

## Tom Thumb

A poor Peasant sat one evening by his hearth and poked the fire, while his Wife sat opposite, spinning yarn. He said: 'What a sad thing it is that we have no children; our home is so quiet, while other folk's houses are noisy and cheerful with pattering feet.' 'Yes,' answered his Wife, and then she sighed; 'even if it were an only one, and if it were no bigger than my thumb, I should be quite content; and we would love the child with all our hearts.'

Now, some time after this, she had a little boy who was strong and healthy, but who was no bigger than a thumb. Then they said: 'Well, our wish has been fulfilled, and small as he is, we will love him dearly.' Because of his tiny stature they called him Tom Thumb. They let him want for nothing, yet still the child grew no bigger, but remained the same size as when he was born. Still, he looked out on the world with intelligent eyes, and soon showed himself to be a clever and agile creature, who was lucky in all that he attempted. One day, when the Peasant was preparing to go into the forest to cut wood, the peasant said to himself: 'I wish that I had someone to bring the cart after me.'

'O Father!' said Tom Thumb, 'I will soon bring it. You leave it to me; it shall be there at the appointed time.' The Peasant laughed, and said: 'How can that be? You are much too small even to hold the reins.' 'That doesn't matter, if only Mother will harness the horse,' answered Tom, 'I will sit in his ear and tell him where to go.'

'Very well,' said the Father; 'we will try it for once.' When the time came, the Mother harnessed the horse, set Tom in his ear, and then Tom Thumb called out; 'Gee-up' and 'Whoa' in turn, and directed it where to go. It went quite well, just as though its master was driving it; and they went the right way to the wood.

Now it happened that while the cart was turning a corner, and Tom was calling to the horse, two strange men appeared on the scene. 'My goodness,' said one, 'what is this? There goes a cart, and a driver is calling to the horse, but there is absolutely nothing to be seen.' 'There is something eerie about this,' said the other; 'we will follow the cart and see where it stops.' The cart went on deep into the forest, and arrived quite safely at the place where the wood was cut. When Tom spied his Father, he said: 'You see, Father, here I am with the cart; now lift me down.' The Father held the horse with his left hand, and took his little son out of its ear with the right. Then Tom sat down quite happily on some straw. When the two strangers noticed him, they did not know what to say for astonishment. Then one drew the other aside, and said: 'Listen, that little creature might make our fortune if we were to show him in the town for money. We will buy him.' So they went up to the Peasant, and said: 'Sell us the little man; he shall be well looked after with us.' 'No,' said the Peasant; 'he is the delight of my eyes. I would not sell him for all the gold in the world.' But Tom Thumb, when he heard the bargain, crept up by the folds of his Father's coat, placed himself on his shoulder, and whispered in his ear: 'Father, let me go; for I will soon come back again.' Then his Father gave him to the two men for a fine piece of valuable gold. 'Where will you sit?' they asked him. 'Oh, put me on the brim of your hat, then I can walk up and down and observe the neighbourhood without falling down and breaking my bones.' They did as he wished, and when Tom had said his good-byes to his Father, they went away with him.

They walked on till it was twilight, when the little man said to them: 'You must lift me down.' 'Stay where you are,' answered the Man on whose head he sat. 'No,' said Tom; 'I must come down. Lift me down right now.' The Man took off his hat and set the little

creature in a field by the wayside where Tom jumped and crept about for a time, here and there among the sods.

Then he slipped suddenly into a mouse-hole, which he had discovered. 'Good evening, gentlemen, just you go home without me,' he called out to them in mockery. They ran about and poked with sticks into the mouse hole, but it was all in vain. Tom crept further and further back and as it soon got quite dark, the men were forced to go home, full of anger, and with empty purses. When Tom noticed that they were gone, he crept out of his underground hiding-place again. 'It is dangerous walking in this field in the dark,' he said to himself; 'I can pass the night in safety here,' and having said that, he sat down. Not long after, when he was about to go to sleep, he heard two men pass by. One of them said: 'How shall we set about stealing the rich parson's gold and silver?' 'I can tell you,' interrupted Tom. 'What was that?' said the thief in a fright. 'I heard someone speak out loud.' They remained standing and listened intently. Then Tom spoke again: 'Take me with you and I will always be there to help you.' 'Where are you?' they asked. 'Just look on the ground and see where the voice comes from,' he answered. At last the thieves found him, and lifted him up. 'You little urchin, How can YOU possibly help us?' 'I can help,' said Tom; 'I will creep between the iron bars in the pastor's room, and will hand out to you whatever you want.'

When they came to the Parsonage, Tom crept into the room, but called out immediately with all his strength to the others: 'Do you want everything that is here?' The thieves were startled, and said: 'Do speak softly, and don't wake anyone.' But Tom pretended not to hear them, and called out again: 'What do you want? Everything?' The Cook, who slept above, heard him and sat up in bed, listening for more. But the thieves were so frightened now that they retreated a little way. At last they summoned up courage again and thought to themselves, 'The little rogue wants to tease us.' So they came back and whispered to him: 'Now, do be serious and hand us out something.' Then Tom called out again, as loud as he could, 'I will give you everything if only you hold out your hands.' The Maid, who'd been listening as well, heard him quite distinctly. She jumped out of bed and then stumbled sleepily to the door.

The thieves turned and fled, running as though wild huntsmen were after them. The Maid, seeing nothing, went to get a light for herself. When she came back with it, Tom, without being seen, slipped out into the barn. The Maid searched every corner and could find nothing. She went to bed again, thinking that she must have been dreaming with her eyes and ears open. Tom Thumb climbed about in the hay, and found a splendid place to sleep in. There he determined to rest till day came, and then to go home to his loving parents. But he had more experiences to go through first, in this world of trouble and sorrow! The Maid got up in the grey dawn to feed the cows. First she went into the barn, where she piled up an armful of hay, the very bundle in which poor Tom was asleep. But he slept so soundly that he knew of nothing till he was almost in the large mouth of the cow, which was eating him up with the hay.

'Heavens!' he said disoriented, 'however did I get myself into this mill?' But he soon saw where he was, and the great thing was to avoid being crushed between the cow's flat molars. But finally, whether he liked it or not, he had to go down the cow's throat anyway. 'The windows have been forgotten in this house,' said Tom to himself. 'The sun does not shine into it, and no light of any kind has been provided.' Altogether he was very ill pleased with his quarters, and worst of all, more and more hay came in at the door, causing the already precious little space to grow narrower and narrower. At last he called out, in his fear, as loud as he could; 'Don't give me any more

food. Please, don't give me any more food. It's enough already!' The Maid was just milking the cow, and when she heard the same voice as in the night, without seeing anyone, she became very frightened and slipped from her stool, spilling all of the milk. Then, in the greatest haste, she ran to her master, and said: 'Oh, your Reverence, the cow has spoken to me!' 'You are mad,' he answered; but then went into the stable himself to see what was happening. Scarcely had he set foot in the cow-shed before Tom began again; 'Oh, no, don't bring me any more food.' Then the Pastor was terrified too, and thought that the cow must be bewitched somehow and so he ordered for it to be killed. It was accordingly slaughtered, but the stomach in which Tom was hidden, was thrown into the manure heap where Tom had the greatest trouble in working his way out.

But just as he stuck out his head, a hungry Wolf ran by and snapped up the whole stomach with one bite. Still, Tom did not lose his courage. 'Perhaps the Wolf will listen to reason,' he said. So he called out, 'Dear Wolf, I know where you would find a magnificent meal.' 'Where is it to be had?' asked the Wolf astonished. 'Why, in such and such a house,' answered Tom. 'You must squeeze through the grating of the small store-room window, and there you will find cakes, bacon, and even sausages, as many as you can possibly eat'; and then he went on to describe his father's house. The Wolf did not wait to hear this twice. During the night he forced himself in through the grating, and ate to his heart's content. Satisfied, he wanted to go away into the night again; but he had grown so fat that he could not get out the same way.

Tom had reckoned on this, and began to make a great commotion inside the Wolf's body, struggling and screaming with all his might. 'Be quiet,' said the Wolf; 'you will wake up the people of this house. Then I'll get caught.' 'All very fine,' answered Tom. 'You have eaten your fill, and now I am going to make merry;' and then he began to scream again with all his might. At last his father and mother woke up, ran to the room, and looked through the crack of the door. When they saw the Wolf, they went away, and the husband fetched his axe. His wife was armed with a scythe. 'You stay behind,' said he, as they came upon the room. 'If my blow does not kill him, you must attack and rip up his body with your scythe.' When Tom heard his Father's voice, he called out: 'Dear Father, I am here, inside the Wolf's body.' Full of joy, his Father cried, "Heaven be praised! Our dear child is found again,' and he bade his wife throw aside the scythe so that it might not injure Tom. Then he gathered himself together, and struck the Wolf a blow on the head, so that it fell down lifeless. Then with knives and shears they ripped up the body, and were finally able to take their little boy out.

'Ah,' said his Father, 'what sorrow we have been in about you.' 'Yes, Father, I have travelled about the world, and I am thankful to breathe fresh air again.' 'Wherever have you been?' they asked. 'Down a mouse-hole, a Cow's stomach, and in a Wolf's maw,' he replied; 'but now I shall stay with you.' 'And we will never sell you again, for all the riches in the world,' they said, kissing and hugging their dear child. Then they gave him food and drink, and had new clothes made for him since his old ones had been spoilt during his travels.