

1812

**GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES
THE TWELVE HUNTSMEN**

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 Twelve Huntsmen (1812) - On his deathbed, a king orders his son to marry a maiden. The son does as he is told even though he is betrothed to another. The scorned maiden returns to her beloved's castle as a huntsman.

THE TWELVE HUNTSMEN

THERE WAS once a King's son who was betrothed to a maiden, and he loved his bride very much. One day, as they were sitting very happily together, there came information that his father lay ill and dying, and wished to see him for the last time before his death. "I must go and leave you, darling," said the King's son, "and directly too, for I have a long journey to take; but I will give you this ring as a memory token, and when I am King I will come and fetch you home." Then he rode away, and when he reached the castle he found his father dying and his end very near. But he was able to speak, and said, "Dearest son, I have sent for you because I want you to promise to do as I wish about your marriage." And then he named to him a King's daughter who was well known, and asked him to take her as his wife. The son was so sad at these words that he hardly knew at first what to say; still, he could not refuse his dying father, so he replied, "Dear father, whatever your will is shall be done." Then the King closed his eyes and died. As soon as the son became King, and the mourning was over, he remembered that he must keep the promise which he had given to his father. He sent, therefore, to the King's daughter, and as she was willing to be his bride they were betrothed to each other.

The first bride very soon heard of what he had done, and she grieved so bitterly over her lover's unfaithfulness that her life seemed passing away. At last her father, who was also a King, said to her, "Dearest child, why are you so sad? If anything you wish can be done, I will do it for you." She roused herself in a moment,

and said, "Dear father, I should so like to have as companions eleven maidens exactly like myself in countenance, shape, and size." Her father replied: "As soon as possible your wish shall be fulfilled." He sent messengers all over the kingdom, who were ordered to find eleven maidens who should resemble his daughter in face, figure, and size; and after a long time they succeeded, and brought them to the King's daughter.

As soon as they arrived she ordered twelve hunting dresses to be made exactly alike, and when they were finished, each of the eleven maidens put one on, and she did the same. Then she bade her father farewell and rode away to the castle of her former bridegroom, whom she still loved. On arriving she sent a message to the King, saying she was the chief of twelve young huntsmen who wished to be taken into the King's service.

He came out to see them, but in the huntsman's dress he did not recognize his former bride; but he was so pleased with their appearance that he said he should like them to serve him very much, and so they all became the king's huntsmen.

But the King had a lion who was a wonderful animal, for he found out every concealment or secret.

So it happened one evening that he said to the King, "You think that you have engaged twelve young huntsmen to serve you." "Yes," said the King, "I have engaged twelve huntsmen." "You are mistaken," replied the lion; "they are maidens, not huntsmen." "Well," said the King, "that cannot be true; or, if it is, how can you prove it?" "Oh, easily," said the lion; "strew peas in the antechamber, and you will soon see. A man has a firm step; he will either crush the peas or pass over them without moving them; but maidens will come tripping or shuffling along, and set the peas rolling." The King was very much pleased with this advice, and ordered the room to be strewn with peas.

But one of the King's own servants was kind-hearted, and as he overheard the lion's advice, he went at once and told the young huntsmen how they were to be put to the proof, and said also, "The lion wants the King to believe that you are women." The King's daughter thanked him, and when she spoke afterward to the maidens about it, she said, "Remember to step strongly and with a firm foot on the peas." The next morning the King sent for the twelve huntsmen, and met them in the antechamber; but as they passed through where the peas lay they stepped upon them so heavily, and had such a firm, strong walk, that not a single pea rolled or even moved.

After they were gone the King said to the lion, "You have spoken falsely to me; they walk like men." "Yes," answered the lion; "they knew that the peas were put there to prove them, so they exerted all their strength; but now give them another trial; have twelve spinning-wheels placed in the anteroom, and when they see them they will look quite delighted, whereas no man would notice them." The King was pleased with this advice also, and gave orders for twelve spinning-wheels to be placed in the anteroom.

The servant, however, who really believed in the truthfulness of the young huntsmen, disclosed the plan to them. When they were alone the King's daughter cautioned them not even to glance at the spinning-wheels, and to walk firmly.

The next morning the King sent for his twelve huntsmen; but as they passed through the anteroom with a firm step not one of them took the slightest notice of the spinning-wheels.

"Wrong again, lion," said the King; "they must be men, for they did not even see the spinning-wheels." "Because," answered the lion, "they knew that you were trying them with another test." But after this the King would not believe the lion.

The twelve huntsmen generally followed or accompanied the King when he went hunting, and the more he knew of them the more he liked them.

It happened one day while they were out hunting that information was brought of the approach of the King's bride. As soon as the chief huntsman- who really was the King's first bride, and rode near him- heard the news, such a pang of grief came upon her that her heart seemed to stop, and she fell off her horse to the ground insensible. The King, who supposed that his favorite huntsman had met with an accident, ran to help him; and raising him up, his glove fell off. Then the King saw with surprise that he wore on his finger a ring which he had given to his first bride, and looking earnestly in the face, he recognized her. Then was his heart so completely at rest that he kissed her, and as she opened her eyes he exclaimed, "You are mine, and I am yours, and no one in the world shall separate us again." To his other bride he sent a messenger to say that he had a wife already whom he had chosen before he knew her, and that he prayed her to return to her own country.

Soon after the marriage was celebrated, and the lion taken into favor, for, after all, he had spoken the truth.

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