# The Son of the King of Erin, and the Giant of Loch Léin

On a time there lived a king and a queen in Erin, and they had an only son. They were very careful and fond of this son; whatever he asked for was granted, and what he wanted he had.When grown to be almost a young man the son went away one day to the hills to hunt. He could find no game,—saw nothing all day. Towards evening he sat down on a hillside to rest, but soon stood up again and started to go home empty-handed. Then he heard a whistle behind him, and turning, saw a giant hurrying down the hill.The giant came to him, took his hand, and said: "Can you play cards?""I can indeed," said the king's son."Well, if you can," said the giant, "we'll have a game here on this hillside."So the two sat down, and the giant had out a pack of cards in a twinkling. "What shall we play for?" asked the giant."For two estates," answered the king's son.They played: the young man won, and went home the better for two estates. He was very glad, and hurried to tell his father the luck he had.Next day he went to the same place, and didn't wait long till the giant came again."Welcome, king's son," said the giant. "What shall we play for to-day?""I'll leave that to yourself," answered the young man."Well," said the giant, "I have five hundred bullocks with golden horns and silver hoofs, and I'll play them against as many cattle belonging to you.""Agreed," said the king's son.They played. The giant lost again. He had the cattle brought to the place; and the king's son went home with the five hundred bullocks. The king his father was outside watching, and was more delighted than the day before when he saw the drove of beautiful cattle with horns of gold and hoofs of silver.When the bullocks were driven in, the king sent for the old blind sage (Sean dall Glic), to know what he would say of the young man's luck."My advice," said the old blind sage, "is not to let your son go the way of the giant again, for if he plays with him a third time he'll rue it."But nothing could keep the king's son from playing the third time. Away he went, in spite of every advice and warning, and sat on the same hillside.He waited long, but no one came. At last he rose to go home. That moment he heard a whistle behind him, and turning, saw the giant coming."Well, will you play with me to-day?" asked the giant."I would," said the king's son, "but I have nothing to bet.""You have indeed.""I have not," said the king's son."Haven't you your head?" asked the giant of Loch Léin, for it was he that was in it."I have," answered the king's son."So have I my head," said the giant; "and we'll play for each other's heads."This third time the giant won the game; and the king's son was to give himself up in a year and a day to the giant in his castle.The young man went home sad and weary. The king and queen were outside watching, and when they saw him approaching, they knew great trouble was on him. When he came to where they were, he wouldn't speak, but went straight into the castle, and wouldn't eat or drink.He was sad and lamenting for a good while, till at last he disappeared one day, the king and queen knew not whither. After that they didn't hear of him,—didn't know was he dead or alive.The young man after he left home was walking along over the kingdom for a long time. One day he saw no house, big or little, till after dark he came in front of a hill, and at the foot of the hill saw a small light. He went to the light, found a small house, and inside an old woman sitting at a warm fire, and every tooth in her head as long as a staff.She stood up when he entered, took him by the hand, and said, "You are welcome to my house, son of the king of Erin." Then she brought warm water, washed his feet and legs from the knees down, gave him supper, and put him to bed.When he rose next morning he found breakfast ready before him. The old woman said: "You were with me last night; you'll be with my sister to-night, and what she tells you to do, do, or your head'll be in danger. Now take the gift I give you. Here is a ball of thread: do you throw it in front of you before you start, and all day the ball will be rolling ahead of you, and you'll be following behind winding the thread into another ball."He obeyed the old woman, threw the ball down, and followed. All the day he was going up hill and down, across valleys and open places, keeping the ball in sight and winding the thread as he went, till evening, when he saw a hill in front, and a small light at the foot of it.He went to the light and found a house, which he entered. There was no one inside but an old woman with teeth as long as a crutch."Oh! then you are welcome to my house, king's son of Erin," said she. "You were with my sister last night; you are with me to-night; and it's glad I am to see you."She gave him meat and drink and a good bed to lie on.When he rose next morning breakfast was there before him, and when he had eaten and was ready for the journey, the old woman gave him a ball of thread, saying: "You were with my younger sister the night before last; you were with me last night; and you'll be with my elder sister to-night. You must do what she tells you, or you'll lose your head. You must throw this ball before you, and follow the clew till evening."He threw down the ball: it rolled on, showing the way up and down mountains and hills, across valleys and braes. All day he wound the ball; unceasingly it went till nightfall, when he came to a light, found a little house, and went in. Inside was an old woman, the eldest sister, who said: "You are welcome, and glad am I to see you, king's son."She treated him as well as the other two had done. After he had eaten breakfast next morning, she said:—"I know well the journey you are on. You have lost your head to the Giant of Loch Léin, and you are going to give yourself up. This giant has a great castle. Around the castle are seven hundred iron spikes, and on every spike of them but one is the head of a king, a queen, or a king's son. The seven hundredth spike is empty, and nothing can save your head from that spike if you don't take my advice."Here is a ball for you: walk behind it till you come to a lake near the giant's castle. When you come to that lake at midday the ball will be unwound."The giant has three young daughters, and they come at noon every day of the year to bathe in the lake. You must watch them well, for each will have a lily on her breast,—one a blue, another a white, and the third a yellow lily. You mustn't let your eyes off the one with the yellow lily. Watch her well: when she undresses to go into the water, see where she puts her clothes; when the three are out in the lake swimming, do you slip away with the clothes of Yellow Lily."When the sisters come out from bathing, and find that the one with the yellow lily has lost her clothes, the other two will laugh and make game of her, and she will crouch down crying on the shore, with nothing to cover her, and say, 'How can I go home now, and everybody making sport of me? Whoever took my clothes, if he'll give them back to me, I'll save him from the danger he is in, if I have the power.'"The king's son followed the ball till nearly noon, when it stopped at a lake not far from the giant's castle. Then he hid behind a rock at the water's edge, and waited.At midday the three sisters came to the lake, and, leaving their clothes on the strand, went into the water. When all three were in the lake swimming and playing with great pleasure and sport, the king's son slipped out and took the clothes of the sister with the yellow lily.After they had bathed in the lake to their hearts' content, the three sisters came out. When the two with the blue and the white lilies saw their sister on the shore and her clothes gone, they began to laugh and make sport of her. Then, cowering and crouching down, she began to cry and lament, saying: "How can I go home now, with my own sisters laughing at me? If I stir from this, everybody will see me and make sport of me."The sisters went home and left her there. When they were gone, and she was alone at the water crying and sobbing, all at once she came to herself and called out: "Whoever took my clothes, I'll forgive him if he brings them to me now, and I'll save him from the danger he is in if I can."When he heard this, the king's son put the clothes out to her, and stayed behind himself till she told him to come forth.Then she said: "I know well where you are going. My father, the Giant of Loch Léin, has a soft bed waiting for you,—a deep tank of water for your death. But don't be uneasy; go into the water, and wait till I come to save you. Be at that castle above before my father. When he comes home to-night and asks for you, take no meat from him, but go to rest in the tank when he tells you."The giant's daughter left the king's son, who went his way to the castle alone at a fair and easy gait, for he had time enough on his hands and to spare.When the Giant of Loch Léin came home that night, the first question he asked was, "Is the son of the king of Erin here?""I am," said the king's son."Come," said the giant, "and get your evening's meat.""I'll take no meat now, for I don't need it," said the king's son."Well, come with me then, and I'll show you your bed." He went, and the giant put the king's son into the deep tank of water to drown, and being tired himself from hunting all day over the mountains and hills of Erin, he went to sleep.That minute his youngest daughter came, took the king's son out of the tank, placed plenty to eat and to drink before him, and gave him a good bed to sleep on that night.The giant's daughter watched till she heard her father stirring before daybreak; then she roused the king's son, and put him in the tank again.Soon the giant came to the tank and called out: "Are you here, son of the king of Erin?""I am," said the king's son."Well, come out now. There is a great work for you to-day. I have a stable outside, in which I keep five hundred horses, and that stable has not been cleaned these seven hundred years. My great-grandmother when a girl lost a slumber-pin (bar an suan) somewhere in that stable, and never could find it. You must have that pin for me when I come home to-night; if you don't, your head will be on the seven hundredth spike to-morrow."Then two shovels were brought for him to choose from to clean out the stable, an old and a new one. He chose the new shovel, and went to work.For every shovelful he threw out, two came in; and soon the door of the stable was closed on him. When the stable-door was closed, the giant's daughter called from outside: "How are you thriving now, king's son?""I'm not thriving at all," said the king's son; "for as much as I throw out, twice as much comes in, and the door is closed against me.""You must make a way for me to come in, and I'll help you," said she."How can I do that?" asked the king's son.However, she did it. The giant's daughter made her way into the stable, and she wasn't long inside till the stable was cleared, and she saw the bar an suan."There is the pin over there in the corner," said she to the king's son, who put it in his bosom to give to the giant.Now he was happy, and the giant's daughter had good meat and drink put before him.When the giant himself came home, he asked: "How did you do your work to-day?""I did it well; I thought nothing of it.""Did you find the bar an suan?""I did indeed; here 'tis for you.""Oh! then," said the giant, "it is either the devil or my daughter that helped you to do that work, for I know you never did it alone.""It's neither the devil nor your daughter, but my own strength that did the work," said the son of the king of Erin."You have done the work; now you must have your meat." "I want no meat to-day; I am well satisfied as I am," said the king's son."Well," said the giant, "since you'll have no meat, you must go to sleep in the tank."He went into the tank. The giant himself was soon snoring, for he was tired from hunting over Erin all day.The moment her father was away, Yellow Lily came, took the king's son out of the tank, gave him a good supper and bed, and watched till the giant was stirring before daybreak. Then she roused the king's son and put him in the tank."Are you alive in the tank?" asked the giant at daybreak."I am," said the king's son."Well, you have a great work before you to-day. That stable you cleaned yesterday hasn't been thatched these seven hundred years, and if you don't have it thatched for me when I come home to-night, with birds' feathers, and not two feathers of one color or kind, I'll have your head on the seven hundredth spike to-morrow.""Here are two whistles,—an old, and a new one; take your choice of them to call the birds."The king's son took the new whistle, and set out over the hills and valleys, whistling as he went. But no matter how he whistled, not a bird came near him. At last, tired and worn out with travelling and whistling, he sat down on a hillock and began to cry.That moment Yellow Lily was at his side with a cloth, which she spread out, and there was a grand meal before him. He hadn't finished eating and drinking, before the stable was thatched with birds' feathers, and no two of them of one color or kind.When he came home that evening the giant called out: "Have you the stable thatched for me to-night?""I have indeed," said the king's son; "and small trouble I had with it.""If that's true," said the giant, "either the devil or my daughter helped you.""It was my own strength, and not the devil or your daughter that helped me," said the king's son.He spent that night as he had the two nights before.Next morning, when the giant found him alive in the tank, he said: "There is great work before you to-day, which you must do, or your head'll be on the spike to-morrow. Below here, under my castle, is a tree nine hundred feet high, and there isn't a limb on that tree, from the roots up, except one small limb at the very top, where there is a crow's nest. The tree is covered with glass from the ground to the crow's nest. In the nest is one egg: you must have that egg before me here for my supper to-night, or I'll have your head on the seven hundredth spike to-morrow."The giant went hunting, and the king's son went down to the tree, tried to shake it, but could not make it stir. Then he tried to climb; but no use, it was all slippery glass. Then he thought, "Sure I'm done for now; I must lose my head this time."He stood there in sadness, when Yellow Lily came, and said: "How are you thriving in your work?""I can do nothing," said the king's son."Well, all that we have done up to this time is nothing to climbing this tree. But first of all let us sit down together and eat, and then we'll talk," said Yellow Lily.They sat down, she spread the cloth again, and they had a splendid feast. When the feast was over she took out a knife from her pocket and said:—"Now you must kill me, strip the flesh from my bones, take all the bones apart, and use them as steps for climbing the tree. When you are climbing the tree, they will stick to the glass as if they had grown out of it; but when you are coming down, and have put your foot on each one, they will drop into your hand when you touch them. Be sure and stand on each bone, leave none untouched; if you do, it will stay behind. Put all my flesh into this clean cloth by the side of the spring at the roots of the tree. When you come to the earth, arrange my bones together, put the flesh over them, sprinkle it with water from the spring, and I shall be alive and well before you. But don't forget a bone of me on the tree.""How could I kill you," asked the king's son, "after what you have done for me?""If you won't obey, you and I are done for," said Yellow Lily. "You must climb the tree, or we are lost; and to climb the tree you must do as I say."The king's son obeyed. He killed Yellow Lily, cut the flesh from her body, and unjointed the bones, as she had told him.As he went up, the king's son put the bones of Yellow Lily's body against the side of the tree, using them as steps, till he came under the nest and stood on the last bone.Then he took the crow's egg; and coming down, put his foot on every bone, then took it with him, till he came to the last bone, which was so near the ground that he failed to touch it with his foot.He now placed all the bones of Yellow Lily in order again at the side of the spring, put the flesh on them, sprinkled it with water from the spring. She rose up before him, and said: "Didn't I tell you not to leave a bone of my body without stepping on it? Now I am lame for life! You left my little toe on the tree without touching it, and I have but nine toes."When the giant came home that night, the first words he had were, "Have you the crow's egg for my supper?""I have," said the king's son."If you have, then either the devil or my daughter is helping you.""It is my own strength that's helping me," said the king's son."Well, whoever it is, I must forgive you now, and your head is your own."So the king's son was free to go his own road, and away he went, and never stopped till he came home to his own father and mother, who had a great welcome before him; and why not? for they thought he was dead.When the son was at home a time, the king called up the old blind sage, and asked, "What must I do with my son now?""If you follow my advice," said the old blind sage, "you'll find a wife for him; and then he'll not go roaming away again, and leave you as he did before."The king was pleased with the advice, and he sent a message to the king of Lochlin to ask his daughter in marriage.The king of Lochlin came with the daughter and a ship full of attendants, and there was to be a grand wedding at the castle of the king of Erin. Now, the king's son asked his father to invite the Giant of Loch Léin and Yellow Lily to the wedding. The king sent messages for them to come.The day before the marriage there was a great feast at the castle. As the feast went on, and all were merry, the Giant of Loch Léin said: "I never was at a place like this but one man sang a song, a second told a story, and the third played a trick."Then the king of Erin sang a song, the king of Lochlin told a story, and when the turn came to the giant, he asked Yellow Lily to take his place.She threw two grains of wheat in the air, and there came down on the table two pigeons. The cock pigeon pecked at the hen and pushed her off the table. Then the hen called out to him in a human voice, "You wouldn't do that to me the day I cleaned the stable for you."Next time Yellow Lily put two grains of wheat on the table. The cock ate the wheat, pecked the hen, and pushed her off the table to the floor. The hen said: "You would not do that to me the day I thatched the stable for you with birds' feathers, and not two of one color or kind."The third time Yellow Lily put two more grains of wheat on the table. The cock ate both, and pushed the hen off to the floor. Then the hen called out: "You wouldn't do that to me the day you killed me and took my bones to make steps up the glass tree nine hundred feet high to get the crow's egg for the supper of the Giant of Loch Léin, and forget my little toe when you were coming down, and left me lame for life.""Well," said the king's son to the guests at the feast, "when I was a little younger than I am now, I used to be everywhere in the world sporting and gaming; and once when I was away, I lost the key of a casket that I had. I had a new key made, and after it was brought to me I found the old one. Now, I'll leave it to any one here to tell what am I to do,—which of the keys should I keep?""My advice to you," said the king of Lochlin, "is to keep the old key, for it fits the lock better, and you're more used to it."Then the king's son stood up and said: "I thank you, king of Lochlin, for a wise advice and an honest word. This is my bride, the daughter of the Giant of Loch Léin. I'll have her, and no other woman. Your daughter is my father's guest, and no worse, but better, for having come to a wedding in Erin."The king's son married Yellow Lily, daughter of the Giant of Loch Léin, the wedding lasted long, and all were happy.

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