

1812

**GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES
THE THREE SNAKE-LEAVES**

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 Snake-Leaves (1812) - A young soldier marries the king's daughter and vows that he will allow himself to be buried alive with her if she dies. When the princess dies, he brings her back to life with three snake-leaves.

THE THREE SNAKE-LEAVES

THERE WAS once a man who was so poor that he could hardly earn enough to keep himself and his son from starving. One day the boy said to him, "Dear father, I see you going about every day looking so sad and tired that I am determined to go out into the world and try to earn my own living." So his father gave him his blessing and took leave of him with many tears.

Just at this time a great King was going to war with the King of another country, and the youth took service under him and marched to the battle-field as a soldier.

In the first conflict with the enemy he was in great danger and had a wonderful escape, for his comrades fell on each side of him. Their commander also was wounded, and several were inclined to take flight and run from the field. But the youth stepped forth to raise their courage, and cried, "No, no, we will never allow our fatherland to sink to the ground!" Then they took courage and followed their young leader, who led them forward, attacked and quickly vanquished the enemy.

When the King heard to whom he owed this great victory, he sent for the youth, raised him to a position of great honor, gave him great treasures, and made him first in the kingdom next to himself.

Now the King had a daughter who was very beautiful, but she was also very whimsical. She had made a vow that she would take no man for a husband who did not promise that if she should die he

would allow himself to be buried alive with her in the grave. "If he loves me," she said, "he will not wish to outlive me."

In return for this she would also promise to be buried in the grave with her spouse should he die first.

This strange vow had hitherto frightened away all wooers, but the young soldier was so struck with the beauty of the Princess that he disregarded the vow, although her father warned him and said, "Do you know what a terrible promise you will have to make?" "Yes," replied the young man, "I must be buried with her in the grave if I outlive her. But my love for her is so strong, that I disregard that danger." Then the King gave his consent, and the marriage was celebrated with great pomp.

After they had lived together for some time in great happiness and contentment, the young queen was seized with a terrible illness from which her physicians were unable to restore her. As she lay dead, the young husband remembered what he had promised and the thought of lying in the grave alive filled him with horror, but there was no escape. The King placed a watch at every outlet from the castle, so that it was not possible to avoid his fate. When the day of the funeral arrived and the body had been carried down and placed in the royal vault, he was taken there also, and the door firmly fastened with locks and bolts. Near to the coffin stood a table upon which were four lights, four loaves of bread, and four bottles of wine, and he knew that when these provisions came to an end, he must starve. So he seated himself, feeling full of grief and sorrow, but with a determination to take only a small piece of bread and the least drop of wine, to make them last.

One day when death seemed nearer than ever, he saw from a corner of the vault just opposite to where he sat, a white snake creep out and approach the body. He rose in horror, thinking it was about to gnaw it, and drawing his sword, exclaimed, as with two blows he cut the snake into three pieces, "As long as I live you shall not touch that." After a while a second snake crept out of the corner, but as soon as he saw the other lying dead in three pieces, he went back and quickly returned with three green leaves in his mouth. Then he took the three separate portions of the snake, placed them together and laid a leaf on each wound, and no sooner were they joined, than the snake raised himself as lively as ever, and went away hastily with his companion.

The leaves remained lying on the ground, and as he looked at them, the thoughts of the poor unfortunate man were full of the wonderful properties they possessed, and it suddenly occurred to

him that a leaf which could restore a dead snake to life, might be useful to human beings. He stooped and picked up the leaves, then advancing softly towards the body, he laid one on the mouth of the dead, and the others on both the eyes. In a moment he saw the effect of what he had done. The blood began to circulate in the veins and blushed softly in the pale face and lips of his dead wife. She drew a deep breath, opened her closed eyes and exclaimed faintly, "Where am I?" "You are with me, dear wife," answered her husband; and then he told her all that had happened, and how he had wakened her to life.

After taking a little of the wine and bread she became stronger, and was able to rise from the bier and walk to the door of the vault with her husband. Here they knocked and called loudly for a long time, till at last the watchman heard them and word was sent to the King. He came himself very quickly and ordered the door of the vault to be opened. How astonished and joyful he was to find them both alive and uninjured, and to know that his anxiety was over! The whole matter had been a great trouble to him.

The three leaves, the young Prince took with him, and gave them to a servant to take care of, saying, "Preserve them carefully for me, and see that they are safe every day; who knows what help they may be to us in any future trouble?" A great change appeared in the wife of the young Prince after this event- it was as if with her return to life, all her love for her husband had vanished from her heart.

Not long after, he wished to take a voyage across the sea to see his old father, and she accompanied him. While they were on board ship, she forgot all the true and great love he had shown for her in trying to restore her to life when she was dead, and made friends with the captain, who was as wicked as herself.

One day when the young Prince lay asleep on deck, she called the skipper to her and told him to take her husband by the feet, while she raised his head, and before he was awake enough to save himself, these two wicked people threw him overboard into the sea. As soon as this shameful deed was accomplished, she said to the skipper, "Now let us sail home again and say that the Prince has died on the voyage. I will praise and extol you so greatly to my father, that I know he will readily give his consent to our marriage, and leave the crown to you after his death." But the faithful servant to whom the Prince had entrusted the wonderful leaves saw all that his master's wife had done. Unnoticed, he lowered one of the boats from the ship's side, got on board and very soon discovered the body of the Prince. Dragging it hastily into the boat, he rowed

away and soon left the traitors far behind. As soon as he felt safely out of sight, he produced the precious leaves which he always carried about with him, laid one on each eye and one on the mouth of the dead man, who very quickly showed signs of life, and was at last sufficiently restored to help in rowing the boat. They both rowed with all their strength day and night, and their little bark flew so swiftly over the waves, that they arrived at the King's palace long before his daughter and the captain.

The King wondered greatly when he saw his son-in-law and the servant enter, and asked them what had happened. But when he heard of his daughter's wickedness, he said, "I can scarcely believe she would act so basely. However, the truth will soon be brought to light. For the present, I advise you both to hide yourselves in a private chamber, and make yourselves quite at home till the ship returns." The master and servant took the King's advice, and a few days afterwards the large ship made its appearance, and the King's guilty daughter appeared before her father with a sorrowful countenance.

"Why have you come back alone?" he asked. "Where is your husband?"

"Ah! dear father," she replied, "I come home to you in great sorrow, for, during the voyage, my husband was taken suddenly ill and died, and if the good captain had not stood by me and conducted me home, I cannot tell what evil might have happened to me. He stood by my husband's deathbed, and he can tell you all that occurred." "Oh!" said the King, "I can restore your dead husband to life again, so do not grieve any longer." He threw open the door of the private room as he spoke, and told his son and the servant to come out.

When the wife saw her husband she was thunderstruck, and sank on her knees imploring mercy.

"I can show you no mercy," said the King. "Your husband was not only ready to be buried and die with you, but he used the means which restored you to life, and you have murdered him while he slept, and shall receive the reward you so truly merit." Then was she with her accomplice placed in a boat full of holes, and driven out to sea, where they were soon overwhelmed in the waves and drowned.

THE END