

1812

GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES

THE GOLD CHILDREN

Jacob Ludwig Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm

Grimm, Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) - German philologists whose collection "Kinder- und Hausmärchen," 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 Gold Children (1812) - A poor fisherman catches a golden fish a third time, cuts it in half, then buries it. Soon thereafter two golden lilies spring up and the fisherman's wife gives birth to two golden children.

THE GOLD CHILDREN

A LONG time ago there lived in a little cottage a poor fisherman and his wife, who had very little to live upon but the fish the husband caught. One day as he sat by the water throwing his net he saw a fish drawn out which was quite golden. He examined it with wonder; but what was his surprise to hear it say, "Listen, fisherman! if you will throw me again in the water, I will change your little hut into a splendid castle." The fisherman replied, "What would be the use of a castle to me when I have nothing to eat?" "On that account," said the gold fish, "I will take care that there shall be a cupboard in the castle in which, when you unlock it, you will find dishes containing everything to eat that heart can wish." "If it is so," said the man, "then I am quite willing to do as you please." "There is, however, one condition," continued the fish; "you must not mention to a living creature in the world, be it who it may, the source of your good fortune. If you utter a single word, it will at once be at an end." The man, upon this, threw the fish back into the water, and went home. But where his little hut had once stood now rose the walls of a large castle.

He stared with astonishment, and then stepped in and saw his wife dressed in costly clothes, and sitting in a handsomely furnished room. She seemed quite contented, and yet she said, "Husband, how has all this happened? I am so pleased!" "Yes," said the man,

“it pleases me also; but I am so hungry; give me something to eat in our fine house!” “Oh dear!” she replied, “I have nothing, and I don’t know where any is to be found here.” “There will be no trouble on that account,” he replied. “Do you see that great cupboard? Just unlock it.” When the cupboard was opened they saw with surprise that it contained every requisite for a beautiful feast- bread, meat, vegetables, cake, wine, and fruit.

“Dear husband,” cried the wife, full of joy, “what more can we desire than this?” Then they sat down, and ate and drank together in great comfort.

After they had finished the wife said, “Husband, where do all these good things and riches come from?” “Ah!” he replied, “do not ask me; I dare not tell you. If I disclose anything all our good fortune will come to an end.” “Very well,” she replied, “if I am not to be told I shall not desire to know”; but this was merely pretense, for she gave her husband no peace night or day, and she tormented and worried the poor man so terribly that she exhausted his patience, and he told her at last.

“This good fortune,” he said, “all comes from a wonderful gold fish which I caught, and afterward gave it freedom by throwing it back into the water.”

No sooner had he uttered these words than the castle with its wonderful cupboard disappeared, and they were again sitting in the fisherman’s hut. The husband was now again obliged to follow his trade and go fishing, and as luck would have it he again caught the golden fish.

“Listen!” cried the fish; “if you will again throw me into the water I will once more give you a castle and a cupboard full of good things; but be firm this time, and reveal to no one from whom it comes, or all will be again lost.” “I will keep it to myself,” answered the fisherman, and threw the fish into the water.

Everything at home now was in its former splendor, and the fisherman’s wife joyful over their good fortune; but her curiosity gave her no peace, and two days had scarcely passed before she began to ask how it all happened, and what was the cause.

Her husband kept silence for a long time, but at last she made him so angry that he incautiously revealed the secret. In a moment the castle and all that it contained vanished, and they were again sitting in their little old hut.

“See what you have done!” he said. “We shall have again to starve with hunger.” “Oh, well,” she replied, “I would rather not have such riches if I am not to know where they come from; it destroys my peace.” The husband again went fishing, and after a time what should he again pull up in his net but the gold fish for the third time.

“Listen!” cried the fish; “I see I am always to fall into your hands; therefore you must take me to your house, and cut me in two pieces. These you must place in the ground, and you will have gold enough to last your life.” The man took the fish home, and did exactly as he had been told.

It happened after a while that from the pieces of the fish placed in the earth two golden lilies sprang up, which were taken great care of.

Not long after the fisherman’s wife had two little children, but they were both golden, as well as the two little foals in the stable. The children grew tall and beautiful, and the lilies and the foals grew also.

One day the children said to their father, “We should like to ride out and see the world on our golden steeds. Will you let us?” But the parents answered sorrowfully, “How shall we be able to endure the thought that you are far away from us and perhaps ill or in danger?” “Oh,” they replied, “the two golden lilies will remain, and by them you can always tell how we are going on. If they are fresh, we are in health; if they fade, we are sick; and when they fall, we shall die!” So the parents let them go, and they rode away for some time till they came to an inn where a number of people were staying. But when they saw the two gold children they began to laugh and make a mockery of them.

As soon as one of them heard the laughter and mocking words he would not go any further, but turned back and went home to his father. The other, however,

rode on till he came to a large forest. As he was about to enter the forest some people came by and said, “You had better not ride there, for the wood is full of robbers who will overcome you and rob you, especially when they see that you and your horse are golden, and you will both be killed.” He would not, however, allow himself to be frightened, but said, “I must and will ride through!” He took bearskins and threw them over himself and his horse, that the gold might not be seen, and rode confidently into

the wood. He had not ridden far when he heard a rustling in the bushes, and voices speaking audibly to each other.

“That is one!” said a voice; but the other said, “No; let him alone—he has nothing on but a bearskin, and is, I dare say, as poor and cold as a church mouse.

What do we want with him?” So the gold child rode through the wood, and no harm happened to him.

One day he came to a town in which he saw a maiden who appeared to him so beautiful that he did not think there could be another so beautiful in the world.

And as his love became stronger for her he went to her and said, “I love you with my whole heart! Will you be my wife?” The maiden was so pleased that she answered willingly, “Yes, I will be your wife, and be true to you as long as I live.” Very soon after they were married, and just as they were enjoying themselves with the guests on the wedding-day, the bride’s father returned home. When he found his daughter already married, he was much astonished, and said, “Where is the bridegroom?” He was pointed out to him, and he still wore the bearskin dress.

On seeing him he exclaimed in great anger, “My daughter shall never have a bearskin wearer for a husband!” and wanted to murder him.

But the bride interceded for him as much as she could, and said, “He is already my husband, and I shall always love him with my whole heart.” And at last her father was appeased. However, he could not help thinking about it all night, and in the morning, when the bridegroom was dressing, he peeped into his room, and saw a noble-looking golden man, and the bearskin lying on the ground. Then he went back to his own room and said to himself, “How fortunate it is that I restrained my anger last night, or I should have committed a great crime!” The same morning the gold child told his wife that he had dreamed of being in the hunt and catching a beautiful stag, so that he must on that day go out hunting.

She was very uneasy at the thought, and said, “Pray don’t go; a misfortune might so easily happen to you.” But he replied, “I will and must go!” As soon as he was ready he rode out into the wood, and had not been there long before he saw just such a stag as the one in his dream. He raised his gun to shoot it, but the stag sprang away, and he followed it over hedges and ditches the whole day

without feeling tired. At last, as night came on, it vanished from his eyes.

Then the gold child looked round him and saw close by a small house in which sat an old woman, who was a witch; but he did not know it. He knocked at the door, and she came out and asked him what he wanted so late as that in the middle of the wood.

He said, "Have you seen a stag pass this way?" "Yes," she replied; "I know the stag well." And while she spoke a little dog that had come out of the house with the old woman began to bark furiously. "Be quiet, will you," he cried, "you spiteful cur, or I will shoot you!" "What! you will kill my dog?" cried the old witch in a rage. "Ah, I'll soon stop that." And in a moment he lay on the ground turned into stone.

His bride waited for his return in vain, and thought, "Something has certainly happened to him, or else why am I so anxious and troubled in my heart?" On the same evening the brother, who was at home, was standing by the golden lily, when it suddenly fell drooping on its stem. "Ah me!" he exclaimed; "there has some misfortune happened to my brother; I must go to him. Very likely I shall be able to save him." Then said his father, "No, no; stay here. If I were to lose both of you, what should I do?" But the youth answered, "I must and will go and find my brother." Then he mounted his golden horse and rode away quickly to the wood where his brother lay turned to stone.

The old witch saw him in the distance, and came out of her house, and tried to mislead him about his brother, and called to him to come in. But he would not go near her, and raising his gun he cried, "If you do not this moment restore my brother to life, I will shoot you dead!" She saw he was in earnest, yet she moved unwillingly toward a stone that lay near the door, touched it with her finger, and immediately the gold child stood before his brother in his own form. They were both overjoyed to meet again, and kissed and embraced each other. Then they rode together out of the wood, and there they parted- the one to hasten back to his bride, the other home to his parents.

"Ah," said his father, "we knew that your brother had been released from his trouble, for the golden lily is again erect and in full bloom." And after this they lived in happiness and contentment for the rest of their days.

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