

The tale of Little Thumb

Narrative



Long ago, in a village nestled at the edge of an ancient forest, there lived a humble woodcutter and his diffident wife. Although the poverty-stricken couple were blessed with seven beautiful children, they buckled under the crippling burden of providing for them and (after enduring years of deprivation) allowed a terrible hopelessness to saturate their hearts.

One winter's day, the desperate couple – in true folk tale fashion – decided there was only one way to put an end to their family's hunger. Wasting no time, they guided their children into the heart of the forest and, hoping to finally leave all their troubles behind, abandoned them there.

Now, Little Thumb, who was the smallest of all the siblings, was no fool. While his parents led them all through the woods, which were a labyrinth of twisted trees and tangled thornbushes, he scattered burnt breadcrumbs beside him. Little did he know that a mischievous blackbird was following close behind, gleefully devouring his delicate trail...

Realising his parents had vanished, Little Thumb fell to his knees and began rifling through the festering foliage that smothered the dank forest floor. His shivering siblings watched on, bemused, as he frantically rummaged and rooted like a wild boar in winter.

"What's wrong, Thummy?" the siblings quizzed.

Blinking back tears, the shivering boy pointed to the leaves. "M-my crumbs. They've g-gone. W-we're l-lost!" he cried, shaking his head.

At this, the wide-eyed children, some of whom were still babies, began to wail. Little Thumb's face flushed with anger. Though he was terrified, he was desperate to shield his beloved brothers, whose tears were like daggers to his heart, from the stark reality of their fate. "Ah, follow me!" he declared. "I remember the way!"

Obediently, the innocent boys followed as he tried (in vain) to retrace their parents' steps. Driven by his protective instincts, Little Thumb fought his way back through the darkness for hours on end until – eventually – he stumbled upon a charming little cottage that seemed to offer the promise of shelter.

Gathering their courage, the children rapped on the door, which promptly opened to reveal an elderly lady with soft eyes. "Oh, my darlin's. My husband ain't one to be messed with. He eats kiddies like you for breakfast," she awkwardly explained.

Little Thumb's face crumpled. "Please. We're exhausted. We haven't eaten for days. We mean no harm!" he pleaded determinedly.

Reluctantly, the woman bustled the children inside where she sat them beside her seven daughters and served them a comforting meal. Just as the children's bones began to thaw, the door swung open, revealing the woman's



husband – a grimacing ogre with blood dripping from his fangs. Gesturing for the children to hide, she leapt up to take her husband's coat and remove his magic boots.

"Hmmm, you smell strange!" he growled, with suspicion clouding his eyes. "Anyone else here?"

"No, Dear," the woman whimpered.

Unsatisfied with his wife's explanation, the ogre began prowling the house. The younger brothers, squashed inside a cramped closet, sobbed helplessly as the floorboards creaked a warning that the fiend's footsteps were drawing closer.

Luckily, Little Thumb, who was hiding behind the mantelpiece, had hatched a plan. With his eyes fixed on the ogre, the courageous boy sneaked behind him, stepped into his boots and snatched up the boys' hats that had been drying by the fire. Then, he ran towards the ogre's daughters and, before they could protest, plopped a single hat on each of their heads.

Detecting the sound of movement, the ogre span on his heels and immediately lurched towards the hats. Seizing their chance, the boys burst out of the cottage and ran for their lives as the air behind them began to reverberate with the ogre's grief-stricken roars.

No sooner had the boys reached the forest when Little Thumb, armed with the magic boots, was suddenly bestowed with the ogre's wealth, power and knowledge. All at once, he knew what he needed to do...

Later that night, the boys' parents, transformed by the consequences of their actions, welcomed their children back with tearful eyes and open arms. And so, the story of Little Thumb became a beloved folk tale – a reminder that even in the darkest woods, one can always find the way back home.

