



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

The Adventures of Florian

From "The Firelight Fairy Book" by Henry Beston



nce upon a time there lived in an old and ruinous house by the shore of the wild sea, a widowed nobleman and his only child, a daughter named Isabella. They were very poor in spite of their high birth, so poor that one by one the fields and woods of their little domain had been sold in order to buy the bare necessities of life. Knowing that his death would leave Isabella quite alone in the world and practically penniless, her father brought her up more like a boy than a girl; she could ride a horse as gracefully as an Amazon, she could swim like a born mermaid, and even outdo her father in his favorite sport of fencing. Yet so sweet was the gentle nature which the girl had inherited from her mother, that this strange upbringing never spoiled her in the least.

Late one October evening, when the fierce gusts of wind from the sea shook the old house to its very foundation and set the ragged tapestries swaying on the walls, Isabella's father died, leaving her only the ruinous house, a handful of copper pence, and a single golden florin. The sum of money was enough to keep body and soul together for a few weeks, but what was Isabella to do when the little pittance was gone? Her father had once counseled her to go to the King and ask for his protection; but the King's castle was hundreds of miles distant, and Isabella shrank from begging on the highway.

At last the brave girl resolved to make her own way in the world. Taking the golden florin with her, she went to a neighboring town, and purchased a suit of clothes such as pages and squires wear who are in the service of noblemen. She then caused her black hair to be cut short, boy-fashion, put on the boy's clothes she had purchased, and went into the market-place to see if she could not find a situation in the service of some great family.

Now, it was the custom in those days for masters and servants to meet by a fountain in the market-place, the masters who were in need of servants standing on one side of the fountain, the servants who were in search of masters on the other.

When Isabella came into the market-place, there was no one standing on the masters' side of the fountain, but on the other side, ready for the first master who should appear, was a little group of noisy and impudent squires and pages. Isabella, or, as she now called herself, Florian, strode boldly over and joined this group, her heart beating high with the thrill of the great adventure.

Suddenly a black knight, mounted on a black horse and leading another horse by the bridle, clattered over the cobble-stones of the square, and taking his place by the fountain, called on the pages to come to him. In spite of the horseman's summons, however, the pages paid no attention to him at all. Curious to know the reason of this disdain, Florian questioned a fellow page, and was told that the knight was no other than the Enchanter of the Black Rock, and that no page or squire would take service with him because his castle was haunted by goblins, ghosts, and all manner of terrifying spirits.

Now, Florian was no coward, and, as the saying is, beggars cannot be choosers. So, much to the astonishment of the pages, Florian walked over to the Enchanter, who sat fuming with anger and impatience, and offered to go with him. The Knight bade Florian mount the horse

which he was holding; and amid the cat-calls and hooting of the pages, master and boy galloped away.

All day long they rode, and when it was near the end of the afternoon Florian found himself at the edge of a wild and desolate moor. Within the great circle of the horizon, under the pale sky, not a tree, not a house, not a shepherd's hut even was to be seen—nothing but the great barren waste rolling, rising and falling to the very edge of the world. Lower and lower sank the sun; it grew cold, and a blue mist fell. Twilight came, a green, mysterious twilight.

Suddenly, from a hillock of the moor, Florian beheld afar the enchanted dwelling. A great sunken marsh lay before him, beginning at the foot of the little hill and stretching away, league after league, till its farther shore was hidden in the gathering darkness. The autumn wind stirred the dead sedges at its brim, and though the dying twilight was still gleaming in the sky, the great bog had caught little of its glow, and lay full of coiling blue mists, pale quagmires, and islands of mysterious darkness. A dreadful moaning cry, uttered by some demon of the moor, sounded through the mist, chilling the blood in Florian's veins; and as if in answer to the cry, thousands upon thousands of will-o'-the-wisps appeared, darting and dancing. In the very heart of this terrible marsh a great black rock uprose, and on this rock, its turrets and battlements outlined against the burning face of the moon, stood the castle. Ghostly lights, now green, now blue, flickered in its windows.

The Enchanter reined up his horse at the brink of the mire, and cried,—

“List! List! Will-o'-the-Wisp, Lend me your light.”

Scarcely had the last word fallen from the Enchanter's mouth, when the dancing witch-fires hurried toward him from all sides of the marsh. Soon a pale road leading across the bog to the castle stood revealed, an enchanted road which melted away behind the riders as smoke melts into the winter air. To the very gates of his castle did the ghost-fires accompany the Enchanter; then, rising swiftly high into the air, they fled like startled birds, in every direction.

Doors opened of their own will, strange goblins and ghostly creatures passed, and bright, whirling globes of fire fled hissing across the castle courtyard. Just as they were about to enter the castle itself, the Enchanter turned, and fastened his burning eyes on Florian.

“Boy,” said he, “let nothing that you hear or see make you afraid. Be assured that no power or spirit can harm you. There is only one demon in the world whose power is greater than mine, and that is Fear himself. Be brave, keep the doors of your heart locked against Fear; be faithful, and you shall never have cause to regret your coming.”

So Florian, who was by nature brave, felt ashamed of having allowed the demon Fear to knock at the door of his heart, and resolved never to let his courage fail, no matter what might happen. And true to this resolve the lad remained during the years he spent in the service of the Enchanter. At first, to be sure, he had to struggle to conquer his fear of some of the goblins; but as time passed and no ghost or goblin ever ventured to annoy him, he grew accustomed to their presences and ended by paying no more attention to them than he

paid to the great ravens who flew croaking over the mire. So faithful and courageous was the little page that, when his year was up, the Enchanter begged him to remain yet another year, promising him rich rewards if he stayed. When this second year was up, however, Florian felt a longing to see the world again, and told the Enchanter that he must be going.

“Very well,” said the Enchanter, who respected the courage of the brave page, “thou shalt do as thou desirest. Thou art a brave and faithful lad. Here is a purse of gold for thy wages, and here are three gifts to reward thy courage and good-will.” He opened a copper casket and took forth a little golden bird with outstretched wings hanging from a fine golden chain, a golden key, and a scarlet sphere marked with a band of white. “This little bird,” continued the Enchanter, “will protect you from the spells of any sorcerer whose power is less than mine, and will sing when you fare into hidden danger; this key will open every door in the world; and should you ever lose your way, you have but to put this sphere on the ground, and it will roll home of its own accord. Moreover, if you are ever yourself in deadly peril, call upon me, and I will come and help you.”

So Florian thanked the Enchanter, and taking his gifts, went back into the world again. But so gentle and kind was he that he soon gave away to the unfortunate all the gold he had earned, and was forced to go in search of another situation. At length he entered the service of the King and Queen of the Twelve Towers.

This royal couple, who were renowned in Fairyland as much for their goodness and generosity as for their wealth and magnificence, had but one son, Prince Florizel. No braver or more gallant prince ever drew breath. He had driven the dragon of the blue cavern out of his father’s kingdom; he had fought three wicked ogres one after the other, and finished each one; he had delivered the diamond castle of a terrible spell which lay upon it.

When Florian entered the service of the King and Queen, these excellent parents were sending their son on a visit to his uncle, the Emperor of the Plain, and Florian was ordered to join the gay company of lords and ladies, knights and soldiers, who were to make the journey. According to the gossip of the company, Prince Florizel was being sent to his uncle’s in the hope that he would fall in love with his uncle’s ward, the beautiful Princess Rosamond.

Now in some way or other, after the company had been a few days on the road, Prince Florizel, who watched over the company as carefully as a good captain does over his soldiers, became aware of the bravery, trustworthiness, and modest bearing of Florian, the little page, and promoted him to be his own personal squire. Alas! no sooner had he been advanced, than Florian the little page, though remaining outwardly a page, became at heart the runaway girl, Isabella. Though she fought as hard as she could against her own heart, it was of little use, and she knew herself to be deeply in love with the gallant Florizel. Yet she suffered no word or sign of her affection to escape her, for Prince Florizel thought her only a little page, and to speak would be to betray the secret she had so long and successfully guarded.

One morning, as the cavalcade was riding through a charming country, Florian, for so we must still continue to call Isabella, was following close behind his master, when the Prince

caught sight of a wonderful scarlet flower, something like a scarlet lily, blooming by the roadside. At the same moment, the little golden bird that Florian wore round his neck sang a few clear notes as if it were alive.

“What a pretty flower!” said the Prince. “I must have it.”

And he was about to dismount and pick the flower, when Florian spurred on ahead of him, grasped the enchanted flower, and tossed it into a ditch.

“Fie, what a naughty page!” cried the lords and ladies.

The company rode on a few miles more, and suddenly the Prince caught sight of a beautiful jeweled dagger lying in the highway. At the same moment the little golden bird sang a few clear notes of warning.

“What a fine dagger!” cried the Prince, “I must have it.”

And he was about to dismount and pick up the dagger, when Florian spurred on ahead of him, seized the dagger, and tossed it into a ditch.

“Fie, what a naughty page!” cried the lords and ladies.

The company now rode on for a few miles more, and the Prince saw by the roadside a beautiful enchanted garden. Birds of many colors sang in the branches of the trees, fountains sparkled and danced in the sunlight, and the sweetest of music was heard. At the same moment the golden bird sang louder and longer than ever.

“What a beautiful garden!” cried the Prince. “Let us ride in and look about.”

So Florian hurried to the Prince’s side, and implored him not to enter, saying that the garden was enchanted and that some harm would certainly befall him.

At this, all the lords and ladies, who were a little jealous, perhaps, that a page should know more than they, laughed at poor Florian, and even Florizel smiled at him and said, “All that is only fancy, little Florian,” and dashed in through the garden gate. For a minute or so nothing happened, and the first to enter mocked at Florian again; but when the whole company had entered the garden, there was a clap of thunder, and everybody except the Prince and Florian, who was protected by the Enchanter’s charm, was turned into stone. The echoes of the thunder had hardly ceased rolling when two frightful demons with lions’ heads rushed towards them through the garden, seized the Prince, and hurried him away. Florian was left alone in the garden. Night was fast approaching.

Now, the owner of the enchanted garden was a witch, who had a daughter so frightfully ugly that even her mother’s powerful magic could not make her beautiful. In spite of her ugliness, however, the witch’s daughter considered herself quite beautiful, and was always importuning her mother to invite to the castle princes whom she considered worthy of her hand. So the old witch gave wonderful dances and parties, to which all the eligible young

kings and princes of the neighborhood were invited; but just as soon as the witch's daughter appeared with a horrid smirk on her ugly face, the young men were sure to make their excuses and ride away.

At length the old witch, who had just had a severe tongue-lashing from her daughter for not punishing the Prince of Zagabondiga after that prince had failed to ask her for a dance, could endure her daughter's scolding no longer, and resolved to catch the first prince who came past her garden, and force him, willy nilly, to accept her ugly daughter. Into her trap poor Florizel had walked, and the witch, hoping to bend him to her will by terrifying him, had thrown him into a deep dungeon. The ugly daughter had immediately peered through the key-hole of the prison, and fallen in love with Florizel at first sight.

The witch was just considering what to do next, when her lion-headed servitors informed her that one of the company had resisted her enchantment, and was wandering about the garden. So the witch put on her cloak of invisibility, and going down to the garden, found poor Florian wandering disconsolately under the trees. She saw at once that it was the little golden bird which had protected him from her magic; and being afraid of the charm and yet unable to work the poor lad any harm while the bird was in his possession, she decided to rid herself of Florian by transporting her castle, gardens and all, over to the other side of the world. So she uttered a spell, and everything disappeared.

When Florian woke the next morning, and found that the castle was gone, his heart sank. Nevertheless, he did not despair, but taking from his pocket the little scarlet ball which his master the Enchanter had given him, he put it on the ground, and bade it guide him back to the Enchanted Garden.

The little ball immediately began rolling ahead at Florian's own pace; at night it glowed with a scarlet fire. Day after day, month after month, the scarlet ball rolled on; it led Florian over hill and down dale, through the land of the men who have only one eye, through the country of the dwarfs, and the valley of the talking trees, never stopping till it reached the gate of the witch's garden.

A year, meanwhile, had gone by, and during that year the witch had done everything she could to induce Prince Florizel to accept her ugly daughter. First she had tried frightening him, then she had tried to win him by giving splendid fetes, then she had tried terrifying him again; but as the Prince was neither to be terrified nor cajoled, she came to her wits' end. Finally she told the Prince that, if he were not willing to accept her daughter in marriage on the very next day, she would turn him into a hare and set her dogs upon him. The Prince made no answer to her terrible threat, and the witch went ahead and made preparation for the grandest of weddings. On that night, Florian arrived at the garden.

When it was very late, and the moon, which was a quarter full, had disappeared behind a bank of clouds, Florian crept unobserved to the door of Florizel's prison; for the witch had locked him up so securely that she had not taken the trouble to find a watchman. Alas! the poor Prince lay at the top of a high tower, and twenty different doors, each one opened by a different key, stood between him and the ground.

But Florian was not to be daunted, and drawing from his bosom the key which the Enchanter had given him, he opened one door after the other till he arrived in the cell occupied by the Prince.

The poor Prince lay chained on a bed of straw, trying to read a book by the light of a single candle. He was very unhappy, for he had resolved to let himself be torn in pieces rather than marry the ugly witch maiden. You may be sure he was glad to see Florian.

“Dear Florian,” said the unhappy Prince, “if I had only obeyed your counsel, all would have been well.” And he begged Florian to tell him where he had been all the long year.

So Florian told the Prince of his adventures.

Now, the chains which the Prince wore were riveted cruelly upon him, and since there was no lock to them, the magic key was of no avail. At length, however, Florizel managed to work them off; but in doing so, he injured his foot, and found to his dismay that he could only limp along.

Little by little the freshened air and the stir of leaves began to foretell the coming of the dawn. Finally, just as the dawn-star began to pale, Florizel and Florian hurried out of the prison through the twenty doors, and fled to the highroad.

But they had traveled only a few miles, when the wicked witch discovered Florizel’s flight, and, dreadfully enraged, commanded that her dragon car be got ready in order that she might go in pursuit of him. So the car was brought forth, and into it the witch leaped, and mounted into the sky. Hearing the hissing and roaring of the dragons in the air, Florian and Florizel tried to hide under some trees; but the witch instantly saw them, and pronounced a spell to turn them into hares. But though the hate of the witch was quick, the woman’s heart of Isabella was quicker, and sacrificing herself for the man she loved, she threw the chain and the golden bird over the Prince’s head. An instant later she had turned into a little gray hare crouching at Florizel’s feet. At the same moment, the cruel witch, who had arrived at her castle, let loose her pack of fierce hunting dogs, who soon took up the trail of the hare and came bounding toward her in full cry.

The poor Prince picked up the hare and hobbled forward as fast as he could go, forgetting the dreadful pain it caused him; but the dogs were running a hundred times faster than he. Nearer and nearer came the pack, their red tongues lolling from their black throats. By good fortune, just as the leader of the pack was not more than fifty feet away, Isabella had wit enough to remember the promise which the Enchanter had made her, and called upon him. Immediately a strong glass wall, as high as a castle tower, shot up from the ground behind Isabella and the Prince; and the pack, hurrying forward, found themselves baulked of their prey. Snarling and yelling, they threw themselves against the magic wall; but in vain.

In another instant, the Enchanter himself stood before them, and touching the hare with his wand, restored Isabella to her human form. She still wore the garments of Florian, however, and the Prince still thought her a boy.

Suddenly a shadow fell on the ground near them, and looking up, all beheld the wicked witch and her ugly daughter, who had ridden out in the dragon car to enjoy Florizel's cruel death. The Enchanter immediately caused the dragon car to vanish, and the witch and her daughter fell tumbling through the air into a pond, and were changed into ugly little fishes. Then the Enchanter carried Florizel and Florian back to the witch's castle, where they found the tables spread and the dinner being prepared which was to celebrate the wedding of Florizel and the witch's daughter. Last of all, he released Florizel's company from the witch's spell.

Now, one of the ladies, when she heard how the witch had tried to match Florizel with her daughter, and saw the preparations for the wedding, told the Prince that it was a pity that the Princess Rosamond were not at hand, so that there might be a wedding after all.

"A wedding? No," said Florizel, "not till I have found a wife who shall have proved herself as faithful and true as little Florian."

"She is already here," said the Enchanter. And he touched Florian with his wand.

Immediately there was a flash of flame, and out of it, Florian no longer, but her own self, appeared Isabella. Her hair had grown long again, and the Enchanter had clad her in the most magnificent of gowns. Never was there a lovelier girl to be seen on earth. You may be sure that the Prince stepped forward, took her by the hand, and claimed her for his bride.

Soon the parents of Florizel, who had been summoned by the Enchanter, arrived, and there was a wedding after all. When the merrymaking was over, the Enchanter went back to his castle on the Black Rock, while Florizel and Isabella returned to their own country, and lived there happily to a good old age.

To get more stories

Go to www.tonightsbedtimestory.com

License

While the text and the illustrations used in this work are out of copyright, the unique presentation created for those elements is copyrighted. You may use, copy and distribute this work freely but you are not authorized to use this work for commercial purpose and you may not alter, transform, or build upon this work in any way.