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FAIRY
TALES

The Brothers Grimm



Contents

LITTLE BRIAR ROSE.....7

THE SIX SWANS.....11

RAPUNZEL.....17

MOTHER HOLLE.....22

THE FROG PRINCE.....26

THE FISHERMAN AND HIS WIFE.....30

SNOW-WHITE AND ROSE-RED.....40

RUMPELSTILTSKIN.....48

CINDERELLA.....52

LITTLE RED CAP.....58

THE JUNIPER-TREE.....62

THE GOLDEN GOOSE.....71

LITTLE SNOW WHITE.....77

THE SEVEN RAVENS.....87

HANSEL AND GRETHEL.....90

THE STORY OF THE YOUTH WHO WENT FORTH TO
LEARN WHAT FEAR WAS.....98

THE KING OF THE GOLDEN MOUNTAIN.....108

JORINDA AND JORINDEL.....115

THE ROBBER BRIDEGROOM.....119

THE ELVES AND THE SHOEMAKER.....124

THE WOLF AND THE SEVEN LITTLE KIDS.....127

THE GOLDEN BIRD.....131

THE VALIANT LITTLE TAILOR.....140

CLEVER ELSIE.....149

LITTLE BROTHER AND LITTLE SISTER.....153

THE BLUE LIGHT.....161

THE SPINDLE, THE SHUTTLE, AND THE
NEEDLE.....167

THE THREE LUCK-CHILDREN.....171

THE DONKEY CABBAGES.....175

CLEVER HANS.....183

LITTLE BRIAR-ROSE

A long time ago, there were a King and Queen who said every day, "Ah, if only we had a child!" but they never had one.

But it happened that once when the Queen was bathing, a Frog crept out of the water on to the land, and said to her, "Your wish shall be fulfilled. Before a year has gone by, you shall have a daughter."

What the Frog had said came true, and the Queen had a little girl, who was so pretty that the King could not contain himself for joy, and ordered a great feast. He invited not only his kindred, friends and acquaintance, but also the Wise Women, in order that they might be kind and well-disposed toward the child. There were thirteen of them in his kingdom. But, as he had only twelve golden plates for them to eat out of, one of them had to be left at home.

The feast was held with all manner of splendor. When it came to an end the Wise Women bestowed their magic gifts upon the baby. One gave Virtue, another Beauty, a third Riches, and so on with everything in the world that one can wish for.

When eleven of them had made their promises, suddenly the thirteenth came in. She wished to avenge herself for not

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 having been invited, and without greeting, or even looking at any one, she cried with a loud voice, "The King's Daughter, in her fifteenth year, shall prick herself with a spindle, and fall down dead." And, without saying a word more, she turned round and left the room.

They were all shocked. But the twelfth, whose good wish still remained unspoken, came forward, and as she could not undo the evil sentence, but only soften it, she said, "It shall not be death, but a deep sleep of a hundred years, into which the Princess shall fall."

The King, who wished to keep his dear child from the misfortune, gave orders that every spindle in the whole kingdom should be burnt. Meanwhile, the gifts of the Wise Women were fulfilled on the young girl, for she was so beautiful, modest, sweet tempered, and wise, that every one who saw her, was bound to love her.

It happened that on the very day, when she was fifteen years old, the King and Queen were not at home, and the maiden was left in the palace quite alone. So she went round into all sorts of places, looked into rooms and bedchambers just as she liked, and at last came to an old tower. She climbed up the narrow winding-staircase, and reached a little door. A rusty key was in the lock, and when she turned it the door sprang open. There in a little room sat an Old Woman with a spindle, busily spinning flax.

"Good day, old Dame," said the King's Daughter; "what are you doing there?"

"I am spinning," said the Old Woman, and nodded her head.

"What sort of thing is that, which rattles round so merrily?" said the maiden, and she took the spindle and wanted to spin too. But scarcely had she touched the spindle when the magic decree was fulfilled, and she pricked her finger with it.

And, in the very moment when she felt the prick, she fell down upon the bed that stood there, and lay in a deep sleep. And this sleep extended over the whole palace.

The King and Queen, who had just come home, and had entered the great hall, began to go to sleep, and the whole of the Court with them. The horses, too, went to sleep in the stable, the dogs in the yard, the pigeons upon the roof, the flies on the wall. Even the fire, that was flaming on the hearth, became quiet and slept. The roast meat left off frizzling, and the cook, who was just going to pull the hair of the scullery boy, because he had forgotten something, let him go, and went to sleep. And the wind fell; and on the trees before the castle not a leaf moved again.

But round about the castle, there began to grow a hedge of thorns. Every year it became higher, and at last grew close up round the castle and all over it, so that there was nothing of it to be seen, not even the flag upon the roof.

But the story of the beautiful sleeping "Briar-Rose," for so the Princess was named, went about the country, so that from time to time Kings' Sons came and tried to get through the thorny hedge into the castle. But they found it impossible, for the thorns held fast together, as if they had hands, and the youths were caught in them, could not get loose again, and died a miserable death.

After long, long years, again a King's Son came to that country. He heard an old man talking about the thorn-hedge, and that a castle was said to stand behind it in which a wonderfully beautiful Princess, named Briar-Rose, had been asleep for a hundred years; and that the King and Queen and the whole Court were asleep likewise. He had heard, too, from his grandfather, that many Kings' Sons had come, and had tried to get through the thorny hedge, but they had remained sticking fast in it, so had died a pitiful death.

Then the youth said, "I am not afraid. I will go and see the beautiful Briar-Rose." The good old man might dissuade him as he would, he did not listen to his words.

But by this time the hundred years had just passed. The day was come when Briar-Rose was to awake again. When the King's Son came near to the thorn-hedge, it was nothing

but large and beautiful flowers, which parted from each other of their own accord, and let him pass unhurt. Then they closed again behind him like a hedge.

In the castle yard he saw the horses and the spotted hounds lying asleep. On the roof, sat the pigeons with their heads under their wings. And when he entered the house, the flies were asleep upon the wall, the cook in the kitchen was still holding out his hand to seize the boy, and the maid was sitting by the black hen which she was going to pluck.

He went on farther, and in the great hall he saw the whole of the Court lying asleep, and by the throne lay the King and Queen.

Then he went on still farther, and all was so quiet that a breath could be heard. At last he came to the tower, and opened the door into the little room where Briar-Rose was sleeping. There she lay, so beautiful that he could not turn his eyes away. He stooped down and gave her a kiss. But as soon as he kissed her, Briar-Rose opened her eyes and awoke, and looked at him quite sweetly.

Then they went down together, and the King awoke, and the Queen, and the whole Court, and gazed at each other in great astonishment. And the horses in the courtyard stood up and shook themselves. The hounds jumped up and wagged their tails. The pigeons upon the roof pulled out their heads from under their wings, looked round, and flew into the open country. The flies on the wall crept again. The fire in the kitchen burned up and flickered and cooked the meat. The joint began to turn and frizzle, and the cook gave the boy such a box on the ear that he screamed, and the maid plucked the fowl ready for the spit.

And then the marriage of the King's Son and Briar-Rose was celebrated with all splendor, and they lived contented to the end of their days.

THE SIX SWANS

Once upon a time, a certain King was hunting in a great forest, and he chased a wild beast so eagerly that none of his attendants could follow him. When evening drew near, he stopped and looked around him, and saw that he had lost his way. He sought a way out, but could find none. Then he perceived an Old Woman with a head which nodded all the time, who came toward him, but she was a Witch.

"Good woman," said he to her, "can you not show me the way through the forest?"

"Oh, yes, Lord King," she answered, "that I certainly can, but on one condition, and if you do not fulfill that, you will never get out of the forest, and will die of hunger in it."

"What kind of a condition is it?" asked the King.

"I have a daughter," said the old woman, "who is as beautiful as any one in the world, and well deserves to be your wife. If you will make her your Queen, I will show you the way out of the forest."

In the anguish of his heart the King consented, and the old woman led him to her little hut, where her daughter was sitting by the fire. She received the King as if she had been expecting

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him. He saw that she was very beautiful, but still she did not please him, and he could not look at her without secret horror.

After he had taken the maiden up on his horse, the old woman showed him the way, and the King reached his royal palace again, where the wedding was celebrated.

The King had already been married once, and had by his first wife, seven children, six boys and a girl, whom he loved better than anything else in the world. As he now feared that the new Queen might not treat them well, and even do them some injury, he took them to a lonely castle which stood in the midst of a forest. It lay concealed, and the way was so difficult to find, that he himself would not have found it at all, if a Wise Woman had not given him a ball of yarn with wonderful properties. When he threw it down before him, it unrolled itself and showed him his path.

The King, however, went so frequently to visit his dear children, that the Queen noticed his absence. She was curious and wanted to know what he did when he was alone in the forest. She gave a great deal of money to his servants, and they betrayed the secret to her, and told her likewise of the ball which alone could point out the way.

And now she knew no rest until she had learnt where the King kept the ball of yarn. Then she made little shirts of white silk, and as she had learnt the art of witchcraft from her mother, she sewed a charm inside them. And one day, when the King had ridden forth to hunt, she took the little shirts and went into the forest, and the ball showed her the way.

The children, who saw from a distance that some one was approaching, thought that their dear father was coming to them, and full of joy, ran to meet him. Then she threw one of the little shirts over each of them. And no sooner had the shirts touched their bodies than they were changed into Swans, and flew away over the forest.

The Queen went home quite delighted, and thought she had got rid of all the children, but the girl had not run out with her brothers, and the Queen knew nothing about her.

Next day, the King went to visit his children, but found no one but the little girl.

"Where are your brothers?" asked the King.

"Alas, dear Father," she answered, "they have gone away and left me alone!" and she told him that she had seen from her little window, how her brothers had flown away over the forest in the shape of Swans. And she showed him the feathers, which they had let fall in the courtyard, and which she had picked up.

The King mourned, but he did not think that the Queen had done this wicked deed. And as he feared that the girl also would be stolen from him, he wanted to take her away. But she was afraid of the Queen, and entreated the King to let her stay just one night more in the forest-castle.

The poor girl thought, "I can no longer remain here. I will go and seek my brothers." And when night came, she ran away, and went straight into the forest.

She walked the whole night long, and next day also without stopping, until she could go no farther for weariness. Then she saw a forest-hut, and went into it, and found a room with six little beds. She did not venture to get into any of them, but crept under one, and lay down on the hard ground, to pass the night there. Just before sunset she heard a rustling, and saw six Swans come flying in at the window. They alighted on the ground and blew at each other, and blew all the feathers off, and their swan's skins stripped off like a shirt.

Then the maiden looked at them and recognized her brothers. She rejoiced and crept forth from beneath the bed. The brothers were not less delighted to see their little sister, but their joy was short.

"Here can you not abide," they said to her. "This is a shelter for robbers. If they come home and find you, they will kill you."

"But can you not protect me?" asked the little sister.

"No," they replied, "only for one quarter of an hour each

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evening, can we lay aside our swan's skins and have our human form. After that, we are once more turned into Swans."

The little sister wept, and said, "Can you not be set free?"

"Alas, no," they answered, "the conditions are too hard! For six years you may neither speak nor laugh, and in that time you must sew together six little shirts of Star-Flowers for us. And if one single word falls from your lips, all your work will be lost."

And when the brothers had said this, the quarter of an hour was over, and they flew out of the window again as Swans.

The maiden, however, resolved to deliver her brothers, even if it should cost her her life. She left the hut, went into the midst of the forest, seated herself on a tree, and there passed the night. Next morning, she went out and gathered Star-Flowers and began to sew. She could not speak to any one, and she had no wish to laugh. She sat there and looked at nothing but her work.

When she had spent a long time there, it came to pass that the King of the country was hunting in the forest, and his huntsmen came to the tree on which the maiden was sitting.

They called to her, and said, "Who are you?" But she made no answer. "Come down to us," said they. "We will not do you any harm."

She only shook her head. As they pressed her further with questions, she threw her golden necklace down to them, and thought to content them with that. They, however, did not cease, and then she threw her girdle down to them, and as this also was to no use, her garters, and little by little everything which she had on that she could do without, until she had nothing left but her shift. The huntsmen, however, did not let themselves be turned aside by that, but climbed the tree and fetched the maiden down and led her before the King.

The King asked, "Who are you? What are you doing on the tree?"

But she did not answer. He put the question in every language that he knew, but she remained as mute as a fish.

As she was so beautiful, the King's heart was touched, and he was smitten with a great love for her. He put his mantle on her, took her before him on his horse, and carried her to his castle.

Then he caused her to be dressed in rich garments, and she shone in her beauty like bright daylight, but no word could be drawn from her. He placed her by his side at table, and her modest bearing and courtesy pleased him so much, that he said, "She is the one whom I wish to marry, and no other woman in the world." And a few days after, he united himself to her.

The King, however, had a wicked mother, who was dissatisfied with his marriage and spoke ill of the young Queen. "Who knows," said she, "from whence comes the creature, who can't speak? She is not worthy of a King!"

After a year had passed, when the Queen brought her first child into the world, the old woman took it away from her and smeared her mouth with blood as she slept. Then she went to the King and accused the Queen of being a man-eater. The King would not believe it, and would not suffer any one to do her injury. She, however, sat continually sewing at the shirts, and cared for nothing else.

The next time, when she again bore a beautiful boy, the false old woman used the same treachery, but the King could not bring himself to believe her words. He said, "She is too pious and good to do anything of that kind. If she were not dumb, and could defend herself, her innocence would come to light."

But when the old woman stole away the newly-born child for the third time, and accused the Queen, who did not utter one word of defense, the King could do no otherwise than deliver her over to justice; and she was sentenced to be burned.

When the day came for the sentence to be executed, it was the last day of the six years during which she was not to speak or laugh, and she had delivered her dear brothers from the power of the enchantment. The six shirts were ready, only the left sleeve of the sixth was wanting.

When, therefore, she was led to the stake, she laid the shirts on her arm. And when she stood on high and the fire was just going to be lighted, she looked around and six Swans came flying through the air toward her. Then she saw that her deliverance was near, and her heart leapt with joy.

The Swans swept toward her and sank down so that she could throw the shirts over them. And as they were touched by them, their swan's skins fell off, and her brothers stood in their own form before her, vigorous and handsome. The youngest lacked only his left arm, and had in its place a swan's wing on his shoulder.

They embraced and kissed each other, and the Queen went to the King, who was greatly moved, and she began to speak, and said, "Dearest Husband, now I may speak and declare to you that I am innocent, and falsely accused." And she told him of the treachery of the old woman who had taken away her three children, and hidden them.

To the great joy of the King, they were brought back. And as a punishment, the wicked woman was bound to the stake and burned to ashes.

But the King and the Queen, with their six brothers, lived many years in happiness and peace.

RAPUNZEL

There was once a man and a woman, who had long in vain wished for a child. At length, the woman hoped that God was about to grant her desire.

These people had a little window at the back of their house from which a splendid garden could be seen. It was full of the most beautiful flowers and herbs. It was, however, surrounded by a high wall, and no one dared to go into it because it belonged to a Witch, who had great power and was dreaded by all the world.

One day, the woman was standing by this window and looking down into the garden, when she saw a bed which was planted with the most beautiful rampion (rapunzel), and it looked so fresh and green that she longed for it, and had the greatest desire to eat some.

This desire increased every day, and as she knew that she could not get any of it, she quite pined away, and looked pale and miserable.

Then her husband was alarmed, and asked, "What ails you, dear Wife?"

"Ah," she replied, "if I can't get some of the rampion to eat, which is in the garden behind our house, I shall die."