



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

Tom Thumb

From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock



n the days of King Arthur, Merlin, the most learned enchanter of his time, was on a journey; and being very weary, stopped one day at the cottage of an honest ploughman to ask for refreshment. The ploughman's wife, with great civility, immediately brought him some milk in a wooden bowl, and some brown bread on a wooden platter. Merlin could not help observing, that although everything within the cottage was particularly neat and clean, and in good order, the ploughman and his wife had the most sorrowful air imaginable: so he questioned them on the cause of their melancholy, and learned that they were very miserable because they had no children. The poor woman declared, with tears in her eyes, that she should be the happiest creature in the world, if she had a son, although he were no bigger than his father's thumb. Merlin was much amused with the notion of a boy no bigger than a man's thumb; and as soon as he returned home, he sent for the queen of the fairies (with whom he was very intimate), and related to her the desire of the ploughman and his wife to have a son the size of his father's thumb. She liked the plan exceedingly, and declared their wish should be speedily granted. Accordingly, the ploughman's wife had a son, who in a few minutes grew as tall as his father's thumb. The queen of the fairies came in at the window as the mother was sitting up in bed admiring the child. Her majesty kissed the infant, and, giving it the name of Tom Thumb, immediately summoned several fairies from Fairyland, to clothe her new little favourite:—

“An oak-leaf hat he had for his crown,

His shirt it was by spiders spun:

With doublet wove of thistledown,

His trousers up with points were done;

His stockings, of apple-rind, they tie

With eye-lash pluck'd from his mother's eye:

His shoes were made of a mouse's skin,

Nicely tann'd with hair within.”

Tom was never any bigger than his father's thumb, which was not a large thumb neither; but as he grew older, he became very cunning, for which his mother did not sufficiently correct him: and by this ill quality he was often brought into difficulties. For instance, when he had learned to play with other boys for cherry-stones, and had lost all his own, he used to creep into the boys' bags, fill his pockets, and come out again to play. But one day as he was getting out of a bag of cherry-stones, the boy to whom it belonged chanced to see him.

“Ah, ha, my little Tom Thumb!” said he, “have I caught you at your bad tricks at last? Now I will reward you for thieving.” Then drawing the string tight round his neck, and shaking the bag, the cherry-stones bruised Tom's legs, thighs, and body sadly; which made him beg to be let out, and promise never to be guilty of such things any more.

Shortly afterwards Tom's mother was making a batter-pudding, and that he might see how she mixed it, he climbed on the edge of the bowl; but his foot happening to slip, he fell over head and ears into the batter, and his mother, not observing him, stirred him into the pudding, and popped him into the pot to boil. The hot water made Tom kick and struggle; and his mother, seeing the pudding jump up and down in such a furious manner, thought it was bewitched; and a tinker coming by just at the time, she quickly gave him the pudding; he put it into his budget, and walked on.

As soon as Tom could get the batter out of his mouth, he began to cry aloud, which so frightened the poor tinker, that he flung the pudding over the hedge, and ran away from it as fast as he could. The pudding being broken to pieces by the fall, Tom was released, and walked home to his mother, who gave him a kiss and put him to bed.

Tom Thumb's mother once took him with her when she went to milk the cow; and it being a very windy day, she tied him with a needleful of thread to a thistle, that he might not be blown away. The cow, liking his oak-leaf hat, took him and the thistle up at one mouthful. While the cow chewed the thistle, Tom, terrified at her great teeth, which seemed ready to crush him to pieces, roared, "Mother, mother!" as loud as he could bawl.

"Where are you, Tommy, my dear Tommy?" said the mother.

"Here, mother, here in the red cow's mouth."

The mother began to cry and wring her hands; but the cow, surprised at such odd noises in her throat, opened her mouth and let him drop out. His mother clapped him into her apron, and ran home with him. Tom's father made him a whip of a barley straw to drive the cattle with, and being one day in the field he slipped into a deep furrow. A raven flying over picked him up with a grain of corn, and flew with him to the top of a giant's castle by the sea-side, where he left him; and old Grumbo, the giant, coming soon after to walk upon his terrace, swallowed Tom like a pill, clothes and all. Tom presently made the giant very uncomfortable, and he threw him up into the sea. A great fish then swallowed him. This fish was soon after caught, and sent as a present to King Arthur. When it was cut open, everybody was delighted with little Tom Thumb. The king made him his dwarf; he was the favourite of the whole court; and, by his merry pranks, often amused the queen and the knights of the Round Table. The king, when he rode on horseback, frequently took Tom in his hand; and if a shower of rain came on, he used to creep into the king's waist-coat-pocket, and sleep till the rain was over. The king also sometimes questioned Tom concerning his parents; and when Tom informed his majesty they were very poor people, the king led him into his treasury, and told him he should pay his friends a visit, and take with him as much money as he could carry. Tom procured a little purse, and putting a threepenny piece into it, with much labour and difficulty got it upon his back; and after travelling two days and nights, arrived at his father's house. His mother met him at the door, almost tired to death, having in forty-eight hours travelled almost half a mile with a huge silver threepence upon his back. Both his parents were glad to see him, especially when he had brought such an amazing sum of money with him. They placed him in a walnut-shell by the fireside, and feasted him for three days upon a hazel-nut, which made him sick, for a whole nut usually served him for a month. Tom got well, but could not travel because it had rained: therefore his mother took

him in her hand, and with one puff blew him into King Arthur's court; where Tom entertained the king, queen, and nobility at tilts and tournaments, at which he exerted himself so much that he brought on a fit of sickness, and his life was despaired of. At this juncture the queen of the fairies came in a chariot, drawn by flying mice, placed Tom by her side, and drove through the air, without stopping till they arrived at her palace; when, after restoring him to health and permitting him to enjoy all the gay diversions of Fairyland, she commanded a fair wind, and, placing Tom before it, blew him straight to the court of King Arthur. But just as Tom should have alighted in the courtyard of the palace, the cook happened to pass along with the king's great bowl of furmenty (King Arthur loved furmenty), and poor Tom Thumb fell plump into the middle of it, and splashed the hot furmenty into the cook's eyes. Down went the bowl.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried Tom.

"Murder! murder!" bellowed the cook; and away poured the king's nice furmenty into the kennel.

The cook was a red-faced, cross fellow, and swore to the king that Tom had done it out of mere mischief; so he was taken up, tried, and sentenced to be beheaded. Tom hearing this dreadful sentence, and seeing a miller stand by with his mouth wide open, he took a good spring, and jumped down the miller's throat, unperceived by all, even by the miller himself.

Tom being lost, the court broke up, and away went the miller to his mill. But Tom did not leave him long at rest: he began to roll and tumble about, so that the miller thought himself bewitched, and sent for a doctor. When the doctor came, Tom began to dance and sing; the doctor was as much frightened as the miller, and sent in great haste for five more doctors and twenty learned men. While all these were debating upon the affair, the miller (for they were very tedious) happened to yawn, and Tom, taking the opportunity, made another jump, and alighted on his feet in the middle of the table. The miller, provoked to be thus tormented by such a little creature, fell into a great passion, caught hold of Tom, and threw him out of the window into the river. A large salmon swimming by snapped him up in a minute. The salmon was soon caught and sold in the market to a steward of a lord. The lord, thinking it an uncommon fine fish, made a present of it to the king, who ordered it to be dressed immediately. When the cook cut open the salmon, he found poor Tom, and ran with him directly to the king; but the king, being busy with state affairs, desired that he might be brought another day. The cook resolving to keep him safely this time, as he had so lately given him the slip, clapped him into a mouse-trap, and left him to amuse himself by peeping through the wires for a whole week; when the king sent for him, he forgave him for throwing down the furmenty, ordered him new clothes, and knighted him:—

"His shirt was made of butterflies' wings,

His boots were made of chicken skins;

His coat and breeches were made with pride:

A tailor's needle hung by his side;

A mouse for a horse he used to ride.”

Thus dressed and mounted, he rode a-hunting with the king and nobility, who all laughed heartily at Tom and his fine prancing steed. As they rode by a farmhouse one day, a cat jumped from behind the door, seized the mouse and little Tom, and began to devour the mouse; however, Tom boldly drew his sword and attacked the cat, who then let him fall. The king and his nobles, seeing Tom falling, went to his assistance, and one of the lords caught him in his hat; but poor Tom was sadly scratched, and his clothes were torn by the claws of the cat. In this condition he was carried home, when a bed of down was made for him in a little ivory cabinet. The queen of the fairies came and took him again to Fairyland, where she kept him for some years; and then, dressing him in bright green, sent him flying once more through the air to the earth, in the days of King Thunstone. The people flocked far and near to look at him; and the king, before whom he was carried, asked him who he was, whence he came, and where he lived? Tom answered:—

“My name Is Tom Thumb,

From the Fairies I come;

When King Arthur shone,

This court was my home.

In me he delighted,

By him I was knighted;

Did you never hear of

Sir Thomas Thumb?”

The king was so charmed with this address, that he ordered a little chair to be made, in order that Tom might sit on his table, and also a palace of gold a span high, with a door an inch wide, for little Tom to live in. He also gave him a coach drawn by six small mice, This made the queen angry, because she had not a new coach too: therefore, resolving to ruin Tom, she complained to the king that he had behaved very insolently to her. The king sent for him in a rage. Tom, to escape his fury, crept into an empty snail-shell, and there lay till he was almost starved; when, peeping out of the hole, he saw a fine butterfly settle on the ground: he now ventured out, and getting astride, the butterfly took wing, and mounted into the air with little Tom on his back. Away he flew from field to field, from tree to tree, till at last he flew to the king’s court. The king, queen, and nobles, all strove to catch the butterfly, but could not. At length poor Tom, having neither bridle nor saddle, slipped from his seat, and fell into a watering-pot, where he was found almost drowned. The queen vowed he should be guillotined; but while the guillotine was getting ready, he was secured once more in a mouse-trap; when the cat, seeing something stir, and supposing it to be a mouse, patted the trap about till she broke it, and set Tom at liberty. Soon afterwards a spider, taking him for a fly,

made at him. Tom drew his sword and fought valiantly, but the spider's poisonous breath overcame him:—

“He fell dead on the ground where late he had stood,

And the spider suck'd up the last drop of his blood.”

King Thunstone and his whole court went into mourning for little Tom Thumb. They buried him under a rosebush, and raised a nice white marble monument over his grave, with the following epitaph:—

“Here lies Tom Thumb, King Arthur's knight,

Who died by a spider's cruel bite.

He was well known in Arthur's court,

Where he afforded gallant sport;

He rode at tilt and tournament,

And on a mouse a-hunting went;

Alive he fill'd the court with mirth,

His death to sorrow soon gave birth.

Wipe, wipe your eyes, and shake your head,

And cry, ‘Alas! Tom Thumb is dead.’”

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