

**1812**

**GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES  
THE SPIRIT IN THE BOTTLE**

**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 Spirit in the Bottle (1812) - A poor woodcutter's son comes upon a spirit in a bottle. He releases the spirit, but the spirit threatens his life; he then captures and releases him again in exchange for a magical bag.

**SPIRIT IN BOTTLE**

THERE WAS once a poor woodcutter who toiled from early morning till late night. When at last he had laid by some money he said to his boy, "Thou art my only child, I will spend the money which I have earned with the sweat of my brow on thy education; if thou learnest some honest trade thou canst support me in my old age, when my limbs have grown stiff and I am obliged to stay at home." Then the boy went to a High School and learned diligently so that his masters praised him, and he remained there a long time. When he had worked through two classes, but was still not yet perfect in everything, the little pittance which the father had earned was all spent, and the boy was obliged to return home to him.

"Ah," said the father, sorrowfully, "I can give thee no more, and in these hard times I cannot earn a farthing more than will suffice for our daily bread." "Dear father," answered the son, "do not trouble thyself about it, if it is God's will, it will turn to my advantage. I shall soon accustom myself to it." When the father wanted to go into the forest to earn money by helping to pile and stack wood and also to chop it, the son said, "I will go with thee and help thee." "Nay, my son," said the father, "that would be hard for thee; thou art not accustomed to rough work, and wilt not be able to bear it, besides I have only one axe and no money left wherewith to buy another." "Just go to the neighbor," answered the son, "he will lend thee his axe until I have earned one for myself."

The father then borrowed an axe of the neighbor, and next morning at break of day they went out into the forest together. The

son helped his father and was quite merry and brisk about it. But when the sun was right over their heads, the father said, "We will rest, and have our dinner, and then we shall work as well again." The son took his bread in his hands, and said, "Rest thou, father, I am not tired; I will walk up and down a little in the forest, and look for birds' nests." "Oh, thou fool," said the father, "why shouldst thou want to run about there? Afterwards thou wilt be tired, and no longer able to raise thy arm; stay here, and sit down beside me." The son, however, went into the forest, ate his bread, was very merry and peered in among the green branches to see if he could discover a bird's nest anywhere.

So he went up and down to see if he could find a bird's nest, until at last he came to a great dangerous-looking oak, which certainly was already many hundred years old, and which five men could not have spanned. He stood still and looked at it, and thought, "Many a bird must have built its nest in that." Then all at once it seemed to him that he heard a voice. He listened and became aware that some one was crying in a very smothered voice, "Let me out, let me out!" He looked around, but could discover nothing; nevertheless, he fancied that the voice came out of the ground. Then he cried, "Where art thou?" The voice answered, "I am here down among the roots of the oak tree. Let me out! Let me out!" The scholar began to loosen the earth under the tree, and search among the roots, until at last he found a glass bottle in a little hollow. He lifted it up and held it against the light, and then saw a creature shaped like a frog springing up and down in it. "Let me out! Let me out!" it cried anew, and the scholar, thinking no evil, drew the cork out of the bottle. Immediately a spirit ascended from it, and began to grow, and grew so fast that in a very few moments he stood before the scholar, a terrible fellow as big as half the tree by which he was standing.

"Knowest thou," he cried in an awful voice, "what thy wages are for having let me out?" "No," replied the scholar fearlessly, "how should I know that?" "Then I will tell thee," cried the spirit; "I must strangle thee for it." "Thou shouldst have told me that sooner," said the scholar, "for I should then have left thee shut up, but my head shall stand fast for all thou canst do; more persons than one must be consulted about that." "More persons here, more persons there," said the spirit. "Thou shalt have the wages thou hast earned. Dost thou think that I was shut up there for such a long time as a favor? No, it was a punishment for me. I am the mighty Mercurius. Whoso releases me, him must I strangle." "Softly," answered the scholar, "not so fast. I must first know that thou wert shut up in that little bottle, and that thou art the right

spirit. If, indeed, thou canst get in again, I will believe, and then thou mayst do as thou wilt with me." The spirit said haughtily, "That is a very trifling feat," drew himself together, and made himself as small and slender as he had been at first, so that he crept through the same opening, and right through the neck of the bottle in again. Scarcely was he within than the scholar thrust the cork he had drawn back into the bottle, and threw it among the roots of the oak into its old place, and the spirit was betrayed.

And now the scholar was about to return to his father, but the spirit cried very piteously, "Ah, do let me out! ah, do let me out!" "No," answered the scholar, "not a second time! He who has once tried to take my life shall not be set free by me, now that I have caught him again." "If thou wilt set me free," said the spirit, "I will give thee so much that thou wilt have plenty all the days of thy life." "No," answered the scholar, "thou wouldst cheat me as thou didst the first time." "Thou art playing away thy own good luck," said the spirit; "I will do thee no harm, but will reward thee richly." The scholar thought, "I will venture it, perhaps he will keep his word, and anyhow he shall not get the better of me." Then he took out the cork, and the spirit rose up from the bottle as he had done before, stretched himself out and became as big as a giant. "Now thou shalt have thy reward," said he, and handed the scholar a little bag just like a plaster, and said, "If thou spreadest one end of this over a wound it will heal, and if thou rubbest steel or iron with the other end it will be changed into silver." "I must just try that," said the scholar, and went to a tree, tore off the bark with his axe, and rubbed it with one end of the plaster. It immediately closed together and was healed. "Now, it is all right," he said to the spirit, "and we can part." The spirit thanked him for his release, and the scholar thanked the spirit for his present, and went back to his father.

"Where hast thou been racing about?" said the father; "why hast thou forgotten thy work? I said at once that thou wouldst never get on with anything." "Be easy, father, I will make it up." "Make it up indeed," said the father angrily, "there's no art in that." "Take care, father, I will soon hew that tree there, so that it will split." Then he took his plaster, rubbed the axe with it, and dealt a mighty blow, but as the iron had changed into silver, the edge turned. "Hollo, father, just look what a bad axe thou hast given me, it has become quite crooked." The father was shocked and said, "Ah, what hast thou done? Now I shall have to pay for that, and have not the wherewithal, and that is all the good I have got by thy work." "Don't get angry," said the son, "I will soon pay for the axe." "Oh, thou blockhead," cried the father, "wherewith wilt thou pay for it?"

Thou hast nothing but what I give thee. These are students' tricks that are sticking in thy head, but thou hast no idea of woodcutting." After a while the scholar said, "Father, I can really work no more, we had better take a holiday." "Eh, what!" answered he. "Dost thou think I will sit with my hands lying in my lap like thee? I must go on working, but thou mayst take thyself home." "Father, I am here in this wood for the first time, I don't know my way alone. Do go with me." As his anger had now abated, the father at last let himself be persuaded and went home with him. Then he said to the son, "Go and sell thy damaged axe, and see what thou canst get for it, and I must earn the difference, in order to pay the neighbor." The son took the axe, and carried it into town to a goldsmith, who tested it, laid it in the scales, and said, "It is worth four hundred thalers; I have not so much as that by me." The son said, "Give me what you have, I will lend you the rest." The goldsmith gave him three hundred thalers, and remained a hundred in his debt. The son thereupon went home and said, "Father, I have got the money, go and ask the neighbor what he wants for the axe." "I know that already," answered the old man, "one thaler six groschen." "Then give him two thalers, twelve groschen, that is double and enough; see, I have money in plenty," and he gave the father a hundred thalers, and said, "You shall never know want; live as comfortably as you like." "Good heavens!" said the father, "how hast thou come by these riches?" The scholar then told how all had come to pass, and how he, trusting in his luck, had made such a good hit. But with the money that was left, he went back to the High School and went on learning more, and as he could heal all wounds with his plaster, he became the most famous doctor in the whole world. - -

**THE END**