

The Golden Hammer

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Once upon a time in a little kingdom by the sea, there lived a goldsmith and his little son, whose name was William. The goldsmith worked for the king, who was kind and gentle and brought peace and prosperity to his kingdom. The king was very kind to the goldsmith, and William was a favorite playmate of the youngest prince. The goldsmith and his son were very happy.

Then one day the king died. The eldest son was crowned king and it looked like he would become a great king like his father but he too passed away in his grief. Then the second son became king. He was not kind like his brother and father, but cruel and mean. He sent the young prince to a distant land to be schooled, and he made the goldsmith and his son leave the palace.

Three years passed and the goldsmith became sick. The kingdom, which had been so prosperous, was now barren and poor from the tyrannical rule of the second son, so no medicine could be found. Within a few weeks the goldsmith died. William was sent to his uncle's home in a distant village. His uncle was a blacksmith, who was so jealous of his brother that he hated and despised him and his son.

When William arrived the uncle at first pretended to welcome the boy, but as the weeks passed William's position in the household steadily decreased until he was no more than a slave, subject to intense beatings from his uncle and teasing and mocking from his equally cruel cousins. His meals were reduced to cold soup and burnt bread crusts. His uncle made him work nonstop in the forge, working the bellows and fetching pails of water.

Years passed and William grew accustomed to hard labor, little food, and cold nights in the attic. Yet through all this, he managed to improve his skills as a smith, through his father's old teachings and by watching his uncle and apprentices work in the forge. Over time, William managed to collect enough spare metal to make a coin, with which he intended to buy flowers to put on his father's grave. But before he was even halfway done, the uncle discovered his plan and dumped the metal on the ground and gave William a severe beating.

This was too much for little William, and he ran off into the woods crying. He ran and ran, deeper and deeper into the woods until he realized he was lost. He sat down in a clearing and continued to sob. Just then, an enormous man with an equally enormous beard came into the clearing and asked what was his problem. While William told his story, the man listened intently, stroking his massive

beard. When it was over the man stood up and offered to lead him back to the village. When they reached the edge of the woods the man, who had said nothing the whole way, turned to William and said, "I have a tool that will solve all of your problems. But remember this. Don't let anyone touch it, or they will die." And with that the man handed William a little golden hammer. When William turned back to thank him, all he could see was a dim outline of a wolf running back into the forest.

When he got home he received a horrible beating from his uncle, but he could hardly feel the pain for anticipation. That night, when everyone was asleep, he tried his hammer on a rusty old nail in the attic. To his delight, the nail was transformed into pure gold. The next day William cashed in the piece of gold for a large loaf of bread at the bakery. When his uncle saw him walking home he was astonished. He knew he must find out where the boy could have got the money to buy the bread.

Late that night, the uncle crept silently into the William's room, and saw the hammer under the bed. He tried to lift it, but it would not budge. William began to stir, so the uncle crept out of the room. Once again to the uncle's amazement, William was able to buy a large loaf of bread. The next night the uncle crept into the attic and tied a rope around the hammer, but his efforts were of no avail. Then, on the third night he once again crept silently into the room. To his surprise, the hammer nearly leapt into his hand. He raised his arm with a triumphant yell, when suddenly there was a flash of light and the uncle was turned to gold. William woke early the next morning to see his uncle's shining golden face, with its last smile etched on forever.

Nearly ten years later, William was working in his little shop at the edge of the village, when one of the village boys ran through the streets, proclaiming, "The king is dead! The king is dead!" and the whole kingdom rejoiced. The youngest prince came back, and he immediately welcomed his old friend William back into the palace to be the royal goldsmith, and he lived happily for the rest of his life. And the villagers still say that there is an incredibly life-like golden statue of a sour-looking man standing in front of William's forge, holding a little, golden hammer.