



Valiant Vicky, the Brave

Warrior

Flora Annie Steel

Indian

Advanced
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Once upon a time there lived a little weaver, by name Victor Prince, but because his head was big, his legs thin, and he was altogether small, and weak, and ridiculous, his neighbours called him Vicky—Little Vicky the Weaver.

But despite his size, his thin legs, and his ridiculous appearance, Vicky was very valiant, and loved to *talk* for hours of his bravery, and the heroic acts he would perform if Fate gave him an opportunity. Only Fate did not, and in consequence Vicky remained little Vicky the valiant weaver, who was laughed at by all for his boasting.

Now one day, as Vicky was sitting at his loom, weaving, a mosquito settled on his left hand just as he was throwing the shuttle from his right hand, and by chance, after gliding swiftly through the warp, the shuttle came flying into his left hand on the very spot where the mosquito had settled, and squashed it. Seeing this, Vicky became desperately excited: 'It is as I have always said,' he cried; 'if I only had the chance I knew I could show my mettle! Now, I'd like to know how many people could have done that? Killing a mosquito is easy, and throwing a shuttle is easy, but to do both at one time is a mighty different affair! It is easy enough to shoot a great hulking man—there is something to see, something to aim at; then guns and crossbows are made for

shooting; but to shoot a *mosquito* with a *shuttle* is quite another thing. That requires a man!

The more he thought over the matter, the more elated he became over his skill and bravery, until he determined that he would no longer suffer himself to be called 'Vicky.' No! now that he had shown his mettle he would be called 'Victor'—'Victor Prince'—or better still, 'Prince Victor'; that was a name worthy his merits. But when he announced this determination to the neighbours, they roared with laughter, and though some did call him Prince Victor, it was with such sniggering and giggling and mock reverence that the little man flew home in a rage. Here he met with no better reception, for his wife, a fine handsome young woman, who was tired to death by her ridiculous little husband's whims and fancies, sharply bade him hold his tongue and not make a fool of himself. Upon this, beside himself with pride and mortification, he seized her by the hair, and beat her most unmercifully. Then, resolving to stay no longer in a town where his merits were unrecognised, he bade her prepare some bread for a journey, and set about packing his bundle.

'I will go into the world!' he said to himself. 'The man who can shoot a mosquito dead with a shuttle ought not to hide his light under a bushel!' So off he set, with his bundle, his shuttle, and a loaf of bread tied up in a kerchief.

Now as he journeyed he came to a city where a dreadful elephant came daily to make a meal off the inhabitants. Many mighty warriors had gone against it, but none had returned. On hearing this the valiant little weaver thought to himself, 'Now is my chance! A great haystack of an elephant will be a fine mark to a man who has shot a mosquito with a shuttle!' So he went to the King, and announced that he proposed single-handed to meet and slay the elephant. At first the King thought the little man was mad, but as he persisted in his words, he told him that he was free to try his luck if he chose to run the risk; adding that many better men than he had failed.

Nevertheless, our brave weaver was nothing daunted; he even refused to take either sword or bow, but strutted out to meet the elephant armed only with his shuttle.

'It is a weapon I thoroughly understand, good people,' he replied boastfully to those who urged him to choose some more deadly arm, 'and it has done its work in its time, I can tell you!'

It was a beautiful sight to see little Vicky swaggering out to meet his enemy, while the townsfolk flocked to the

walls to witness the fight. Never was such a valiant weaver till the elephant, describing its tiny antagonist, trumpeted fiercely, and charged right at him, and then, alas! all the little man's courage disappeared, and forgetting his new name of Prince Victor he dropped his bundle, his shuttle, and his bread, and bolted away as fast as Vicky's legs could carry him.

Now it so happened that his wife had made the bread ever so sweet, and had put all sorts of tasty spices in it, because she wanted to hide the flavour of the poison she had put in it also; for she was a wicked, revengeful woman, who wanted to be rid of her tiresome, whimsical little husband. And so, as the elephant charged past, it smelt the delicious spices, and catching up the bread with its long trunk, gobbled it up without stopping an instant. Meanwhile fear lent speed to Vicky's short legs, but though he ran like a hare, the elephant soon overtook him. In vain he doubled and doubled, and the beast's hot breath was on him, when in sheer desperation he turned, hoping to bolt through the enormous creature's legs; being half blind with fear, however, he ran full tilt against them instead. Now, as luck would have it, at that very moment the poison took effect, and the elephant fell to the ground stone dead.

When the spectators saw the monster fall they could scarcely believe their eyes, but their astonishment was greater still when, running up to the scene of action, they found Valiant Vicky seated in triumph on the elephant's head, calmly mopping his face with his handkerchief.

'I had to pretend to run away,' he explained, 'or the coward would never have engaged me. Then I gave him a little push, and he fell down, as you see. Elephants are big beasts, but they have no strength to speak of.'

The good folks were amazed at the careless way in which Valiant Vicky spoke of his achievement, and as they had been too far off to see very distinctly what had occurred, they went and told the King that the little weaver was just a feaiful wee man, and had knocked over the elephant like a ninepin. Then the King said to himself, 'None of my warriors and wrestlers, no, not even the heroes of old, could have done this. I must secure this little man's services if I can.' So he asked Vicky why he was wandering about the world.

[Illustration: Vicky descending from the dead elephant]

'For pleasure, for service, or for conquest!' returned Valiant Vicky, laying such stress on the last word that the King, in a great hurry, made him Commander-in-Chief of his whole army, for fear he should take service

elsewhere.

So there was Valiant Vicky a mighty fine warrior, and as proud as a peacock of having fulfilled his own predictions.

'I knew it!' he would say to himself when he was dressed out in full fig, with shining armour and waving plumes, and spears, swords, and shields; 'I *felt* I had it in me!'

Now after some time a terribly savage tiger came ravaging the country, and at last the city-folk petitioned that the mighty Prince Victor might be sent out to destroy it. So out he went at the head of his army,—for he was a great man now, and had quite forgotten all about looms and shuttles. But first he made the King promise his daughter in marriage as a reward. 'Nothing for nothing!' said the astute little weaver to himself, and when the promise was given he went out as gay as a lark.

'Do not distress yourselves, good people,' he said to those who flocked round him praying for his successful return; 'it is ridiculous to suppose the tiger will have a chance. Why, I knocked over an elephant with my little finger! I am really invincible! *'

But, alas for our Valiant Vicky! No sooner did he see the tiger lashing its tail and charging down on him, than he ran for the nearest tree, and scrambled into the branches. There he sat like a monkey, while the tiger glowered at him from below. Of course when the army saw their Commander-in-Chief bolt like a mouse, they followed his example, and never stopped until they reached the city, where they spread the news that the little hero had fled up a tree.

'There let him stay!' said the King, secretly relieved, for he was jealous of the little weaver's prowess, and did not want him for a son-in-law.

Meanwhile, Valiant Vicky sat cowering in the tree, while the tiger occupied itself below with sharpening its teeth and claws, and curling its whiskers, till poor Vicky nearly tumbled into its jaws with fright. So one day, two days, three days, six days passed by; on the seventh the tiger was fiercer, hungrier, and more watchful than ever. As for the poor little weaver, he was so hungry that his hunger made him brave, and he determined to try and slip past his enemy during its mid-day snooze. He crept stealthily down inch by inch, till his foot was within a yard of the ground, and then? Why then the tiger, which had had one eye open all the time, jumped up

with a roar!

Valiant Vicky shrieked with fear, and making a tremendous effort, swung himself into a branch, cocking his little bandy legs over it to keep them out of reach, for the tiger's red panting mouth and gleaming white teeth were within half an inch of his toes. In doing so, his dagger fell out of its sheath, and went pop into the tiger's wide-open mouth, and thus point foremost down into its stomach, so that it died!

Valiant Vicky could scarcely believe his good fortune, but, after prodding at the body with a branch, and finding it did not move, he concluded the tiger really was dead, and ventured down. Then he cut off its head, and went home in triumph to the King.

'You and your warriors are a nice set of cowards!' said he, wrathfully. 'Here have I been fighting that tiger for seven days and seven nights, without bite or sup, whilst you have been guzzling and snoozing at home. Pah! it's disgusting! but I suppose every one is not a hero as I am!' So Prince Victor married the King's daughter, and was a greater man than ever.

But by and by a neighbouring prince, who bore a grudge against the King, came with a huge army, and encamped outside the city, swearing to put every man, woman, and child within it to the sword. Hearing this, the inhabitants of course cried with one accord, 'Prince Victor! Prince Victor to the rescue!' so the valiant little weaver was ordered by the King to go out and destroy the invading army, after which he was to receive half the kingdom as a reward. Now Valiant Vicky, with all his boasting, was no fool, and he said to himself, 'This is a very different affair from the others. A man may kill a mosquito, an elephant, and a tiger; yet another man may kill *him*. And here is not one man, but thousands! No, no!—what is the use of half a kingdom if you haven't a head on your shoulders? Under the circumstances I prefer *not* to be a hero!'

So in the dead of night he bade his wife rise, pack up her golden dishes, and follow him—'Not that you will want the golden dishes at my house,' he explained boastfully, 'for I have heaps and heaps, but on the journey these will be useful.' Then he crept outside the city, followed by his wife carrying the bundle, and began to steal through the enemy's camp.

Just as they were in the very middle of it, a big cockchafer flew into Valiant Vicky's face. 'Run! run!' he shrieked to his wife, in a terrible taking, and setting off as fast as he could, never stopped till he had reached his room

again and hidden under the bed. His wife set off at a run likewise, dropping her bundle of golden dishes with a clang. The noise roused the enemy, who, thinking they were attacked, flew to arms; but being half asleep, and the night being pitch-dark, they could not distinguish friend from foe, and falling on each other, fought with such fury that by next morning not one was left alive! And then, as may be imagined, great were the rejoicings at Prince Victor's prowess. 'It was a mere trifle!' remarked that valiant little gentleman modestly; 'when a man can shoot a mosquito with a shuttle, everything else is child's play.'

So he received half the kingdom, and ruled it with great dignity, refusing ever afterwards to fight, saying truly that kings never fought themselves, but paid others to fight for them.

Thus he lived in peace, and when he died every one said Valiant Vicky was the greatest hero the world had ever seen.

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