

THICKASATHUMB

There was once a poor peasant who sat at his hearth all evening poking the fire while his wife sat spinning. And he said: 'It's so sad that we don't have any children! Our house is so silent, and the others are full of noise and fun.' 'Yes,' answered his wife with a sigh, 'even if we had only one, even just a tiny little one the size of a thumb, I'd be content; we'd love him just the same.' Then it came about that the wife was poorly, and seven months later she bore a child; and though all its limbs were perfectly formed, it was no bigger than a thumb. So they said: 'It's what we wished for, and he shall be our own dear child.' And because he was so tiny they called him Thickasathumb. Though they gave him plenty to eat, he never grew any bigger but stayed the same size as he had been when he was born. All the same, he had an intelligent face and soon showed himself to be a clever and nimble little creature, successful in everything he undertook.

One day as the peasant was getting ready to go out into the forest and fell some timber, he muttered to himself: 'I wish I had someone who could follow me there and bring me the cart.' 'Oh, father,' exclaimed Thickasathumb, 'I'll bring you the cart, you can count on me, it shall be there in the forest at whatever time you say.' The man laughed and said: 'How will you manage that? You're much too tiny to hold a horse by the reins.' 'That's all right, father; if mother will just harness him, I'll sit in his ear and call out to him which way to go.' 'Well,' answered his father, 'we'll try it for once.' When the time came, Thickasathumb's mother harnessed the cart and put him into the horse's ear, and then the little fellow shouted his orders to the horse, 'Ho-whoa! Hoy - gee-up!' and off they went in as orderly a fashion as if a mastercarter had been driving, and the cart took the right road to the forest. It happened that just as it was turning a corner and the little fellow was shouting 'Hoy, hoy!' that two strangers came walking along. 'Goodness me,' said one of them, 'what's this? Here's a cart being driven and a carter calling out to the horse, and yet there's no sign of him.' 'There's something queer about it,' said the other. 'Let's follow the cart and see where it stops.' But the cart went right into the forest to the very place where the timber was being felled. When Thickasathumb saw his father, he called out to him: 'You see, father, here I am with the cart! Now fetch me down.' His father held the horse with his left hand, and with his right he took his little son out of its ear, and Thickasathumb sat down very merrily on a blade of straw. When the two strangers caught sight of him, they were speechless with astonishment. Then one of them took the other aside and said: 'Do you know, that little fellow could make our fortune if we exhibited him for money in a big city; let's buy him.' They went to the peasant and said: 'Sell us the little man, we'll treat him well.' 'No,' answered the father, 'he's the apple of my eye and I won't part with him for all the gold in the world.' But Thickasathumb, when he heard what was afoot, had crept up a fold in his father's coat, and now he stood on his shoulder and whispered into his ear: 'Father, just hand me over, I'll get back again all right.' So his father handed him over to the two men for a tidy sum of money. 'Where do you want to sit?' they asked him. 'Oh, just put me on the brim of your hat, sir, I'll be able to walk up and down there

and look at the countryside and not fall off.' They did as he asked, and when Thickasathumb had said goodbye to his father they set off with him. They walked on till evening began to fall, and then the little fellow said: 'Lift me down for a minute, I have to do something.' 'Just stay where you are,' said the man whose head he was sitting on, 'it won't worry me; the birds often drop things on me anyway.' 'No,' said Thickasathumb, 'I know what's right and proper: just you lift me down quickly.' The man took off his hat and put the little fellow down in a field by the roadside, where he hopped and crawled about for a while among the clods and then suddenly vanished into a mouse-hole which he had been looking for. 'Good evening, gentlemen!' he called to them. 'Now you can just go home without me.' And he laughed his head off at them. They rushed up and poked sticks into the mouse-hole, but it was all in vain: Thickasathumb crawled further and further in, and as it soon became quite dark they just had to set off for home with their noses out of joint and their purses empty.

When Thickasathumb saw they had gone, he crawled out of his underground passage again. 'It's dangerous walking on this field in the dark,' he said, 'one can easily break one's leg or one's neck!' Luckily he came across an empty snail-shell. 'God be praised,' he said, 'here I can pass the night in safety.' And he settled down in it. Presently, just as he was falling asleep, he heard two men passing, and one of them said: 'How are we to get hold of that rich priest's money and silver?' 'I could tell you how!' cried Thickasathumb. 'What was that?' said one of the thieves in alarm. 'I heard someone speak.' They stood still and listened, and Thickasathumb spoke again: 'Take me with you,' he said, 'and I'll help you.' 'But where are you?' 'Just search the ground, and listen where my voice is coming from,' he replied. Eventually the thieves found him and picked him up. 'You little midget,' they said, 'how will you help us?' 'Well, don't you see,' he replied, 'I'll crawl between the iron bars into the priest's room and hand you out whatever you want.' 'Very well,' they said, 'let's see what you can do.' When they got to the presbytery Thickasathumb crawled into the room, but at once began yelling for all he was worth: 'D'you want to take everything there is here?' The thieves took fright and said: 'For heaven's sake speak quietly, or someone'll wake up.' But Thickasathumb pretended he hadn't heard them properly and yelled again: 'What'll you have? D'you want everything that's here?' The cook, who slept in the next room, heard this and sat up in her bed to listen. The thieves had got such a fright that they had run back part of the way they had come; but finally they plucked up their courage again, thinking: The little fellow's making fun of us. They came back and whispered to him: 'Now stop playing the fool and hand us out something.' At this Thickasathumb yelled out again as loud as he could: 'I'll give you anything you like, just put your hands in through the bars.' The listening maidservant heard this quite clearly; she jumped out of bed and stumbled in through the door. The thieves ran away as if they had the Wild Huntsman at their heels: but the maid, finding there was nothing to be seen, went to light a candle. When she came back with it, Thickasathumb slipped out unnoticed into the barn. But when the maid had searched in every corner and found nothing she finally went back to bed, thinking she must just after all have been dreaming with her eyes and ears wide open.

Thickasathumb had been climbing around in the hay and found himself a nice place to sleep; he decided he would stay here till daybreak and then go home to his parents. But his adventures were not over yet! Ah yes, the world is full of trouble and sorrow. By daybreak the maid had already got up to feed the cattle. The first place she went to was the barn, where she took up an armful of hay, and it happened to be the very hay poor Thickasathumb was lying asleep in. But he was sleeping so soundly that he noticed nothing, and he didn't wake up till he was in the jaws of the cow, who had picked him up with her hay. 'Oh, good Lord!' he exclaimed, 'how did I get into this washing-machine?' But he soon realized where he was. So he had to take good care not to get between the cow's teeth and be crushed, and presently he had to slide down into her stomach all the same. 'They've forgotten to put windows in this little room,' he said, 'so it doesn't get any sunlight, and I can't see anyone bringing a lamp either.' In short he found it pretty poor accommodation, and the worst of it was that more and more new hay kept piling in through the door, leaving less and less room for him. In the end he was so scared that he shouted as loud as he could: 'Stop feeding me, stop feeding me!' The maid was just milking the cow, and when she heard a voice speaking and couldn't see the speaker, and it was the same voice as she had heard in the night too, she got such a fright that she fell off her stool and spilt the milk. She ran as fast as she could to her master and cried out: 'Oh, God bless us, father, the cow's started talking!' 'You're crazy,' answered the priest, but all the same he came to the cowshed himself to see what was going on. But scarcely had he set foot in it when Thickasathumb shouted again: 'Stop feeding me, stop feeding me!' This scared the priest too; he thought an evil spirit had got into the cow, and ordered it to be killed. So the cow was slaughtered and its stomach, with Thickasathumb still inside, was thrown on the dungheap. Thickasathumb had a lot of trouble working his way through its contents, but eventually he managed to clear himself some space, and was just about to push his head out when a new misfortune overtook him. A hungry wolf ran up and swallowed the whole stomach at one gulp. Thickasathumb wasn't downhearted; perhaps I can come to an agreement with this wolf, he thought. And he called out to the wolf from inside its belly: 'Dear wolf, I know a place where you can get a fine meal.' 'Where's that?' asked the wolf. 'In such and such a house; you must crawl in through the drain, and then you'll find as many cakes and hams and sausages as you'll ever want to eat.' And he gave him an exact description of his father's house. The wolf didn't need a second telling; that night he squeezed in through the drain and plundered the larder to his heart's content. When he had eaten his fill he tried to leave, but he was so fat now that he couldn't get back the way he had come. Thickasathumb had foreseen this, and he now began to make a tremendous noise inside the wolf, raging and screaming as hard as he could. 'Will you stop that noise!' said the wolf, 'you'll waken everybody.' 'Come now,' answered the little man, 'you've had a good meal, and I want to cheer myself up too,' and he began to scream his head off again. In the end it woke his father and his mother, and they ran to the larder, opened the door slightly and peered in. When they saw there was a wolf inside they hurried off, and the man fetched the axe and his wife the scythe. 'Stay behind me,' said the man as they went in. 'I'll give him a bash, but if that doesn't kill him you have a go with the scythe and cut him in half.' Thickasathumb heard his father's voice and called out: 'Father dear, it's me, I'm in the wolf's belly.' His father was

overjoyed and said: 'God be praised, we've found our dear child again,' and told his wife to put away the scythe in case Thickasathumb should get injured. Then he swung the axe and struck the wolf such a blow on the head that it fell dead, and after that they fetched a knife and scissors and cut open its body and pulled out their little son. 'Oh,' said his father, 'we've been worried to death about you!' 'Yes, father, I've had quite a lot of adventures; thank goodness I can breathe freely again!' 'But wherever have you been?' 'Oh, father, I've been in a mouse-hole, in a cow's stomach and in a wolf's belly; now I'm going to stay at home with you.' 'And we'll never sell you again for all the riches in the world,' said his parents, and they hugged and kissed their dear Thickasathumb. They gave him something to eat and drink and had new clothes made for him, because the ones he had on had got spoilt during his travels.