



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

Brother and Sister

From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock



brother took his sister by the hand and said, "Since our mother is dead we have no more happy hours: our stepmother beats us every day, and whenever we come near her she kicks us away. She gives us hard crusts and nasty scraps to eat, and the dog under the table fares better than we do, for he does sometimes get a nice bit thrown to him. It would break our mother's heart if she knew it! Come, we will go out into the wide world together."

They went along the whole day through meadows, over rocks and stones, and when it rained the little sister said, "Heaven and our hearts are crying together." In the evening they came to a great wood, and were so worn out with grief, hunger, and weariness, that they sat down in a hollow tree and went to sleep.

The next morning, when they awoke, the sun was already high in the heavens, and shone down very hot on the tree. Upon which said the brother, "Sister, I am thirsty; I would go and have a drink if I knew where there was a spring: I think I can hear one trickling." He got up, took his sister by the hand, and they went to look for the spring.

The wicked stepmother, however, who was a witch, and well knew how the children had run away, had crept after them secretly, in the way witches do, and had bewitched all the springs in the wood. When they had found a spring that was dancing brightly over the stones, the brother stooped down to drink; but his sister heard a voice in its murmur, which said, "Whoever drinks of me will become a tiger." Eagerly the little sister cried, "I pray thee, brother, do not drink, lest thou become a wild beast and tear me to pieces."

The brother did not drink, although he was so thirsty, but said, "I will wait for the next spring." When they came to the next, the little sister heard it say, "Who drinks of me will become a wolf; who drinks of me will become a wolf!" and cried out, "Oh brother, I pray thee do not drink, lest thou become a wolf and eat me up."

The brother did not drink, but said, "I will wait till I come to the next spring, but then I must drink, say what you will, for my thirst is getting unbearable."

And when they came to the third spring, the little sister heard a voice in its murmur, saying, "Whoever drinks of me will become a roe," and she cried, "Oh brother, do not drink, I pray thee, lest thou become a roe and run away from me." But the brother had already knelt down by the stream, stooped down, and drank of the water; and as soon as the first drop touched his lips, there he lay—a white roe.

The little sister cried over her poor bewitched brother, and the roe cried also as he rested mournfully beside her. At last the maiden said, "Never mind, dear Roe, I will never forsake you." So she took off her golden garter and put it round the roe's neck, then pulled some rushes and wove them into a cord. To this she tied the little animal and led him on, and they both went still deeper into the wood. When they had gone a long, long way, they came at last to a little house, into which the maiden peeped; and as it was empty, she thought, "Here we may stay and live." So she made a pretty bed of leaves and moss for the roe; and every morning she went out and gathered roots, berries, and nuts for herself; and for the roe she brought tender grass, which he ate out of her hand, and played about and was very happy. In

the evening, when the little sister was tired and had said her prayers, she laid her head upon the roe, who was her pillow, and went sweetly to sleep; and if her brother had only kept his proper shape, they would have led a very happy life.

They had lived alone in this way during a long time, when it happened that the king of the country held a great hunt in the forest. Through the trees might be heard the blowing of horns, the barking of dogs, and the joyous cries of the hunters, which when the little roe heard he was almost beside himself with delight. "Oh," said he to his sister, "let me go and see the hunt: I can no longer refrain;" and he begged hard till she consented.

"But," said she, "when you return at evening I shall have shut my door against the wild huntsmen, and in order that I may know you, knock and say, 'My little sister, let me in;' but if you do not say so, I shall not open the door."

Now off sprang the roe, and was so happy to find himself in the open air. The king and his huntsmen saw the beautiful beast and set off after him, but they could not catch him; for when they thought they had certainly got him, he sprang over a bush and disappeared. When it was dark he galloped up to the little house, knocked, and cried, "My little sister, let me in." And when the door was opened he sprang in, and rested all night on his pretty little bed. Next morning the hunt began again, and when the roe heard the blast of the horns, and the "Ho! ho!" of the hunters, he could not rest, and cried, "Sister, open the door; I must go."

His sister opened the door and said, "But mind you must be back in the evening and make your little speech, that I may let you in."

When the king and his huntsmen saw the white roe with the gold band once more, they all rode after him, but he was too quick and agile for them. This chase lasted the whole day; at last, towards evening, the hunters surrounded him, and wounded him with an arrow in the foot, so that he was forced to limp and go slowly. One of the hunters, creeping softly after him to the little house, heard him say, "My sister, let me in," and saw that the door was opened and immediately shut to again; so he went back to the king, and told him all he had seen and heard.

"We will have another hunt to-morrow," said the king.

The little sister was greatly alarmed when she saw her white roe was wounded; she washed off the blood, laid herbs upon the place, and said, "Go now to thy bed, dear Roe, and get well."

The wound, however, was so slight that the next morning he felt nothing of it, and when he heard the noise of the hunt, he said, "I cannot keep away; I must go, and nothing shall keep me."

His sister cried and said, "Now you will go and be killed, and leave me here alone in the forest, forsaken by all the world; I will not let you go out."

“Then I shall die here of grief,” answered the roe: “for when I hear the sound of the horn, I do feel as if I could jump out of my shoes.” So his sister could not do less than open the door with a heavy heart, and the roe sprang out joyfully into the forest.

As soon as the king saw him, he said to his huntsmen, “Now hunt him all day till evening, but don’t do anything to hurt him.”

When the sun was set the king said to his huntsman, “Now come and show me the little house you saw in the wood.” And when he was before the door he knocked and cried, “Dear little sister, let me in.” Immediately the door opened, the king entered, and there stood a maiden more beautiful than any one he had ever seen. The damsel was frightened when she found there had come in, not her roe, but a man who wore a golden crown on his head. But the king looked kindly at her, took her hand and said, “Wilt thou go with me to my castle, and be my dear wife?”

“Oh yes,” answered the maiden, “but the roe must come with me, for I cannot forsake him.”

The king replied, “He shall remain with you as long as you live, and shall want for nothing.”

At this moment he came springing in, his sister tied the cord of rushes round his neck, led him with her own hand, and they all left the little house together.

The king took the beautiful maiden on his own horse and conducted her to his castle, where the marriage was celebrated with great pomp. She was now queen, and they lived a long time very happily together; while the roe was petted and taken care of, and played all day about the palace-garden.

But the wicked stepmother, on whose account these children had been driven into the wide world, thought nothing less than that the little sister had been torn to pieces by wild beasts in the forest, and that the brother, in the shape of a roe, had been killed by the hunters. When she now heard they were so happy, and that everything went well with them, envy and spite raged in her heart and gave her no rest, and her only thought was how she could do some mischief to them both. Her own daughter, who was as ugly as the night and had only one eye, was continually reproaching her, and saying, “It is I who ought to have been made queen.”

“Never mind,” said the old witch to console her; “when the time comes I will manage it.”

By and by the queen gave birth to a beautiful little boy; and the king being away at the hunt, the old witch took upon herself the form of the lady-in-waiting, entered the room where the queen lay, and said to her, “Come, the bath is ready, which will do you good and give you new strength; make haste before it gets cold.” Her daughter was also at hand, and they carried the poor weak queen between them into the bathroom, and laid her in the bath: then they shut the door and ran away. But under the bath they had first lighted a great furnace-fire, so that the beautiful young queen could not save herself from being scorched alive.

When that was done the old witch took her own daughter, put a cap on her, and laid her on the bed in the queen's room. She changed her also into the shape of the young queen, all except her one eye, and she could not give her another. But in order that the king might not observe it, she was obliged to lie on that side where there was no eye. In the evening, when he was come home, and heard that he had a little son, he was very much delighted, and wished to visit his dear wife and see how she was getting on; on which the old woman cried out in a great hurry, "As you value your life, don't touch the curtain; the queen must not see the light, and must be left quite quiet." So the king went away, and never found out that it was a false queen in the bed.

But when it was midnight, and all the world was asleep, the nurse who was sitting beside the cradle, and who was the only person awake, saw the door open and the true queen come in. She took the baby out of the cradle, laid it in her arms, and nursed it tenderly. She then shook up the pillows, laid it down again, and covered it with the counterpane. She did not forget the roe either, but went into the corner where it lay, and stroked it gently. After this she passed out, quite silently, through the door; and the nurse inquired next morning of the sentinels whether any one had gained entrance into the palace during the night, but they answered, "No—we have seen nobody." She continued to come in the same way for several nights, though she spoke never a word: the nurse always saw her, but never dared to mention it.

When some time had passed, the queen at last began to speak, and said—

"How is my baby? How is my roe?"

I can come again twice, then for ever must go."

The nurse could not answer her; but when she had disappeared she went to the king, and told him all about it, upon which he cried, "What does it mean? I will myself watch by the child to-night."

In the evening he came to the nursery, and there at midnight the dead queen appeared, and said—

"How is my baby? How is my roe?"

I can come but once more, then for ever must go;"

and nursed and fondled the baby as before, then vanished. The king did not dare to address her, but watched again the following night. This time she said—

"How is my baby? How is my roe?"

I can come but this once, then for ever must go."

Upon which the king could no longer contain himself, but sprang forward and cried, "Thou canst surely be no one but my own dear wife!"

She replied, "Yes, I am thy dear wife;" and as soon as she had spoken these words she was restored to life, and became once more fresh and blooming.

Then she related to the king the crime committed on her by the old witch and her ugly daughter, whom he at once commanded to be brought to judgment, and had sentence passed upon them. The daughter was taken forth into the woods, where the wild beasts tore her in pieces, and the witch was burnt. And behold! as soon as there was nothing left of her but ashes, the white roe became changed again and resumed his human form; so they all lived happily together till the end of their lives.

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