

2. The Tale of Tom Thumb

Tom Thumb is a boy the size of a thumb - imagine what adventures he has! In the days of good king Arthur there lived a countryman and his wife who, though they had plenty to eat and to drink, and a very comfortable cottage to live in, were not at all happy.

They had no children, and they both wished very much for a baby. The wife was often in tears when her husband was out at work and she was all alone, because she had not an infant to take care of and nurse. One day, as she sat weeping by herself, more than usually sad, she said aloud, "If I only had a dear little baby, I should not care what it was like. I should be thankful for one if it were no bigger than my husband's thumb."

Now it happened that the Queen of the Fairies was passing by, though the poor woman could not see her, and as she knew the farmer's wife was kind to the poor and likely to be a good mother, she thought she would grant her wish.

So about an hour or two afterwards the woman was much surprised to see standing by the table a very beautiful lady, dressed splendidly, with a glittering star on her forehead and a wand in her right hand, with a gem of great brilliancy at the top of it. But what delighted the woman most of all was a tiny cradle, made of a walnut shell, lined with velvet, in which lay the prettiest baby ever seen, but it was only just as large as a man's thumb. "See," said the fairy, "your wish is granted. Here is a baby for you. Take care of it; it is your own." The woman did not know how to thank the fairy enough; she was so delighted, and the queen went away quite pleased at having given so much happiness.

Before the fairy went away, however, she gave the woman a little shirt of spider's web and a doublet of thistle-down for the baby.

When the farmer came home he was very much pleased. He invited all his friends to the christening, and the child was named "Tom," after him, and "Thumb," because he was no bigger than one.

The baby was very well, and merry, and grew, of course; but still it was very small.

However, at last Tom thought himself quite a great boy, and begged his mother to make him a little suit of clothes, and she made him one; but with a great deal of trouble, they were so small.

Tom was very often in mischief. He was so small that his mother used to put him on the table to play; and once she found him in the salt-box.