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The Travelling Companion

by

Hans Christian Andersen

(from *Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories* [1930], translated by M. R. James)

Poor John was in sad trouble, for his father was very ill and could not recover. No one besides the two of them was in the little room. The lamp on the table was on the point of going out, and it was quite late on in the evening.

"You have been a good son, John," said the sick father, "God will be sure to help you on in the world!" And he gazed on him with solemn kind eyes, drew a very deep breath and died; it seemed just as if he were asleep. But John burst into tears; he had no one left now in all the world, neither father, mother, sister or brother. Poor John! He fell on his knees by the bedside and kissed his dead father's hand; many salt tears he shed, but at last his eyes closed and he went to sleep, with his head on the hard bedstead.

Then he dreamt a wonderful dream; he saw the sun and moon bowing to him, and he saw his father well and hearty once more, and heard him laugh as he always laughed when he was really happy. A beautiful girl with a golden crown on her long pretty hair stretched out her hand to John, and his father said, "Do you see what a bride you have won; she is the fairest in all the world?" Then he woke up, and all that pretty sight was gone; his father lay dead and cold in the bed, and there was no one at all with them. Poor John!

The week after, the dead man was buried. John walked close behind the coffin. He would never again see the good father who had been so fond of him. He listened to them casting the earth down upon the coffin, and he saw the last little corner of it, but, with the next shovelful of earth that was cast on it, that was hidden too. And then it seemed as if his heart would break asunder, so sharp was his sorrow. Round about him the people were singing a hymn, and the sound of it was very sweet; tears came into John's eyes; he wept, and that eased his sorrow. The sun shed a beautiful light on the green trees as if it would say, "You mustn't be so cast down, John, you see how beautiful and blue the sky is: your father is up there now, praying to the good God that it may be always well with you".

"I will always be good," said John, "and then I too shall go up to heaven to my father, and what a joy that will be, when we see one another again! What a lot there will be for me to tell him, and what a number of things he will have to show me, and teach me about all the beautiful things in heaven, just as he used to teach me here on earth. Oh, what a joy it will all be." John imagined all this to himself so clearly that he smiled while the tears were still running down over his cheeks. The little birds sat in the chestnut trees above him and twittered, "Kiwit, kiwit", they were as happy as possible, although they were attending the funeral; but then they knew well enough that the dead man was now up in heaven, and had wings far finer and bigger than theirs, and was happy because he had been good here on earth; and so they were happy. John watched them fly away from the green trees out into the wide world, and at that he felt a longing to fly away too. But first he hewed out a large cross of wood to set on his father's grave, and that evening when he brought it to the place he found the grave decked out with sand and flowers. It had been done by strangers, because they were so fond of the dear father who now lay there dead.

Early next morning John packed up his little bundle, and in his belt he put away all his inheritance. It was just fifty-six dollars and a few silver pennies; with that he meant to go out into the world, but first he went to the churchyard to his father's grave, and repeated the Lord's Prayer and said, "Good-bye, dear father, I will always be a good man, and then you will be able to pray to the good God that it may be well with me".

Out in the fields through which he walked, all the flowers were standing fresh and fair in the warm sunshine and they nodded in the breeze as if they would say, "Welcome to the green country; isn't it pleasant here?" But John turned round yet once again to look at the old church where he had been christened as a little child, and where he had been every Sunday to service with his old father and had sung his hymn, and there he saw high up in one of the openings in the tower the church Brownie standing in his little red peaked cap; he was shading his eyes with his bent arm, for the sun dazzled

him. John waved a farewell to him, and the little Brownie waved his red cap and laid his hand on his heart and kissed his fingers over and over again to show how well he wished John, and hoped he would have a good journey.

John kept on thinking of all the charming things he would come to see in the splendid wide world; and on he went, further and further, never before had he been so far. He knew nothing of the villages he passed through or of the people he met, he was far away now, among strangers.

The first night he had to lie down to sleep in a haystack in the fields; no other bed could he get. But to his thinking it was just delightful; the King himself could have no prettier sleeping place. The open country and the river, the haystack and the blue sky over it made the pleasantest of bedrooms. The green grass with the little red and white flowers was the carpet, and the elder trees and the wild rosebushes stood for posies, and for a bath he had the whole river with its clear fresh water where the reeds waved, and wished him good night and good morning. The moon was a proper big night light, hung high up under the blue ceiling, and wouldn't set fire to the curtains. John could sleep there as tranquilly as possible, and that is what he did. He did not wake up again till the sun rose and all the little birds round about sang: "Good morning, good morning! Aren't you up yet?"

The bells were ringing for service; it was Sunday. The people were on their way to listen to the parson, and John went too. He sang a hymn and hearkened to God's word, and it seemed to him as if he were in his own church at home, where he had been christened and had sung hymns with his father.

Out in the churchyard were many many graves, and on some of them the grass was growing tall and rank. At that John thought of his father's grave, and how it too might come to look like these, now that he could no longer weed it and tidy it. So he sat himself down and pulled up the long grass, set up the wooden crosses that had fallen down, and laid the wreaths that the wind had blown off the graves back in their places; for he thought: "Perhaps someone will do the like for my father's grave now that I can't do it any more myself."

Outside the churchyard gate an old beggar stood leaning on his crutch. John gave him the silver pennies he had and went forward, cheerful and happy, out into the wide world.

Towards evening the weather turned very bad and John hurried on to get under shelter, but very soon it came to be dark night. At last he came in sight of a little church standing quite alone on a rising. Luckily the door stood ajar and he slipped in; he would stop there till the storm was over.

"I'll sit down here in a corner," said he, "I'm very tired and can manage with a bit of a rest," and so he sat down, clasped his hands, and said his evening prayer, and before he knew it he was asleep and dreaming while it thundered and lightened outside.

When he woke up again it was far on in the night, but the storm had passed over, and the moon was shining in on him through the windows. In the middle of the church floor there stood an open coffin with a dead man in it who had not yet been buried. John was not at all frightened, for he had a clear conscience, and knew well enough that the dead do no one any harm. It is bad men who are alive who do the mischief. Two bad live men of this sort were standing there, close by the dead man who had been put in the church before being laid in the grave; they meant to do him a mischief and not let him lie in his coffin, but throw him out in front of the church door: poor dead man!

"Why do you want to do that?" asked John. "It's wrong and wicked; let him sleep in Jesus' name."

"Oh, ah!" said the two villainous men, "he's made fools of us: he owed us money and couldn't pay, and now he's gone dead into the bargain, and we shan't get a penny, so we're going to take it out of him properly, and he shall lie like a dog outside the church door."

"I've got but fifty dollars," said John, "it's all my property, but I'll give it you and be glad to do it if you'll promise me faithfully to leave the poor dead man in peace. I shall get on all right without the money; I've got good sound arms and legs, and God will be helping me always."

"All right," said the two ruffians, "if you'll pay his debts of course we won't do anything to him, you may take your oath on that." So they took the money John gave them, shouted with laughter at his simpleness and went their way. But John

laid the body reverently in the coffin, crossed its hands on its breast, bade it good-bye and went on contentedly through the deep wood.

All round him, wherever the moonlight could pierce between the trees, he saw the prettiest little elves playing about most delightfully. They didn't take fright at him; they knew that he was a good innocent being; it's only the bad people who cannot catch a glimpse of the elves. Some of them were no bigger than a finger, and had their long yellow hair fastened up with golden combs. They would be running in pairs on the big dewdrops that lay on the leaves and the long grass. Sometimes the dewdrop would fall down, and then they tumbled over among the tall green blades and there was a great laughter and commotion among the rest of the tiny creatures. It was monstrous funny. They would sing, and John recognized as plain as possible all the pretty tunes he had learnt as a little child. Big spotted spiders with silver crowns on their heads were kept spinning long hanging bridges from one bush to another, and palaces, which looked like glittering glass in the moonlight when the fine dew settled on them. And so it went on until the sun rose, when the little elves crept into the flower buds and the breeze caught their bridges and palaces, and they flew away through the air in great webs of gossamer.

Now John had just got out of the wood when from behind him a deep voice called out, "Hallo, comrade, where are you making for?" "Out into the wide world," said John, "I've neither father nor mother, and I'm only a poor lad, but God will help me, I know." "I'm for the wide world too," said the stranger, "shall we bear each other company?" "All right," said John, and they went on together. It wasn't long before they took to each other very much, for they were both good fellows. But John was soon aware that the stranger was much cleverer than he; he had been almost all the world over, and could tell all about everything we can imagine.

The sun was already high when they sat themselves down under a big tree to eat their breakfast, and just as they did so there came along an old woman. Oh how old she was! She was quite doubled up, and went leaning on a crutch stick, and on her back she had a bundle of sticks for firing which she had picked up in the wood. Her apron was pinned up, and John saw sticking out from it three long rods made of bracken and willow twigs. Just as she had got to where they were, her foot slipped, down she fell, and she gave a loud scream, for she had broken her leg, poor old thing.

John was anxious to carry her home at once to where she lived, but the strange man opened his knapsack and took out a bottle; and he said that in it he had an ointment which could make her leg properly well, so that she could get home by herself as well as if she had never broken her leg, but in return he wanted her first to give him the three rods she had in her apron.

"That's a good price," said the old woman, and she wagged her head in a very odd fashion. She didn't care about parting with her rods, but it wasn't much fun either to lie there with a broken leg, so she gave him the rods, and the minute he had rubbed the ointment on the leg, the old mother got up and walked off much quicker than before. That was what the ointment could do. But then it wasn't an ointment that you could buy at the chemist's.

"What do you want with the rods?" John asked his companion. "Why, they're three pretty nosegays," said he, "I've a fancy for them. I'm an odd sort of fellow."

So on they went for a good bit. "Goodness me, how overcast it is getting!" said John and pointed in front. "Those are tremendous thick clouds." "No," said his comrade, "those are not clouds; they are the mountains, the splendid great mountains where one gets right up beyond the clouds in the fresh air. That is noble, I can tell you; to-morrow we shall be sure enough right out in the world." But they weren't so near as they seemed; it needed a whole day's walk before they got to the mountains where the great forests grew straight up towards heaven, and where there were rocks as big as a whole town. It would sure enough be a heavy job to get up to the top, and for that very reason John and his comrade went into an inn to get a good rest and gather strength for the morrow's march.

Down in the big taproom in the inn there was a large company come together, for a man with a puppet show was there: he had just put up his little theatre, and people were seated round in front to see the play, but in the very front of all a fat old butcher had taken a seat—the best seat there was. His big bulldog (and ugh! how fierce he looked) sat by his side and stared with all his eyes like the rest of the company.

Now the play began, and a pretty play it was, with a King and Queen who sat on a velvet throne with gold crowns on

their heads and long trains to their robes, as was right and proper. The most charming wooden puppets with glass eyes and big moustaches stood at all the doors and opened and shut them to let folk into the room. It was really a delightful play and not in the least sad, but just as the Queen got up and walked across the floor—God knows what the big bulldog was thinking of—but as the fat butcher wasn't holding him, he made one bound right on to the stage, seized the Queen by her slender waist, and crick-crack it went: it was quite frightful.

The poor man who was performing the whole of the play was dreadfully frightened and upset about his Queen, for she was the prettiest by far of all the dolls he had, and now the horrid bulldog had bitten her head off. But afterwards, when the people were gone, the strange man—I mean the man who had come with John—said he could put her to rights well enough; and he got out his bottle and rubbed the doll with the ointment he had used to cure the poor old woman when she had broken her leg. The moment the doll was rubbed it became quite sound again, and what was more, it could move all its limbs itself; there was no need to pull the string. The doll was just like a living human being except that it couldn't talk. The man who owned the little theatre was delighted. There was no necessity for him to hold the doll any longer; it could dance by itself, and there were none of the others that could do that.

When at last night came, and all the people in the inn were gone to bed, someone was heard sighing—sighing so deep and going on so long that everybody got up to see who it could be. The man who had played the comedy went to his little theatre, for it was in there that the someone was sighing. All the wooden dolls were lying there mixed up together, the King and all the bodyguard, and it was they who were sighing so miserably, staring with their big glass eyes: for they wanted dreadfully to be rubbed with the ointment like the Queen, so that they too might be able to move of themselves. The Queen threw herself right down on her knees and held up her beautiful golden crown. "Take it," she begged, "only do anoint my husband and my court people." At that the poor man who owned the play and all the dolls could not keep from crying; he was really grieved for them. He promised the Travelling Companion at once to give him all the money he got for his play next evening if he would only anoint four or five of his best dolls. But the Companion said that all he would ask for was the big sword the man wore at his side; and when he had got that he rubbed six of the dolls, which began to dance that moment; and so delightfully did they dance that all the girls, the living, human girls who were looking on, began to dance too. The ostler and kitchenmaid, the cook and the chambermaid, all danced, and so did all the visitors, and the shovel and tongs into the bargain; but they both tumbled down just as they were making their first hop! Ah, they had a merry night of it, I can tell you.

Next morning John and his comrade left them all, and started off towards the high mountains and through the great pine forests. So high did they climb that the church towers far below them looked at last like little red berries down there in the midst of the green, and they could see far and wide for many and many a mile over country where they had never been. So much of the beauty of the beautiful world John had never before seen at one time; and the sun shone so hot in the fresh blue sky, and he heard huntsmen sounding their horns in among the hills—such a lovely blessed sound—that the water stood in his eyes from pure pleasure, and he could not help saying: "O kind Lord! I could kiss you for being so good to us and giving us all the beauty there is in the world!"

His Companion stood there too, with clasped hands, looking out over the woods and villages in the hot sunshine. Just then a marvellously beautiful sound rang out above them, and they looked upwards. A great white swan was hovering in the sky; beautiful it was, and it sang as they had never before heard a bird sing; but gradually it became weaker and weaker, its head drooped, and slowly it sank down till it lay at their feet dead, the splendid bird.

"Two such fine wings," said the Companion, "so big and so white as these are, are worth money. I'll take them with me. It's a good thing I've got a sword, you can see that now?" And he cut both wings off the dead swan with a single stroke, for he meant to keep them.

And so now they travelled on for many and many a mile across the mountains, till at last they saw before them a great city with more than a hundred towers that shone like silver in the sun. In the centre of this town was a stately marble palace roofed with red gold, and there lived the King.

John and his Companion would not go into the city at once, but stayed in an inn just outside it to make themselves tidy, for they wanted to look smart when they appeared in the streets. The landlord told them that the King was a good sort of man who never did nothing to nobody, neither the one nor yet the other: but his daughter, why there! God help us, she was a bad Princess. Beauty she had and to spare, nobody was ever so pretty and attractive as what she was, but where

was the use of that? She was a right down wicked witch, and so it came about that so many fine young princes had lost their lives. She'd given everybody leave to come courting her; any person could come, no matter whether he was a prince or a beggar, that was all one to her, and all he'd got to do was to guess three things as she asked him; if he could do that she would marry him and he'd be King over the whole country when her father died, but if he couldn't guess the three things, why she had him hung or else beheaded; so wicked and cruel was this lovely Princess. Her father, the old King, was terribly upset about it, but he couldn't prevent her being so nasty, for he had said once he never would have anything whatever to do with her lovers, she might do just as she pleased. Every time a Prince came to guess and to win the Princess, he couldn't make anything of it, and so he was hung or had his head chopped off: well, they'd warned him beforehand; he might have left it alone. The old King was so troubled at all the sorrow and misery, that once every year he spent a whole day on his knees with all his soldiers, praying that the Princess might turn good, but she wouldn't. The old women who drank brandy coloured it quite black before they drank it; that was their way of mourning, and more than that they couldn't do.

"What a hateful Princess," said John, "she ought to be whipped, that would do her good. If I was the old King she should get her red stripes right enough."

Just then they heard the people outside shouting: "Hurrah!" The Princess passed by, and she was really so lovely that everybody forgot how horrid she was, and so they shouted: "Hurrah!" Twelve fair maidens, all in white silk dresses and each with a gold tulip in her hand, rode on coal-black horses beside her. The Princess herself had a milk-white horse, caparisoned with diamonds and rubies; her riding habit was of pure gold, and the whip she had in her hand looked like a ray of sunlight. The gold crown on her head was like little stars from up in heaven, and her cloak was made of thousands of butterflies' wings sewn together, and yet she was far more beautiful than all her clothes.

When John caught sight of her, he went as red in the face as a drop of blood, and could hardly say a word; the Princess looked exactly like the lovely girl with a gold crown he had dreamt of the night his father died. He thought her most beautiful, and couldn't help loving her. It certainly wasn't true, he said, that she could be an evil witch who had people hung or beheaded when they couldn't guess what she asked them. "Well, everyone is free to court her, even the poorest beggar; and on my word I will go up to the Palace; I can't help it." They all said he must not do that; it would certainly go with him as with the rest, and the Travelling Companion too advised him not to go, but John said it would be all right, brushed his shoes and his clothes, washed his face and hands, combed his nice fair hair and went all alone into the town and up to the palace.

"Come in," said the old King when John knocked at the door. John opened it, and the old King in his dressing-gown and embroidered slippers came to meet him. He had the gold crown on his head, the sceptre in one hand and the gold orb in the other. "Half a minute," said he, and tucked the orb under his arm in order to give John his hand. But the moment he heard that here was a suitor, he began to cry so that both sceptre and orb fell on the floor and he had to dry his eyes with his dressing-gown. Poor old King!

"Do let it alone," he said, "it'll go with you just like all the rest. You shall just see for yourself," and he took John out into the Princess's garden. It was a horrible sight. On every tree there hung three or four king's sons who had courted the Princess, but couldn't guess the things she asked them. Every time the wind blew, all the bones rattled so that the little birds were frightened and never would come into the garden. All the flowers were tied up to human bones, and in the flower-pots there were dead men's skulls grinning. That was a nice garden for a Princess.

"There, you see," said the old King, "it will go with you just like all the others you see here, so do let it alone; you really do make me quite wretched, I feel these things so much."

John kissed the kind old King's hand and said it would be all right, he was so fond of the lovely Princess.

Just then, here came the Princess herself with all her ladies riding into the palace court, so they went out to meet her, and said good morning. She was beautiful, in all conscience; she shook hands with John and he grew more in love with her than before; he was certain she could not be a dreadful wicked witch as everybody said she was. They went up into the hall, and the little pages offered them sweetmeats and gingernuts, but the old King was so wretched he couldn't eat anything, and besides the gingernuts were too hard for him.

So now it was settled that John should come back to the palace next morning, and then the judges and all the council should be assembled and hear how he got on with his guessing. If he succeeded, he was to come twice more; but so far there had never been anybody who had guessed the first time, and so they had to lose their lives.

John was not the least troubled about what would happen to him, he was merely happy, he only thought about the lovely Princess, and believed most surely that the good God would help him all right; but how, he didn't know in the least, nor did he care to think. He danced all along the street when he went back to the inn where the Travelling Companion was waiting for him.

John never tired of telling how prettily the Princess had behaved to him and how lovely she was; he longed already for the next day when he should go there to the palace and try his luck at guessing.

But the Travelling Companion shook his head and was quite depressed. "I'm so fond of you," he said, "and we might have been together for a long time yet; and now I'm to lose you already. My poor, dear John, I could cry—but I won't spoil your pleasure on this last evening perhaps, that we shall be together; we'll be merry, so we will; to-morrow when you are gone I shall have time to cry."

Everybody in town had got to know at once that a new suitor to the Princess had come, and there was great lamentation in consequence. The theatre was closed, and all the cake women tied black crape round their sugar pigs; the King and the clergy were on their knees in the church, and there was the deepest of sorrow, because of course John could not fare better than all the rest of the suitors.

Late in the evening the Travelling Companion made a big bowl of punch, and said to John that now they would make merry and drink the health of the Princess. But no sooner had John drunk a couple of glasses than he turned so sleepy that he couldn't keep his eyes open, he must have a nap. The Travelling Companion lifted him off his chair very gently and laid him on his bed, and when it was dark night he took the two great wings that he had cut from the swan and tied them fast to his shoulders; the biggest of the rods he got from the old woman who fell down and broke her leg, he put in his pocket, he opened the window and flew over the town right away to the palace and there he sat himself in a corner up under the window which opened into the Princess's bedroom.

The whole town was perfectly still. When the clock struck a quarter to twelve, the window opened, and the Princess flew out in a great white cloak, and with long black wings, away over the town, and out to a great hill. But the Travelling Companion made himself invisible so that she couldn't see him, and flew after her, and he whipped the Princess with his rod so that the blood actually came at every blow. Ugh, what a flight that was through the air! The wind caught her cloak, and it spread out all round like a great sail, and the moon shone through it. "How it hails, how it hails," said the Princess at every stroke she got of the rod—and much good might it do her. At last she got out to the hill, and knocked. There was a rumbling as of thunder when the hill opened, and the Princess went in, and the Travelling Companion after her, for nobody could see him, he was invisible. They went through a great long passage where the walls glistened in a marvellous fashion; there were thousands of glowing spiders that ran up and down along the wall and gave a light like fire. Then they came to a large hall built of silver and gold: flowers as big as sunflowers, red and blue, shone from the walls, but nobody could pick them, for the stalks were poisonous snakes and the flowers were fire that shot out of their mouths. The whole ceiling was set with shining glow-worms and sky-blue bats that flapped their thin wings; it was a most extraordinary sight. In the middle of the floor was a throne supported by four skeletons of horses which had harness of red fire-spiders. The throne itself was of milk-white glass, and the cushions to sit on were of little black mice all biting each others' tails. Over it was a canopy of rose-red cobweb set with the prettiest little green flies, shining like jewels. On the throne sat an old Troll with a crown on his hideous head and a sceptre in his hand. He kissed the Princess on her forehead and made her sit by his side on the splendid throne; and now the music struck up. Great black grasshoppers played their Jew's harps, and the owl beat on its stomach, for it hadn't got a drum. That was a funny concert: tiny little goblins with will-o'-the-wisps in their caps danced round the hall. Nobody could see the Travelling Companion; he had placed himself right behind the throne and heard and saw everything. The courtiers who now came in were as fine and stately as could be; but anyone who could see properly noticed at once what they were. They were nothing but broomsticks with cabbage heads on them—into which the Troll had bewitched life, and given them embroidered clothes. But that didn't matter after all, for they were only used for show.

When the dancing had gone on some time, the Princess told the Troll that she had got a new suitor, and asked what she

should think of to ask him about next morning when he came to the palace.

"Listen," said the Troll, "now I'll tell you something. You must choose something very easy, for then he won't hit on it. Think of one of your shoes; he won't guess that. Then have his head cut off, but don't forget when you come out here to me to-morrow night to bring me his eyes, for I want to eat them."

The Princess made a very deep curtsy and said she would not forget the eyes. Then the Troll opened the hill and she flew home again, but the Travelling Companion followed her and thrashed her so hard with the rod that she moaned and sighed at the fierce hail storm and made all the haste she could to get in at her bedroom window.

But the Travelling Companion flew back to the inn where John was still asleep, took off his wings and laid himself too down on the bed; for he had every right to be tired.

It was quite early in the morning when John awoke. The Travelling Companion got up too and told him that he had had a very strange dream about the Princess and one of her shoes; and therefore he earnestly begged him to ask if the Princess had not thought of one of her shoes. That, of course, was what he had heard from the Troll in the hill; but he didn't want to tell John anything about that, but only begged him to ask whether she had thought of one of her shoes.

"I may as well ask about one thing as another," said John, "perhaps what you have dreamt about may be quite right, for I believe always that God will be sure and help me. Still, I'll bid you good-bye, for if I do guess wrong, I shall never get a sight of you again."

So they kissed each other, and John went into the town and up to the palace. The whole hall was quite full of people; the judges were in their armchairs and had eiderdown cushions for their heads because they had so much to think about! The old King stood up drying his eyes with a white pocket handkerchief; then the Princess entered. She was even more lovely than the day before, and she greeted them all most kindly, but to John she gave her hand and said: "Good morning to you."

Now John had to guess what she had thought of. Goodness, how kindly she looked at him—but the moment she heard the single word *shoe* she turned as white as a sheet in the face and shivered all over her body; but that didn't do her any good, for he had guessed right. Bless his heart, how delighted the old King was! He turned right head over heels, and everybody clapped their hands at him and at John, who had guessed right the first time.

The Travelling Companion beamed with pleasure when he learned how well all had gone. But John clasped his hands and thanked the good God, who would surely help him again the other two times.

There was to be a second guessing no later than next day.

The evening passed just like the one before. When John was asleep the Travelling Companion flew out after the Princess to the hill and thrashed her even harder than the first time, for now he had taken two rods. No one got a sight of him, and he heard everything. The Princess was to think of her glove, and this he told to John as if it had been a dream.

So John was able again to guess right, and there was the greatest rejoicing at the Palace. The whole court turned head over heels as they had seen the King do the first time; but the Princess lay on the sofa and would not utter a single word. Now the question was if John could guess right the third time. If that went well he would, of course, win the lovely Princess and inherit the whole countryside when the old King died; if he guessed wrong, he would lose his life, and the Troll would eat his pretty blue eyes.

The evening before, John went to bed early, said his evening prayer and went quite peacefully to sleep. But the Travelling Companion fastened his wings to his back, bound his sword to his side and took all his three rods with him and flew off to the palace.

It was a pitch dark night; it blew so that the tiles flew off the house roofs and the trees in the garden where the skeletons hung bent like reeds under the blast; it lightened every minute, and the thunder rumbled as if it were but a single peal that lasted the whole night.

Suddenly the window opened and the Princess flew out. She was as pale as a corpse, but she laughed at the awful storm; she thought it was not fierce enough; her white cloak whirled abroad in the air like a great sail, but the Travelling Companion flogged her so hard with his three rods that the blood dripped down on to the earth and at last could she scarcely fly any further. Finally she reached the hill.

"It is hailing and blowing," said she, "never have I been out in such a storm."

"Well, one can have too much of a good thing," said the Troll. Then she told him that John had again guessed right the second time. If he did the same on the morrow, he would have won, and she could never again come out to the Troll to the hill, and never could do such witchcraft as before; and so she was greatly troubled.

"He shan't be able to guess," said the Troll, "I shall hit on something he's never thought of, never fear, or else he must be a bigger wizard than me. But now let's enjoy ourselves," and with that he took the Princess by both hands and they danced round with all the little goblins and will-o'-the-wisps that were in the room. The red spiders ran merrily up and down along the walls, and it seemed as if the fire flowers shed sparks. The owl beat the drum, the crickets whistled, and the black grasshoppers blew the Jew's harp. It was a merry ball.

When they had danced long enough the Princess had to get home otherwise she might be missed at the Palace. The Troll said he would come with her, and so they would at any rate still be together for so long.

So they flew off through the awful storm, and the Travelling Companion wore out his three rods on their backs; never had the Troll been out in such a hailstorm. Outside the palace he said good-bye to the Princess and in the same instant whispered in her ear, "Think of my head". But the Travelling Companion heard it all the same, and at the moment when the Princess slipped in through the window into her bedroom, and the Troll was turning to go back, he caught him by his long black beard and with his sword hewed off his hideous Troll's head at the shoulders, so that the Troll himself never once caught sight of him. The body he threw out into the lake to the fishes, but the head he only dipped into the water and then tied it up in his silk pocket handkerchief, took it home to the inn, and lay down to sleep.

Next morning he gave John the handkerchief, but told him he must not untie it before the Princess asked what it was she had thought of.

There were so many people in the great hall of the Palace that they stood on one another like radishes tied in a bundle. The council sat in their chairs with their soft pillows and the old King had a new suit on, and the golden crown and the sceptre had been polished so that it all looked splendid. But the Princess was quite pale and had on a coal black dress as if she were going to a funeral.

"What have I thought of?" said she to John, and at once he untied the handkerchief, and was quite startled when he saw the hideous Troll's head. A shudder ran through everyone, for it was frightful to look upon, but the Princess sat like a stone image and could not utter a single word. At last she rose and gave her hand to John, for, of course, he had guessed right. She looked on neither one or another, but with a deep deep sigh she said, "Now you are my lord, to-night we will hold our bridal."

"That's the sort for me," said the old King; "so we will!" All the people shouted "Hurrah", the guards' band played in the street, the bells rang, and the cake women took the black crape off their sugar pigs, for now there was rejoicing. Three whole roasted oxen, stuffed with ducks and chickens, were set out in the middle of the marketplace; anyone could cut himself a slice. The fountains ran with the most delicious wine, and anyone who bought a penny roll at the baker's had six large buns given him into the bargain, buns, mark you, with raisins in them.

At night the whole town was illuminated and the soldiers fired off cannons, and the boys peashooters, and there was eating and drinking, singing and springing, up at the palace; all the noble lords and the lovely ladies danced together, and from far away you could hear them when they sang:

*Here are so many pretty maidens
That all want a turn.
They are asking for the drum and fife march;
Pretty maiden, take a turn,*

*Dance about and stamp about
Till your shoe soles tumble out.*

But the Princess was still a witch and cared not at all for John. This the Travelling Companion was aware of, and therefore he gave John three feathers from the swan's wings, and a little bottle with some drops in it, and told him that he must have a large tub full of water put by the bride's bed, and when the Princess was going to get into bed, he must give her a little push so that she should fall into the water; then he must duck her thrice—having first put the feathers and the drops into the bath—and then she would be rid of her witchcraft and would come to be very fond of him.

John did all that the Travelling Companion had advised him. The Princess screamed aloud when he plunged her beneath the water, and wriggled in his hands in the form of a great coal-black swan with fiery eyes. When she came up from the water a second time, the swan was white, save for a black ring round its neck. John prayed earnestly to God and made the water run over the bird the third time, and in that instant it was changed to a real lovely Princess. She was even prettier than before, and she thanked him with tears in her beautiful eyes for having freed her from the spell that was on her.

Next morning the old King came with all his court, and there were congratulations that lasted till late on in the day; last of all came the Travelling Companion. He had his stick in his hand and his knapsack on his back. John kissed him over and over again and said he must never go away, but must stay with him; he had been the cause of all his good fortune; but the Travelling Companion shook his head and said—how kindly and lovingly—"No, now my time is up, I have but paid my debt. Do you remember the dead man whom those evil men would have injured? You gave all you had that he might rest in his grave. I am that dead man." And that same instant he was gone.

The bridal lasted a whole month. John and the Princess were as fond of each other as could be, and the old King lived for many happy days and let their little children ride a cock horse on his knee and play with his sceptre. But John was king over the whole realm.

Transcriber's note:

The edition used as base for this book contained the following errors, which have been corrected:

Page 51: You mustn't be so cast down, John you see => You mustn't be so cast down, John, you see

Page 52: till the sunrose => till the sun rose

[End of *The Travelling Companion* by Hans Christian Andersen, from *Hans Andersen Forty-Two Stories*, translated by M. R. James]