

The Blue Belt

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
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Once on a time there was an old beggar-woman, who had gone out to beg. She had a little lad with her, and when she had got her bag full, she struck across the hills towards her own home. So when they had gone a bit up the hill-side, they came upon a little blue belt, which lay where two paths met, and the lad asked his mother's leave to pick it up.

'No', said she, 'maybe there's witchcraft in it'; and so with threats she forced him to follow her. But when they had gone a bit further, the lad said he must turn aside a moment out of the road, and meanwhile his mother sat down on a tree-stump. But the lad was a long time gone, for as soon as he got so far into the wood, that the old dame could not see him, he ran off to where the belt lay, took it up, tied it round his waist, and lo! he felt as strong as if he could lift the whole hill. When he got back, the old dame was in a great rage, and wanted to know what he had been doing all that while. You don't care how much time you waste, and yet you know the night is drawing on, and we must cross the hill before it is dark!' So on they tramped; but when they had got about half-way, the old dame grew weary, and said she must rest under a bush.

'Dear mother', said the lad, 'mayn't I just go up to the top of this high crag while you rest, and try if I can't see some sign of folk hereabouts?'

Yes! he might do that; so when he had got to the top, he saw a light shining from the north. So he ran down and told his mother.

'We must get on, mother; we are near a house, for I see a bright light shining quite close to us in the north.' Then she rose and shouldered her bag, and set off to see; but they hadn't gone far, before there stood a steep spur of the hill, right across their path.

'Just as I thought!' said the old dame; 'now we can't go a step farther; a pretty bed we shall have here!'

But the lad took the bag under one arm, and his mother under the other, and ran straight up the steep crag with them.

'Now, don't you see! don't you see that we are close to a house! don't you see the bright light?'

But the old dame said those were no Christian folk, but Trolls, for she was at home in all that forest far and near, and knew there was not a living soul in it, until you were well over the ridge, and had come down on the other side. But they went on, and in a little while they came to a great house which was all painted red.

'What's the good?' said the old dame, 'we daren't go in, for here the Trolls live.'

'Don't say so; we must go in. There must be men where the lights shine so', said the lad. So in he went, and his mother after him, but he had scarce opened the door before she swooned away, for there she saw a great stout man, at least twenty feet high, sitting on the bench.

'Good evening, grandfather!' said the lad.

'Well, here I've sat three hundred years', said the man who sat on the bench, 'and no one has ever come and called me grandfather before.' Then the lad sat down by the man's side, and began to talk to him as if they had been old friends.

'But what's come over your mother?' said the man, after they had chattered a while. 'I think she swooned away; you had better look after her.'

So the lad went and took hold of the old dame; and dragged her up the hall along the floor. That brought her to herself, and she kicked, and scratched, and flung herself about, and at last sat down upon a heap of firewood in the corner; but she was so frightened that she scarce dared to look one in the face.

After a while, the lad asked if they could spend the night there.

'Yes, to be sure', said the man.

So they went on talking again, but the lad soon got hungry, and wanted to know if they could get food as well as lodging.

'Of course', said the man, 'that might be got too.' And after he had sat a while longer, he rose up and threw six loads of dry pitch-pine on the fire. This made the old hag still more afraid.

'Oh! now he's going to roast us alive', she said, in the corner where she sat.

And when the wood had burned down to glowing embers, up got the man and strode out of his house.

'Heaven bless and help us! what a stout heart you have got', said the old dame; 'don't you see we have got amongst Trolls?'

'Stuff and nonsense!' said the lad; 'no harm if we have.'

In a little while back came the man with an ox so fat and big, the lad had never seen its like, and he gave it one blow with his fist under the ear, and down it fell dead on the floor. When that was done, he took it up by all the four legs, and laid it on the glowing embers, and turned it and twisted it about till it was burnt brown outside. After that, he went to a cupboard and took out a great silver dish, and laid the ox on it; and the dish was so big that none of the ox hung over on any side. This he put on the table, and then he went down into the cellar, and fetched a cask of wine, knocked out the head, and put the cask on the table, together with two knives, which were each six feet long. When this was done, he bade them go and sit down to supper and eat. So they went, the lad first and the old dame after, but she began to whimper and wail, and to wonder how she should ever use such knives. But her son seized one, and began to cut slices out of the thigh of the ox, which he placed before his mother. And when they had eaten a bit, he took up the cask with both hands, and lifted it down to the floor; then he told his mother to come and drink, but it was still so high she couldn't reach up to it; so he caught her up, and held her up to the edge of the cask while she drank; as for himself, he clambered up and hung down like a cat inside the cask while he drank. So when he had quenched his thirst, he took up the cask and put it back on the table, and thanked the man for the good meal, and told his mother to come and thank him too, and a-feared though she was, she dared do nothing else but thank the man. Then the lad sat down again alongside

the man and began to gossip, and after they had sat a while, the man said,

'Well! I must just go and get a bit of supper too'; and so he went to the table and ate up the whole ox--hoofs, and horns, and all--and drained the cask to the last drop, and then went back and sat on the bench.

As for beds', he said, 'I don't know what's to be done. I've only got one bed and a cradle; but we could get on pretty well if you would sleep in the cradle, and then your mother might lie in the bed yonder.'

'Thank you kindly, that'll do nicely', said the lad; and with that he pulled off his clothes and lay down in the cradle; but, to tell you the truth; it was quite as big as a four-poster. As for the old dame, she had to follow the man who showed her to bed, though she was out of her wits for fear.

'Well!' thought the lad to himself, 'twill never do to go to sleep yet. I'd best lie awake and listen how things go as the night wears on.'

So after a while the man began to talk to the old dame, and at last he said:

'We two might live here so happily together, could we only be rid of this son of yours.'

'But do you know how to settle him? Is that what you're thinking of?' said she.

'Nothing easier', said he; at any rate he would try. He would just say he wished the old dame would stay and keep house for him a day or two, and then he would take the lad out with him up the hill to quarry corner-stones, and roll down a great rock on him. All this the lad lay and listened to.

Next day the Troll--for it was a Troll as clear as day--asked if the old dame would stay and keep house for him a few days; and as the day went on he took a great iron crowbar, and asked the lad if he had a mind to go with him up the hill and quarry a few corner-stones. With all his heart, he said, and went with him; and so, after they had split a few stones, the Troll wanted him to go down below and look after cracks in the rock; and while he was doing this, the Troll worked

away, and wearied himself with his crowbar till he moved a whole crag out of its bed, which came rolling right down on the place where the lad was; but he held it up till he could get on one side, and then let it roll on.

'Oh!' said the lad to the Troll, 'now I see what you mean to do with me. You want to crush me to death; so just go down yourself and look after the cracks and refts in the rock, and I'll stand up above.'

The Troll did not dare to do otherwise than the lad bade him, and the end of it was that the lad rolled down a great rock, which fell upon the Troll, and broke one of his thighs.

'Well! you are in a sad plight', said the lad, as he strode down, lifted up the rock, and set the man free. After that he had to put him on his back and carry him home; so he ran with him as fast as a horse, and shook him so that the Troll screamed and screeched as if a knife were run into him. And when he got home, they had to put the Troll to bed, and there he lay in a sad pickle.

When the night wore on the Troll began to talk to the old dame again, and to wonder how ever they could be rid of the lad.

'Well', said the old dame, 'if you can't hit on a plan to get rid of him, I'm sure I can't.'

'Let me see', said the Troll; 'I've got twelve lions in a garden; if they could only get hold of the lad they'd soon tear him to pieces.'

So the old dame said it would be easy enough to get him there. She would sham sick, and say she felt so poorly, nothing would do her any good but lion's milk. All that the lad lay and listened to; and when he got up in the morning his mother said she was worse than she looked, and she thought she should never be right again unless she could get some lion's milk.

'Then I'm afraid you'll be poorly a long time, mother', said the lad, 'for I'm sure I don't know where any is to be got.'

'Oh! if that be all', said the Troll, 'there's no lack of lion's milk, if we only had the man to fetch it'; and then he went on to say how his brother had a garden with twelve lions in it, and how the lad might

have the key if he had a mind to milk the lions. So the lad took the key and a milking pail, and strode off; and when he unlocked the gate and got into the garden, there stood all the twelve lions on their hind-paws, rampant and roaring at him. But the lad laid hold of the biggest, and led him about by the fore-paws, and dashed him against stocks and stones, till there wasn't a bit of him left but the two paws. So when the rest saw that, they were so afraid that they crept up and lay at his feet like so many curs. After that they followed him about wherever he went, and when he got home, they lay down outside the house, with their fore-paws on the door sill.

'Now, mother, you'll soon be well', said the lad, when he went in, 'for here is the lion's milk.'

He had just milked a drop in the pail.

But the Troll, as he lay in bed, swore it was all a lie. He was sure the lad was not the man to milk lions.

When the lad heard that, he forced the Troll to get out of bed, threw open the door, and all the lions rose up and seized the Troll, and at last the lad had to make them leave their hold.

That night the Troll began to talk to the old dame again.

'I'm sure I can't tell how to put this lad out of the way--he is so awfully strong; can't you think of some way?

'No,' said the old dame, 'if you can't tell, I'm sure I can't.'

'Well!' said the Troll, 'I have two brothers in a castle; they are twelve times as strong as I am, and that's why I was turned out and had to put up with this farm. They hold that castle, and round it there is an orchard with apples in it, and whoever eats those apples sleeps for three days and three nights. If we could only get the lad to go for the fruit, he wouldn't be able to keep from tasting the apples, and as soon as ever he fell asleep my brothers would tear him in pieces.'

The old dame said she would sham sick, and say she could never be herself again unless she tasted those apples; for she had set her heart on them.

All this the lad lay and listened to.

When the morning came the old dame was so poorly that she couldn't utter a word but groans and sighs. She was sure she should never be well again, unless she had some of those apples that grew in the orchard near the castle where the man's brothers lived; only she had no one to send for them.

Oh! the lad was ready to go that instant; but the eleven lions went with him. So when he came to the orchard, he climbed up into the apple tree and ate as many apples as he could, and he had scarce got down before he fell into a deep sleep; but the lions all lay round him in a ring. The third day came the Troll's brothers, but they did not come in man's shape. They came snorting like man-eating steeds, and wondered who it was that dared to be there, and said they would tear him to pieces, so small that there should not be a bit of him left. But up rose the lions and tore the Trolls into small pieces, so that the place looked as if a dung heap had been tossed about it; and when they had finished the Trolls they lay down again. The lad did not wake till late in the afternoon, and when he got on his knees and rubbed the sleep out of his eyes, he began to wonder what had been going on, when he saw the marks of hoofs. But when he went towards the castle, a maiden looked out of a window who had seen all that had happened, and she said:

'You may thank your stars you weren't in that tussle, else you must have lost your life.'

'What! I lose my life! No fear of that, I think,' said the lad.

So she begged him to come in, that she might talk with him, for she hadn't seen a Christian soul ever since she came there. But when she opened the door the lions wanted to go in too, but she got so frightened that she began to scream, and so the lad let them lie outside. Then the two talked and talked, and the lad asked how it came that she, who was so lovely, could put up with those ugly Trolls. She never wished it, she said; 'twas quite against her will. They had seized her by force, and she was the King of Arabia's daughter. So they talked on, and at last she asked him what he would do; whether she should go back home, or whether he would have her to wife. Of course he would have her, and she shouldn't go home.

After that they went round the castle, and at last they came to a great hall, where the Trolls' two great swords hung high up on the wall.

'I wonder if you are man enough to wield one of these,' said the Princess.

'Who?--I?' said the lad. 'Twould be a pretty thing if I couldn't wield one of these.'

With that he put two or three chairs one a-top of the other, jumped up, and touched the biggest sword with his finger tips, tossed it up in the air, and caught it again by the hilt; leapt down, and at the same time dealt such a blow with it on the floor that the whole hall shook. After he had thus got down, he thrust the sword under his arm and carried it about with him.

So, when they had lived a little while in the castle, the Princess thought she ought to go home to her parents, and let them know what had become of her; so they loaded a ship, and she set sail from the castle.

After she had gone, and the lad had wandered about a little, he called to mind that he had been sent on an errand thither, and had come to fetch something for his mother's health; and though he said to himself, 'After all, the old dame was not so bad but she's all right by this time'--still he thought he ought to go and just see how she was. So he went and found both the man and his mother quite fresh and hearty.

'What wretches you are to live in this beggarly hut', said the lad. 'Come with me up to my castle, and you shall see what a fine fellow I am.'

Well! they were both ready to go, and on the way his mother talked to him, and asked, 'How it was he had got so strong?'

'If you must know, it came of that blue belt which lay on the hill- side that time when you and I were out begging', said the lad.

'Have you got it still?' asked she.

'Yes'--he had. It was tied round his waist.

'Might she see it?'

'Yes, she might'; and with that he pulled open his waistcoat and shirt to show it her.

Then she seized it with both hands, tore it off, and twisted it round her fist.

'Now', she cried, 'what shall I do with such a wretch as you? I'll just give you one blow, and dash your brains out!'

'Far too good a death for such a scamp', said the Troll. 'No! let's first burn out his eyes, and then turn him adrift in a little boat.'

So they burned out his eyes and turned him adrift, in spite of his prayers and tears; but, as the boat drifted, the lions swam after, and at last they laid hold of it and dragged it ashore on an island, and placed the lad under a fir tree. They caught game for him, and they plucked the birds and made him a bed of down; but he was forced to eat his meat raw, and he was blind. At last, one day the biggest lion was chasing a hare which was blind, for it ran straight over stock and stone, and the end was, it ran right up against a fir-stump and tumbled head over heels across the field right into a spring; but lo! when it came out of the spring it saw its way quite plain, and so saved its life.

'So, so!' thought the lion, and went and dragged the lad to the spring, and dipped him over head and ears in it. So, when he had got his sight again, he went down to the shore and made signs to the lions that they should all lie close together like a raft; then he stood upon their backs while they swam with him to the mainland. When he had reached the shore he went up into a birchen copse, and made the lions lie quiet. Then he stole up to the castle, like a thief, to see if he couldn't lay hands on his belt; and when he got to the door, he peeped through the keyhole, and there he saw his belt hanging up over a door in the kitchen. So he crept softly in across the floor, for there was no one there; but as soon as he had got hold of the belt, he began to kick and stamp about as though he were mad. Just then his mother came rushing out.

'Dear heart, my darling little boy! do give me the belt again', she said.

'Thank you kindly', said he. 'Now you shall have the doom you passed on me', and he fulfilled it on the spot. When the old Troll heard that, he came in and begged and prayed so prettily that he might not be smitten to death.

'Well, you may live', said the lad, 'but you shall undergo the same punishment you gave me'; and so he burned out the Troll's eyes, and turned him adrift on the sea in a little boat, but he had no lions to follow him.

Now the lad was all alone, and he went about longing and longing for the Princess; at last he could bear it no longer; he must set out to seek her, his heart was so bent on having her. So he loaded four ships and set sail for Arabia. For some time they had fair wind and fine weather, but after that they lay wind-bound under a rocky island. So the sailors went ashore and strolled about to spend the time, and there they found a huge egg, almost as big as a little house. So they began to knock it about with large stones, but, after all, they couldn't crack the shell. Then the lad came up with his sword to see what all the noise was about, and when he saw the egg, he thought it a trifle to crack it; so he gave it one blow and the egg split, and out came a chicken as big as an elephant.

'Now we have done wrong', said the lad; 'this can cost us all our lives'; and then he asked his sailors if they were men enough to sail to Arabia in four-and-twenty hours if they got a fine breeze. Yes! they were good to do that, they said, so they set sail with a fine breeze, and got to Arabia in three-and-twenty hours. As soon as they landed, the lad ordered all the sailors to go and bury themselves up to the eyes in a sandhill, so that they could barely see the ships. The lad and the captains climbed a high crag and sate down under a fir.

In a little while came a great bird flying with an island in its claws, and let it fall down on the fleet, and sunk every ship. After it had done that, it flew up to the sandhill and flapped its wings, so that the wind nearly took off the heads of the sailors, and it flew past the fir with such force that it turned the lad right about, but he was ready with his sword, and gave the bird one blow and brought it down dead.

After that he went to the town, where every one was glad because the king had got his daughter back; but now the king had hidden her away somewhere himself, and promised her hand as a reward to any one

who could find her, and this though she was betrothed before. Now as the lad went along he met a man who had white bear-skins for sale, so he bought one of the hides and put it on; and one of the captains was to take an iron chain and lead him about, and so he went into the town and began to play pranks. At last the news came to the king's ears, that there never had been such fun in the town before, for here was a white bear that danced and cut capers just as it was bid. So a messenger came to say the bear must come to the castle at once, for the king wanted to see its tricks. So when it got to the castle every one was afraid, for such a beast they had never seen before; but the captain said there was no danger unless they laughed at it. They mustn't do that, else it would tear them to pieces. When the king heard that, he warned all the court not to laugh. But while the fun was going on, in came one of the king's maids, and began to laugh and make game of the bear, and the bear flew at her and tore her, so that there was scarce a rag of her left. Then all the court began to bewail, and the captain most of all.

'Stuff and nonsense', said the king; 'she's only a maid, besides it's more my affair than yours.'

When the show was over, it was late at night. 'It's no good your going away, when it's so late', said the king. 'The bear had best sleep here.'

'Perhaps it might sleep in the ingle by the kitchen fire', said the captain.

'Nay', said the king, 'it shall sleep up here, and it shall have pillows and cushions to sleep on.' So a whole heap of pillows and cushions was brought, and the captain had a bed in a side-room.

But at midnight the king came with a lamp in his hand and a big bunch of keys, and carried off the white bear. He passed along gallery after gallery, through doors and rooms, up-stairs and down-stairs, till at last he came to a pier which ran out into the sea. Then the king began to pull and haul at posts and pins, this one up and that one down, till at last a little house floated up to the water's edge. There he kept his daughter, for she was so dear to him that he had hid her, so that no one could find her out. He left the white bear outside while he went in and told her how it had danced and played its pranks. She said she was afraid, and dared not look at it; but he talked her over, saying there was no danger, if she only wouldn't laugh. So they brought the

bear in, and locked the door, and it danced and played its tricks; but just when the fun was at its height, the Princess's maid began to laugh. Then the lad flew at her and tore her to bits, and the Princess began to cry and sob.

'Stuff and nonsense', cried the king; 'all this fuss about a maid! I'll get you just as good a one again. But now I think the bear had best stay here till morning, for I don't care to have to go and lead it along all those galleries and stairs at this time of night.'

'Well!' said the Princess, 'if it sleeps here, I'm sure I won't.'

But just then the bear curled himself up and lay down by the stove; and it was settled at last that the Princess should sleep there too, with a light burning. But as soon as the king was well gone, the white bear came and begged her to undo his collar. The Princess was so scared she almost swooned away; but she felt about till she found the collar, and she had scarce undone it before the bear pulled his head off. Then she knew him again, and was so glad there was no end to her joy, and she wanted to tell her father at once that her deliverer was come. But the lad would not hear of it; he would earn her once more, he said. So in the morning when they heard the king rattling at the posts outside, the lad drew on the hide, and lay down by the stove.

'Well, has it lain still?' the king asked.

'I should think so', said the Princess; 'it hasn't so much as turned or stretched itself once.'

When they got up to the castle again, the captain took the bear and led it away, and then the lad threw off the hide, and went to a tailor and ordered clothes fit for a prince; and when they were fitted on he went to the king, and said he wanted to find the Princess.

'You're not the first who has wished the same thing', said the king, 'but they have all lost their lives; for if any one who tries can't find her in four-and-twenty hours his life is forfeited.'

Yes; the lad knew all that. Still he wished to try, and if he couldn't find her, 'twas his look-out. Now in the castle there was a band that played sweet tunes, and there were fair maids to dance with, and so the lad danced away. When twelve hours were gone, the king said:

'I pity you with all my heart. You're so poor a hand at seeking; you will surely lose your life.'

'Stuff!' said the lad; 'while there's life there's hope! So long as there's breath in the body there's no fear; we have lots of time'; and so he went on dancing till there was only one hour left.

Then he said he would begin to search.

'It's no use now', said the king; 'time's up.'

'Light your lamp; out with your big bunch of keys', said the lad, 'and follow me whither I wish to go. There is still a whole hour left.'

So the lad went the same way which the king had led him the night before, and he bade the king unlock door after door till they came down to the pier which ran out into the sea.

'It's all no use, I tell you', said the king; 'time's up, and this will only lead you right out into the sea.'

'Still five minutes more', said the lad, as he pulled and pushed at the posts and pins, and the house floated up.

'Now the time is up', bawled the king; 'come hither, headsman, and take off his head.'

'Nay, nay!' said the lad; 'stop a bit, there are still three minutes! Out with the key, and let me get into this house.'

But there stood the king and fumbled with his keys, to draw out the time. At last he said he hadn't any key.

'Well, if you haven't, I *have*', said the lad, as he gave the door such a kick that it flew to splinters inwards on the floor.

At the door the Princess met him, and told her father this was her deliverer, on whom her heart was set. So she had him; and this was how the beggar boy came to marry the king's daughter of Arabia.