

Lord Peter

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
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Once on a time there was a poor couple, and they had nothing in the world but three sons. What the names the two elder had I can't say, but the youngest he was called Peter. So when their father and mother died, the sons were to share what was left, but there was nothing but a porridge-pot, a griddle, and a cat.

The eldest, who was to have first choice, he took the pot; 'for', said he, 'whenever I lend the pot to any one to boil porridge, I can always get leave to scrape it'.

The second took the griddle; 'for', said he, 'whenever I lend it to any one, I'll always get a morsel of dough to make a bannock.'

But the youngest, he had no choice left him; if he was to choose anything it must be the cat.

'Well!' said he, 'if I lend the cat to any one I shan't get much by that; for if pussy gets a drop of milk, she'll want it all herself. Still, I'd best take her along with me; I shouldn't like her to go about here and starve.'

So the brothers went out into the world to try their luck, and each took his own way; but when the youngest had gorse a while, the cat said:

'Now you shall have a good turn, because you wouldn't let me stay behind in the old cottage and starve. Now, I'm off to the wood to lay hold of a fine fat head of game, and then you must go up to the king's palace that you see yonder, and say you are come with a little present for the king; and when he asks who sends it, you must say, "Why, who should it be from but Lord Peter."' "

Well! Peter hadn't waited long before back came the cat with a reindeer from the wood; she had jumped up on the reindeer's head, between his horns, and said, 'If you don't go straight to the king's palace I'll claw your eyes out.'

So the reindeer had to go whether he liked it or no.

And when Peter got to the palace he went into the kitchen with the deer, and said: 'Here I'm come with a little present for the king, if he won't despise it.'

Then the King went out into the kitchen, and when he saw the fine plump reindeer, he was very glad.

'But, my dear friend', he said, 'who in the world is it that sends me such a fine gift?'

'Oh!' said Peter, 'who should send it but Lord Peter.'

'Lord Peter! Lord Peter!' said the King. 'Pray tell me where he lives'; for he thought it a shame not to know so great a man. But that was just what the lad wouldn't tell him; he daren't do it, he said, because his master had forbidden him.

So the King gave him a good bit of money to drink his health, and bade him be sure and say all kind of pretty things, and many thanks for the present to his master when he got home.

Next day the Cat went again into the wood, and jumped up on a red deer's head, and sat between his horns, and forced him to go to the palace. Then Peter went again into the kitchen, and said he was come with a little present for the King, if he would be pleased to take it. And the King was still more glad to get the red deer than he had been to get the reindeer, and asked again who it was that sent so fine a present.

'Why, it's Lord Peter, of course', said the lad; but when the King wanted to know where Lord Peter lived, he got the same answer as the day before; and this day, too, he gave Peter a good lump of money to drink his health with.

The third day the Cat came with an elk. And so when Peter got into the palace kitchen, and said he had a little present for the King, if he'd be pleased to take it, the King came out at once into the kitchen; and when he saw the grand big elk, he was so glad he scarce knew which leg to stand on; and this day, too, he gave Peter many many more dollars--at least a hundred. He wished now, once for all, to know

where this Lord Peter lived, and asked and asked about this thing and that, but the lad said he daren't say, for his master's sake, who had strictly forbidden him to tell.

'Well, then', said the King, 'beg Lord Peter to come and see me.'

Yes, the lad would take that message; but when Peter got out into the yard again, and met the Cat, he said,

'A pretty scrape you've got me into now, for here's the King, who wants me to come and see him, and you know I've nothing to go in but these rags I stand and walk in.'

'Oh, don't be afraid about that', said the Cat; 'in three days you shall have coach and horses, and fine clothes, so fine that the gold falls from them, and then you may go and see the king very well. But mind, whatever you see in the king's palace, you must say you have far finer and grander things of your own. Don't forget that.'

No, no, Peter would bear that in mind, never fear.

So when three days were over, the Cat came with a coach and horses, and clothes, and all that Peter wanted, and altogether it was as grand as anything you ever set eyes on; so off he set, and the Cat ran alongside the coach. The King met him well and graciously; but whatever the King offered him, and whatever he showed him, Peter said, 'twas all very well, but he had far finer and better things in his own house. The King seemed not quite to believe this, but Peter stuck to what he said, and at last the King got so angry, he couldn't bear it any longer.

'Now I'll go home with you', he said, 'and see if it be true what you've been telling me, that you have far finer and better things of your own. But if you've been telling a pack of lies, Heaven help you, that's all I say.'

'Now, you've got me into a fine scrape', said Peter to the Cat, 'for here's the King coming home with me; but my home, that's not so easy to find, I think.'

'Oh! never mind', said the Cat; 'only do you drive after me as I run before.'

So off they set; first Peter, who drove after his Cat, and then the King and all his court.

But when they had driven a good bit, they came to a great flock of fine sheep, that had wool so long it almost touched the ground.

'If you'll only say', said the Cat to the Shepherd, 'this flock of sheep belongs to Lord Peter, when the King asks you, I'll give you this silver spoon', which she had taken with her from the King's palace.

Yes! he was willing enough to do that. So when the king came up, he said to the lad who watched the sheep,

'Well, I never saw so large and fine a flock of sheep in my life! Whose is it? my little lad.'

'Why', said the lad, 'whose should it be but Lord Peter's.'

A little while after they came to a great, great herd of fine brindled kine, who were all so sleek the sun shone from them.

'If you'll only say', said the Cat to the neat-herd, 'this herd is Lord Peter's, when the King asks you, I'll give you this silver ladle'; and the ladle too she had taken from the King's palace.

'Yes! with all my heart', said the neat-herd.

So when the King came up, he was quite amazed at the fine fat herd, for such a herd he had never seen before, and so he asked the neat-herd who owned those brindled kine.

'Why! who should own them but Lord Peter', said the neat-herd.

So they went on a little further, and came to a great, great drove of horses, the finest you ever saw, six of each colour, bay, and black, and brown, and chesnut.

'If you'll only say this drove of horses is Lord Peter's when the King asks you', said the Cat, 'I'll give you this silver stoop'; and the stoop too she had taken from the palace.

Yes! the lad was willing enough; and so when the King came up, he was quite amazed at the grand drove of horses, for the matches of such horses he had never yet set eyes on, he said.

So he asked the lad who watched them, whose all these blacks, and bays, and browns, and chesnuts were?

'Whose should they be', said the lad, 'but Lord Peter's.'

So when they had gone a good bit farther, they came to a castle; first there was a gate of tin, and next there was a gate of silver, and next a gate of gold. The castle itself was of silver, and so dazzling white, that it quite hurt one's eyes to look at in the sunbeams which fell on it just as they reached it.

So they went into it, and the Cat told Peter to say this was his house. As for the castle inside, it was far finer than it looked outside, for everything was pure gold--chairs, and tables, and benches, and all. And when the King had gone all over it, and seen everything high and low, he got quite shameful and downcast.

'Yes', he said at last; 'Lord Peter has everything far finer than I have, there's no gainsaying that', and so he wanted to be off home again.

But Peter begged him to stay to supper, and the King stayed, but he was sour, and surly the whole time.

So as they sat at supper, back came the Troll who owned the castle, and gave such a great knock at the door.

'WHO'S THIS EATING MY MEAT AND DRINKING MY MEAD LIKE SWINE IN HERE', roared out the Troll.

As soon as the Cat heard that, she ran down to the gate.

'Stop a bit', she said, 'and I'll tell you how the farmer sets to work to get in his winter rye.'

And so she told him such a long story about the winter rye.

'First of all, you see, he ploughs his field, and then he dungs it, and then he ploughs it again, and then he harrows it'; and so she went on till the sun rose.

'Oh, do look behind you, and there you'll see such a lovely lady', said the Cat to the Troll.

So the Troll turned round, and, of course, as soon as he saw the sun he burst.

'Now all this is yours', said the Cat to Lord Peter. 'Now, you must cut off my head; that's all I ask for what I have done for you.'

'Nay, nay', said Lord Peter, 'I'll never do any such thing, that's flat.'

'If you don't', said the Cat, 'see if I don't claw your eyes out.'

Well! so Lord Peter had to do it, though it was sore against his will. He cut off the Cat's head, but there and then she became the loveliest Princess you ever set eyes on, and Lord Peter fell in love with her at once.

'Yes! all this greatness was mine first', said the Princess, 'but a Troll bewitched me to be a Cat in your father's and mother's cottage. Now you may do as you please, whether you take me as your queen or not, for you are now king over all this realm.'

Well, well; there was little doubt Lord Peter would be willing enough to have her as his queen, and so there was a wedding that lasted eight whole days, and a feast besides; and after it was over, I stayed no longer with Lord Peter and his lovely queen, and so I can't say anything more about them.