

1812

GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES

THE FOUNDLING BIRD

Jacob Ludwig Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm

Grimm, Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) - German philologists whose collection "Kinder- und Hausmarchen," known in English as "Grimm's Fairy Tales," is a timeless literary masterpiece. The brothers transcribed these tales directly from folk and fairy stories told to them by common villagers. The Foundling Bird (1812) - A forester finds a child in a tree, names her Birdie, and raises her with his daughter, Lena. The forester's old cook considers Birdie an intruder and tries to cook her one day for dinner.

THE FOUNDLING BIRD

A FORESTER went out shooting one day. He had not gone far into the wood when he heard, as he thought, the cry of a child. He turned his steps instantly toward the sound, and at length came to a high tree, on one of the branches of which sat a little child.

A mother, some short time before, had seated herself under the tree with the child in her lap, and fallen asleep. A bird of prey, seeing the child, seized it in its beak and carried it away; but hearing the sound of the sportsman's gun, the bird let the child fall, its clothes caught in the branches of a high tree, and there it hung, crying, till the forester came by.

The mother, on awaking and missing her child, rushed away in great agony to find it, so that the poor little thing would have been left alone in the world to die had not the sportsman made his appearance.

"Poor little creature!" he said to himself as he climbed up the tree and brought the child down, "I will take it home with me, and it shall be brought up with my own little Lena." He kept his word, and the little foundling grew up with the forester's little daughter, till they loved each other so dearly that they were always unhappy when separated, even for a short time. The forester had named the child Birdie, because she had been carried away by the bird; and

Lena and Birdie were for several years happy little children together.

But the forester had an old cook, who was not fond of children, and she wanted to get rid of Birdie, who she thought was an intruder.

One evening Lena saw the woman take two buckets to the well, and carry them backward and forward more than twenty times.

“What are you going to do with all that water?” asked the child. “If you will promise not to say a word, I will tell you,” replied the woman. “I will never tell any one,” she said. “Oh, very well, then look here. Tomorrow morning, early, I mean to put all this water into a kettle on the fire, and when it boils I shall throw Birdie in and cook her for dinner.” Away went poor Lena, in great distress, to find Birdie. “If you will never forsake me, I will never forsake you,” said Lena. “Then,” said Birdie, “I will never, never leave you, Lena.” “Well, then,” she replied, “I am going away and you must go with me, for old cook says she will get up early tomorrow morning, and boil a lot of water to cook you in, while my father is out hunting. If you stay with me, I can save you. So you must never leave me.” “No, never, never!” said Birdie.

So the children lay awake till dawn, and then they got up and ran away so quickly that by the time the wicked old witch got up to prepare the water, they were far out of her reach.

She lit her fire, and as soon as the water boiled went into the sleeping-room to fetch poor little Birdie and throw her in. But when she came to the bed and found it empty, she was very much frightened to find both the children gone, and said to herself, “What will the forester say when he comes home if the children are not here? I must go downstairs as fast as I can and send some one to catch them.” Down she went, and sent three of the farm servants to run after the children and bring them back.

The children, who were sitting among the trees in the wood, saw them coming from a distance.

“I will never forsake you, Birdie!” said Lena quickly. “Will you forsake me?” “Never, never!” was the reply. “Then,” cried Lena, “you shall be turned into a rose bush, and I will be one of the roses!” The three servants came up to the place where the old witch had told them to look; but nothing was to be seen but a rose tree and a rose. “There are no children here,” they said.

So they went back and told the cook that they had found only roses and bushes, but not a sign of the children.

The old woman scolded them well when they told her this, and said, "You stupid fools! you should have cut off the stem of the rose bush, and plucked one of the roses, and brought them home with you as quickly as possible. You must just go again a second time."

Lena saw them coming, and she changed herself and Birdie so quickly that when the three servants arrived at the spot to which the old woman had sent them they found only a little church with a steeple- Birdie was the church and Lena the steeple.

Then the men said one to another: "What was the use of our coming here? We may as well go home." But how the old woman did scold! "You fools!" she said, "you should have brought the church and the steeple here. However, I will go myself this time!" So the wicked old woman started off to find the children, taking the three servants with her.

When they saw the three servants coming in the distance, and the old woman waddling behind, Lena said, "Birdie, we will never forsake each other." "No, no! never, never!" replied the little foundling. "Then you shall be changed into a pond, and I will be a duck swimming upon it." The old woman drew near, and as soon as she saw the pond she laid herself down by it, and, leaning over, intended to drink it all up. But the duck was too quick for her. She seized the head of the old woman with her beak, and drew it under the water, and held it there till the old witch was drowned.

Then the two children resumed their proper shape, and went home with the three servants, all of them happy and delighted to think that they had got rid of such a wicked old woman. The forester was full of joy in his home with the children near the wood; and if they are not dead they all live there still.

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