

Doll i' The Grass

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
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Once on a time there was a King who had twelve sons. When they were grown big he told them they must go out into the world and win themselves wives, but these wives must each be able to spin, and weave, and sew a shirt in one day, else he wouldn't have them for daughters-in-law.

To each he gave a horse and a new suit of mail, and they went out into the world to look after their brides; but when they had gone a bit of the way, they said they wouldn't have Boots, their youngest brother, with them--he wasn't fit for anything.

Well, Boots had to stay behind, and he didn't know what to do or whither to turn; and so he grew so downcast, he got off his horse, and sat down in the tall grass to weep. But when he had sat a little while, one of the tufts in the grass began to stir and move, and out of it came a little white thing, and when it came nearer, Boots saw it was a charming little lassie, only such a tiny bit of a thing. So the lassie went up to him, and asked if he would come down below and see 'Doll i' the Grass'.

Yes, he'd be very happy, and so he went.

Now, when he got down; there sat Doll i' the Grass on a chair; she was so lovely and so smart, and she asked Boots whither he was going, and what was his business.

So he told her how there were twelve brothers of them, and how the King had given them horses and mail, and said they must each go out into the world and find them a wife who could spin, and weave, and sew a shirt in a day.

'But if you'll only say at once you'll be my wife, I'll not go a step further', said Boots to Doll i' the Grass.

Well, she was willing enough, and so she made haste and span, and wove, and sewed the shirt, but it was so tiny, tiny little. It wasn't longer than so-----long.

So Boots set off home with it, but when he brought it out he was almost ashamed, it was so small. Still the King said he should have her, and so Boots set off, glad and happy to fetch his little sweetheart. So when he got to Doll i' the Grass, he wished to take her up before him on his horse; but she wouldn't have that, for she said she would sit and drive along in a silver spoon, and that she had two small white horses to draw her. So off they set, he on his horse and she on her silver spoon, and the two horses that drew her were two tiny white mice; but Boots always kept the other side of the road, he was so afraid lest he should ride over her, she was so little. So, when they had gone a bit of the way, they came to a great piece of water. Here Boots' horse got frightened, and shied across the road and upset the spoon, and Doll i' the Grass tumbled into the water. Then Boots got so sorrowful because he didn't know how to get her out again; but in a little while up came a merman with her, and now she was as well and full grown as other men and women, and far lovelier than she had been before. So he took her up before him on his horse, and rode home.

When Boots got home all his brothers had come back each with his sweetheart, but these were all so ugly, and foul, and wicked, that they had done nothing but fight with one another on the way home, and on their heads they had a kind of hat that was daubed over with tar and soot, and so the rain had run down off the hats on to their faces, till they got far uglier and nastier than they had been before. When his brothers saw Boots and his sweetheart, they were all as jealous as jealous could be of her; but the King was so overjoyed with them both, that he drove all the others away, and so Boots held his wedding-feast with Doll i' the Grass, and after that they lived well and happily together a long long time, and if they're not dead, why they're alive still.