

THE SLAVE AND HIS GOLDEN EGG



NELSON





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A FAIRY TALE

BY

THOMAS ALFRED SPALDING

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by Eduard Duller*

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SLAVE AND HIS GOLDEN EGG

A FAIRY TALE.

CHAPTER I.

SLAVE AND HIS MASTER.

IN those far off days when fairies ruled the world, there lived, in the land of Nowhere, an old miser whose name was Malcho. This old man was so greedy of gain that he half starved himself. All the money that he could make he put in a little wooden box, which he hid

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under a stone in the floor of his hut. When night came, and there was no fear that any one would see his hoard, he lifted the stone, took out the box, and counted his money. The only thing that vexed him was that the sum was so small.

With this old miser lived a little lad, who did all the hard work of the hut. He swept the floors, lit the fire—when Malcho would allow it—ran errands, and did everything that the old man told him to do. It was a sad life that he led, for Malcho was always scolding him. He beat him for every small fault; and as for feeding him, the old man grudged the cost of food for himself, so you may be sure that the scraps that

fell to the poor boy's share were few and scanty.

Malcho had found this boy sleeping on his doorstep one day. He kicked him roughly, and told him to be off. The boy looked up at him with a pale face, and with tears in his eyes. "I know not where to go," he said, sobbing; "I have lost my way."

"You are a thief," said Malcho; "you have come here to steal."

"I am no thief, good sir," the boy made answer. "I am a poor boy who has been charmed away from his father and mother by wicked sprites. I have wandered for days in the forest, and I have had no food save the berries that I found growing on the bushes. Have

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pity on me, kind master ; I am half dead for lack of food."

There was no pity in the heart of the old miser, but there was much greed. "This boy shall be my slave," he thought. "He shall work for me, and so I shall have more time for making money. I need pay him nothing, and I shall see to it that he does not cost me much for food."

So Malcho took the boy into his hut and set him hard tasks. He gave him no rest by day, and at night he made him sleep on the cold stones of the floor. He called him his slave, and by this name the little lad came in time to be known to all the neighbours, who pitied his sad plight, but did nothing to help him out of it.

CHAPTER II.

THE DOVE, THE CROW, AND THE HEN.

Now, as I have said, nothing vexed old Malcho so much as the fact that his hoard of coins increased so slowly. He lent money to those who wanted to borrow, and he drove hard bargains with them; but however much they paid, he always wanted more.

So he bethought him one day of a cousin of his, who was a wise man, and knew many spells and charms. Surely this man could tell him some way to make money quickly. Malcho had heard

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of spells that caused gold, rich yellow gold, to fall from the skies like rain, and of spells that showed where it lay in great lumps, hidden under the earth. That was the way to grow rich with little toil.

So one day he put on his battered hat and his tattered cloak, and he took his staff in his hand. After setting Slave so many tasks that he could not be idle for one moment while he was away, he set forth on his journey.

His way lay for miles through a dark forest. At the end of the forest was a high cliff, and in the cliff was a cave. Malcho entered the cave, and before him he saw an old man, with a white beard that reached down to his waist, sitting at a stone table reading a great book.

The Dove, the Crow, and the Hen. 13

“Good morrow, cousin,” said Malcho, bowing low.

“Why do you come to disturb my peace?” said the old man, without looking up from his book.

“Fair cousin,” Malcho went on, “I am poor, and I would be rich. Give me, you who are so wise, some spell or charm that will bring me gold.”

“Rich I can make you,” replied the wise man; “but riches will not bring joy with them.”

“I care not for joy,” said Malcho; “my joy is in gold alone.”

“Then I will help you,” said the old white-beard gravely. “Look above you.”

Malcho looked up, and saw, hanging from the roof of the cave, a long wooden

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perch. On the perch were three birds—a dove, a crow, and a hen. “What may this mean?” he asked.

“Those are the birds of good luck,” said the wise man. “I give them to you. The dove will lay one golden egg. He who carries this egg about with him shall never be killed or wounded by a foe. The crow will lay one egg of pearl. He who wears it hung about his neck shall have power to walk unseen of men.”

“Thanks for your gifts,” cried Malcho; “but they will not make me rich, for if I sell the eggs there is the end of it.”

“Hear me out,” said the old man. “The hen you must roast and eat, every bit of it. There is a certain part of it—

The Dove, the Crow, and the Hen. 15

what part I may not tell—which, if it is eaten, will bring wealth. He who eats that part shall find, every morning when he wakes, seven gold coins under his pillow.”

Malcho's eyes glistened with greed. “How shall I take these birds?” he asked.

“That is easy,” said the old man. He waved a wand three times in the air, and down flew the three birds. The hen perched on Malcho's head, and the dove and the crow perched one on each shoulder. “Now begone,” said the wise man, “and pester me no more.”

CHAPTER III.

SLAVE EATS THE HEN'S TONGUE.

WHEN Malcho came back to his hut with the three birds perched on him, Slave burst out laughing.

“What are you grinning at, Slave,” cried Malcho angrily, “instead of doing your work? There is much for you to do now; so get about it at once, or I will give you something that will cure your laughter.”

Malcho took the birds down gently one by one, and placed them on the floor of the hut. They stayed just where he

put them, and did not attempt to fly away.

“And now,” he said, “bestir yourself. Take the axe, go into my neighbour's wood, and cut some long, straight branches, that I may make coops for the dove and the crow. The hen I shall eat.”

“I will not go,” said Slave stiffly.

Old Malcho glared at the boy. “My slave defy me!” he shouted. “Go at once, or—”

“I will not go,” said the boy again. “I am not a thief. I will not cut your neighbour's wood.”

Then Malcho took his staff in his hand and beat the poor boy until his arm grew tired, and he could beat no more.

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“Will you go now?” he said.

“I will not go,” said Slave, choking down his sobs.

Malcho seized on the hen, wrung its neck, and threw it down upon the floor. “Then pluck that bird, truss and cook it, so that it may be ready for my dinner when I come back.” Having said this, he took up the axe and went out of the hut.

Slave made a fire of sticks. While it was burning up, he plucked and trussed the hen. When this was done, he placed it on the spit, and began turning the spit round and round while the hen roasted over the fire.

Slave’s back was aching and sore from the blows that old Malcho had



"I will not go," said Slave, choking down his sobs.

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given him. He was very sad while he twirled the spit, and he wished very much that some good fairy would come and waft him back to his dear father and mother.

While he turned and turned, the hen began to splutter as it roasted, and the smell of the cooking meat was good. It told Slave that he was a very hungry boy as well as a very sore one. He sniffed up the savoury steam that arose from the hen, and he longed to eat a little of the flesh, even if it were only the tiniest piece, for he had eaten no food for a long time.

But he did not dare to cut the hen, because old Malcho would be sure to find out what he had done, and he

would only get another beating. So he sat watching the hen while it was cooking, and he grew hungrier and hungrier.

At last he thought, "There is one part of the hen that I could eat, and my cruel master would never find out the loss. It is but a tiny part, but it is better than nothing." So he took a knife, opened the hen's beak, and cut out the tongue.

It was indeed but a small morsel, not half a mouthful; but Slave was so hungry that he thought that he had never tasted anything so good in all his life. While he was eating, something fell—clink, clink—on the floor, and rolled away into one corner of the hut.

CHAPTER IV.

SLAVE PLUCKS A FEATHER FROM THE
DOVE'S TAIL.

SLAVE looked up with a start, and there, in the corner of the hut, he saw a golden egg. He ran to pick it up, and held it in his hand. While he was wondering at its beauty, he heard a soft cooing voice say, "Little boy!"

"Who calls?" asked Slave.

"I call," said the voice. "I give you that golden egg. It is yours, keep it safely, and do not let your wicked old master see it, or he will take it from you."

Slave plucks a Feather. 23

Slave looked round him, and saw that it was the dove that was speaking. "I thank you for your gift," he said.

"Hide it in your bosom, and keep it always there," the dove went on. "So long as you keep it, no man will have power to kill or wound you. And now, in return for my gift, you must do me a kindness. Pluck, I pray you, a feather from my tail."

"I shall hurt you," said the kind-hearted Slave.

"You will save me," the dove made answer.

So Slave quickly plucked a white feather from the dove's tail, and lo! on the instant, the hut was filled with a rosy cloud. When the cloud cleared

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away the dove was no more to be seen. In its stead Slave saw a fairy, clothed from head to foot in fine white gauze, and on her brow was a crown of lilies.

Slave was so amazed that he could speak no word. "Thanks for your good deed," said the fairy. "You have restored me to life. A spell was laid upon me by a foe, that changed me into the form of a dove, and I could not be freed from it until one should pluck a feather from my tail. You have your reward. You have the golden egg."

"Alas!" cried Slave, "but what will that avail? When my master comes back, and finds that the dove has flown

away, he will beat me sorely. It may be that he will not be able to kill me, but he will beat me until I wish myself dead: my life will be such a burden. Take back, then, the golden egg, and undo, if it be in your power, the spell that has been laid upon me. Restore me to my happy home, and to the arms of my dear mother."

"That may not be," said the fairy, "at least not yet. The time is not ripe for it. The charm can only be broken when you shoot an arrow at a man whom you cannot see. But keep the feather that you plucked from the dove's tail always with you, and if ever you are in a sore strait, kiss it, and I will come to your aid."

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After the fairy had spoken thus, the rosy cloud gathered again, and when it cleared away the fairy was no more to be seen. Only the crow was in the hut, and the hen, roasting over the fire, was burnt almost to a cinder.

Slave, in a great fright, tucked the golden egg and the white feather into the folds of his tunic, opened the door of the hut, and ran fast towards the forest. He did not stop running until he was miles away from old Malcho's hut. Then he sat down under a great tree to think what he would do, now that he was alone in the wide world.

CHAPTER V.

OLD MALCHO EATS THE HEN.

IT was not long after Slave had left the hut that old Malcho came back, grumbling and growling. He carried a great armful of branches, with which he meant to make coops for the dove and the crow.

When he came into the hut and looked round him, he threw the branches down on the floor and stamped his feet with anger. No dove was to be seen, and over the fire was the hen, nearly burnt to a cinder.



Old Malcho came back, grumbling and growling.

Old Malcho eats the Hen. 29

“Slave! Slave!” he shouted, “you young villain! come here at once, or I will beat the life out of you!” He called and called, but there was no answer. He went out of the hut, and searched the wood, shouting Slave’s name all the time, but nothing happened.

Then he came back into the hut, stamped out the fire under the hen, and set to work to make a coop for the crow. “That young rascal is a thief,” he thought; “he has stolen my dove, and he will have my golden egg. But I will go in chase of him, and when I catch him his back shall smart for it.”

When he had made the coop, he put the crow into it. Then he sat down on the floor and began to eat the hen.

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He had been looking forward all day to this meal, for he had never had such a grand feast in his life as a whole roast hen, all to himself, for which he had paid nothing. It was a sad blow to him that the nice juicy flesh was all scorched and dried up; but he ate on and on, for he was not going to risk losing the chance of gaining seven golden coins every day of his life by leaving even a little bit of cinder uneaten.

“I suppose I needn’t eat the bones,” he thought, as he threw them into a corner of the hut. “I must surely have eaten the bit that will give me my daily dole of wealth.”

Then he looked into the crow’s coop; but there was no egg there. “Be quick

and lay that egg, you lazy bird," he said. "A pearl the size of a crow's egg will fetch a mint of money: I shall not do so badly."

By this time the sun had set; so Malcho made his bed, lay down on it, and tried to sleep. But sleep would not come to him. Sometimes he heard soft noises outside the hut, and he thought that Slave was coming back. Then he would jump out of bed, seize his staff, and open the door softly. But no one was there. Some wild creature had stolen past the hut, and he had heard its footsteps.

When by chance he slept, he was sure to dream that it was morning, and that the seven golden coins were lying

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under his pillow. Waking, he would plunge his hand under the pillow, and draw it back empty. At length, weary from his hard day's work, he fell fast asleep, and dreamt no more.

CHAPTER VI.

OLD MALCHO GETS THE EGG OF PEARL.

THE sun was high in the heavens when old Malcho woke with a start. He sprang out of bed, seized his pillow, and flung it aside. No golden coins were there; not one. "I have scattered them in my haste," he thought, and down he went on his knees upon the stone floor,

Old Malcho gets Egg of Pearl. 33

and searched, and searched. He looked all over the floor, and into the crannies between the stones, but not a coin could he find.

His face grew pale, and he ground his old teeth together in his rage. Then, to make quite sure, he took a broom and swept out every corner of the floor of the hut ; but he only swept up dust and dirt.

Old Malcho sat down on the floor, biting his nails angrily, and he thought, and thought. " This is a paltry spell that my cousin has given me, whereby I was to get rich quickly," he muttered. " My dove has been stolen ; my crow has not laid an egg of pearl, and I have eaten a hen at one meal, which might have lasted seven days, and has made me feel quite

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poorly, and there are no golden coins under my pillow."

Then of a sudden he sprang up, his eyes gleaming with greed. "There is yet a chance!" he cried. "He said that I must eat the whole of it." He grabbed up the bones of the hen that he had swept up with the rest of the rubbish on the floor, and began crunching them up. It was hard work for his old teeth; but he chewed and chewed until at last he had gulped down all the bones except the head.

"I suppose that I must eat that too, to make quite sure," he said, looking ruefully at the head. "How my jaws do ache, and what a pain I am getting inside!" He tore open the beak, and then he saw

Old Malcho gets Egg of Pearl. 35

that the hen's tongue had been cut out. With a great shriek he threw the two pieces away from him. "It is that rascal Slave!" he cried. "He guessed the secret. The spell lay in the hen's tongue, which he has eaten. He will get the good gold coins—seven bright coins every day—my coins." With that he clutched his hair with his hands, and throwing himself upon the floor of the hut, he wept with rage and envy.

After a time he rose, his face grim and glowering. "I will hunt him through all the world," he said, through his set teeth. "I will catch him, and I will bring him back. I will chain him to a bed, so that every morning I may take the seven golden coins from under his pillow. And

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I can kill two birds with one stone, for while I am hunting him I can gather debts that are due to me. There is old Claus the innkeeper, who has not paid me anything for a long time. I will bleed him dry."

Then Malcho put on his battered hat and his tattered cloak, and he took his staff in his hand. Looking down at the crow's coop, he saw, lying in it, a shining egg of pearl. He took it out eagerly, and fondled it in his hand. "It is worth a king's ransom," he said.

He tied a string to the egg of pearl, and hung it round his neck, under his tattered cloak. Then, if you had been there, you would have seen the strangest sight. Slowly, very slowly, the body of

Slave and the Red-faced Woman. 37

the miser shrunk and dwindled, until it looked like a tiny pillar of white smoke. At last even this smoke vanished, and Malcho was no more to be seen.

CHAPTER VII.

SLAVE AND THE RED-FACED WOMAN.

WHILE Slave was sitting under the shady tree, thinking what he should do, he fell fast asleep. When he awoke the sun was sinking towards the west. He jumped up and ran on in a fright. He had been a fool, he thought, to go to sleep ; for old Malcho, when he found that he had gone, would be sure to seek him, and might

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easily have caught him while he lay under the tree.

On went poor Slave, mile after mile, growing more hungry and weary every step that he took. The sun sank behind the western hills, and darkness fell upon the land, yet still the tired lad trudged on.

At last, in front of him, he saw the gleam of a light in a window. When he came to the house from which it shone, he found that it was an inn. He knocked timidly at the door.

The door was partly opened, and out peered the red, round face of a woman.

“Go away, little boy,” she said. “We want no beggars here.”

Slave and the Red-faced Woman. 39

“Oh, please, ma’am,” said poor tired Slave, “may I rest here to-night?”

“You may have a bed, the best in the land, if you can pay for it,” said the red-faced woman. “Have you any money?”

“Alas! I have nothing,” sighed Slave, for although he had the golden egg in his tunic he was not going to part with that.

“Then get along with you, and be quick about it,” said the woman.

She was going to shut the door in Slave’s face, when something, perhaps the tears that started into the young lad’s eyes, made her pause.

“Well, well,” she said, after she had looked at him a while, “a corner by the fire costs nothing. You may sleep on the bench beside it. But, mark my words,

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if I hear you prowling about the house at night, out you go, and you may think yourself lucky if my good man does not give you a taste of the stick."

Having said this, she opened the door wider, and Slave went in. A fire was burning brightly on the hearth, and before it stood a wide oak bench. Huge barrels were ranged round the room, and on its walls hung shining metal pots and pans.

"Sit down," said the red-faced woman, as she was going into an inner room; "and don't stir from the bench, or it will be the worse for you."

Slave threw himself down on the bench, and gazed sleepily at the fire. The bench was hard, but not so hard as

Slave and the Red-faced Woman. 41

the cold stones of the floor of Malcho's hut, and although he was very hungry, Slave's heart grew lighter.

He was almost dosing, when the red-faced woman came into the room again, bearing in her hands a rug and a pillow. "Take these," she said, "to keep your bones from the board, and don't forget my good man and his stick."

Slave began to thank her, but she was gone almost before he could speak. So he wrapped himself in the rug, placed the pillow under his head, and was soon fast asleep.

CHAPTER VIII.

SLAVE IS TAKEN FOR A PRINCE.

WHEN Slave woke in the morning it was high day. The sun was shining brightly into the room, and the fire had burnt low. Slave listened, but he could hear no one stirring. He longed to be off, for he could not tell how close old Malcho might be on his tracks. But he did not like to go before he had thanked the red-faced woman for her kindness.

So he softly opened the door of the inn and went out, closing it behind him. By the side of the door was a big stone,

which travellers used when they wanted to mount their horses. Slave sat down on this stone, letting the cool morning air fan his face while he waited. After a while the woman opened the door. Her face was one great smile, and her fat body shook with her laughter.

“Good morning, my lord,” she said, making a low curtsy before Slave. “You young folk do love your jokes, to be sure!”

Slave stared at her and said nothing. He thought that she must have gone mad.

“To think of it now!” the woman went on, “that you should be playing your tricks upon me, making out that you were a poor beggar boy. And indeed I



“Good morning, my lord,” she said, making a low curtsy before Slave.

might have seen, had it not been so dark, that for all your torn clothes, and boots with holes in them, you were really a prince at least."

"Me!—a prince!" gasped Slave, more puzzled than ever.

"Ay, ay," gurgled the woman. "I found your money under the pillow, where you thought you had hidden it so cleverly. Seven golden pieces!" She opened her hand and showed Slave the bright yellow coins. Slave was about to say that they were not his, but the red-faced woman went on chattering, and did not give him the chance.

"Yes, yes," she went on; "it was a mad prank of yours indeed; but I love a joke, even when it is against myself.

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Come in now, my lord, and break your fast."

Slave pricked up his ears at this, for he had eaten nothing since he took the tongue from the roasting hen, and that had not been any great meal. He followed the red-faced woman into the house.

There he saw a table spread, and on it was a huge meat pie, a loaf of white bread, and a jug of milk. "Sit down, my lord, and eat your fill," said the red-faced woman.

Slave needed no pressing, he was so hungry. He ate until he could eat no more. He had never had such a good meal in all his life.

When he had finished, he made ready

to start on his journey. The red-faced woman begged him to stay. When she found that it was in vain, she gave him three of the gold coins. "The other four," she said, "will just pay for your meal."

Slave had never before had any money, so he did not know that even one of the gold coins would have been far too much to pay for what he had eaten. He thanked the red-faced woman, hid the three coins with the golden egg and the fairy feather in his tunic, and went on his way.

CHAPTER IX.

SLAVE GROWS RICH.

SLAVE sang as he walked, for the thought of the three golden coins made him merry. He had at least enough money, he thought, to pay for one other meal, if he did not have quite such a grand one as the red-faced woman had given him. But there was no need that he should always feast like that; he was not going to travel like a prince.

As the day wore on, Slave grew hungry again. Not long after he spied another inn. There was a trough in front of it,

and an old man had brought a horse to drink at the trough.

“Can you give a poor boy a bite of food?” asked Slave of the old man.

“If he can pay for it,” the old man said, leading the horse back to its stable.

Slave took one of his gold coins out of the breast of his tunic and showed it to the old man.

“Ay, surely, surely,” the old man cried, “if that is the case with you. Come indoors. There is a fine fat fowl upon the spit, and a jug of cool cider in the cellar.”

The old man tied up the horse, and then led the way into the inn. In a very short time the fat fowl was steaming on

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the table, with a jug of cider beside it, and a great slice of bread.

When Slave had eaten all that he wanted, he gave the old man one of his gold coins. He was turning to go, thinking that he had eaten a very cheap meal, when the old man called out, "Hi, young master! Hi! you have forgotten your change!" Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he pulled out some silver money, and he gave Slave quite a number of these coins.

Slave thanked him, and went on his way. "That red-faced woman cheated me badly," he thought. "I did not know that I was so rich. I shall grow wiser as I grow older."

When night fell there was no house to

be seen, so Slave lay down on a mossy bank by the roadside, and soon fell fast asleep. He slept soundly till early morning, when he was awakened by the singing of birds. He jumped up, and was about to go on his way when he chanced to glance down at the moss upon which he had slept. There, sparkling in the sunlight, lay seven golden coins.

Slave could hardly believe his eyes. He felt in the breast of his tunic, but his two gold coins and the silver that the old man had given him were still there. He was quite sure that the gold was not on the moss when he lay down to sleep.

“This is the doing of the good fairy,” he thought. “She will not let me want.” So he picked up the coins, added them

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to his little store, and went on his way.

And thus it happened every morning—whether he slept in a peasant's hut, or at an inn, or in the open air—he always found seven golden coins where he had laid his head. As time went on the weight of coins grew so great that it was hard to carry them ; for now he had found out the value of money, and he did not allow people to cheat him.

“ I can hunt now through all the world to find my dear father and mother,” he thought. “ Yet what did the good fairy say? She said that the spell that binds me can never be broken until I shoot an arrow at a man whom I cannot see. That, surely, is a hard task.”

CHAPTER X.

THE WOLF AND THE ROBBERS.

AFTER many days the road along which Slave was walking passed from the open fields and pleasant orchards, where the homes of men stood, into a great dark forest. The way was overhung by the branches of the trees, which swayed and moaned sadly in the wind, and between the gusts could be heard the howling of wild beasts.

Slave did not sing any more as he went. His heart sank with fear, and he

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peered at the bushes and the trunks of trees, lest any foe should be lurking behind them.

Towards evening, when the wind was blowing shriller than ever, there came a rustling in the undergrowth, and a great brown wolf sprang into the road. Slave saw his green eyes glaring, and his red tongue lolling out. Slave's heart was in his mouth. "Surely this is the sore strait of which the good fairy spoke," he thought, and he put his hand into his tunic to take out the feather. But before he could do this, the wolf, with a fierce snarl, sprang upon him, snapping at him with his great white teeth. But he did not touch Slave. In mid-air he seemed to swerve, and passing



A great brown wolf sprang into the road.

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the boy, he went stumbling and rolling along the road behind him.

With a growl of rage, the wolf turned and sprang at Slave again, and again, and again. But always the same thing happened. He could never seize Slave, but always swerved and went stumbling and rolling along the road. At last, with a snarl, he skulked off into the wood with his tail between his legs.

“It is the good fairy’s gift of the golden egg that has saved me,” thought Slave. “I need have no fear of any foe so long as I keep it.” And he went on his way more cheerily.

But his faith in the good fairy’s gift was soon to be tested once more. He had not gone very far before three men

sprang out of the wood, with swords in their hands. "Give us your money," they cried, "or we will kill you." And they brandished their swords above Slave's head.

Slave trusted to the golden egg. He folded his arms, and said, smiling, "I will not give you my money. You are three brave men, indeed, to attack one boy. Kill me if you can."

At this the three men swore oaths, and they began to hack at Slave with their long swords. The swords flashed above and around him; they clashed as they met in the air, but Slave did not get even one scratch.

"You are a long time about it," said Slave, laughing; "get on with your job."

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The robbers grew angrier than ever, and slashed away more fiercely. At last one of them, with a great sweep of his sword, wounded another on the shoulder. "Clumsy loon!" shouted the hurt man, and at that the two turned on one another and began to fight with fury.

How the fight would have ended no one can tell, for the third robber came between them and struck up their swords. "Fools!" he cried, "and fools we are all! Don't you see that this boy is a fairy? We cannot harm him."

"You are bewitched," said Slave, holding up the golden egg. At this the robbers made off, and were soon lost to sight in the forest.

CHAPTER XI.

“STOP THIEF !”

SLAVE went on his way with a light heart. After some days he came to the edge of the forest, and before him, on a hill, he saw a walled city, its spires and towers gleaming in the sunlight. Slave was glad at the sight of it, for the load of coins that he carried was now so heavy that he could hardly bear the weight of it.

As he drew nearer, he saw that the city gates were open, and many people were going in and out of them. He passed in with the crowd, and found himself in a

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busy street, full of shops and booths. Men and women were buying and selling, and the air was full of clatter, and noise, and shouting.

Slave had never seen a city before, and he was quite dazed as he pushed his way through the crowd. He had never thought that there were so many houses in one place in the world, or so many people. He soon grew tired of walking on the rough cobbled street, and he thought that he would seek an inn where he might rest and find quiet.

He went on until he came to a tall house, before which swung a sign that showed that it was an inn. He went under the great stone archway that led into a yard, which was full of horses and carts and

wagons. At the end of the archway stood a tall, surly man, who had a white cloth hanging over one arm.

“Can I have a bedroom here,” asked Slave, “and some dinner?”

The surly man looked at Slave’s dusty, torn tunic, and the holes in his boots. “No,” he said, “we don’t take in tramps.”

“But I will pay,” said Slave.

“You will be out of the window early in the morning, and away before we have risen,” said the man. “I know your ways.”

“I will pay you now,” said Slave, “if you are afraid of that.” And he showed the man some of his golden coins.

“Oho! a thief,” cried the surly man in a loud voice. “I thought as much!”

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Many people crowded out of the yard to see what the noise was about.

Slave grew frightened, and he did a foolish thing: he ran away. All the people came running after him, with the surly man at their head, crying, "Stop thief! Stop thief!"

And they would surely have caught him, had not the jolt of his running caused the coins in the folds of his tunic to fall upon the road. One by one they began to fall with a clink upon the hard stones. The foremost of the crowd stopped to pick them up, and those behind tumbled over those in front, until they all lay in a struggling heap in the middle of the road.

This gave Slave his chance. He

darted down a side street as hard as he could tear. There were no people in this street, and as he ran on he saw that the houses became smaller and meaner. The plaster was falling from the walls, and many of the tiles on the roofs were broken.

At length, when Slave felt that he could run no farther, he saw the door of a low shed standing open. He dashed in, and flung himself down, panting and breathless. As he fell, all the gold coins that were left to him shot out of the breast of his tunic and rolled about on the floor.

CHAPTER XII.

SLAVE FINDS FRIENDS.

SLAVE was so tired that he fell fast asleep. When he woke it was night, but a dim light shone in the shed. Looking up, he saw, standing over him, an old man, who held a lantern in one hand. This old man had long white hair and a pale worn face. His cloak was threadbare and torn. It was clear that he was very poor.

“Boy,” he said, rather sternly, “is this the way that you keep faith with your master?” He pointed to the coins that lay scattered upon the floor.

“I have no master; this money is mine,” said Slave, and he began hastily to pick up the coins and hide them in his tunic.

“Have no fear of me,” said the old man. “If this money is indeed yours, it is as safe in my inn as if it were in the king’s treasure house.” Then he knelt down, and began to pick up the money and give it to Slave.

“If you keep an inn,” said Slave, “I will stay with you. You see that I can pay.”

“Alas!” the old man said, “it is but poor comfort that we can give you. No guests come to my inn now; they go to the fine inns in the new part of the city. But we will do our best. Come with me.”

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So saying, the old man led Slave out of the shed and into the inn. An old woman was seated inside, with her hands clasped in her lap. She too was grey and pale and thin.

“Wife,” said the old man, “I have brought you a guest.”

“Then I hope that he has brought his food with him, for I have none to give him,” said the old woman.

“Give me one of your coins, and I will go into the city and buy food,” said the old man. “The rest of the money we will lock up in this chest.”

The old man opened an oak chest, bound with iron, and Slave began to place the money in it. When the old woman saw the gold, her eyes glistened.

“If we had only half of it—” she began, but her husband checked her with a frown. Then he locked the chest, gave the key to Slave, and went out.

The old woman set Slave in the best chair, and began to light a fire. The wood burnt up bravely, and was a mass of glowing charcoal when the old man came back, bearing meat and bread. Soon the meat was sputtering over the fire, and when it was well cooked they all sat down to the table to eat.

While they ate, Slave told all the story of his life : how he had been taken from his father and mother by a wicked spell ; how he had become the slave of a hard master ; and how the good fairy that had been changed into a dove had given him

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the golden egg that saved him from wounds and death. He told them also how every morning he found seven gold coins under his pillow, the gift, as he thought, of the good fairy.

And the old folk told Slave that they owed money, that they could not pay, to a greedy miser, and that they expected every day to be turned out of their house, to beg in the streets. Slave's heart grew sad at this story, and he made up his mind, as he lay in his clean white bed that night, that he would pay the debt, and save these good old people from their sorrow.

CHAPTER XIII.

OLD MALCHO SETS OUT ON HIS TRAVELS.

WHEN old Malcho had tied the egg of pearl round his neck, he marched out of the hut to go in chase of his slave. He had forgotten what the wise man had said about the crow's egg, and nothing reminded him of it, for he could see his tattered cloak, and his arms and legs, and his long staff, well enough.

Malcho took, by chance, the same road that Slave had taken, but he did not know it. When he had walked some way, he began to wonder whether he was

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on the right road. Seeing a boy in a tree, hunting for birds' nests, he called out,—

“Hi, boy!”

The boy looked down into the road, and round about him, and then up into the tree; but he could see no one.

“Who speaks?” he cried.

“I speak,” said Malcho; “I am here, under the tree. Have you seen a boy about your own size, in a ragged tunic, and with holes in his boots, pass this way?”

The boy stared down into the road again. “It is the wicked Nobody,” he cried, and clambering down the tree, he ran off as fast as his legs could carry him,

Old Malcho sets out on his Travels. 71
calling out all the time, "Beware of the wicked Nobody!"

"That is a strange boy," thought old Malcho, as he went on his way. Soon after he met a girl, who was carrying two pails full of milk. "My good girl," he said, "have you seen a boy—"

The girl stared wildly round her, gave a loud shriek, and ran off, the milk slopping out of the pails as she ran. "The wicked Nobody is about!" she cried.

Then Malcho started, and clutched at the pearl egg. "Yes," he said to himself, "they cannot see me, so they take me for the wicked Nobody, who breaks the plates, steals the food, and does all the mischief in the house. This is great good luck, for I can travel without spending

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any money." And old Malcho walked on feeling quite happy, in his cross-patch way.

Towards evening he came to the inn where Slave had slept on the bench by the fire. The door was open, and he walked in. There was no one in the room where the barrels and pots and pans were. Malcho was thirsty, so he took down one of the largest pots and began to draw himself a drink.

"Hans!" called a voice from the inner room. "Why are you drawing more cider?" and out bounced the red-faced woman. All she could see was the cider trickling from the tap.

"Hans, you careless lout," she shouted, "you have left the cider running."

Old Malcho sets out on his Travels. 73

Hans came in from the road. "I haven't," he said. "Besides, it isn't running, and there is none on the floor."

And this was true. The red-faced woman did not know what to make of it.

"But there is one of the big pots on the floor," Hans went on. "You may be sure that a thief has been in and stolen a drink."

"That must be it," said the red-faced woman, as she went back into the inner room. "Keep more careful watch on the door."

CHAPTER XIV.

HOW TO GET A MEAL FOR NOTHING.

OLD Malcho sat on the bench, while the red-faced woman and Hans were talking thus, laughing quietly to himself. He was quite sure now that he could do just what he liked, without anybody seeing him. He had been sitting so near to them that he could have touched either of them while they spoke together.

When Hans had gone out into the road again, old Malcho bethought him that, although he was no longer thirsty, he was very hungry. The red-faced

How to get a Meal for Nothing. 75

woman had left the door of the inner room ajar. Through it was wafted a pleasing smell of food, and Malcho heard the clatter of dishes and spoons.

Malcho rose, walked to the door, and slowly pulled it open. Inside he saw a table spread, and in the midst of it a huge bowl of steaming stew. The red-faced woman and her husband, who was quite as red-faced as she was, were seated at the table, eating the stew with great spoons, which they dipped from time to time into the bowl.

Old Malcho took a chair from the side of the room, placed it at the table, and sat down.

“Who did that?” said the man, putting his spoon back into the bowl.

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“Did what?” said the woman, with her mouth full of stew.

“Who put that chair at the table?” he asked. “It was not there a minute ago.”

“It was there,” said the red-faced woman. “I saw it when we sat down.”

“It was not,” cried her husband. “It was standing by the wall.”

“You are an old dolt,” said the red-faced woman. “Hans! Hans!”

Hans came running in. “What’s the matter now?” he asked.

“Why did you set three chairs when you laid the table?” asked the red-faced woman.

“I did not set three chairs,” Hans answered crossly. “Why should I?”

How to get a Meal for Nothing. 77

You never ask me to dinner. The place is bewitched, I think."

"You can go, Hans," said the woman, "you forget things dreadfully."

"And now I will trouble you for my spoon, my dear," said the man, when Hans had gone out.

"Your spoon!" cried the red-faced woman. "What should I do with two spoons? You have swallowed it, I think."

"I put it in the bowl when that chair was pulled up to the table," said the man.

Then they both started to their feet. The man gave a groan, and the woman screamed. For they saw the spoon moving in mid air. It dipped itself into the bowl, took up some of the stew,



They saw the spoon moving in mid air.

How to get a Meal for Nothing. 79

rose slowly again, and in another moment the spoon was empty.

“It is the wicked Nobody!” shrieked the red-faced woman. She and her husband dashed out of the inn and into the road. They never ceased running until they had hidden themselves deep in the forest.

Old Malcho sat quietly on until he had eaten all the stew. Then he curled himself up in one corner of the room and fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF OLD MALCHO'S JOURNEY.

NEXT morning old Malcho ate the best part of a meat pie that he found in the cupboard. He put all the rest of the food that he could find in his pouch, and he went on his way. He saw no more of the red-faced woman and her husband, and what became of them I do not know.

He went on for days and days, sleeping at night under trees or in barns, and eating a little of the food that he had stolen every day. He passed through the great forest, and

End of Old Malcho's Journey. 81

there he saw the brown wolf prowling, but the wolf took no heed of him. He saw also the three robbers, crouching behind bushes, waiting for their prey, but they saw nothing of old Malcho. Malcho clutched at the pearl egg in his bosom. "If they could only know the chance that they are losing!" he muttered.

And so at last he passed out of the forest, and before him he saw the great walled city, built upon a hill. "That is where old Claus lives," he said to himself; "he shall pay me the money that he owes me, or I will frighten him out of his life."

It was night before he reached the city walls, and guards were standing at the closed gates, with their swords drawn. But they saw nothing of old Malcho,

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who passed right through the heavy wooden gates, as if they were made of air, and into the silent street beyond.

Not a soul was stirring: there was hardly a gleam of light in any window; the whole city was asleep. Only now and then a dog howled at the moon that flooded the city with its pale rays.

Malcho walked along the main street, and then he turned into the meaner street down which Slave had run the day before. He stopped in front of the inn door, and beat a loud rat-tat upon it with his staff. The noise of his knocking echoed down the silent street.

The old man and his wife woke up, startled by the sound. "What is that?" said the old woman.

End of Old Malcho's Journey. 83

"Some one knocks at our door," replied the old man. He opened the window, and cried, "Who is it that knocks at this time of night?"

"It is I—Malcho," was the reply. "Let me in at once."

"The end has come at last," said the old man; "he has come for his money, and we cannot pay."

"There is enough—in the chest," said the old woman—"if—"

"If it were ours," the old man said; "but it is not. I will go down and let him in."

While they were talking, Slave had opened his window. "What is the matter?" he cried, "a fire?"

"Oho! my fine young bird, I have

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caught you at last !” thought Malcho, but he said nothing, and Slave, seeing no one, closed the window.

The old man went slowly downstairs, followed by his wife. He opened the door. “Come in and rest,” he said. But there was no one to be seen : the street was empty.

“Where are you ?” he cried.

“Here,” a voice answered, within the house. “Shut the door.”

“It is the wicked Nobody !” said the old woman, trembling.

“We need not fear him,” the old man said. “We have done no ill,” and they groped their way back to their bedroom.

CHAPTER XVI.

SLAVE KISSES THE DOVE'S FEATHER.

OLD Malcho went upstairs and into the room where Slave had been sleeping. Slave had dressed and was sitting on his bed.

"Aha! Master Runaway Thief," cried Malcho, "I have caught you at last!"

"Malcho!" said Slave, with a choke in his voice, "where are you?" For though the room was bright with the light of the moon, he could see no one.

"Too near for your comfort," said Malcho. "Give me back my dove, and

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the golden coins that you have taken from me."

"I will not," cried Slave. "I have not got your dove, and the golden coins are mine. The good fairy gave them to me."

Malcho, with a roar of anger, seized Slave by the throat, and tried to choke him. He could do Slave no hurt because of the golden egg. But Slave was in great fear; the grip upon him was tight, and he could see no foe. Then he bethought him of the feather in his bosom. He took it out and kissed it.

Suddenly the room was filled with a rosy cloud. Old Malcho, in a fright, crouched down in one corner of the room. When the cloud had cleared away, behold,

Slave kisses the Dove's Feather. 87

the fairy stood before Slave, clothed from head to foot in fine white gauze, and on her brow was a crown of lilies. In one hand she held a bow, and in the other an arrow.

“My child,” she said, “I have come at your call. It is time that the spell should be loosened. Take this bow and this arrow and shoot.”

“Whither shall I shoot?” asked Slave, fitting the arrow to the bowstring.

“Your hand will be guided,” said the fairy.

Slave drew the bow, and shot into the corner where old Malcho lay crouching. The arrow struck full on the egg of pearl that hung round Malcho's neck. There came a flash of blinding light, and a loud

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crash. Then Slave saw Malcho, crawling on hands and knees towards the fairy's feet.

“Have mercy!” Malcho whined;
“have mercy!”

“What mercy have you shown?” said the fairy in a stern voice; “—you, who have spared no one in your greed for gold. Yet you, even you, shall have justice. In the chest downstairs there is gold, more than enough to pay the debt that the good old Claus owes you. Take what is due to you, no more, and go your ways. Repent of your ill deeds, if you can; but if you go on doing evil, beware of my wrath.”

Old Malcho went slowly out of the room with bent head, and was seen no



“Have mercy !” Malcho whined ; “have mercy !”

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more. He took the amount of his debt from Claus, leaving the rest of the money for that good old man.

“And now, my child,” said the fairy, “it is time that we were gone.” She took Slave up in her arms, and the rosy cloud gathered around her once more.

Slave felt that he was floating through the air, slowly at first, then faster and faster. He could see nothing but the rosy cloud around him; he could feel nothing but the clasp of the strong arms that held him in safety. He had no fear; his soul was lulled to rest; his eyelids drooped, and he knew nothing more.

When he woke, he was lying on a bed in his old home. His dear mother was sitting by his side, with her arms round

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his neck. His father was standing near,
gazing down at him with glad eyes full of
love. "O mother! O father!" he cried,
stretching forth a hand to each, "can it all
have been a bad dream?"

THE END.

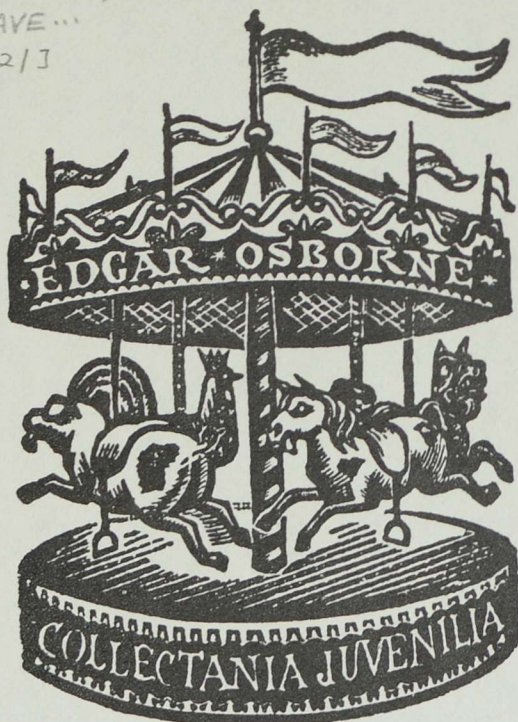
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