such terrible homesickness that one might have wept for pity. “Forward!” she said hastily, “let us fly, for if he finds us here, woe betide you.”

The Poor Boy took her in his arms and kissed her, because she was his sister, but the prince embraced and kissed her, too, because—because he was the Poor Boy’s sworn brother.

Then they agreed to serve this dragon as they had served his brother, so they waited awhile, received the dragon as he deserved, conquered him, and after thanking God that they had overcome this peril too, journeyed on again to deliver the emperor’s daughter.

But now came fresh trouble. The princess did not want to be rescued, and the prince had no token with him by which she might have recognized him as her brother. In vain the Poor Boy told her that if she did not come willingly, he would carry her off by force; she kept her hand on the dangerous nail and it was impossible to coax her.

I must mention that it would go hard with them if they waited for the dragon; for there were only two champions, and if one held up the palace by keeping the gates on their hinges and the other waited for the dragon in the middle of the court-yard, there was no one who could protect them from the nail.

“Let me attend to it,” said the Poor Boy, who, since he had seen the princess, had grown fairly frantic. “Either his life or mine!”

As we perceive, he had determined to fight the dragon in the open ground, where he could not see him,—a thing never heard of since fairy princes first began to fight the dragon’s brood; for if it is hard to conquer a

dragon at all, it is doubly difficult to vanquish one when he is invisible, and no one had ever thought of such an exploit.

The prince and the Poor Boy's sister hid themselves in a ditch near the palace, that the dragon might not see them; but the Poor Boy stationed himself a little behind the gate and waited for the dragon to hurl his club, in order to get near him, for when he no longer had a club he would be obliged to fight either with his sword or with his fists.

Ere long, crash! the club struck the iron-barred gate, but the Poor Boy was not slow, he opened the other gate and ran out with it, leaving the palace to fall in ruins behind him.

"Come on, if you have the courage to show yourself," he shouted, believing that the dragon would make some reply and thus betray himself.

But the dragon felt that he had found his match, and did not think of speaking, but, invisible to the youth, approached, drew his sword, and aimed straight at his enemy's head to hack it off, but the blow only broke the lad's jaw. The wound hurt the Poor Boy, but it pleased him, too, because he now knew where to look for his foe; so he rushed in the direction from which the blow had come, struck out, and felt that he hit flesh, struck again, and again felt that he had hit, and so continued to deal short, swift thrusts, with which he drove the dragon before the point of his sword. Suddenly he perceived that he no longer hit any thing and the dragon had escaped, so he stood cowering, like a person who does not know from whence the next blow will come.

The dragon again aimed straight at the Poor Boy's head, and as he hacked, struck off his right ear.

"I'll pay you for that," shouted the youth, rushing upon him again. But his strength was now greatly diminished, and he only hit the dragon twice before he lost him from the point of his saber.

The princess was watching their battle from her tower, which had remained standing, and as she watched wondered at the Poor Boy's heroic courage; but when she saw the dragon aiming a third blow at the youth's head, she called: "Dear hero, turn to the right and spit three times, then you can see your foe."

When the Poor Boy heard this, he felt a hundred thousand times stronger than he had been before, and as he turned to the right, spit, and saw the dragon, he rushed upon him, seized him in his arms, and squeezed him so that he crushed all his bones and flung him on the ground as dead as a mouse.

The prince and the Poor Boy lost no time, but prepared to journey home. The princess kissed the Poor Boy and his ear and his chin instantly healed, so that he looked even handsomer than before. Then the two comrades went to the dragon's stables, which were hidden under the foundations of the fallen palace. Each took an enchanted horse, mounted, lifted his betrothed bride upon it, and hurried homeward.

If the Red Emperor had been only an ordinary mortal he would have rejoiced, but he was a sovereign to boot! He divided his empire between his son and his daughter's husband; the Poor Boy went to his poor mother's house to bring her to court and, when she had arrived, a wedding was celebrated, dear me! a wedding that will be talked about as long as the world stands.

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

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