

The Widows Son

**Collected from Mr. Patrick Stroger,(Aged 57)
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**Told By Miss Annie Stroger,
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Once upon a time there lived a man and his wife and nine children in a small house, and they had no land.

Their father died, and the eldest son called Jack had not much sense.

They were very poor, and their mother went out working every day. The support she had for the children was a bowl of meal every day, to make porridge for them when she came home. Jack had to mind the children when his mother was out working. When she used to be coming home, she could hear the children crying with the hunger, waiting for her to come home.

One evening, an old beggar man came in to Jack and asked him for lodgings for the night, and he got them. He asked Jack why the children were crying and Jack said they were crying with the hunger. He told him to put the pot on the fire, and fill it with stones. He did as he was told, and the children fell asleep. The man said to Jack, "Its time your mother should be coming home. You should go to the fields to meet her, in case she would frighten when she would not hear them crying, as was used to each night coming from work".

Jack went out to the fields and found her, fainted at a stile. When she came to, she inquired about the children, and why they were so quiet, or were they dead. Jack told her about the beggar man being in the house, and that he told him to put down the pot and fill it with stones and they all fell asleep.

When the mother came home, she welcomed the stranger. He told Jack to take up the pot, and when he took it up it was full of meat, and when the children awoke, the all ate a hearty meal together. Next morning when they got out of bed Jack went to the room door but he could not open it because it was full of sacks of meal.

The old man asked Jack to go a while of the way with him. When they were going, the old beggar said “Wasn’t that a good turn I did to fill the room with sacks of meal, and weren’t they good stories I told you also, so where is my thanks, now Jack?” All Jack could say was “The Lord spare your health”. But the beggar said “That will never do”.

When they came to a river, the beggar told Jack that he would turn him into a salmon, with one side silver and the other side gold for a day and a year. When the day and the year were over, he called to Jack, and he said to him, “Wasn’t that a good story I told you a year last night, so where is my thanks?” Jack said “The Lord spare you the health.” “That will never do” said the beggar.

“I will make a pigeon of you”, said he, with a gold star on your forehead. There will be thousands of pounds spent on your account trying to shoot you but there is no danger of you being killed”.

When the day and the year were up he came to him again, and Jack gave him the same answer, but the beggar said: “That will never do. I will leave you as you are for another day and a year”. As much as was lost the first time, there was far more lost the second time, the firing, and shooting being so great that he had to fly for fear into a dwelling-house. When he got to a perch with the other fowl, they all began to cackle when they saw the strange bird amongst them.

There were some people card-playing in the house that night. With all the cackling the fowl had, they had to give over card-playing and begin to tell stories. The bird with human nature picked up all that was said. After one fellow had finished his story, they all praised him and said: “The Lord have mercy on your soul and of all belonging to you”. Jack picked up those words.

When the day and the year were up the old man came to Jack for the third time, and it was Jack's own father that was in it all the time. He said to Jack, "What is my thanks for all the stories I told you three years last night?" Jack said: "The Lord have mercy on your soul and the souls of all belonging to you". "Well that is very good; I was a long time waiting for you to say one prayer for souls, because I could not get to Heaven until you would, so now I am going straight to Heaven. I will leave you as you are for another "day and a year" and I will come to you then for the last time. When he went away the bird began to get hungry. He hopped about seeking food on the window stool of the King's palace.

The King's daughters tried to catch him but each time he would hop away. The youngest princess broke some bread into a tumbler of wine, and when the bird had eaten it he got drunk and fell asleep. The princess then caught him and took him into the house.

When she brought him in, her mother and sister began to argue with her, each saying that she had as much right to the bird as the youngest sister had. They agreed, at last, that each one could put a hundred pounds in a purse and leave it on the table and that if the bird took a purse and lay on it, in its owner's lap the bird would belong to that person. The bird took the Queen's purse off the table and flew with it to the Queen's lap. She roared with joy and said: "He's mine". The youngest princess said: "No, he did not lie on it". The bird flew to the table a second time, took the eldest sister's purse, and flew with it to her lap. She also claimed the bird, but the youngest princess reminded her that he did not lie on the purse. He flew again to the table, took the youngest princesses purse, flew with it to her lap and lay on it, so she claimed it. She got a beautiful cage made for him.

The next day he appeared to her in reality, and told her that he was a young man that was changed into a bird.

There had been a golden sword stolen from the princesses' father by another king. The king had promised his youngest daughter in marriage, and her weight in gold, to any man who could bring back the sword. When Jack heard this, he told the princess that no one could bring back the sword as good as himself. He set off the next day and flew down the chimney of the other king's palace, took the sword that hung on the wall beside the bed. He got the belt that was round the handle and put it round his neck and flew off again. When he got to the king's palace he was so tired that he went into the horse's stable and fell asleep. When the horse man came, in the morning and found him with the sword, he cut his head off, pulled up some paving stones, put him under them, and put them back in their place again.

He brought the stolen sword into the king and said that he got the sword back and that he wanted his daughter in marriage. The King believed him, and said he must get her for marriage. But she said "No", that she would marry no man but the man that brought back the sword. The king would not believe but that was the man that brought back the sword. He got angry, and said, "I will give you two days to make up your mind. At the end of that time, I will make a fire and burn you to death".

At the end of that time she still refused. At twelve o'clock she was bound hands and feet and put in the fire. Just then they saw a man and a horse coming. He said to the king, "I was nearly late. Come with me and I will show you the man that brought back the sword. He brought him to the stable and lifted up the bird and restored him to life again. "That's the man that brought back the sword" he said, "That's my son Jack"

Instead of putting her in the fire, he gave her to Jack with her own weight of gold.

They put the man who stole the sword from Jack in the fire and burned him. The man who had saved Jack was his father.

Jack and the youngest princess were married not long afterwards and lived happily ever afterwards.