

1812

**GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES
THE THREE FEATHERS**

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 Three Feathers (1812) - The king's three sons toss feathers into the air to direct their expeditions to earn the right to be king. The youngest son, Simple, is guided to a trap door where he finds a family of helpful frogs.

THE THREE FEATHERS

THERE WAS once a King who had three sons. Two of them were considered wise and prudent; but the youngest, who said very little, appeared to others so silly that they gave him the name of Simple. When the King became old and weak, and began to think that his end was near, he knew not to which of his sons to leave his kingdom.

So he sent for them, and said, "I have made a determination that whichever of you brings me the finest carpet shall be King after my death." They immediately prepared to start on their expedition, and that there might be no dispute between them, they took three feathers. As they left the castle each blew a feather into air, and said, "We will travel in whatever direction these feathers take." One flew to the east, and the other to the west; but the third soon fell on the earth and remained there. Then the two eldest brothers turned one to the right, and the other to the left, and they laughed at Simple because where his feather fell he was obliged to remain.

Simple sat down after his brothers were gone, feeling very sad; but presently, looking round, he noticed near where his feather lay a kind of trap-door. He rose quickly, went toward it, and lifted it up. To his surprise he saw a flight of steps, down which he descended, and reached another door; hearing voices within he knocked hastily. The voices were singing, "Little frogs, crooked legs, Where do you hide? Go and see quickly Who is outside." At this the door

opened of itself, and the youth saw a large fat frog seated with a number of little frogs round her.

On seeing him the large frog asked what he wanted. "I have a great wish for the finest and most beautiful carpet that can be got," he replied. Then the old frog called again to her little ones, "Little frogs, crooked legs, Run here and there; Bring me the large bag That hangs over there." The young frogs fetched the bag, and when it was opened the old frog took from it a carpet so fine and so beautifully worked that nothing on earth could equal it. This she gave to the young man, who thanked her and went away up the steps.

Meanwhile, his elder brothers, quite believing that their foolish brother would not be able to get any carpet at all, said one to another, "We need not take the trouble to go further and seek for anything very wonderful; ours is sure to be the best." And as the first person they met was a shepherd, wearing a shepherd's plaid, they bought the large plaid cloth and carried it home to the King.

At the same time the younger brother returned with his beautiful carpet, and when the King saw it he was astonished, and said, "If justice is done, then the kingdom belongs to my youngest son." But the two elder brothers gave the King no peace; they said it was impossible for Simple to become King, for his understanding failed in everything, and they begged their father to make another condition.

At last he said, "Whoever finds the most beautiful ring and brings it to me shall have the kingdom." Away went the brothers a second time, and blew three feathers into the air to direct their ways. The feathers of the elder two flew east and west, but that of the youngest fell, as before, near the trap-door and there rested. He at once descended the steps, and told the great frog that he wanted a most beautiful ring. She sent for her large bag and drew from it a ring which sparkled with precious stones, and was so beautiful that no goldsmith on earth could make one like it.

The elder brothers had again laughed at Simple when his feather fell so soon to the ground, and forgetting his former success with the carpet, scorned the idea that he could ever find a gold ring. So they gave themselves no trouble, but merely took a plated ring from the harness of a carriage horse, and brought it to their father.

But when the King saw Simple's splendid ring he said at once, "The kingdom belongs to my youngest son." His brothers, however, were not yet inclined to submit to the decision; they begged their father to make a third condition, and at last he

promised to give the kingdom to the son who brought home the most beautiful woman to be his wife.

They all were again guided by blowing the feathers, and the two elder took the roads pointed out to them. But Simple, without hesitation, went at once to the frog, and said, "This time I am to take home the most beautiful woman." "Hey-day!" said the frog. "I have not one by me at present, but you shall have one soon." So she gave him a carrot which had been hollowed out, and to which six mice were harnessed.

Simple took it quite sorrowfully, and said, "What am I to do with this?" "Seat one of my little frogs in it," she said.

The youth, on this, caught one up at a venture, and seated it in the carrot. No sooner had he done so than it became a most beautiful young lady; the carrot was turned into a gilded coach; and the mice were changed to prancing horses.

He kissed the maiden, seated himself in the carriage with her, drove away to the castle, and led her to the King.

Meanwhile his brothers had proved more silly than he; not forgetting the beautiful carpet and the ring, they still thought it was impossible for Simple to find a beautiful woman also. They therefore took no more trouble than before, and merely chose the handsomest peasant maidens they could find to bring to their father.

When the King saw the beautiful maiden his youngest son had brought he said, "The kingdom must now belong to my youngest son after my death." But the elder brothers deafened the King's ears with their cries, "We cannot consent to let our stupid brother be King. Give us one more trial. Let a ring be hung in the hall, and let each woman spring through it." For they thought the peasant maidens would easily manage to do this, because they were strong, and that the delicate lady would, no doubt, kill herself. To this trial the old King consented.

The peasant maidens jumped first; but they were so heavy and awkward that they fell, and one broke her arm and the other her leg. But the beautiful lady whom Simple had brought home sprang as lightly as a deer through the ring, and thus put an end to all opposition.

The youngest brother married the beautiful maiden, and after his father's death ruled the kingdom for many years with wisdom and equity.

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