



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

Snow White and Rose Red

From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock



A poor widow lived alone in a little cottage, in front of which was a garden, where stood two little rose-trees: one bore white roses, the other red. The widow had two children, who resembled the two rose-trees: one was called Snow-white, and the other Rose-red. They were two of the best children that ever lived; but Snow-white was quieter and more gentle than Rose-red. Rose-red liked best to jump about in the meadows, to look for flowers and catch butterflies; but Snow-white sat at home with her mother, helped her in the house, or read to her when there was nothing else to do. The two children loved one another so much, that they always walked hand in hand; and when Snow-white said, "We will not forsake one another," Rose-red answered, "Never, as long as we live;" and the mother added, "Yes, my children, whatever one has, let her divide with the other." They often ran about in solitary places, and gathered red berries; and the wild creatures of the wood never hurt them, but came confidingly up to them. The little hare ate cabbage-leaves out of their hands, the doe grazed at their side, the stag sprang merrily past them, and the birds remained sitting on the boughs, and never ceased their songs. They met with no accident if they loitered in the wood and right came on; they lay down together on the moss, and slept till morning; and the mother knew this, and was in no anxiety about them. Once, when they had spent the night in the wood, and the red morning awoke them, they saw a beautiful child in a shining white dress, sitting by the place where they had slept, who, arising, and looking at them kindly, said nothing, but went into the wood. And when they looked round, they found out that they had been sleeping close to a precipice, and would certainly have fallen down it if they had gone a few steps farther in the dark. Their mother told them it must have been the angel that takes care of good children who had sat by them all night long.

Snow-white and Rose-red kept their mother's cottage so clean, that it was a pleasure to look into it. In the summer, Rose-red managed the house, and every morning she gathered a nosegay in which was a rose off each tree, and set it by her mother's bed before she awoke. In winter Snow-white lighted the fire, and hung the kettle on the hook; and though it was only copper, it shone like gold, it was rubbed so clean. In the evening, when the snow fell, the mother said, "Go, Snow-white, and bolt the door;" and then they seated themselves on the hearth, and the mother took her spectacles, and read aloud out of a great book, and the two girls listened, and sat and span. Near them lay a lamb on the floor, and behind them, on a perch, sat a white dove, with its head under its wing.

One evening, as they were thus happy together, some one knocked to be let in. The mother said, "Quick, Rose-red, open the door; perhaps it is a traveller who seeks shelter." Rose-red went and pushed the bolt back, and thought it was a poor man, but a bear stretched his thick black head into the door. Rose-red screamed and sprang back, the little lamb bleated, the little dove fluttered about, and Snow-white hid herself behind her mother's bed. However, the bear began to speak, and said, "Do not be frightened, I will do you no harm; I am half frozen, and only want to warm myself a little."

"You poor bear," said the mother, "lay yourself down before the fire, only take care your fur does not burn." Then she called out, "Snow-white and Rose-red, come out; the bear will not hurt you—he means honestly by us." Then they both came out, and, by degrees, the lamb and the dove also approached, and ceased to be afraid. The bear said, "Children, knock the snow a little out of my fur;" and they fetched a broom, and swept the bear's skin clean; and

he stretched himself before the fire and growled softly, like a bear that was quite happy and comfortable. In a short time, they all became quite friendly together, and the children played tricks with the awkward guest. They pulled his hair, set their feet on his back, and rolled him here and there; or took a hazel rod and beat him, and when he growled they laughed. The bear was very much pleased with this frolic, only, when they became too mischievous, he called out, "Children, leave me alone."

"Little Snow-white and Rose-red,

You will strike your lover dead."

When bedtime came, and the others went to sleep, the mother said to the bear: "You can lie there on the hearth, and then you will be sheltered from the cold and the bad weather." At daybreak the two children let him out, and he trotted over the snow into the wood. Henceforward, the bear came every evening at the same hour, laid himself on the hearth, and allowed the children to play with him as much as they liked; and they became so used to him, that the door was never bolted until their black companion had arrived. When spring came, and everything was green out of doors, the bear said one morning to Snow-white: "Now I must go away, and may not come again the whole summer."

"Where are you going, dear Bear?" asked Snow-white.

"I must go into the wood, and guard my treasures from the bad dwarfs; in winter, when the ground is frozen hard, they have to stay underneath, and cannot work their way through, but now that the sun has thawed and warmed the earth, they break through, come up, seek, and steal: what is once in their hands, and lies in their caverns, does not come so easily into daylight again." Snow-white was quite sorrowful at parting, and as she unbolted the door for him, and the bear ran out, the hook of the door caught him, and a piece of his skin tore off; it seemed to Snow-white as if she had seen gold shining through, but she was not sure. But the bear ran quickly away, and soon disappeared behind the trees.

After some time, their mother sent the children into the wood to collect faggots. They found there a large tree, which had been cut down and lay on the ground, and by the trunk something was jumping up and down, but they could not tell what it was. As they came nearer, they saw that it was a dwarf, with an old withered face, and a snow-white beard a yard long. The end of the beard was stuck fast in a cleft in the tree, and the little fellow jumped about like a dog on a rope, and did not know how to help himself. He stared at the girls with his fiery red eyes, and screamed out, "Why do you stand there! Can't you come and render me some assistance?"

"What is the matter with you, little man?" asked Rose-red.

"Stupid little goose!" answered the dwarf; "I wanted to chop the tree, so as to have some small pieces of wood for the kitchen; we only want little bits; with thick logs, the small quantity of food that we cook for ourselves—we are not, like you, great greedy people—burns directly. I had driven the wedge well in, and it was all going on right, but the detestable wood was too smooth, and sprang out unexpectedly; and the tree closed up so quickly, that I

could not pull my beautiful white beard out; now it is sticking there, and I can't get away. There you foolish, soft, milk-faces! you are laughing and crying out, 'How ugly you are! how ugly you are!'"

The children took a great deal of trouble, but they could not pull the beard out; it stuck too fast.

"I will run and fetch somebody," said Rose red.

"You great ninny!" snarled the dwarf, "you want to call more people; you are two too many for me now. Can't you think of anything better?"

"Only don't be impatient," said Snow-white, "I have thought of something;" and she took her little scissors out of her pocket, and cut the end of the beard off.

As soon as the dwarf felt himself free, he seized a sack filled with gold that was sticking between the roots of the tree; pulling it out, he growled to himself, "You rude people, to cut off a piece of my beautiful beard! May evil reward you!" Then he threw his sack over his shoulders and walked away, without once looking at the children.

Some time afterwards, Snow-white and Rose red wished to catch some fish for dinner. As they came near to the stream, they saw that something like a grasshopper was jumping towards the water, as if it were going to spring in. They ran on and recognised the dwarf.

"Where are you going?" asked Rose-red, "You don't want to go into the water?"

"I am not such a fool as that," cried the dwarf, "Don't you see the detestable fish wants to pull me in?"

The little fellow had been sitting there fishing, and, unluckily, the wind had entangled his beard with the line. When directly afterwards a great fish bit at his hook, the weak creature could not pull him out, so the fish was pulling the dwarf into the water. It is true he caught hold of all the reeds and rushes, but that did not help him much; he had to follow all the movements of the fish, and was in imminent danger of being drowned. The girls, coming at the right time, held him fast and tried to get the beard loose from the line, but in vain—beard and line were entangled fast together. There was nothing to do but to pull out the scissors and to cut off the beard, in doing which a little piece of it was lost. When the dwarf saw that, he cried out: "Is that manners, you goose! to disfigure one's face so? Is it not enough that you once cut my beard shorter? But now you have cut the best part of it off, I dare not be seen by my people. I wish you had had to run, and had lost the soles of your shoes!" Then he fetched a sack of pearls that lay among the rushes, and, without saying a word more, he dragged it away and disappeared behind a stone.

Soon after, the mother sent the two girls to the town to buy cotton, needles, cord, and tape. The road led them by a heath, scattered over which lay great masses of rock. There they saw a large bird hovering in the air; it flew round and round just above them, always sinking lower and lower, and at last it settled down by a rock not far distant. Directly after, they

heard a piercing, wailing cry. They ran up, and saw with horror that the eagle had seized their old acquaintance the dwarf, and was going to carry him off. The compassionate children instantly seized hold of the little man, held him fast, and struggled so long that the eagle let his prey go.

When the dwarf had recovered from his first fright, he called out, in his shrill voice: "Could not you deal rather more gently with me? You have torn my thin coat all in tatters, awkward, clumsy creatures that you are!" Then he took a sack of precious stones, and slipped behind the rock again into his den. The girls, who were used to his ingratitude, went on their way, and completed their business in the town. As they were coming home again over the heath, they surprised the dwarf, who had emptied his sack of precious stones on a little clean place, and had not thought that any one would come by there so late. The evening sun shone on the glittering stones, which looked so beautiful in all their colours, that the children could not help standing still to gaze.

"Why do you stand there gaping?" cried the dwarf, his ash-coloured face turning vermilion with anger.

With these cross words he was going away, when he heard a loud roaring, and a black bear trotted out of the wood towards them. The dwarf sprang up terrified, but he could not get to his lurking hole again—the bear was already close upon him. Then he called out in anguish,—

"Dear Mr. Bear, spare me, and you shall have^[178] all my treasures; look at the beautiful precious stones that lie there. Give me my life! for what do you want with a poor thin little fellow like me? You would scarcely feel me between your teeth. Rather seize those two wicked girls; they will be tender morsels for you, as fat as young quails; pray, eat them at once."

The bear, without troubling himself to answer, gave the malicious creature one single stroke with his paw, and he did not move again. The girls had run away, but the bear called after them, "Snow-white and Rose-red, do not be frightened; wait, I will go with you. Recognising the voice of their old friend, they stood still, and when the bear came up to them his skin suddenly fell off; and behold he was not a bear, but a handsome young man dressed all in gold.

"I am a king's son," said he; "I was changed by the wicked dwarf, who had stolen all my treasures, into a wild bear, and obliged to run about in the wood until I should be freed by his death. Now he has received his well-deserved punishment."

So they all went home together to the widow's cottage, and Snow-white was married to the prince, and Rose-red to his brother. They divided between them the great treasures which the dwarf had amassed. The old mother lived many quiet and happy years with her children; but when she left her cottage for the palace, she took the two rose-trees with her, and they stood before her window and bore every year the most beautiful roses—one white and the other red.

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