

country had daughters who were interested in the Prince and threatened abdication if their fathers went to war with his father.

One day, the Prince galloped into the castle yard upon his trusty steed, at midnight, being careful to avoid the prone figures of all the maidens who had swooned in his path. He was just back from slaying a dragon, and he planned to practice a new song he had composed on the ride back after cleaning off the dragon blood. Just as he began strumming his favourite guitar, there came a knock at the door. Since his parents had gone abroad to watch a Sting concert, and the entire household was on holiday (including the cook- that's how he learnt to fry an egg), the Prince himself had to go and answer the door. He was not annoyed at having his song interrupted, as lack of annoyance was part of his Beautiful Disposition. He opened the door, guitar in hand.

An old woman stood on the top step. "Alms, alms for the poor," she mumbled, in a cracked voice. The Prince dug into his pocket and produced two of the special christening gold coins, which he handed to her.

"Young man, I have to earn money so that my grandchildren can eat...

I could make a lot of money with that guitar. Please let me have it," she said.

In vain did the Prince try to explain that collectors paid exorbitant prices for the christening coins. The old woman insisted that she had to have the guitar. Finally, losing his temper, the Prince shouted, "It's mine! And you can't have it, you, nasty old woman!" He slammed the door.

The old woman turned and hobbled off. But as she went she muttered something under her breath, and suddenly it was as if a cloud had passed over the sun.

Back inside his room, the Prince was having trouble strumming his guitar. His nails seemed too long, so he got up to fetch his nail scissors. Walking seemed hard. It was much easier to crawl on all fours. The Prince felt vaguely alarmed. His vision changed and blurred, and smells overwhelmed him as he prowled around the room, the nail scissors forgotten. He leapt onto his bed and felt his shirt slowly becoming tighter and tighter, and finally tearing. He turned to face the mirror. Yellow eyes burned into his brain as a fanged animal stared back at him.

An animal cry rang through the deserted castle.