

**1812**

**GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES  
THE RIDDLE**

**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 Riddle (1812) - A witch kills the horse of the king's son's servant. The king's son kills the witch and some robbers with the flesh of a raven who fed on the carcass of the horse then he forms the experience into a riddle.

**RIDDLE**

A KING'S SON once had a great desire to travel through the world, so he started off, taking no one with him but one trusty servant. One day he came to a great forest, and as evening drew on and he could find no shelter he could not think where to spend the night. All of a sudden he saw a girl going toward a little house, and as he drew near he saw that she was both young and pretty. He spoke to her, and said, "Dear child, could I spend the night in this house?" "Oh, yes," said the girl in a sad tone, "you can if you like, but I should not advise you to do so. Better not go in." "Why not?" asked the King's son.

The girl sighed, and answered, "My stepmother deals in black magic, and she is not friendly to strangers." The Prince guessed easily he had come to a witch's house, but it was now dark and he could go no farther. Moreover, he was not afraid, and he stepped in with his groom.

An old woman sat in an armchair near the fire, and as they entered, she turned her red eyes on them. "Good evening," she muttered, pretending to be friendly.

"Won't you sit down?"

She blew up the fire on which she was cooking something in a little pot. But her daughter had warned the travelers to be careful not to eat or drink anything, as the old woman's brews were likely to be dangerous.

They went to bed and slept soundly till morning. When they were ready to start, and the King's son had already mounted his horse, the old woman said, "Wait a minute, I must give you a stirrup cup." While she went to fetch it the King's son rode off, and the groom who had waited to tighten his saddle girths was alone when the witch returned.

"Take that to your master," she said. But as she spoke the glass cracked and the poison spurted over the horse. It was so powerful the poor creature sank down dead. The servant ran after his master and told him what had happened, and then, not wishing to lose the saddle as well as the horse, he went back to fetch it. When he reached the spot he saw a raven had perched on the carcass and was pecking at it.

"Who knows whether we shall get anything better to eat today!" said the man, and he shot the raven and carried it off.

Then they rode on all day through the forest without coming to the end. At nightfall they reached an inn. The servant made the landlord a present of the raven. Now, as it happened, this inn was the resort of a band of robbers, and the old witch, too, was in the habit of frequenting it.

As soon as it was dark twelve thieves arrived, with the full intention of killing and robbing the strangers. However, they sat down first to table, where the landlord and the old witch joined them, and they all ate some broth in which the flesh of the raven had been boiled. They had hardly taken a couple of spoonfuls when they all fell down dead, for the poison had passed from the horse to the raven and so into the broth. There was no one left belonging to the house but the landlord's daughter, who was a good, well-meaning girl and had taken no part in all the evil doings.

She opened all the doors and showed the strangers the treasures the robbers had gathered together. The Prince bade her keep them all for herself, as he wanted none of them, and so he rode on with his servant.

After traveling about for some time they reached a town where lived a lovely but arrogant Princess. She had announced that anyone who asked her a riddle which she was unable to guess should be her husband, but should she guess it he must forfeit his head. She claimed three days in which to think over the riddles, but she was so clever she invariably guessed them in much shorter time. Nine suitors had already lost their lives when the King's son

arrived, and, dazzled by her beauty, determined to risk his life. He came before her and propounded his riddle.

“What is this?” he asked. “One slew none and yet killed twelve.” She could not think what it was! She thought and thought and looked through all her books of riddles and puzzles. She found nothing to help her and could not guess. In fact, she was at her wits’ end. As she could think of no way to guess the riddle, she ordered her maid to steal at night into the Prince’s bedroom and listen.

She thought he might talk aloud in his dreams and so betray the secret. But the clever servant had taken his master’s place, and when the maid came, he tore off the cloak she had wrapped about herself and chased her off.

On the second night the Princess sent her lady-in-waiting, hoping she might succeed better. But the servant took away her mantle and chased her away also.

On the third night the King’s son thought he really might feel safe, so he went to bed. But in the middle of the night the Princess came herself, wrapped in a misty gray mantle, and sat down near him. When she thought he was fast asleep, she spoke to him, hoping he would answer in the midst of his dreams as many people do. But he was wide awake all the time and heard and understood everything very well.

Then she asked, “One slew none- what is that?” And he answered, “A raven which fed on the carcass of a poisoned horse.” She went on, “And yet killed twelve- what is that?” “Those are twelve robbers who ate the raven and died of it.” As soon as she knew the riddle she tried to slip away, but he held her mantle so tightly she was obliged to leave it behind.

Next morning the Princess announced she had guessed the riddle and sent for the twelve judges, before whom she declared it. But the young man begged to be heard. Then he said, “She came by night to question me; otherwise she never could have guessed it.” The judges said, “Bring us some proof.” So the servant brought out the three cloaks. When the judges saw the gray one, which the Princess was in the habit of wearing, they said, “Let it be embroidered with gold and silver. It shall be your wedding mantle.”

**THE END**