

The Poor Boy Who Loved to Dream

by [Michael Shindler](#) (December 2023)



Grizzly Bear– Frank Tenney Johnson

Once upon a time, there was a poor boy living with his aged parents. They loved him more than anything in the world, but he loved his dreams. His father would dance dances for him and he would say, “these dances are nothing compared to the dances in my dreams.” His mother would sing songs for him and he would say, “these songs are nothing compared to the songs in my dreams.” Both would even pray prayers for him and he would say, “these prayers are nothing compared to the prayers in my dreams.” Indeed, everyday instead of earning his keep, he would think about his dreams, which were really very wonderful. At last, however, his parents came to him and said, “We love you and have shown you all that we know. Indeed, we have shown you the miracle of life, the glory of the new day, and the mystery of love. But instead of earning your keep, you think about your dreams. You must go and make your own way in the world.”

The next day the boy arose to make his way in the world and went forward. But by the time the sun was almost down, he was hungry and tired. So, he looked around and saw a little inn and knocked at the door of it and an innkeeper answered him. The boy said, “I am hungry and tired. Could you give me food to eat and a bed to sleep in?” And the innkeeper replied, “Can you do anything to earn your keep?” And the boy said, “I love to dream and think about my dreams because they are really very wonderful.” Then the innkeeper replied, “Dreams are the moon’s business and this is a little inn. Is there anything else you can do?” So, the boy thought back to his poor parents and said, “I can also dance some dances I know, though they are nothing at all compared to the dances in my dreams. You see, in my dreams, my dances are as wild as the heartbeat of a mother who is bringing her first daughter into the world; as

wild as the war cry of the angels who leapt for love into the battle against pride; as wild, even, as the eyes of lovers, which reflect the faces of their beloveds." Then the innkeeper replied, "Never mind the dances in your dreams. Save those for the moon! If you dance what dances you can, I will give you food to eat and a bed to sleep in." So, the boy danced the dances he could and the innkeeper gave him food to eat and a bed to sleep in.

The next day the boy arose to make his way in the world and went forward. But by the time the sun was almost down, he was hungry and tired. So, he looked around and saw a great house and knocked at the door of it and a great lady answered him. The boy said, "I am hungry and tired. Could you give me food to eat and a bed to sleep in?" And the great lady replied, "Can you do anything to earn your keep?" And the boy said, "I love to dream and think about my dreams because they are really very wonderful. But at a little inn, I danced dances and that is how I have made my way in the world so far." Then the great lady replied, "Dreams are the moon's business and dances are quite fine for little inns, but this is a great house. Is there anything else you can do?" So, the boy thought back to his poor parents and said, "I can also sing some songs I know, though they are nothing at all compared to the songs in my dreams. You see, in my dreams, my songs are as sweet as the sight of a daughter who has stolen her mother's best necklace to try on in the mirror; as sweet as the play of the constellations who sketch by night the hopes of heroes; as sweet, even, as the lips of lovers, which taste the memory of a common dawn." Then the great lady replied, "Never mind the songs in your dreams. Save those for the moon! If you sing what songs you can, I will give you food to eat and a bed to sleep in." So, the boy sang the songs he could and the great lady gave him food to eat and a bed to sleep in.

The next day the boy arose to make his way in the world and went forward. But by the time the sun was almost down, he was

hungry and tired. So, he looked around and saw a hermit's hut and knocked at the door of it and a hermit answered him. The boy said, "I am hungry and tired. Could you give me food to eat and a bed to sleep in?" And the hermit replied, "Can you do anything to earn your keep?" And the boy said, "I love to dream and think about my dreams because they are really very wonderful. But at a little inn I danced dances and at a great house I sang songs and that is how I have made my way in the world so far." Then the hermit replied, "Dreams are the moon's business and dances and songs are quite fine for little inns and great houses, but this is a hermit's hut. Is there anything else you can do?" So, the boy thought back to his poor parents and said, "I can also pray some prayers I know, though they are nothing at all compared to the prayers in my dreams. You see, in my dreams, my prayers are as pure as the tears of an orphan who cries on the anniversary of her mother's death; as pure as the light of the morning stars who sang for joy in the darkness of the first day; as pure, even, as the silence of lovers, which steals away with the meaning of words." Then the hermit replied, "Never mind the prayers in your dreams. Save those for the moon! If you pray what prayers you can, I will give you food to eat and a bed to sleep in." So, the boy prayed the prayers he could and the hermit gave him food to eat and a bed to sleep in.

The next day the boy arose to make his way in the world and went forward. But by the time the sun was almost down, he was hungry and tired. So, he looked around, but saw no place where he might get food to eat and a bed to sleep in. Then the sun went down and he kept on looking by moonlight. At last, he saw a cave and went to the mouth of it and saw inside a bear who looked very friendly. The boy said, "I am hungry and tired. Could you give me food to eat and a bed to sleep in?" And the bear replied, "Oh, how fortunate you are to have found me and my cave! The sun is down and the moon has arisen. It is time for dreaming!" And the boy was delighted and said, "I love to dream and think about my dreams because they are really very

wonderful. But at a little inn I had to dance dances and at a great house I had to sing songs and at a hermit's hut I had to pray prayers, all of which were nothing compared to the dances and songs and prayers in my dreams. Indeed, that is how I have had to make my way in the world so far." Then the bear replied, "Well, never mind such dances and songs and prayers. They are none of my business! This is a cave and quite right for dreaming." The boy thought back to his poor parents and said, "I have been looking for a place like this since I set out from my parents' house." And the bear replied, "That is very wonderful. You see, I am a dreamer myself. Sometimes I spend months doing nothing but dreaming. Indeed, I dream of the miracle of life, the glory of the new day, and the mystery of love, and sometimes even of other things. Above all, I love to dream." The boy marveled and said, "And you do not get hungry?" And the bear replied, "Nothing is more delicious than the food I eat in my dreams." And the boy said, "You must really show me how you make your way in the world!" And the bear replied, "I shall show you all that I know." So, the boy, who was extremely glad to have found such a wonderful friend, went to sleep and began dreaming his wonderful dreams. He dreamt of wild dances and sweet songs and pure prayers: none were so wild, so sweet, and so pure. And then the bear, seeing that the poor boy was asleep and dreaming, went over beside him, smiled in the moonlight, and ate him up.

[Table of Contents](#)

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