

The Traveling Companion

Hans Christian Andersen

Poor John was greatly troubled, because his father was very ill and could not recover. Except for these two, there was no one in their small room. The lamp on the table had almost burned out, for it was quite late at night.

You have been a good son, John," his dying father said, "and the Lord will help you along in the world." He looked at his son with earnest, gentle eyes, sighed deeply, and fell dead as if he were falling asleep.

John cried bitterly, for now he had no one in all the world, neither father nor mother, sister nor brother. Poor John! He knelt at the bedside, and kissed his dead father's hand. He cried many salty tears, until at last his eyes closed, and he fell asleep with his head resting against the hard bedstead.

Then he had a strange dream. He saw the sun and the moon bow down to him. He saw his father well again and strong, and heard him laughing as he always laughed when he was happy. A beautiful girl, with a crown of gold on her lovely long hair, stretched out her hand to John, and his father said, "See what a bride you have won. She is the loveliest girl in the world." Then he awoke, and all these fine things were gone. His father lay cold and dead on the bed, and there was no one with them. Poor John!

The following week the dead man was buried. John walked close behind the coffin; he could no longer see his kind father, who had loved him so. He heard how they threw the earth down upon the coffin, and watched the last corner of it until a shovel of earth hid even that. He was so sad that he felt as if his heart were breaking in pieces. Then those around him sang a psalm which sounded so lovely that tears came to his eyes. He cried, and that did him good in his grief. The sun shone in its splendor down on the green trees, as if to say, "John, you must not be so unhappy. Look up and see how fair and blue the sky is. Your father is there, praying to the good Lord that things will always go well with you."

"I'll always be good," John said. "Then I shall go to join my father in heaven. How happy we shall be to see each other again! How much I shall have to tell him, and how much he will have to show me and to teach me about the joys of heaven, just as he used to teach me here on earth. Oh, what joy that will be!"

He could see it all so clearly that he smiled, even though tears were rolling down his cheeks. The little birds up in the chestnut trees twittered, "Chirp, chirp! Chirp, chirp!" They were so happy and gay, for although they had attended a funeral they knew very well that the dead man had gone to heaven, where he now wore wings even larger and lovelier than theirs. They knew that he was happy now, because here on earth he had been a good man, and this made them glad.

John saw them fly from the green trees far out into the world, and he felt a great desire to follow them. But first he carved a large wooden cross to mark his father's grave. When he took it there in the evening he found the grave neatly covered with sand and flowers. Strangers had done this, for they had loved the good man who now was dead.

Early the next morning, John packed his little bundle and tucked his whole inheritance into a money belt. All that he had was fifty dollars and a few pieces of silver, but with this he meant to set off into the world. But first he went to the churchyard, where he knelt and repeated the Lord's Prayer over his father's grave. Then he said, "Farewell, father dear! I'll always be good, so you may safely pray to our Lord that things will go well with me."

The fields through which he passed were full of lovely flowers that flourished in the sunshine and nodded in the breeze, as if to say, "Welcome to the green pastures! Isn't it nice here?" But John turned round for one more look at the old church where as a baby he had been baptised, and where he had gone with his father every Sunday to sing the hymns. High up, in one of the belfry windows, he saw the little church goblin with his pointed red cap, raising one arm to keep the sun out of his eyes. John nodded good-bye to him, and the little goblin waved his red cap, put his hand on his heart, and kissed his finger tips to him again and again, to show that he wished John well and hoped that he would have a good journey.

As John thought of all the splendid things he would see in the fine big world ahead of him, he walked on and on - farther away than he had ever gone before. He did not even know the towns through which he passed, nor the people whom he met. He was far away among strangers.

The first night he slept under a haystack in the fields, for he had no other bed. But he thought it very comfortable, and the king himself could have no better. The whole field, the brook, the haystack, and the blue sky overhead, made a glorious bedroom. The green grass patterned with red and white flowers was his carpet. The elder bushes and hedges of wild roses were bouquets of flowers, and for his wash bowl he had the whole brook full of clear fresh water. The reeds nodded their heads to wish him both "Good night," and "Good morning." The moon was really a huge night lamp, high up in the blue ceiling where there was no danger of its setting fire to the bed curtains. John could sleep peacefully, and sleep he did, never once waking until the sun rose and all the little birds around him began singing, "Good morning! Good morning! Aren't you up yet?"

The church bells rang, for it was Sunday. People went to hear the preacher, and John went with them. As he sang a hymn and listened to God's Word, he felt just as if he were in the same old church where he had been baptised, and where he had sung the hymns with his father.

There were many, many graves in the churchyard, and some were overgrown with high grass. Then John thought of his own father's grave and of how it too would come to look like these, now that he could no longer weed and tend it. So he knelt down to weed out the high grass. He straightened the wooden crosses that had fallen, and replaced the wreaths that the wind had blown from the graves. "Perhaps," he thought, "someone will do the same for my father's grave, now that I cannot take care of it."

Outside the churchyard gate stood an old beggar, leaning on his crutch and John gave him the few pieces of silver that he had. Happy and high-spirited, John went farther on - out into the wide world. Toward nightfall the weather turned dreadfully stormy. John hurried along as - fast as he could to find shelter, but it soon grew dark. At last he came to a little church which stood very lonely upon a hill. Fortunately the door was ajar, and he slipped inside to stay until the storm abated.

"I'll sit down here in the corner," he said, "for I am very tired and need a little rest." So he sat down, put his hands together, and said his evening prayer. Before he knew it he was fast asleep and dreaming, while it thundered and lightened outside.

When he woke up it was midnight. The storm had passed, and the moon shone upon him through the window. In the middle of the church stood an open coffin and in it lay a dead man, awaiting burial. John was not at all frightened. His conscience was clear, and he was sure that the dead do not harm anyone. It is the living who do harm, and two such harmful living men stood beside the dead one, who had been put here in the church until he could be buried. They had a vile scheme to keep him from resting quietly in his coffin. They intended to throw his body out of the church - the helpless dead man's body.

Why do you want to do such a thing?" John asked. "It is a sin and a shame. In Heaven's name, let the man rest."

"Stuff and nonsense!" the two evil men exclaimed. "He cheated us. He owed us money which he could not pay, and now that he has cheated us by dying we shall not get a penny of it. So we intend to revenge ourselves. Like a dog he shall lie outside the church door."

"I have only fifty dollars," John cried. "It is my whole inheritance, but I'll give it to you gladly if you will solemnly promise to let the poor dead man rest in peace. I can do without the money. I have my healthy, strong arms, and Heaven will always help me."

"Why certainly," the villainous fellows agreed. "If you are willing to pay his debt, we won't lay a hand on him, you can count on that."

They took the money he gave them and went away roaring with laughter at his simplicity. John laid the body straight again in its coffin, folded its hands, and took his leave. He went away through the great forest, very well pleased.

All around him, wherever moonlight fell between the trees, he saw little elves playing merrily. They weren't disturbed when he came along because they knew he was a good and innocent fellow. It is only the wicked people who never are allowed to see the elves. Some of the elves were no taller than your finger, and their long yellow hair was done up with golden combs. Two by two, they seesawed on the big raindrops, which lay thick on the leaves and tall grass. Sometimes the drops rolled from under them, and then they tumbled down between the grass blades. The little manikins would laugh and made a great to-do about it, for it was a very funny sight. They sang, and John knew all their pretty little songs, which had been taught him when he was a small boy.

Big spotted spiders, wearing silver crowns, were kept busy spinning long bridges and palaces from one bush to another, and as the tiny dewdrops formed on these webs they sparkled like glass in the moonlight. All this went on until sunrise, when the little elves hid in the buds of flowers. Then the wind struck the bridges and palaces, which were swept away like cobwebs.

John had just come out of the forest, when behind him a man's strong voice called out, "Ho there, comrade! Where are you bound?"

"I'm bound for the wide world," John told him. "I have neither father nor mother. I am a poor boy, but I am sure the Lord will look after me."

"I am off to the wide world, too," the stranger said. "Shall we keep each other company?"

"Yes indeed," John replied. So they strode along together.

They got to like each other very much, for both of them were kindly. But John soon found that he was not nearly so wise as the stranger, who had seen most of the world, and knew how to tell about almost everything.

The sun was high in the heavens when they sat down under a big tree to eat their breakfast. Just then an old woman came hobbling along. Oh! she was so old that she bent almost double and walked with a crutch. On her back was a load of firewood she had gotten from the forest. Her apron was tied up and John could see these big bunches of fern fronds and willow switches sticking out. As she came near the two travelers, her foot slipped. She fell down, and screamed aloud, for the poor old woman had broken her leg.

John suggested that they carry the woman to her home right away, but the stranger opened up his knapsack and took out a little jar of salve, which he said would mend her leg completely and at once, so that she could walk straight home as well as if her leg had never been broken. But in return he asked for the three bunches of switches that she carried in her apron.

"That's a very high price!" The old woman dubiously nodded her head. She did not want to give up the switches, but it was not very pleasant to lie there with a broken leg, so she let him have the three bunches. No sooner had he rubbed her with the salve than the old woman got to her feet and walked off much better than she had come - all this the salve could do. Obviously it was not the sort of thing you can buy from the apothecary.

"What on earth do you want with those bunches of switches?" John asked his companion.

"Oh, they are three nice bundles of herbs," he said. "They just happened to strike my fancy, because I'm an odd sort of fellow."

When they had gone on for quite a distance, John remarked, "See how dark the sky has grown. Those are dreadfully dense clouds."

"No," his comrade said, "those are not clouds. They are mountains - splendid high mountains, where you can get clear above the clouds into perfectly fresh air. It is glorious, believe me. Tomorrow we shall certainly be far up in the world."

But they were not so near as they seemed to be. It took a whole day to reach the mountains, where the dark forests rose right up to the skies, and where the boulders were almost as large as a whole town. To climb over all of them would be heavy going indeed, so John and his companion went to an inn to rest and strengthen themselves for tomorrow's journey.

Down in the big tap-room at the inn were many people, because a showman was there with a puppet-show. He had just set up his little theatre, and the people sat there waiting to see the play. Down in front, a burly old butcher had taken a seat, the very best one too, and his big bulldog - how vicious it looked - sat beside him, with his eyes popping as wide as everyone else's.

Then the play started. It was a very pleasant play, all about a king and a queen who sat on a velvet throne. They wore gold crowns on their heads and long trains to their costumes, all of which they could very well afford. The prettiest little wooden dolls, with glass eyes and big mustaches, stood by to open and shut all the doors so that fresh air might come into the room. It was a very pleasant play, it wasn't sad at all. But just as the queen rose and swept across the stage - heaven only knows what possessed the big bulldog to do it - as the fat butcher was not holding him, the dog made a jump right on to the stage, snatched up the queen by her slender waist, and crunched her until she cracked in pieces. It was quite tragic!

The poor showman was badly frightened, and quite upset about the queen; for she was his prettiest little puppet, and the ugly bulldog had bitten off her head. But after a while, when the audience had gone, the stranger who had come with John said that he could soon mend her. He produced his little jar, and rubbed the puppet with some of the ointment that had cured the poor old woman who had broken her leg. The moment the salve was applied to the puppet, she was as good as new - nay, better. She could even move by herself, and there was no longer any need to pull her strings. Except that she could not speak, the puppet was just like a live woman. The showman was delighted that he didn't have to pull strings for this puppet, who could dance by herself. None of the others could do that.

In the night, after everyone in the inn had gone to bed, someone was heard sighing so terribly, and the sighs went on for so long, that everybody got up to see who it could be. The showman went straight to his little theatre, because the sighs seemed to come from there. All the wooden puppets were in a heap, with the king and his attendants mixed all together, and it was they who sighed so profoundly. They looked so pleading with their big glass eyes, and all of them wanted to be rubbed a little, just as the queen had been, so that they too would be able to move by themselves. The queen went down on her knees and held out her lovely golden crown as if to say: "Take even this from me, if you will only

rub my king and his courtiers."

The poor showman felt so sorry for them that he could not keep back his tears. Immediately he promised the traveling companion to give him all the money he would take in at the next performance, if only he would anoint four or five of the nicest puppets. But the traveling companion said he would not take any payment, except the big sword that hung at the showman's side. On receiving it he anointed six of the puppets, who began to dance so well that all the girls, the real live girls who were watching, began to dance too. The coachman danced with the cook, and the waiter with the chambermaid. All the guests joined the dance, and the shovel and tongs did too, but these fell down as soon as they took their first step. It was a lively night indeed!

Next morning, John and his companion set off up the lofty mountainside and through the vast pine forests. They climbed so high that at last the church towers down below looked like little red berries among all that greenery. They could see in the distance, many and many a mile away, places where neither of them had ever been. Never before had John seen so many of the glories of this lovely world at once. The sun shone bright in the clear blue air, and along the mountainside he could also hear the hunters sounding their horns. It was all so fair and sweet that tears came into his eyes, and he could not help crying out, "Almighty God, I could kiss your footsteps in thankfulness for all the splendors that you have given us in this world."

His traveling companion also folded his hands and looked out over the woods and towns that lay before them in the warm sunlight. Just then they heard a wonderful sound overhead. They looked up, and saw a large white swan sweeping above them and singing as they had never before heard any bird sing. But the song became fainter and fainter, until the bird bowed his head and dropped slowly down dead at their feet - the lovely bird!

"Two such glorious wings!" said the traveling companion. "Wings so large and white as these are worth a good deal of money. I'll take them with me. You can see now what a good thing it was that I got a sword." With one stroke he cut off both wings of the dead swan, for he wanted to keep them.

They journeyed many and many a mile over the mountains, until at last they saw a great town rise before them, with more than a hundred towers that shone like silver in the sun. In the midst of the town there was a magnificent marble palace, with a roof of red gold. That was where the King lived.

John and his companion did not want to enter the town at once. They stopped at a wayside inn outside the town to put on fresh clothes, for they wanted to look presentable when they walked through the streets. The innkeeper told them what the King was a good man who never harmed anyone. But as for his daughter - Heaven help us - she was a bad Princess.

She was pretty enough. No one could be more lovely or more entertaining than she - but what good did that do? She was a wicked witch, who was responsible for many handsome Princes' losing their lives. She had decreed that any man might come to woo her. Anybody might come, whether he were Prince or beggar, it made no difference to her, but he must guess the answer to three questions that she asked him. If he knew the answers, she would marry him and he would be King over all the land when her father died. But if he could not guess the right answers, she either had him hanged or had his head chopped off. That was how bad and wicked the beautiful Princess was.

The old King, her father, was terribly distressed about it, but he could not keep her from being so wicked, because he had once told her that he would never concern himself with her suitors - she could do as she liked with them. Whenever a Prince had come to win the Princess's hand by making three guesses, he had failed. Then he was either hanged or beheaded, for each suitor was warned beforehand, when he was still free to abandon his

courtship. The old King was so distressed by all this trouble and grief that for one entire day every year he and all his soldiers went down on their knees to pray that the Princess might reform; but she never would. As a sign of mourning, old women who drank schnapps would dye it black before they quaffed it - so deeply - did they mourn - and more than that they couldn't do.

"That abominable Princess," John said, "ought to be flogged. It would be just the thing for her, and if I were the old King I'd have her whipped till her blood ran."

"Hurrah!" they heard people shout outside the inn. The Princess was passing by, and she was so very beautiful that everyone who saw her forgot how wicked she was, and everyone shouted "Hurrah." Twelve lovely maidens, all dressed in white silk and carrying golden tulips, rode beside her on twelve coal-black horses. The Princess herself rode a snow-white horse, decorated with diamonds and rubies. Her riding costume was of pure gold, and the whip that she carried looked like a ray of sunlight. The gold crown on her head twinkled like the stars of heaven, and her cloak was made from thousands of bright butterfly wings. But she herself it; was far lovelier than all these things.

When John first set eyes on her, his face turned red - as red as blood - and he could hardly speak a single word. The Princess was the living image of the lovely girl with the golden crown, of whom he had dreamed on the night when his father died. He found the Princess so fair that he could not help falling in love with her.

"Surely," he thought, "it can't be true that she is a wicked witch who has people hanged or beheaded when they can't guess what she asks them. Anyone at all may ask for her hand, even though he is the poorest beggar, so I really will go to the palace, for I cannot help doing it!

Everyone told him he ought not to try it, lest he meet with the same fate that had befallen the others. His traveling companion also tried to persuade him not to go, but John felt sure he would succeed. He brushed his shoes and his coat, washed his face and his hands, and combed his handsome blond hair. Then, all alone, he went through the town to the palace.

"Come in," the old King said when John came knocking at his door. As John opened it the old King advanced to meet him, wearing a dressing gown and a pair of embroidered slippers. He had his crown on his head, his sceptre in one hand, and his orb in the other. "Just a minute," he said, tucking the orb under his arm so that he could offer a hand to John. But the moment he heard that John had come as a suitor, he fell to sobbing so hard that both the orb and sceptre dropped to the floor, and he had to use his dressing gown to wipe his eyes. The poor old King!

"Don't try it!" he said. "You will fare badly like all the others. Come, let me show them to you."

Then he led John into the Princess's pleasure garden, where he saw a fearful thing. From every tree hung three or four Kings' sons who had been suitors of the Princess but had not been able to answer the questions she put to them. The skeletons rattled so in every breeze that they terrified the little birds, who never dared come to the garden. All the flowers were tied to human bones, and human skulls grinned up from every flower pot. What a charming garden for a Princess!

"There!" said the old King, "you see. It will happen to you as it happened to all these you see here. Please don't try it. You would make me awfully unhappy, for I take these things deeply to heart.

John kissed the good old King's hand, and said he was sure everything would go well; for he was infatuated with the Princess's beauty. Just then the Princess and all of her ladies rode into the palace yard, so they went over to wish her good morning. She was lovely to

look at, and when she held out her hand to John he fell in love more deeply than ever. How could she be such a wicked witch as all the people called her?

The whole party went to the palace hall, where little pages served them jam and gingerbread. But the old King was so miserable that he couldn't eat anything at all. Besides, the gingerbread was too hard for his teeth.

It was arranged that John was to visit the palace again the following morning, when the judges and the full council would be assembled to hear how he made out with his answer. If he made out well he would have to come back two more times, but as yet no one had ever answered the first question, so they had forfeited their lives in the first attempt.

However, John was not at all afraid of his trial. Far from it! he was jubilant, and thought only of how lovely the Princess was. He felt sure that help would come to him, though he didn't know how it would come, and he preferred not to think about it. He fairly danced along the road when he returned to the inn, where his comrade awaited him. John could not stop telling him how nicely the Princess had treated him, and how lovely she was. He said that he could hardly wait for tomorrow to come, when he would go to the palace and try his luck in guessing. But his comrade shook his head, and was very sad.

"I am so fond of you," he said, "and we might have been comrades together for a long while to come, but now I am apt to lose you soon, poor, dear John! I feel like crying, but I won't spoil your happiness this evening, which is perhaps the last one we shall ever spend together. We shall be as merry as merry can be, and tomorrow, when you are gone, I'll have time enough for my tears."

Everyone in the town had heard at once that the Princess had a new suitor, and therefore everyone grieved. The theatre was closed; the women who sold cakes tied crape around their sugar pigs; the King and the preachers knelt in the churches; and there was widespread lamentation. For they were all sure that John's fate would be no better than that of all those others.

Late that evening, the traveling companion made a large bowl of punch, and said to John, "Now we must be merry and drink to the health of the Princess." But when John had drunk two glasses of the punch he felt so sleepy that he couldn't hold his eyes open, and he fell sound asleep. His comrade quietly lifted him from the chair and put him to bed. As soon as it was entirely dark he took the two large wings he had cut off the swan, and fastened them to his own shoulders. Then he put into his pocket the biggest bunch of switches that had been given him by the old woman who had fallen and broken her leg. He opened the window and flew straight over the house tops to the palace, where he sat down in a corner under the window which looked into the Princess's bedroom.

All was quiet in the town until the clock struck a quarter to twelve. Then the window opened and the Princess flew out of it, cloaked in white and wearing long black wings. She soared over the town to a high mountain, but the traveling companion had made himself invisible, so that she could not see him as he flew after her and lashed her so hard with his switch that he drew blood wherever he struck. Ah, how she fled through the air! The wind caught her cloak, which billowed out from her like a sail, and the moonlight shone through it.

"How it hails! how it hails!" the Princess cried at each blow, but it was no more than she deserved.

At last she came to the mountain and knocked on it. With a thunderous rumbling, the mountainside opened and the Princess went in. No one saw the traveling companion go in after her, for he had made himself completely invisible. They went down a big, long passage where the walls were lighted in a peculiar fashion. Thousands of glittering spiders ran along the walls and gave off a fiery glow. Then they entered a vast hall, built of silver and gold. Red and blue blossoms the size of sunflowers covered the walls, but no one

could pick them, for the stems were ugly poisonous snakes, and the flowers were flames darting out between their fangs. The ceiling was alive with glittering glow-worms, and sky-blue bats that zapped their transparent wings. The place looked really terrible! A throne in the center of the floor was held up by four horse skeletons in a harness of fiery red spiders. The throne itself was of milk-colored glass, and its cushions consisted of little black mice biting each other's tails. The canopy above it was made of rose-red spider webs, speckled with charming little green flies that sparkled like emeralds.

On the throne sat an old sorcerer, with a crown on his hideous head and a sceptre in his hand. He kissed the Princess on her forehead, and made her sit with him on the costly throne as the music struck up. Big black grasshoppers played upon mouth-harps, and the owl beat upon his own stomach, because he had no drum. It was a most fantastic concert! Many tiny goblins, with will-o'-the-wisps stuck in their little caps, capered around the hall. Nobody could see the traveling companion, who had placed himself behind the throne, where he could see and hear everything. The courtiers who now appeared seemed imposing and stately enough, but any-one with an observing eye could soon see what it all meant. They were mere cabbage heads stuck upon broomsticks, which the sorcerer had dressed in embroidered clothes and conjured into liveliness. But that didn't matter, for they were only needed to keep up appearances.

After the dance had gone on for a while, the Princess told the sorcerer that she had a new suitor, and she asked what question she should put to him when he came to the palace tomorrow.

"Listen to me," said the sorcerer, "I'll tell you what; you must think of something commonplace and then he will never guess what it is. Think of one of your shoes. He won't guess that. Then off with his head, and when you come tomorrow night remember to fetch me his eyes, so that I may eat them."

The Princess made a low curtsy, and promised not to forget about the eyes. The sorcerer opened the mountain for her, and she flew homeward. But the traveling companion flew behind her and thrashed her so hard with his switch that she bitterly complained of the fearful hailstorm, and made all the haste she could to get back through the open window of her bedroom. The traveling companion flew back to the inn, where John was still asleep. Taking off the wings he tumbled into bed, for he had good reason to feel tired.

It was very early the next morning when John awoke. When his comrade arose he told John of a very strange dream he had had about the Princess and one of her shoes. He begged him to ask the Princess if she didn't have one of her shoes in mind. This, of course, was what he had overheard the sorcerer say in the mountain, but he didn't tell John about that. He merely told him to be sure to guess that the Princess had her shoe in mind.

"I may as well ask about that as anything else," John agreed. "Maybe your dream was true, for I have always thought that God would look after me. However, I'll be saying good-bye, because if I guess wrong I shall never see you again."

They embraced, and John went straight through the town and up to the palace. The whole hall was packed with people. The judges sat in their armchairs, with eiderdown pillows behind their heads because they had so much to think about, and the old King stood there wiping his eyes with a white handkerchief. Then the Princess entered. She was even lovelier than she was the day before, and she bowed to everyone in the most agreeable fashion. To John she held out her hand and wished him, "Good morning to you."

John was required to guess what she had in mind. She looked at him most charmingly until she heard him say the one word "shoe." Her face turned chalk-white and she trembled from head to foot. But there was nothing she could do about it. His guess was

right.

Merciful Heavens! How glad the old King was. He turned heels over head for joy, and everyone applauded both his performance and that of John, who had guessed rightly the first time.

The traveling companion beamed with delight when he heard how well things had gone. But John clasped his hands together and thanked God, who he was sure would help him through the two remaining trials. The following day he was to guess again.

That evening went by just like the previous one. As soon as John was asleep, his comrade flew behind the Princess to the mountain and thrashed her even harder than before, for this time he had taken two scourges of switches. No one saw him, but he heard all that was said. The Princess was to think of her glove, and he told this to John as if he had dreamed it.

Naturally, John had no trouble in guessing correctly, and there was unbounded rejoicing in the palace. The whole court turned heels over head as they had seen the King do on the first occasion. But the Princess lay on her sofa, without a word to say. Now everything depended on John's answer to the third question. If it was right, he would get the lovely Princess and inherit the whole kingdom after the old King died. But if he guessed wrong, he would forfeit his life, and the wizard would eat his beautiful blue eyes.

That evening John said his prayers, went to bed early, and fell serenely asleep. But his comrade tied the wings to his back, buckled the sword to his side, took all three scourges of switches, and flew off to the palace.

The night was pitch black. A gale blew so hard that it swept tiles from the roofs. In the garden where the skeletons dangled, the trees bent before the blast like reeds. Lightning flashed every moment, and thunder kept up one unbroken roar the whole night through. The window was flung open, and out flew the Princess. She was deathly pale, but she laughed at the weather and thought it was not bad enough. Her white cloak lashed about in the wind like the sail of a ship, and the traveling companion thrashed her with his three switches until blood dripped to the ground. She could scarcely fly any farther, but at last she came to the mountain.

"How it hails and blows!" she said. "I have never been out in such weather."

"One may get too much of a good thing," the sorcerer agreed.

Now she told him how John had guessed right a second time, and if he succeeded again tomorrow, then he won, and never again could she come out to him in the mountains. Never again could she perform such tricks of magic as before, and therefore she felt very badly about it.

"He won't guess it this time," said the sorcerer. "I shall hit upon something that he will never guess unless he's a greater magician than I am. But first let's have our fun."

He took the Princess by both hands, and they danced around with all the little goblins and will-o'-the-wisps that were in the hall. The red spiders spun merrily up and down the walls, the fiery flowers seemed to throw off sparks, the owl beat the drum, the crickets piped, and the black grasshoppers played on mouth organs. It was an extremely lively ball.

After they had danced a while the Princess had to start home, for fear that she might be missed at the castle. The sorcerer said he would go with her, to enjoy that much more of her company.

Away they flew through the storm, and the traveling companion wore out all three scourges on their backs. Never had the sorcerer felt such a hailstorm. As he said good-bye to the Princess outside the palace, he whispered to her, "Think of my head."

But the traveling companion overheard it, and just at the moment when the Princess slipped in through her window and the sorcerer was turning around, he caught him by his long black beard, and with the sword he cut the sorcerer's ugly head off, right at the shoulders, so that the sorcerer himself didn't even see it. He threw the body into the sea for the fishes to eat, but the head he only dipped in the water, wrapped it in his silk handkerchief, and took it back to the inn, where he lay down to sleep.

Next morning he gave John the handkerchief but told him not to open it until the Princess asked him to guess what she had thought about.

The hall was so full of people that they were packed together as closely as radishes tied together in a bundle. The judges sat in their chairs with the soft pillows. The old King had put on his new clothes, and his crown and sceptre had been polished to look their best. But the Princess was deathly pale, and she wore black, as if she were attending a funeral.

"Of what have I thought?" she asked John. He at once untied the handkerchief, and was quite frightened himself when he saw the sorcerer's hideous head roll out of it. Everyone there shuddered at this terrible sight, but the Princess sat like stone, without a word to say. Finally she got up and gave John her hand, for his guess was good. She looked no one in the face, but sighed and said:

"You are my master now. Our wedding will be held this evening."

"I like that!" the old King shouted. "This is as things should be."

All the people shouted "Hurrah!" The military band played in the streets, the bells rang out, and the cake women took the crape off their sugar pigs, now that everyone was celebrating. Three entire oxen stuffed with ducks and chickens were roasted whole in the center of the market square, and everyone could cut himself a piece of them. The fountains spouted up the best of wine. Whoever bought a penny bun at the bakery got six large buns thrown in for good measure, and all the buns had raisins in them.

That evening the entire town was illuminated. The soldiers fired their cannon, and the boys set off firecrackers. At the palace there was eating and drinking, dancing and the clinking of glasses. All the lordly gentlemen and all the lovely ladies danced together. For a long way off you could hear them sing:

*"Here are many pretty girls, and don't they love to dance!
See them hop and swing around whenever they've a chance.
Dance! my pretty maid, anew, till the sole flies of your shoe."*

But the Princess was still a witch, and she had no love for John at all. His comrade kept this in mind, and gave him three feathers from the swan's wings, and a little bottle with a few drops of liquid in it. He said that John must put a large tub of water beside the Princess's bed, and just as she was about to get in bed he must give her a little push, so that she would tumble into the tub. There he must dip her three times, after he had thrown the feathers and the drops of liquid into the water. That would free her from the spell of sorcery, and make her love him dearly.

John did everything his companion had advised him to do, though the Princess shrieked as he dipped her into the water, and struggled as he held her in the shape of a large black swan with flashing eyes. The second time, she came out of the water as a swan entirely white except for a black ring around its neck. John prayed hard, and as he forced the bird under the water once more it changed into the beautiful Princess. She was fairer than ever, and she thanked him with tears in her beautiful eyes for having set her free from the sorcerer's spell.

In the morning the old King came with all his court, and congratulations lasted all through the day. Last of all came John's traveling companion; he had his stick in his hand and the

knapsack on his back. John embraced him time and again, and said that he must not leave them. He must stay here with John, who owed all his happiness to him. But the traveling companion shook his head. Gently and kindly he said:

"No, my time is now up. I have done no more than pay my debt to you. Do you remember the dead man whom the wicked men wanted to harm? You gave all that you had so that he might have rest in his grave. I am that dead man." And at once he disappeared.

The wedding celebration lasted a whole month. John and his Princess loved each other dearly, and the old King lived on for many a happy day to let their little children ride astride his knee and play with his sceptre. But it was John who was King over all the land.