

The poor  
Youth  
and  
the Princess





UKRAINIAN  
FOLK  
TALE



# The poor Youth and the Princess

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Once upon a time there was a Woman who lived with her son in a thatched cottage in a forest. They had no land to raise wheat because the forest grew thickly all around, so they had to buy their bread. One day, when there was no bread left, the Woman sent her son to buy some.

“Here you are, son,” she said. “Take these pennies and go for a loaf of bread.”

The Youth took the pennies and started out. He walked and he walked till he met a man who was leading a Dog toward the forest.

“Hello, sir!” said the Youth.

“Hello!” the man answered.

“Where are you taking the Dog?”

“I’m taking him to the forest to hang him, because the Dog’s too old now and I’ve no use for him any more.”

“Oh, don’t hang him, sir. Sell him to me, instead.”

“Then buy him.”

“How much do you want?”

“How much will you give?”

The Youth gave the man all the pennies his





mother had given him to buy bread, took the Dog and went home.

“Well, son, did you buy the bread?” his mother asked, when he came in.

“No, Mama, I didn’t.”

“Why not?”

“As I was walking along, I met a man about to hang this Dog. So I upped and bought him.”

His mother gave him some more pennies and again she told him to go and buy bread. He was walking along when he came upon a man carrying a Cat.

“Hello, sir”, said the Youth.

“Hello!”

“Where are you going, sir?”

“To the forest: I’m carrying this Cat there.”

“What are you taking him to the forest for?”

“To hang him. The Cat’s a regular nuisance. Why, I can’t keep any food in the house. It’s gone as soon as I put it down, no matter where I hide it.”

“So why don’t you sell him to me?”

“Then buy him!”

“What’s your price?”

“I won’t haggle with you over it. I’ll take whatever you give.”

So the Youth gave the man the pennies his mother had given him to buy bread, took the Cat and went home.

“And where is the bread?” his mother asked, when he came in.

“I didn’t buy any.”





“Why didn’t you? What did you do with the pennies, then? You didn’t buy another creature, did you?”

“I’m afraid I did,” he admitted.

“So what is it this time?”

“This Cat. A man was carrying him to the forest to hang him. And I felt so sorry for the Cat, I upped and bought him!”

“Well, son, here are some more pennies. But see you don’t buy any more creatures, for there’s not a crust of bread left in the house.”

The Youth started out, and he walked and walked till he came upon a man beating a Snake to death.

“Why are you doing that, sir?” he asked. “You’d do better to sell the Snake to me!”

“Then buy him!” the man said. “I’m agreeable.”

“How much do I have to give you for him?”

“Give whatever you can, and he’s yours.”

So the Youth gave him all his pennies. The man took them and went away.

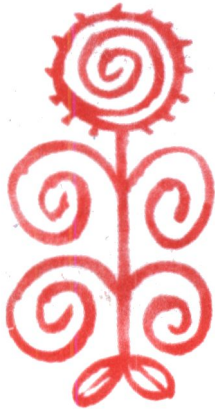
Then the Snake spoke up.

“Thank you, good soul,” he said, “for delivering me from death. Here, take this ring. When you need something, toss the ring from one hand to the other, and servants will come running at once. They will carry out all your commands and grant your every wish.”

The Youth took the ring and walked home. Nearing the cottage, he tossed the ring from one hand to the other, and wonder of wonders! the servants appeared. More than he could count!







“Bring me bread!” he told them.

The moment he said it, they brought him many loaves of bread. More than he could count! Then he entered the cottage.

“Well, Mama, from now on we won’t have to go and buy bread. A Snake gave me a magic ring: I simply toss it from one hand to the other, and many servants come running at once. They will do anything I tell them and grant my every wish.”



“Whyever did the Snake give you a ring like that?”

“Because I delivered him from death. A man wanted to kill it, but I bought him with the pennies you gave me for bread.”

And so they lived in plenty, and the Dog and the Cat lived with them. Whenever the Youth wanted something, he simply tossed the ring and the servants came running to grant his wish.



Eventually he decided that it was time for him to wed.

“Mama,” he said, “go and ask the Princess if she will be my wife.”

So his mother went to the Princess and told her why she had come.

“Well,” said the Princess, “if your son makes me a pair of slippers that will fit me perfectly, I will marry him.”

The Woman returned home to her son.

“The Princess says,” she told him, “if you make her a pair of slippers that will fit her perfectly, she will marry you.”

“Very well,” he said, “I will make the slippers.”

That evening, the Youth went out in the yard, tossed the ring from one hand to the other, and in the wink of an eye the servants came running.

“By morning,” he told them, “I must have a pair of slippers made of cloth of gold and sewn with a silver lining, and they must fit the Princess perfectly.”

When he rose the next morning, the slippers were all ready and his mother took them to the Princess. She tried them on and they were a perfect fit.

“Tell your son,” said the Princess, “to sew me a wedding dress in one night, and let the dress be neither too long nor too short, neither too tight nor too loose, and it must fit nobody else but me.”

The Woman returned home to her son.

“The Princess says,” she told him, “that in one







night you are to sew her a wedding dress that is neither too long nor too short, neither too tight nor too loose, and it must fit nobody else but her."

"Very well," he said. "You go on to bed, Mama, and I'll do everything she bade me."

When his mother had gone to bed, the Youth went out in the yard and tossed the ring from hand to hand. In the wink of an eye, there were the servants. Too many to count!

"By morning," he said, "I must have a dress made of cloth that shines like the sun, and it must fit nobody else but the Princess."

"Very well, all shall be done exactly as you wish."

Then the Youth went to bed.

When he rose the next morning, he told his mother: "Now then, Mama, take the dress to the Princess. Let's see what she has to say this time."

"But where is the dress, my son?" asked his mother. "I don't see it anywhere."

The Youth went to the table, raised the cloth — and the cottage shone as though the sun had come right in.

"Here it is, Mama, right under the tablecloth. Take it to the Princess!"

So she wrapped the dress and carried it to the Princess.

"Well, what have you come to tell us, my good woman?" asked the Princess.

"I have brought you the wedding dress," the Woman replied.







As soon as she uncovered the dress, everything in the Princess' chamber glowed and shone.

The Princess put it on, gazed at herself in the mirror, and jumped for joy because the dress made her look so beautiful. She walked to and fro in her chamber as bright as the sun.



“Well, my good woman,” she said, “let your son build me a bridge from my palace across the ravine to the church where we shall be married. And let the bridge be made of silver and gold. When it is ready, we shall go to the altar.”

And the Woman went home to her son.



“The Princess says,” she told him, “that you are to build her a bridge from her palace across the ravine to the church. She says that it must be made of gold and silver.”

“Very well,” her son replied. “Go and lie down, Mama, and take a rest.”

When all were asleep that night, the Youth went out in the yard and tossed the ring from hand to hand. So many servants turned up, there was scarcely room for them in the yard.

“By morning,” he told them, “I must have a bridge of silver and gold built from the Princess’ palace across the ravine to the church where we shall be married. And when the Princess and I drive there, let there be apple and pear trees, cherry and plum trees in full bloom on both sides of the road; and let the fruit be ripe by the time we drive back from the church.”

“Very well,” said the servants. “By morning, all will be done exactly as you wish.”

When the Youth rose the next morning, he went outside and saw the bridge and the orchard trees in blossom on both sides. So he went in to his mother.

“Mama,” he said, “go and tell the Princess that the bridge is ready and she may come to the church to be married.”

His mother went and told this to the Princess.

“I’ve already seen the bridge,” said she. “It is very beautiful, indeed. Tell your son that I shall marry him tomorrow.”

The Woman returned home to her son.







“The Princess says you may go to the church tomorrow, and she will marry you.”

During the night, the Youth had a palace built for himself, and went to the church the next day. He married the Princess, and when they drove back across the bridge all the fruit was ripe: there were apples and pears and cherries and plums, and all other fruits you could possibly name.

So the Youth and the Princess came to the new palace where they celebrated the wedding. They lived there happily for some time, and the Dog and the Cat lived with them.



One day the Princess said to her husband: "Tell me, my dear, how you managed to make the slippers and the dress when you hadn't even taken my measurements! And how did you manage to build such a bridge in one night, and wherever did you get all that gold and silver?"

"See this ring?" he replied. "Whenever I toss it from one hand to the other, many servants come running. More than you could count! The yard is filled with them. It was they who made the slippers and the dress; it was they who built the bridge and the palace we live in. They do everything for me."





Then the Princess waited till he was fast asleep, quietly took off his ring, tossed it from hand to hand, and the servants turned up. More than she could count!

“Bring horses at once, and a coach,” she told them. “I shall go back to my own palace. Then you must turn this palace into a hollow pillar with just enough room inside for my husband to stand up or lie down, and carry it immediately across the sea. And mind you don’t wake him up till he is inside the pillar!”

“Very well,” said the servants. “All will be done exactly as you wish.”

The Princess went out and wonder of wonders! the coach was waiting. She entered it and drove away. And in the wink of an eye the Youth’s palace became a hollow pillar, and the servants carried it across the sea.

Early the next morning, the Youth awoke and horror of horrors! he had no wife, no palace and no ring: he had nothing. There was only the pillar in which he stood. He wanted to get out, but there was no door. He explored one wall, and then the other, but could not get out for there was only a small window at the top. So he stayed there, poor fellow, with nobody to give him a thing to eat. He would have died if it weren’t for the Dog and the Cat, for they had also been left in the pillar.

They managed to climb out of the window. And the Dog would run to the fields, steal a piece of







bread from a field-worker's lunch bag, and bring it to the pillar. Then the Cat would grip the bread with his teeth, climb the pillar, and give it to the Youth. That way they collected a small supply of bread.

Then the Dog said to the Cat: "Now that our master has some bread, what if we cross the sea? Maybe we can get the ring back, somehow."

"Let's go!" replied the Cat.

So they went. They ran and they ran till they came to the seashore. Then the Cat sat on the Dog's back, and the Dog began to swim. He swam a long time, but at last they reached the opposite shore. When they came out of the water, they sat for a while in the sun to get warm.

"Now," said the Dog to the Cat, "let's go to the palace. We shall have to be quick on our pins. If we get the ring, we must race back here as fast as we can so they don't catch us."

"All right," said the Cat. "Come on!"

Then the two of them ran off. They ran and they ran, they ran and they ran, never stopping to rest. They ran through a great forest. And suddenly they saw the palace, surrounded by a high wall.

Then the Dog said to the Cat: "You stay here beside the forest. I am the older, so I shall go and see whether I can find a way to get into the palace and steal the ring."

So the Cat stayed put, and the Dog ran up to the palace gates but, as they were guarded by soldiers, he stopped and listened.



He heard the head guard tell the soldiers: "Mind you keep good watch at the gates lest an enemy slip in."

"Don't worry," they said. "We'll let nobody in, not even a bird, not even a mouse."

Well, the Dog ran around the wall a few times, and then returned to the Cat.

"There's nothing we can do," he said sadly. "The wall round the palace is so high and the guards at the gates so watchful that nobody can get in, not even a bird, not even a mouse."

"You stay here," said the Cat, "while I try my luck."

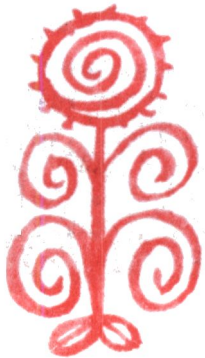
And the Cat ran off. He ran up to the palace and saw the high wall and the guards at the gates. So he went round the wall and found a tree beside it. He climbed the tree, jumped into the courtyard and began strolling about under the Princess' window.

Now the Princess came by chance to the window and saw the Cat walking round the courtyard. She let him into her chamber. The Cat wandered about the room, searching every nook and corner where the Princess might have hidden the ring... When he found the hiding-place, he waited till everybody had gone to bed, snatched the ring and ran off. The Dog and the Cat ran to the seashore and, without wasting a moment, the Cat jumped on the Dog who leaped into the water and began to swim.

When they had almost crossed the sea and the shore was already in sight, the Dog spoke to the Cat.







“Hey there, are you holding the ring?”

The Cat could not answer, for the ring was in his mouth. But the Dog would not leave him in peace.

“Speak up, I asked if you’ve still got the ring! If you don’t answer, I’ll toss you into the sea.”

The Cat kept silent and the Dog grew angry.

“For the last time, either you talk or off you go!” That frightened the Cat.

“I’m ho-old-ing it!” he screeched.



And the ring fell plop into the sea! After that, the Cat kept silent and would not say another word.

As soon as they reached the shore, the Cat flew at the Dog.

“You so-and-so! It’s all your fault I dropped the ring! Why did you have to ask questions? Now, dive right in and look for it! Do as you’re told!”

The Dog dived in and splashed this way and that, but no ring! Then they started quarrelling





anew but, naturally, that didn't help. At last, the Cat made a suggestion.

"Let's stroll along the shore and ask everyone we meet if he can get the ring for us from the sea." And the Dog agreed.

So they sat awhile in the sun to get warm, and then went walking by the sea. They asked everyone they met, and everyone they saw whether he could get them the ring from the sea, or if he knew anyone who might try. But nobody would help them.

Then the Cat had a new idea.

"You know what?" he said. "Let's walk along the water's edge and catch a crab or a frog."

"All right," said the Dog. "Come on!"

There were many frogs by the shoreline and whenever they caught one, they would say: "Promise you will bring us the ring from the sea. If you don't, we shan't let you go!"

As soon as the frog understood what was wanted, it would answer: "I promise! I know where your ring is. Let me go, and I'll bring it to you."

But after they let it go, the frog would swim away and never give another thought to the ring. And soon the frogs were no longer afraid of them. Whenever they caught one, it would immediately say: "I'll bring you the ring." And they would let it go.

So they wandered by the sea all day until evening. Then a baby frog suddenly hopped out, and they caught it.



“Do you know where the ring is that’s down in the sea?” they asked.

“I don’t know... croak, croak!”

“If you don’t know, we won’t let you go back to your mother.”

When the old mother frog heard this, she crawled out of the water. What a frog she was, as big as a pail!

“Don’t hurt my baby. I’ll bring you the ring from the sea.”

“Very well,” they said. “But we’ll keep your baby till you return with the ring. As soon as you do, we’ll let the little one go.”

The huge frog hopped into the sea, found the ring and brought it to the Dog and the Cat. They recognized the ring, let the baby frog go, and ran to the pillar.

By the time they reached their master, he had already eaten up all the bread. For two days, not a crumb had passed his lips, and he was nothing but skin and bones. The Cat climbed up to the window in a trice and gave him the ring. The Youth tossed it from hand to hand, and the servants came running at once. More than he could count!

“Carry this pillar back where it was, and turn it into a palace again, and let my wife and mother be inside.”

No sooner said than done.

Then the Youth told the Princess to begone, and he lived happily ever after with his faithful family — his Mother, his Cat and his Dog.









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О БЕДНОМ ПАРНЕ И ЦАРЕВНЕ

Украинская народная сказка  
(На английском языке)

