

The Poor Boy and the Magical Bird by Pie Corbett

Once upon a time there was a King and Queen and their child. One day the child fell ill. Everyone was sad - because the doctors could not cure the child. They did not even know what was wrong!

At that time there lived a poor shepherd boy. He was so poor that he lived in the hills with only the sky as a roof, with only the grass as a bed, with only his goats for company.

One day, he was sitting by the waterfall when a beautiful creature appeared - it was like a small shimmering ball of light. He stared at its flickering wings of silver. Then it spoke.

"Shepherd, in a distant valley, in the farthestmost corner of the kingdom, there is a garden and in that garden is a tree where the golden blossom never dies and in that tree there is a magical bird and to hear that bird sing just one song would cure anyone."

So the boy and the tiny creature, with shimmering wings, set out to walk to the farthestmost corner of the kingdom. They walked and they walked. They climbed and they climbed. They crossed the great rivers and they climbed the great mountains - till in the end, they found the garden where the tree with golden blossom grew. But coiled round the tree was a huge dragon.

"If the dragon has open eyes - it is asleep so do not be afraid. But if its eyes are shut - then flee," whispered the creature. The boy climbed the garden wall and crept closer, and closer and closer. The dragon stared at him with eyes of black glass that seemed to see right into his heart...The boy shivered.

But as its eyes were open, the boy bit back his fear and climbed the tree. There - hidden amongst the golden blossom - was the magical bird with feathers of the rainbow. It tilted its head on one side and watched the boy. He put out his hand and the bird hopped onto his finger. Then he placed it on his shoulder and climbed down. When he

reached the bottom, he let out a sigh of relief. He glanced at the dragon and saw that its eyes were closing - slowly, like windows being pulled down.

So without looking back, the boy and the bird and the creature ran and they ran - they crossed the great rivers and they climbed the great mountains - till in the end, they came to the King's Palace.

"Quick," said the King.

"Quick," said the Queen. The boy placed the bird on the end of the child's bed where it ruffled its rainbow feathers and sang. How sweetly the bird sang!

Everyone in the city paused as they heard its song - the butchers, the bakers, the candlestick makers, the teacher, the traveller and even the vagabond locked in the dungeon. All heard the song and they felt their hearts lift. So it was that the child was cured. The King and the Queen and the child lived happily ever after. So it was that the shepherd kept the bird and together they travelled throughout the land singing their song.