



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

The Wolf and The Seven Young Goslings

From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock



here was once an old goose who had seven young goslings, and loved them as only a mother can love her children. One day she was going into the wood to seek for provender, and before setting off she called all seven to her and said, “Dear children, I am obliged to go into the wood, so be on your guard against the wolf; for if he gets in here he will eat you up, feathers, skin, and all. The villain often disguises himself, but you can easily recognise him by his rough voice and black paws.”

The children answered, “Dear mother, we will take great care; you may go without any anxiety.” So the old lady was comforted, and set off cheerfully for the wood.

Before long, some one knocked at the door, and cried, “Open, open, my dear children; your mother is here, and has brought something for each of you.”

But the goslings soon perceived, by the rough voice, that it was the wolf. “We will not open,” said they; “you are not our mother, for she has a sweet and lovely voice; but your voice is rough—you are the wolf.”

Thereupon the wolf set off to a merchant and bought a large lump of chalk; he ate it, and it made his voice sweet. Back he came, knocked at the door, and cried, “Open, open, my dear children; your mother is here, and has brought something for each of you.”

But the wolf had laid his black paw on the window-sill, and when the children saw it, they cried, “We will not open; our mother has not black feet like you—you are the wolf.”

So the wolf ran off to the baker, and said, “I have hurt my foot, put some dough on it.” And when the baker had plastered it with dough, the wolf went to the miller and cried, “Strew some meal on my paws.” But the miller thought to himself, “The wolf wants to deceive some one,” and he hesitated to do it; till the wolf said, “If you don’t do it at once, I will eat you up.” So the miller was afraid and made his paws white. Such is the way of the world!

Now came the rogue back for the third time, knocked and said, “Open the door, dear children; your mother has come home, and has brought something for each of you out of the wood.”

The little goslings cried, “Show us your paws first, that we may see whether you are indeed our mother.” So he laid his paws on the window-sill, and when the goslings saw that they were white, they believed it was all right, and opened the door; and who should come in but the wolf!

They screamed out and tried to hide themselves; one jumped under the table, another into the bed, the third into the oven; the fourth ran into the kitchen, the fifth hopped into a chest, the sixth under the wash-tub, and the seventh got into the clock-case. But the wolf seized them, and stood on no ceremony with them; one after another he gobbled them all up, except the youngest, who being in the clock-case he couldn’t find. When the wolf had eaten his fill, he strolled forth, laid himself down in the green meadow under a tree, and went fast asleep.

Not long after, back came the old goose home from the wood; but what, alas! did she see? The house-door stood wide open; table, chairs, benches, were all overthrown; the wash-tub lay in the ashes; blankets and pillows were torn off the bed. She looked for her children, but nowhere could she find them; she called them each by name, but nobody answered. At last, when she came to the youngest, a little squeaking voice answered, "Dear mother, I am in the clock-case." She pulled him out, and he told her how the wolf had come and had eaten up all the others. You may think how she wept for her dear children.

At last, in her grief, she went out, and the youngest gosling ran beside her. And when she came to the meadow there lay the wolf under the tree, snoring till the boughs shook. She walked round and examined him on all sides, till she perceived that something was moving and kicking about inside him.

"Can it be," thought she, "that my poor children whom he has swallowed for his supper are yet alive?" So she sent the little gosling back to the house for scissors, needle, and thread, and began to slit up the monster's stomach. Scarcely had she given one snip, when out came the head of a gosling, and when she had cut a little further, the six jumped out one after another, not having taken the least hurt, because the greedy monster had swallowed them down whole. That was a joy! They embraced their mother tenderly, and skipped about as lively as a tailor at his wedding.

But the old goose said, "Now go and find me six large stones, which we will put inside the greedy beast while he is still asleep." So the goslings got the stones in all haste, and they put them inside the wolf; and the old goose sewed him up again in a great hurry, while he never once moved nor took any notice.

Now when the wolf at last woke up and got upon his legs, he found he was very thirsty, and wished to go to the spring to drink. But as soon as he began to move the stones began to shake and rattle inside him, till he cried,—

"What's this rumbling and tumbling,

What's this rattling like bones?

I thought I had eaten six little geese,

But they've turned out only stones."

And when he came to the spring and bent down his head to drink, the heavy stones overbalanced him, and in he went head over heels. Now when the seven goslings saw this, they came running up, crying loudly, "The wolf is dead, the wolf is dead!" and danced for joy all round the spring, and their mother with them.

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