

Rich Peter The Pedlar

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Once on a time there was a man whom they called Rich Peter the Pedlar, because he used to travel about with a pack, and got so much money, that he became quite rich. This Rich Peter had a daughter, whom he held so dear that all who came to woo her, were sent about their business, for no one was good enough for her, he thought. Well, this went on and on, and at last no one came to woo her, and as years rolled on, Peter began to be afraid that she would die an old maid.

'I wonder now', he said to his wife, 'why suitors no longer come to woo our lass, who is so rich. 'Twould be odd if no body cared to have her, for money she has, and more she shall have. I think I'd better just go off to the Stargazers, and ask them whom she shall have, for not a soul comes to us now.'

'But how', asked the wife, 'can the Stargazers answer that?'

'Can't they?' said Peter; 'why! they read all things in the stars.'

So he took with him a great bag of money, and set off to the Stargazers, and asked them to be so good as to look at the stars, and tell him the husband his daughter was to have. Well! the Stargazers looked and looked, but they said they could see nothing about it. But Peter begged them to look better, and to tell him the truth; he would pay them well for it. So the Stargazers looked better, and at last they said that his daughter's husband was to be the miller's son, who was only just born, down at the mill below Rich Peter's house. Then Peter gave the Stargazers a hundred dollars, and went home with the answer he had got. Now, he thought it too good a joke that his daughter should wed one so newly born, and of such poor estate. He said this to his wife, and added:

'I wonder now if they would sell me the boy; then I'd soon put him out of the way?'

'I daresay they would', said his wife; 'you know they're very poor.'

So Peter went down to the mill, and asked the miller's wife whether she would sell him her son; she should get a heap of money for him?

'No!' that she wouldn't.

'Well!' said Peter, 'I'm sure I can't see why you shouldn't; you've hard work enough as it is to keep hunger out of the house, and the boy won't make it easier, I think.'

But the mother was so proud of the boy, she couldn't part with him. So when the miller came home, Peter said the same thing to him, and gave his word to pay six hundred dollars for the boy, so that they might buy themselves a farm of their own, and not have to grind other folks' corn, and to starve when they ran short of water. The miller thought it was a good bargain, and he talked over his wife; and the end was, that Rich Peter got the boy. The mother cried and sobbed, but Peter comforted her by saying the boy should be well cared for; only they had to promise never to ask after him, for he said he meant to send him far away to other lands, so that he might learn foreign tongues.

So when Peter the Pedlar got home with the boy, he sent for a carpenter, and had a little chest made, which was so tidy and neat, 'twas a joy to see. This he made water-tight with pitch, put the miller's boy into it, locked it up, and threw it into the river, where the stream carried it away.

'Now, I'm rid of him', thought Peter the Pedlar.

But when the chest had floated ever so far down the stream, it came into the mill-head of another mill, and ran down and hampered the shaft of the wheel, and stopped it. Out came the miller to see what stopped the mill, found the chest and took it up. So when he came home to dinner to his wife, he said:

'I wonder now whatever there can be inside this chest which came floating down the mill-head, and stopped our mill to-day?'

'That we'll soon know', said his wife; 'see, there's the key in the lock, just turn it.'

So they turned the key and opened the chest, and lo! there lay the prettiest child you ever set eyes on. So they were both glad, and were ready to keep the child, for they had no children of their own, and were so old, they could now hope for none.

Now, after a little while, Peter the Pedlar began to wonder how it was no one came to woo his daughter, who was so rich in land, and had so much ready money. At last, when no one came, off he went again to the Stargazers, and offered them a heap of money if they could tell him whom his daughter was to have for a husband.

'Why! we have told you already, that she is to have the miller's son down yonder', said the Stargazers.

'All very true, I daresay', said Peter the Pedlar; 'but it so happens he's dead; but if you can tell me whom she's to have, I'll give you two hundred dollars, and welcome.' So the Stargazers looked at the stars again, but they got quite cross, and said,

'We told you before, and we tell you now, she is to have the miller's son, whom you threw into the river, and wished to make an end of; for he is alive, safe and sound, in such and such a mill, far down the stream.'

So Peter the Pedlar gave them two hundred dollars for this news, and thought how he could best be rid of the miller's son. The first thing Peter did when he got home, was to set off for the mill. By that time the boy was so big that he had been confirmed, and went about the mill and helped the miller. Such a pretty boy you never saw.

'Can't you spare me that lad yonder?' said Peter the Pedlar to the miller.

'No! that I can't', he answered; 'I've brought him up as my own son, and he has turned out so well, that now he's a great help and aid to me in the mill, for I'm getting old and past work.'

'It's just the same with me', said Peter the Pedlar; 'that's why I'd like to have some one to learn my trade. Now, if you'll give him up to me, I'll give you six hundred dollars, and then you can buy yourself a farm, and live in peace and quiet the rest of your days.'

Yes! when the miller heard that, he let Peter the Pedlar have the lad.

Then the two travelled about far and wide, with their packs and wares, till they came to an inn, which lay by the edge of a great wood. From this Peter the Pedlar sent the lad home with a letter to his wife, for the way was not so long if you took the short cut across the wood, and told him to tell her she was to be sure and do what was written in the letter as quickly as she could. But it was written in the letter, that she was to have a great pile made there and then, fire it, and cast the miller's son into it. If she didn't do that, he'd burn her alive himself when he came back. So the lad set off with the letter across the wood, and when evening came on he reached a house far, far away in the wood, into which he went; but inside he found no one. In one of the rooms was a bed ready made, so he threw himself across it and fell asleep. The letter he had stuck into his hat-band, and the hat he pulled over his face. So when the robbers came back--for in that house twelve robbers had their abode-- and saw the lad lying on the bed, they began to wonder who he could be, and one of them took the letter and broke it open, and read it.

'Ho! ho!' said he; 'this comes from Peter the Pedlar, does it? Now we'll play him a trick. It would be a pity if the old niggard made an end of such a pretty lad.'

So the robbers wrote another letter to Peter the Pedlar's wife, and fastened it under his hat-band while he slept; and in that they wrote, that as soon as ever she got it she was to make a wedding for her daughter and the miller's boy, and give them horses and cattle, and household stuff, and set them up for themselves in the farm which he had under the hill; and if he didn't find all this done by the time he came back, she'd smart for it--that was all.

Next day the robbers let the lad go, and when he came home and delivered the letter, he said he was to greet her kindly from Peter the Pedlar, and to say that she was to carry out what was written in the letter as soon as ever she could.

'You must have behaved very well then', said Peter, the Pedlar's wife to the miller's boy, 'if he can write so about you now, for when you set off, he was so mad against you, he didn't know how to put you out of the way.' So she married them on the spot, and set them up for

themselves, with horses, and cattle, and household stuff, in the farm up under the hill.

No long time after Peter the Pedlar came home, and the first thing he asked was, if she had done what he had written in his letter.

'Aye! aye!' she said; 'I thought it rather odd, but I dared not do anything else'; and so Peter asked where his daughter was.

'Why, you know well enough where she is', said his wife. 'Where should she be but up at the farm under the hill, as you wrote in the letter.'

So when Peter the Pedlar came to hear the whole story, and came to see the letter, he got so angry he was ready to burst with rage, and off he ran up to the farm to the young couple.

'It's all very well, my son, to say you have got my daughter', he said to the miller's lad; 'but if you wish to keep her, you must go to the Dragon of Deepferry, and get me three feathers out of his tail; for he who has them may get anything he chooses.'

'But where shall I find him?' said his son-in-law.

'I'm sure I can't tell', said Peter the Pedlar; 'that's your look-out, not mine.'

So the lad set off with a stout heart, and after he had walked some way, he came to a king's palace.

'Here I'll just step in and ask', he said to himself; 'for such great folk know more about the world than others, and perhaps I may here learn the way to the Dragon.'

Then the King asked him whence he came, and whither he was going?

'Oh!' said the lad, 'I'm going to the Dragon of Deepferry to pluck three feathers out of his tail, if I only knew where to find him.'

'You must take luck with you, then', said the King, 'for I never heard of any one who came back from that search. But if you find him, just

ask him from me why I can't get clear water in my well; for I've dug it out time after time, and still I can't get a drop of clear water.'

'Yes, I'll be sure to ask him', said the lad. So he lived on the fat of the land at the palace, and got money and food when he left it.

At even he came to another king's palace; and when he went into the kitchen, the King came out of the parlour, and asked whence he came, and on what errand he was bound?

'Oh!' said the lad, 'I'm going to the Dragon of Deepferry to pluck three feathers out of his tail.'

'Then you must take luck with you', said the King, 'for I never yet heard that any one came back who went to look for him. But if you find him, be so good as to ask him from me where my daughter is, who has been lost so many years. I have hunted for her, and had her name given out in every church in the country, but no one can tell me anything about her.'

'Yes, I'll mind and do that', said the lad; and in that palace too he lived on the best, and when he went away he got both money and food.

So when evening drew on again he came at last to another king's palace. Here who should come out into the kitchen but the Queen, and she asked him whence he came, and on what errand he was bound?

'I'm going to the Dragon of Deepferry to pluck three feathers out of his tail', said the lad.

'Then you'd better take a good piece of luck with you', said the Queen, 'for I never heard of any one that came back from him. But if you find him, just be good enough to ask him from me where I shall find my gold keys which I have lost.'

'Yes! I'll be sure to ask him', said the lad.

Well! when he left the palace he came to a great broad river; and while he stood there and wondered whether he should cross it, or go down along the bank, an old hunchbacked man came up, and asked whither he was going?

'Oh, I'm going to the Dragon of Deepferry, if I could only find any one to tell where I can find him.'

'I can tell you that', said the man; 'for here I go backwards and forwards, and carry those over who are going to see him. He lives just across, and when you climb the hill you'll see his castle; but mind, if you come to talk with him, to ask him from me how long I'm to stop here and carry folk over.'

'I'll be sure to ask him', said the lad.

So the man took him on his back and carried him over the river; and when he climbed the hill, he saw the castle, and went in.

He found there a Princess who lived with the Dragon all alone; and she said:

'But, dear friend, how can Christian folk dare to come hither? None have been here since I came, and you'd best be off as fast as you can; for as soon as the Dragon comes home, he'll smell you out, and gobble you up in a trice, and that'll make me so unhappy.'

'Nay! nay!' said the lad; 'I can't go before I've got three feathers out of his tail.'

'You'll never get them', said, the Princess; 'you'd best be off.'

But the lad wouldn't go; he would wait for the Dragon, and get the feathers, and an answer to all his questions.

'Well, since you're so steadfast I'll see what I can do to help you', said the Princess; 'just try to lift that sword that hangs on the wall yonder.'

No; the lad could not even stir it.

'I thought so', said the Princess; 'but just take a drink out of this flask.'

So when the lad had sat a while, he was to try again; and then he could just stir it.

'Well! you must take another drink', said the Princess, 'and then you may as well tell me your errand hither.'

So he took another drink, and then he told her how one king had begged him to ask the Dragon, how it was he couldn't get clean water in his well?--how another had bidden him ask, what had become of his daughter, who had been lost many years since?--and how a queen had begged him to ask the Dragon what had become of her gold keys?--and, last of all, how the ferryman had begged him to ask the Dragon, how long he was to stop there and carry folk over?? When he had done his story, and took hold of the sword, he could lift it; and when he had taken another drink, he could brandish it.

'Now', said the Princess, 'if you don't want the Dragon to make an end of you, you'd best creep under the bed, for night is drawing on, and he'll soon be home, and then you must lie as still as you can, lest he should find you out. And when we have gone to bed, I'll ask him, but you must keep your ears open, and snap up all that he says; and under the bed you must lie till all is still, and the Dragon falls asleep; then creep out softly and seize the sword, and as soon as he rises, look out to hew off his head at one stroke, and at the same time pluck out the three feathers, for else he'll tear them out himself, that no one may get any good by them.'

So the lad crept under the bed, and the Dragon came home.

'What a smell of Christian flesh', said the Dragon.

'Oh, yes', said the Princess, 'a raven came flying with a man's bone in his bill, and perched on the roof. No doubt it's that you smell.'

'So it is, I daresay', said the Dragon.

So the Princess served supper; and after they had eaten, they went to bed. But after they had lain a while, the Princess began to toss about, and all at once she started up and said:

'Ah! ah!'

'What's the matter?' said the Dragon.

'Oh', said the Princess, 'I can't rest at all, and I've had such a strange dream.'

'What did you dream about? Let's hear?' said the Dragon.

'I thought a king came here, and asked you what he must do to get clear water in his well.'

'Oh', said the Dragon, 'he might just as well have found that out for himself. If he dug the well out, and took out the old rotten stump which lies at the bottom, he'd get clean water, fast enough. But be still now, and don't dream any more.'

When the Princess had lain a while, she began to toss about, and at last she started up with her

'Ah! ah!'

'What's the matter now?' said the Dragon.

'Oh! I can't get any rest at all, and I've had such a strange dream', said the Princess.

'Why, you seem full of dreams to-night', said the Dragon 'what was your dream now?'

'I thought a king came here, and asked you what had become of his daughter who had been lost many years since', said the Princess.

'Why, you are she', said the Dragon; 'but he'll never set eyes on you again. But now, do pray be still, and let me get some rest, and don't let's have any more dreams, else I'll break your ribs.'

Well, the Princess hadn't lain much longer before she began to toss about again. At last she started up with her

'Ah! ah!'

'What! Are you at it again?' said the Dragon. 'What's the matter now?' for he was wild and sleep-surlly, so that he was ready to fly to pieces.

'Oh, don't be angry', said the Princess; 'but I've had such a strange dream.'

'The deuce take your dreams', roared the Dragon; 'what did you dream this time?'

I thought a queen came here, who asked you to tell her where she would find her gold keys, which she has lost.'

'Oh', said the Dragon, 'she'll find them soon enough if she looks among the bushes where she lay that time she wots of. But do now let me have no more dreams, but sleep in peace.'

So they slept a while; but then the Princess was just as restless as ever, and at last she screamed out:

'Ah! ah!'

'You'll never behave till I break your neck', said the Dragon, who was now so wroth that sparks of fire flew out of his eyes. 'What's the matter now?'

'Oh, don't be so angry', said the Princess; 'I can't bear that; but I've had such a strange dream.'

'Bless me!' said the Dragon, 'if I ever heard the like of these dreams--there's no end to them. And pray, what did you dream now?'

'I thought the ferryman down at the ferry came and asked how long he was to stop there and carry folk over', said the Princess.

'The dull fool!' said the Dragon; 'he'd soon be free, if he chose. When any one comes who wants to go across, he has only to take and throw him into the river, and say, "Now, carry folk over yourself till someone sets you free." But now, pray let's have an end of these dreams, else I'll lead you a pretty dance.'

So the Princess let him sleep on. But as soon as all was still, and the miller's lad heard that the Dragon snored, he crept out. Before it was light the Dragon rose; but he had scarce set both his feet on the floor before the lad cut off his head, and plucked three feathers out of his tail. Then came great joy, and both the lad and the Princess took as much gold, and silver, and money, and precious things as they could carry; and when they came down to the ford, they so puzzled the

ferryman with all they had to tell, that he quite forgot to ask what the Dragon had said about him till they had got across.

'Halloa, you sir', he said, as they were going off, 'did you ask the Dragon what I begged you to ask?'

'Yes I did', said the lad, 'and he said, "When any one comes and wants to go over, you must throw him into the midst of the river, and say, 'Now, carry folk over yourself till some one comes to set you free,'" and then you'll be free.'

'Ah, bad luck to you', said the ferryman; 'had you told me that before, you might have set me free yourself.'

So, when they got to the first palace, the Queen asked if he had spoken to the Dragon about her gold keys? 'Yes', said the lad, and whispered in the Queen's ear, 'he said you must look among the bushes where you lay the day you wot of.'

'Hush! hush! Don't say a word', said the Queen, and gave the lad a hundred dollars.

When they came to the second palace, the King asked if he had spoken to the Dragon of what he begged him?

'Yes', said the lad, 'I did; and see, here is your daughter.'

At that the King was so glad, he would gladly have given the Princess to the miller's lad to wife, and half the kingdom beside; but as he was married already, he gave him two hundred dollars, and coaches and horses, and as much gold and silver as he could carry away.

When he came to the third King's palace, out came the King and asked if he had asked the Dragon of what he begged him?

'Yes', said the lad, 'and he said you must dig out the well, and take out the rotten old stump which lies at the bottom, and then you'll get plenty of clear water.'

Then the King gave him three hundred dollars, and he set out home; but he was so loaded with gold and silver, and so grandly clothed, that

it gleamed and glistened from him, and he was now far richer than Peter the Pedlar.

When Peter got the feathers he hadn't a word more to say against the wedding; but when he saw all that wealth, he asked if there was much still left at the Dragon's castle.

'Yes, I should think so', said the lad; 'there was much more than I could carry with me--so much, that you might load many horses with it; and if you choose to go, you may be sure there'll be enough for you.'

So his son-in-law told him the way so clearly, that he hadn't to ask it of any one.

'But the horses', said the lad 'you'd best leave this side the river; for the old ferryman, he'll carry you over safe enough.'

So Peter set off, and took with him great store of food and many horses; but these he left behind him on the river's brink, as the lad had said. And the old ferryman took him upon his back; but when they had come a bit out into the stream, he cast him into the midst of the river, and said,

'Now you may go backwards and forwards here, and carry folk over till you are set free.'

And unless some one has set him free, there goes Rich Peter the Pedlar backwards and forwards, and carries folk across this very day.