



By Howard Pyle
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ONCE upon a time there was a king who was the wisest in all of the world. So wise was he that no one had ever befooled him, which is a rare thing, I can tell you. Now, this king had a daughter who was as pretty as a ripe apple, so that there was no end to the number of the lads who came asking to marry her. Every day there were two or three of them dawdling around the house, so that at last the old king grew tired of having them always about.

So he sent word far and near that whoever should befooled him might have the princess and half of the kingdom to boot, for he thought that it would be a wise man indeed who could trick him. But the king also said, that whoever should try to befooled him and should fail, should have a good whipping. This was to keep all foolish fellows away.

The princess was so pretty that there was no lack of lads who came to have a try for her and half of the kingdom, but every one of these went away with a sore back and no luck.

Now, there was a man who was well off in the world, and who had three sons; the first was named Peter, and the second was named Paul. Peter and Paul thought themselves as wise as anybody in all of the world, and their father thought as they did.

As for the youngest son, he was named Boots. Nobody thought anything of him except that he was silly, for he did nothing but sit poking in the warm ashes all of the day.

One morning Peter spoke up and said that he was going to the town to have a try at befooling the king, for it would be a fine thing to have a princess in the family. His father did not say no, for if anybody was wise enough to fool the king, Peter was the lad.

So, after Peter had eaten a good breakfast, off he set for the town, right foot foremost. After a while he came to the king's house and—rap! tap! tap!—he knocked at the door.

Well; what did he want?

Oh! he would only like to have a try at befooling the king.

Very good; he should have his try. He was not the first one who had been there that morning, early as it was.

So Peter was shown in to the king.

“Oh, look!” said he, “yonder are three black geese out in the court-yard!”

But no, the king was not to be fooled so easily as all that. “One goose is enough to look at at a time,” said he; “take him away and give him a whipping!”

And so they did, and Peter went home bleating like a sheep.

One day Paul spoke up. “I should like to go and have a try for the princess, too,” said he.

Well, his father did not say no, for, after all, Paul was the more clever of the two.

So off Paul went as merrily as a duck in the rain. By and by he came to the castle, and then he too was brought before the king just as Peter had been.

“Oh, look!” said he, “yonder is a crow sitting in the tree with three white stripes on his back!”

But the king was not so silly as to be fooled in that way. “Here is a Jack,” said he, “who will soon have more stripes on his back than he will like. Take him away and give him his whipping!”

Then it was done as the king had said, and Paul went away home bawling like a calf.

One day up spoke Boots. “I should like to go and have a try for the pretty princess, too,” said he.

At this they all stared and sniggered. What! he go where his clever brothers had failed, and had nothing to show for the trying but a good beating? What had come over the lout! Here was a pretty business, to be sure! That was what they all said.

But all of this rolled away from Boots like water from a duck's back. No matter, he would like to go and have a try like the others. So he begged and



eter goes to the castle to befool
the King, dressed in his finest clothes.



begged until his father was glad to let him go to be rid of his teasing, if nothing else.

Then Boots asked if he might have the old tattered hat that hung back of the chimney.

Oh, yes, he might have that if he wanted it, for nobody with good wits was likely to wear such a thing.

So Boots took the hat, and after he had brushed the ashes from his shoes set off for the town, whistling as he went.

The first body whom he met was an old woman with a great load of earthenware pots and crocks on her shoulders.

“Good-day, mother,” said Boots.

“Good-day, son,” said she.

“What will you take for all of your pots and crocks?” said Boots. “Three shillings,” said she.

“I will give you five shillings if you will come and stand in front of the king’s house, and do thus and so when I say this and that,” said Boots.

Oh, yes! she would do that willingly enough.

So Boots and the old woman went on together, and presently came to the king’s house. When they had come there, Boots sat down in front of the door and began bawling as loud as he could—” No, I will not! I will not do it, I say! No, I will not do it!”

So he kept on, bawling louder and louder until he made such a noise that, at last, the king himself came out to see what all of the hubbub was about. But when Boots saw him he only bawled out louder than ever. “No, I will not! I will not do it, I say!”

“Stop! stop!” cried the king, “what is all this about?”

“Why,” said Boots, “everybody wants to buy my cap, but I will not sell it! I will not do it, I say!”

“But, why should anybody want to buy such a cap as that?” said the king.

“Because,” said Boots, “it is a fooling cap and the only one in all of the world.”

“A fooling cap!” said the king. For he did not like to hear of such a cap as that coming into the town. “Hum-m-m-m! I should like to see you fool somebody with it. Could you fool that old body yonder with the pots and the crocks?”

“Oh, yes! That is easily enough done,” said Boots, and without more ado he took off his tattered cap and blew into it. Then he put it on his head again and bawled out, “Break pots! break pots!”

No sooner had he spoken these words than the old woman jumped up and began breaking and smashing her pots and crocks as though she had gone crazy. That was what Boots had paid her five shillings for doing, but of it the



Paul comes home again from
the king's castle with no luck. C



king knew nothing. "Hui!" said he to himself, "I must buy that hat from the fellow or he will fool the princess away from me for sure and certain." Then he began talking to Boots as sweetly as though he had honey in his mouth. Perhaps Boots would sell the hat to him?

Oh, no! Boots could not think of such a thing as selling his fooling cap.

Come, come; the king wanted that hat, and sooner than miss buying it he would give a whole bag of gold money for it.

At this Boots looked up and looked down, scratching his head. Well, he supposed he would have to sell the hat some time, and the king might as well have it as anybody else. But for all that he did not like parting with it.

So the king gave Boots the bag of gold, and Boots gave the king the old tattered hat, and then he went his way.

After Boots had gone the king blew into the hat and blew into the hat, but though he blew enough breath into it to sail a big ship, he did not befool so much as a single titmouse. Then, at last, he began to see that the fooling cap was good on nobody else's head but Boots's; and he was none too pleased at that, you may be sure.

As for Boots, with his bag of gold he bought the finest clothes that were to be had in the town, and when the next morning had come he started away bright and early for the king's house. "I have come," said he, "to marry the princess, if you please."

At this the king hemmed and hawed and scratched his head. Yes; Boots had befooled him sure enough, but, after all, he could not give up the princess for such a thing as that. Still, he would give Boots another chance. Now, there was the high-councillor, who was the wisest man in all of the world. Did Boots think that he could fool him also?

Oh, yes! Boots thought that it might be done.

Very well; if he could befool the high-councillor so as to bring him to the castle the next morning against his will, Boots should have the princess and the half of the kingdom; if he did not do so he should have his beating.

Then Boots went away, and the king thought that he was rid of him now for good and all.

As for the high-councillor, he was not pleased with the matter at all, for he did not like the thought of being fooled by a clever rogue, and taken here and there against his will. So when he had come home, he armed all of his servants with blunderbusses, and then waited to give Boots a welcome when he should come.

But Boots was not going to fall into any such trap as that! No indeed! not he! The next morning he went quietly and bought a fine large meal-sack. Then he put a black wig over his beautiful red hair, so that no one might know him.



**The old woman smashes pots
and things at Boots' bidding.**)(



After that he went to the place where the high-councillor lived, and when he had come there he crawled inside of the sack, and lay just beside the door of the house.

By and by came one of the maid servants to the door, and there lay the great meal-sack with somebody in it. "Ach!" cried she, "who is there?" But Boots only said, "Sh.h.h.h.h!"

Then the serving maid went back into the house, and told the high-councillor that one lay outside in a great meal-sack, and that all that he said was, "Sh.h.h.hh!"

So the councillor went himself to see what it was all about. "What do you want here?" said he.

"Sh-h-h-h-h!" said Boots, "I am not to be talked to now. This is a wisdom-sack, and I am learning wisdom as fast as a drake can eat peas."

"And what wisdom have you learned?" said the councillor.

Oh! Boots had learned wisdom about everything in the world. He had learned that the clever scamp who had fooled the king yesterday was coming with seventeen tall men to take the high-councillor, willy-nilly, to the castle that morning.

When the high-councillor heard this he fell to trembling till his teeth rattled in his head. "And have you learned how I can get the better of this clever scamp?" said he.

Oh, yes! Boots had learned that easily enough.

So, good! then if the wise man in the sack would tell the high-councillor how to escape the clever rogue, the high-councillor would give the wise man twenty dollars.

But no, that was not to be done; wisdom was not bought so cheaply as the high-councillor seemed to think.

Well, the councillor would give him a hundred dollars then.

That was good! A hundred dollars were a hundred dollars. If the councillor would give him that much he might get into the sack himself, and then he could learn all the wisdom that he wanted, and more besides.

So Boots crawled out of the sack, and the councillor paid his hundred dollars and crawled in.

As soon as he was in all snug and safe, Boots drew the mouth of the sack together and tied it tightly. Then he flung sack, councillor, and all over his shoulder, and started away to the king's house, and anybody who met them could see with half an eye that the councillor was going against his will.

When Boots came to the king's castle he laid the councillor down in the goose-house, and then he went to the king.

When the king saw Boots again, he bit his lips with vexation. "Well," said he, "have you fooled the councillor?"



The Councilor finds one in the Sack who teaches him wisdom. ●



“Oh, yes!” says Boots, “I have done that.”

And where was the councillor now?

Oh, Boots had just left him down in the goose-house. He was tied up safe and sound in a sack, waiting till the king should send for him.

So the councillor was sent for, and when he came the king saw at once that he had been brought against his will.

“And now may I marry the princess?” said Boots.

But the king was not willing for him to marry the princess yet; no! no! Boots must not go so fast. There was more to be done yet. If he would come to-morrow morning he might have the princess and welcome, but he would have to pick her out from among fourscore other maids just like her; did he think that he could do that?

Oh, yes! Boots thought that that might be easy enough to do.

So, good! then come to-morrow; but he must understand that if he failed he should have a good whipping, and be sent packing from the town.

So off went Boots, and the king thought that he was rid of him now, for he had never seen the princess, and how could he pick her out from among eighty others?

But Boots was not going to give up so easily as all that! No, not he! He made a little box, and then he hunted up and down until he had caught a live mouse to put into it.

When the next morning came he started away to the king’s house, taking his mouse along with him in the box.

There was the king, standing in the doorway, looking out into the street. When he saw Boots coming towards him he made a wry face. “What!” said he, “are you back again?”

Oh, yes! Boots was back again. And now if the princess was ready he would like to go and find her, for lost time was not to be gathered again like fallen apples.

So off they marched to a great room, and there stood eighty-and-one maidens, all as much alike as peas in the same dish.

Boots looked here and there, but, even if he had known the princess, he could not have told her from the others. But he was ready for all that. Before anyone knew what he was about, he opened the box, and out ran the little mouse among them all. Then what a screaming and a hubbub there was. Many looked as though they would have liked to swoon, but only one of them did so. As soon as the others saw what had happened, they forgot all about the mouse, and ran to her and fell to fanning her and slapping her hands and chafing her temples.

“This is the princess,” said Boots.

And so it was.

After that the king could think of nothing more to set Boots to do, so he let him marry the princess as he had promised, and have half of the kingdom to boot.

That is all of this story.

Only this: It is not always the silliest one that sits kicking his feet in the ashes at home.