

Tom Thumb

There was once a poor countryman who used to sit in the chimney-corner all evening and poke the fire, while his wife sat at her spinning-wheel. And he used to say, "How dull it is without any children about us; our house is so quiet, and other people's houses so noisy and merry!" - "Yes," answered his wife, and sighed, "if we could only have one, and that one ever so little, no bigger than my thumb, how happy I should be! It would, indeed, be having our heart's desire." Now, it happened that after a while the woman had a child who was perfect in all his limbs, but no bigger than a thumb. Then the parents said, "He is just what we wished for, and we will love him very much," and they named him according to his stature, "Tom Thumb." And though they gave him plenty of nourishment, he grew no bigger, but remained exactly the same size as when he was first born; and he had very good faculties, and was very quick and prudent, so that all he did prospered.

One day his father made ready to go into the forest to cut wood, and he said, as if to himself, "Now, I wish there was some one to bring the cart to meet me." - "O father," cried Tom Thumb, "I can bring the cart, let me alone for that, and in proper time, too!" Then the father laughed, and said, "How will you manage that? You are much too little to hold the reins." - "That has nothing to do with it, father; while my mother goes on with her spinning I will sit in the horse's ear and tell him where to go." - "Well," answered the father, "we will try it for once." When it was time to set off, the mother went on spinning, after setting Tom Thumb in the horse's ear; and so he drove off, crying, "Gee-up, gee-wo!" So the horse went on quite as if his master were driving him, and drew the waggon along the right road to the wood. Now it happened just as they turned a corner, and the little fellow was calling out "Gee-up!" that two strange men passed by. "Look," said one of them, "how is this? There goes a waggon, and the driver is calling to the horse, and yet he is nowhere to be seen." - "It is very strange," said the other; "we will follow the waggon, and see where it belongs." And the wagon went right through the wood, up to the place where the wood had been hewed. When Tom Thumb caught sight of his father, he cried out, "Look, father, here am I with the wagon; now, take me

down." The father held the horse with his left hand, and with the right he lifted down his little son out of the horse's ear, and Tom Thumb sat down on a stump, quite happy and content. When the two strangers saw him they were struck dumb with wonder. At last one of them, taking the other aside, said to him, "Look here, the little chap would make our fortune if we were to show him in the town for money. Suppose we buy him." So they went up to the woodcutter, and said, "Sell the little man to us; we will take care he shall come to no harm." - "No," answered the father; "he is the apple of my eye, and not for all the money in the world would I sell him." But Tom Thumb, when he heard what was going on, climbed up by his father's coat tails, and, perching himself on his shoulder, he whispered in his ear, "Father, you might as well let me go. I will soon come back again." Then the father gave him up to the two men for a large piece of money. They asked him where he would like to sit, "Oh, put me on the brim of your hat," said he. "There I can walk about and view the country, and be in no danger of falling off." So they did as he wished, and when Tom Thumb had taken leave of his father, they set off all together. And they travelled on until it grew dusk, and the little fellow asked to be set down a little while for a change, and after some difficulty they consented. So the man took him down from his hat, and set him in a field by the roadside, and he ran away directly, and, after creeping about among the furrows, he slipped suddenly into a mouse-hole, just what he was looking for. "Good evening, my masters, you can go home without me!" cried he to them, laughing. They ran up and felt about with their sticks in the mouse-hole, but in vain. Tom Thumb crept farther and farther in, and as it was growing dark, they had to make the best of their way home, full of vexation, and with empty purses.

When Tom Thumb found they were gone, he crept out of his hiding-place underground. "It is dangerous work groping about these holes in the darkness," said he; "I might easily break my neck." But by good fortune he came upon an empty snail shell. "That's all right," said he. "Now I can get safely through the night;" and he settled himself down in it. Before he had time to get to sleep, he heard two men pass by, and one was saying to the other, "How can we manage to get hold of the

rich parson's gold and silver?" - "I can tell you how," cried Tom Thumb. "How is this?" said one of the thieves, quite frightened, "I hear some one speak!" So they stood still and listened, and Tom Thumb spoke again. "Take me with you; I will show you how to do it!" - "Where are you, then?" asked they. "Look about on the ground and notice where the voice comes from," answered he. At last they found him, and lifted him up. "You little elf," said they, "how can you help us?" - "Look here," answered he, "I can easily creep between the iron bars of the parson's room and hand out to you whatever you would like to have." - "Very well," said they, "if we will try what you can do." So when they came to the parsonage-house, Tom Thumb crept into the room, but cried out with all his might, "Will you have all that is here?" So the thieves were terrified, and said, "Do speak more softly, lest any one should be awaked." But Tom Thumb made as if he did not hear them, and cried out again, "What would you like? will you have all that is here?" so that the cook, who was sleeping in a room hard by, heard it, and raised herself in bed and listened. The thieves, however, in their fear of being discovered, had run back part of the way, but they took courage again, thinking that it was only a jest of the little fellow's. So they came back and whispered to him to be serious, and to hand them out something. Then Tom Thumb called out once more as loud as he could, "Oh yes, I will give it all to you, only put out your hands." Then the listening maid heard him distinctly that time, and jumped out of bed, and burst open the door. The thieves ran off as if the wild huntsman were behind them; but the maid, as she could see nothing, went to fetch a light. And when she came back with one, Tom Thumb had taken himself off, without being seen by her, into the barn; and the maid, when she had looked in every hole and corner and found nothing, went back to bed at last, and thought that she must have been dreaming with her eyes and ears open.

So Tom Thumb crept among the hay, and found a comfortable nook to sleep in, where he intended to remain until it was day, and then to go home to his father and mother. But other things were to befall him; indeed, there is nothing but trouble and worry in this world! The maid got up at dawn of day to feed the cows. The first place she went to was the barn, where she took up an armful of hay, and it happened to be the very heap in which Tom Thumb lay asleep. And he was so fast asleep, that he was aware of nothing, and

never waked until he was in the mouth of the cow, who had taken him up with the hay. "Oh dear," cried he, "how is it that I have got into a mill!" but he soon found out where he was, and he had to be very careful not to get between the cow's teeth, and at last he had to descend into the cow's stomach. "The windows were forgotten when this little room was built," said he, "and the sunshine cannot get in; there is no light to be had." His quarters were in every way unpleasant to him, and, what was the worst, new hay was constantly coming in, and the space was being filled up. At last he cried out in his extremity, as loud as he could, "No more hay for me! no more hay for me!" The maid was then milking the cow, and as she heard a voice, but could see no one, and as it was the same voice that she had heard in the night, she was so frightened that she fell off her stool, and spilt the milk. Then she ran in great haste to her master, crying, "Oh, master dear, the cow spoke!" - "You must be crazy," answered her master, and he went himself to the cow-house to see what was the matter. No sooner had he put his foot inside the door, than Tom Thumb cried out again, "No more hay for me! no more hay for me!" Then the parson himself was frightened, supposing that a bad spirit had entered into the cow, and he ordered her to be put to death. So she was killed, but the stomach, where Tom Thumb was lying, was thrown upon a dunghill. Tom Thumb had great trouble to work his way out of it, and he had just made a space big enough for his head to go through, when a new misfortune happened. A hungry wolf ran up and swallowed the whole stomach at one gulp. But Tom Thumb did not lose courage. "Perhaps," thought he, "the wolf will listen to reason," and he cried out from the inside of the wolf, "My dear wolf, I can tell you where to get a splendid meal!" - "Where is it to be had?" asked the wolf. "In such and such a house, and you must creep into it through the drain, and there you will find cakes and bacon and broth, as much as you can eat," and he described to him his father's house. The wolf needed not to be told twice. He squeezed himself through the drain in the night, and feasted in the store-room to his heart's content. When, at last, he was satisfied, he wanted to go away again, but he had become so big, that to creep the same way back was impossible. This Tom Thumb had reckoned upon, and began to make a terrible din inside the wolf, crying and calling as loud as he could. "Will you be quiet?" said the wolf; "you will wake the folks up!" - "Look here," cried the little

man, "you are very well satisfied, and now I will do something for my own enjoyment," and began again to make all the noise he could. At last the father and mother were awakened, and they ran to the room-door and peeped through the chink, and when they saw a wolf in occupation, they ran and fetched weapons - the man an axe, and the wife a scythe. "Stay behind," said the man, as they entered the room; "when I have given him a blow, and it does not seem to have killed him, then you must cut at him with your scythe." Then Tom Thumb heard his father's voice, and cried, "Dear father; I am here in the wolf's inside." Then the father called out full of joy, "Thank heaven that we have found our dear child!" and told his wife to keep the scythe out of the way, lest Tom Thumb should be hurt with it. Then he drew near and struck the wolf such a blow on the head that he fell down dead; and then" he fetched a knife and a pair of scissors, slit up the wolf's body, and let out the little fellow. "Oh, what anxiety we have felt about you!" said the father. "Yes, father, I have seen a good deal of the world, and I am very glad to breathe fresh air again." - "And where have you been all this time?" asked his father. "Oh, I have been in a mouse-hole and a snail's shell, in a cow's stomach and a wolf's inside: now, I think, I will stay at home." - "And we will not part with you for all the kingdoms of the world," cried the parents, as they kissed and hugged their dear little Tom Thumb. And they gave him something to eat and drink, and a new suit of clothes, as his old ones were soiled with travel.

* * *