

The Brother And His Sisters

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
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There were once upon a time three sisters and a brother. The sisters were all proud, and one was very beautiful, and she did not like her little brother, 'because', she said, 'he was dirty'. Now, this beautiful sister was to be married, and the brother begged their mother not to let her marry, as he was sure the man would kill her, for he knew his house was full of bones. So the mother told her daughter, but she would not believe it, and said, 'she wouldn't listen to anything that such a dirty little scrub said', and so she was married.

Now, it was agreed that one sister was to remain with their mother and the other was to go with the bride, and so they set out on their way. When they got to the beach, the husband picked up a beautiful tortoise-shell comb, which he gave to his bride. Then they got into his boat and rowed away over the sea, and when they reached their home, they were so surprised to see their little brother, for the comb had turned into their brother. They were not at all glad to see him, and the husband thought to himself he would kill him without telling his wife. When night came the boy told the husband that at home his mother always put him to sleep in the blacksmith's shop, and so the husband said he should sleep in the smithy.

In the middle of the night the man got up, intending to kill them all, and went to his shop to get his irons ready, but the boy jumped up as soon as he went in, and he said, 'Boy, what is the matter with you?' So the boy said, when he was at home his mother always gave him two bags of gold to put his head on. Then the man said, he should have them, and went and fetched him two bags of gold, and told him to go to sleep.

But the boy said, 'Now mind, when you hear me snore I'm not asleep, but when I am not snoring, then I'm asleep.' Then the boy went to sleep and began to snore, and as long as the man heard the snoring, he blew his bellows; but as soon as the snoring stopped, the man took his irons out of the fire, and the boy jumped up.

Then the man said, 'Why, what's the matter? why, can't you sleep?'

The boy said 'No; for at home my mother always gave me four bags of money to lie upon.

Well, the man said he should have them, and brought him four bags of money. Then the boy told him again the same thing about his snoring and the man bade him go to sleep, and he began to snore, and the man to blow his bellows until the snoring stopped. Then the man took out his irons again, and the boy jumped up, and the man dropped the irons, saying, 'Why, what's the matter now that you can't sleep?'

The boy said, 'At home my mother always gave me two bushels of corn.'

So the man said he should have the corn, and went and brought it, and told him to go to sleep. Then the boy snored, and the man blew his bellows till the snoring stopped, when he again took out his irons, and the boy jumped up, and the man said, 'Why, what's it now?'

The boy said, 'At home my mother always goes to the river with a sieve to bring me some water.'

So the man said 'Very well, I will go, but I have a cock here, and before I go, I must speak to it.'

Then the man told the cock if he saw any one moving in the house, he must crow; that the cock promised to do, and the man set off.

Now when the boy thought the man was gone far away, he got up, and gave the cock some of the corn; then he woke up his sisters and showed them all the bones the man had in the house, and they were very frightened. Then he took the two bags of gold on his shoulders, and told his sisters to follow him. He took them to the bay, and put them into the boat with the bags of gold, and left them whilst he went back for the four bags of money. When he was leaving the house he emptied the bags of corn to the cock, who was so busy eating, he forget to crow, until they had got quite away.

When the man returned home and could not find them in the house, he went to the river, where he found his boat gone, and so he had no way of going after them. When they landed at their own place, the boy turned the boat over and stove it in, so that it was of no use any more;

and he took his sisters home, and told their mother all that had happened, and his sisters loved him, and they lived very happily together ever afterwards, and do so still if they are not dead.