

Andersen Hans Christian

Hans Andersen's Fairy Tales. Second Series



Ганс Андерсен

**Hans Andersen's Fairy
Tales. Second Series**

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Содержание

PREFACE	5
THE FLAX	6
THE DAISY	9
THE PEA BLOSSOM	11
THE STORKS	13
THE WILD SWANS	16
THE LAST DREAM OF THE OLD OAK	24
THE PORTUGUESE DUCK	27
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	30

Hans Christian Andersen

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PREFACE

THE present volume is the second of the selected stories from Hans Andersen. Together the books include what, out of a larger number, are the best for children's use. The story-telling activity of this inimitable genius covered a period of more than forty years. Besides these shorter juvenile tales, there are a few which deserve to survive. "The Ice Maiden" is a standard, if not a classic, and "The Sandhills of Jutland" was pronounced by Ruskin the most perfect story that he knew.

It adds a charm to the little stories of these two volumes to know that the genial author traveled widely for a man of his time and everywhere was urged to tell the tales himself. This he did with equal charm in the kitchens of the humble and in the courts and palaces of nobles.

As was said in the preface to the first volume, wherever there are children to read, the stories of Hans Christian Andersen will be read and loved.

THE FLAX

THE flax was in full bloom; it had pretty little blue flowers, as delicate as the wings of a moth. The sun shone on it and the showers watered it; and this was as good for the flax as it is for little children to be washed and then kissed by their mothers. They look much prettier for it, and so did the flax.

"People say that I look exceedingly well," said the flax, "and that I am so fine and long that I shall make a beautiful piece of linen. How fortunate I am! It makes me so happy to know that something can be made of me. How the sunshine cheers me, and how sweet and refreshing is the rain! My happiness overpowers me; no one in the world can feel happier than I."

"Ah, yes, no doubt," said the fern, "but you do not know the world yet as well as I do, for my sticks are knotty"; and then it sang quite mournfully:

"Snip, snap, snurre,
Basse lurre.
The song is ended."

"No, it is not ended," said the flax. "To-morrow the sun will shine or the rain descend. I feel that I am growing. I feel that I am in full blossom. I am the happiest of all creatures, for I may some day come to something."

Well, one day some people came, who took hold of the flax and pulled it up by the roots, which was very painful. Then it was laid in water, as if it were to be drowned, and after that placed near a fire, as if it were to be roasted. All this was very shocking.

"We cannot expect to be happy always," said the flax. "By experiencing evil as well as good we become wise." And certainly there was plenty of evil in store for the flax. It was steeped, and roasted, and broken, and combed; indeed, it scarcely knew what was done to it. At last it was put on the spinning wheel. "Whir, whir," went the wheel, so quickly that the flax could not collect its thoughts.

"Well, I have been very happy," it thought in the midst of its pain, "and must be contented with the past." And contented it remained, till it was put on the loom and became a beautiful piece of white linen. All the flax, even to the last stalk, was used in making this one piece.

"Well, this is quite wonderful," said the flax. "I could not have believed that I should be so favored by fortune. The fern was not wrong when it sang,

'Snip, snap, snurre,
Basse lurre.'

But the song is not ended yet, I am sure; it is only just beginning. How wonderful it is that, after all I have suffered, I am made something of at last! I am the luckiest person in the world – so strong and fine. And how white and long I am! This is far better than being a mere plant and bearing flowers. Then I had no attention, nor any water unless it rained; now I am watched and cared for. Every morning the maid turns me over, and I have a shower bath from the watering-pot every evening. Yes, and the clergyman's wife noticed me and said I was the best piece of linen in the whole parish. I cannot be happier than I am now."

After some time the linen was taken into the house, and there cut with the scissors and torn into pieces and then pricked with needles. This certainly was not pleasant, but at last it was made into twelve garments of the kind that everybody wears. "See now, then," said the flax, "I have become something of importance. This was my destiny; it is quite a blessing. Now I shall be of some use in

the world, as every one ought to be; it is the only way to be happy. I am now divided into twelve pieces, and yet the whole dozen is all one and the same. It is most extraordinary good fortune."

Years passed away, and at last the linen was so worn it could scarcely hold together. "It must end very soon," said the pieces to each other. "We would gladly have held together a little longer, but it is useless to expect impossibilities." And at length they fell into rags and tatters and thought it was all over with them, for they were torn to shreds and steeped in water and made into a pulp and dried, and they knew not what besides, till all at once they found themselves beautiful white paper. "Well, now, this is a surprise – a glorious surprise too," said the paper. "Now I am finer than ever, and who can tell what fine things I may have written upon me? This is wonderful luck!" And so it was, for the most beautiful stories and poetry were written upon it, and only once was there a blot, which was remarkable good fortune. Then people heard the stories and poetry read, and it made them wiser and better; for all that was written had a good and sensible meaning, and a great blessing was contained in it.

"I never imagined anything like this when I was only a little blue flower growing in the fields," said the paper. "How could I know that I should ever be the means of bringing knowledge and joy to men? I cannot understand it myself, and yet it is really so. Heaven knows that I have done nothing myself but what I was obliged to do with my weak powers for my own preservation; and yet I have been promoted from one joy and honor to another. Each time I think that the song is ended, and then something higher and better begins for me. I suppose now I shall be sent out to journey about the world, so that people may read me. It cannot be otherwise, for I have more splendid thoughts written upon me than I had pretty flowers in olden times. I am happier than ever."

But the paper did not go on its travels. It was sent to the printer, and all the words written upon it were set up in type to make a book, – or rather many hundreds of books, – for many more persons could derive pleasure and profit from a printed book than from the written paper; and if the paper had been sent about the world, it would have been worn out before it had half finished its journey.

"Yes, this is certainly the wisest plan," said the written paper; "I really did not think of this. I shall remain at home and be held in honor like some old grandfather, as I really am to all these new books. They will do some good. I could not have wandered about as they can, yet he who wrote all this has looked at me as every word flowed from his pen upon my surface. I am the most honored of all."

Then the paper was tied in a bundle with other papers and thrown into a tub that stood in the washhouse.

"After work, it is well to rest," said the paper, "and a very good opportunity to collect one's thoughts. Now I am able, for the first time, to learn what is in me; and to know one's self is true progress. What will be done with me now, I wonder? No doubt I shall still go forward. I have always progressed hitherto, I know quite well."

Now it happened one day that all the paper in the tub was taken out and laid on the hearth to be burned. People said it could not be sold at the shop, to wrap up butter and sugar, because it had been written upon. The children in the house stood round the hearth to watch the blaze, for paper always flamed up so prettily, and afterwards, among the ashes, there were so many red sparks to be seen running one after the other, here and there, as quick as the wind. They called it seeing the children come out of school, and the last spark, they said, was the schoolmaster. They would often think the last spark had come, and one would cry, "There goes the schoolmaster," but the next moment another spark would appear, bright and beautiful. How they wanted to know where all the sparks went to! Perhaps they will find out some day.

The whole bundle of paper had been placed on the fire and was soon burning. "Ugh!" cried the paper as it burst into a bright flame; "ugh!" It was certainly not very pleasant to be burned. But when the whole was wrapped in flames, the sparks mounted up into the air, higher than the flax had ever been able to raise its little blue flowers, and they glistened as the white linen never could

have glistened. All the written letters became quite red in a moment, and all the words and thoughts turned to fire.

"Now I am mounting straight up to the sun," said a voice in the flames; and it was as if a thousand voices echoed the words as the flames darted up through the chimney and went out at the top. Then a number of tiny beings, as many as the flowers on the flax had been, and invisible to mortal eyes, floated above the children. They were even lighter and more delicate than the blue flowers from which they were born; and as the flames died out and nothing remained of the paper but black ashes, these little beings danced upon it, and wherever they touched it, bright red sparks appeared.

"The children are all out of school, and the schoolmaster was the last of all," said the children. It was good fun, and they sang over the dead ashes:

"Snip, snap, snurre,
Basse lurre.
The song is ended."

But the little invisible beings said, "The song is never ended; the most beautiful is yet to come."

But the children could neither hear nor understand this; nor should they, for children must not know everything.

THE DAISY

NOW listen. Out in the country, close by the roadside, stood a pleasant house; you have seen one like it, no doubt, very often. In front lay a little fenced-in garden, full of blooming flowers. Near the hedge, in the soft green grass, grew a little daisy. The sun shone as brightly and warmly upon her as upon the large and beautiful garden flowers, so the daisy grew from hour to hour. Every morning she unfolded her little white petals, like shining rays round the little golden sun in the center of the flower. She never seemed to think that she was unseen down in the grass or that she was only a poor, insignificant flower. She felt too happy to care for that. Merrily she turned toward the warm sun, looked up to the blue sky, and listened to the lark singing high in the air.

One day the little flower was as joyful as if it had been a great holiday, although it was only Monday. All the children were at school, and while they sat on their benches learning their lessons, she, on her little stem, learned also from the warm sun and from everything around her how good God is, and it made her happy to hear the lark expressing in his song her own glad feelings. The daisy admired the happy bird who could warble so sweetly and fly so high, and she was not at all sorrowful because she could not do the same.

"I can see and hear," thought she; "the sun shines upon me, and the wind kisses me; what else do I need to make me happy?"

Within the garden grew a number of aristocratic flowers; the less scent they had the more they flaunted. The peonies considered it a grand thing to be so large, and puffed themselves out to be larger than the roses. The tulips knew that they were marked with beautiful colors, and held themselves bolt upright so that they might be seen more plainly.

They did not notice the little daisy outside, but she looked at them and thought: "How rich and beautiful they are! No wonder the pretty bird flies down to visit them. How glad I am that I grow so near them, that I may admire their beauty!"

Just at this moment the lark flew down, crying "Tweet," but he did not go to the tall peonies and tulips; he hopped into the grass near the lowly daisy. She trembled for joy and hardly knew what to think. The little bird hopped round the daisy, singing, "Oh, what sweet, soft grass, and what a lovely little flower, with gold in its heart and silver on its dress!" For the yellow center in the daisy looked like gold, and the leaves around were glittering white, like silver.

How happy the little daisy felt, no one can describe. The bird kissed her with his beak, sang to her, and then flew up again into the blue air above. It was at least a quarter of an hour before the daisy could recover herself. Half ashamed, yet happy in herself, she glanced at the other flowers; they must have seen the honor she had received, and would understand her delight and pleasure.

But the tulips looked prouder than ever; indeed, they were evidently quite vexed about it. The peonies were disgusted, and could they have spoken, the poor little daisy would no doubt have received a good scolding. She could see they were all out of temper, and it made her very sorry.

At this moment there came into the garden a girl with a large, glittering knife in her hand. She went straight to the tulips and cut off several of them.

"O dear," sighed the daisy, "how shocking! It is all over with them now." The girl carried the tulips away, and the daisy felt very glad to grow outside in the grass and to be only a poor little flower. When the sun set, she folded up her leaves and went to sleep. She dreamed the whole night long of the warm sun and the pretty little bird.

The next morning, when she joyfully stretched out her white leaves once more to the warm air and the light, she recognized the voice of the bird, but his song sounded mournful and sad.

Alas! he had good reason to be sad: he had been caught and made a prisoner in a cage that hung close by the open window. He sang of the happy time when he could fly in the air, joyous and

free; of the young green corn in the fields, from which he would spring higher and higher to sing his glorious song – but now he was a prisoner in a cage.

The little daisy wished very much to help him. But what could she do? In her anxiety she forgot all the beautiful things around her, the warm sunshine, and her own pretty, shining, white leaves. Alas! she could think of nothing but the captive bird and her own inability to help him.

Two boys came out of the garden; one of them carried a sharp knife in his hand, like the one with which the girl had cut the tulips. They went straight to the little daisy, who could not think what they were going to do.

"We can cut out a nice piece of turf for the lark here," said one of the boys; and he began to cut a square piece round the daisy, so that she stood just in the center.

"Pull up the flower," said the other boy; and the daisy trembled with fear, for to pluck her up would destroy her life and she wished so much to live and to be taken to the captive lark in his cage.

"No, let it stay where it is," said the boy, "it looks so pretty." So the daisy remained, and was put with the turf in the lark's cage. The poor bird was complaining loudly about his lost freedom, beating his wings against the iron bars of his prison. The little daisy could make no sign and utter no word to console him, as she would gladly have done. The whole morning passed in this manner.

"There is no water here," said the captive lark; "they have all gone out and have forgotten to give me a drop to drink. My throat is hot and dry; I feel as if I had fire and ice within me, and the air is so heavy. Alas! I must die. I must bid farewell to the warm sunshine, the fresh green, and all the beautiful things which God has created." And then he thrust his beak into the cool turf to refresh himself a little with the fresh grass, and, as he did so, his eye fell upon the daisy. The bird nodded to her and kissed her with his beak and said: "You also will wither here, you poor little flower! They have given you to me, with the little patch of green grass on which you grow, in exchange for the whole world which was mine out there. Each little blade of grass is to me as a great tree, and each of your white leaves a flower. Alas! you only show me how much I have lost."

"Oh, if I could only comfort him!" thought the daisy, but she could not move a leaf. The perfume from her leaves was stronger than is usual in these flowers, and the bird noticed it, and though he was fainting with thirst, and in his pain pulled up the green blades of grass, he did not touch the flower.

The evening came, and yet no one had come to bring the bird a drop of water. Then he stretched out his pretty wings and shook convulsively; he could only sing "Tweet, tweet," in a weak, mournful tone. His little head bent down toward the flower; the bird's heart was broken with want and pining. Then the flower could not fold her leaves as she had done the evening before when she went to sleep, but, sick and sorrowful, drooped toward the earth.

Not till morning did the boys come, and when they found the bird dead, they wept many and bitter tears. They dug a pretty grave for him and adorned it with leaves of flowers. The bird's lifeless body was placed in a smart red box and was buried with great honor.

Poor bird! while he was alive and could sing, they forgot him and allowed him to sit in his cage and suffer want, but now that he was dead, they mourned for him with many tears and buried him in royal state.

But the turf with the daisy on it was thrown out into the dusty road. No one thought of the little flower that had felt more for the poor bird than had any one else and that would have been so glad to help and comfort him if she had been able.

THE PEA BLOSSOM

THERE were once five peas in one shell; they were green, and the shell was green, and so they believed that the whole world must be green also, which was a very natural conclusion.

The shell grew, and the peas grew; and as they grew they arranged themselves all in a row. The sun shone without and warmed the shell, and the rain made it clear and transparent; it looked mild and agreeable in broad daylight and dark at night, just as it should. And the peas, as they sat there, grew bigger and bigger, and more thoughtful as they mused, for they felt there must be something for them to do.

"Are we to sit here forever?" asked one. "Shall we not become hard, waiting here so long? It seems to me there must be something outside; I feel sure of it."

Weeks passed by; the peas became yellow, and the shell became yellow.

"All the world is turning yellow, I suppose," said they – and perhaps they were right.

Suddenly they felt a pull at the shell. It was torn off and held in human hands; then it was slipped into the pocket of a jacket, together with other full pods.

"Now we shall soon be let out," said one, and that was just what they all wanted.

"I should like to know which of us will travel farthest," said the smallest of the five; "and we shall soon see."

"What is to happen will happen," said the largest pea.

"Crack!" went the shell, and the five peas rolled out into the bright sunshine. There they lay in a child's hand. A little boy was holding them tightly. He said they were fine peas for his pea-shooter, and immediately he put one in and shot it out.

"Now I am flying out into the wide world," said the pea. "Catch me if you can." And he was gone in a moment.

"I intend to fly straight to the sun," said the second. "That is a shell that will suit me exactly, for it lets itself be seen." And away he went.

"We will go to sleep wherever we find ourselves," said the next two; "we shall still be rolling onwards." And they did fall to the floor and roll about, but they got into the pea-shooter for all that. "We will go farthest of any," said they.

"What is to happen will happen," exclaimed the last one, as he was shot out of the pea-shooter. Up he flew against an old board under a garret window and fell into a little crevice which was almost filled with moss and soft earth. The moss closed itself about him, and there he lay – a captive indeed, but not unnoticed by God.

"What is to happen will happen," said he to himself.

Within the little garret lived a poor woman, who went out to clean stoves, chop wood into small pieces, and do other hard work, for she was both strong and industrious. Yet she remained always poor, and at home in the garret lay her only daughter, not quite grown up and very delicate and weak. For a whole year she had kept her bed, and it seemed as if she could neither die nor get well.

"She is going to her little sister," said the woman. "I had only the two children, and it was not an easy thing to support them; but the good God provided for one of them by taking her home to himself. The other was left to me, but I suppose they are not to be separated, and my sick girl will soon go to her sister in heaven."

All day long the sick girl lay quietly and patiently, while her mother went out to earn money.

Spring came, and early one morning the sun shone through the little window and threw his rays mildly and pleasantly over the floor of the room. Just as the mother was going to her work, the sick girl fixed her gaze on the lowest pane of the window. "Mother," she exclaimed, "what can that little green thing be that peeps in at the window? It is moving in the wind."

The mother stepped to the window and half opened it. "Oh!" she said, "there is actually a little pea that has taken root and is putting out its green leaves. How could it have got into this crack? Well, now, here is a little garden for you to amuse yourself with." So the bed of the sick girl was drawn nearer to the window, that she might see the budding plant; and the mother went forth to her work.

"Mother, I believe I shall get well," said the sick child in the evening. "The sun has shone in here so bright and warm to-day, and the little pea is growing so fast, that I feel better, too, and think I shall get up and go out into the warm sunshine again."

"God grant it!" said the mother, but she did not believe it would be so. She took a little stick and propped up the green plant which had given her daughter such pleasure, so that it might not be broken by the winds. She tied the piece of string to the window-sill and to the upper part of the frame, so that the pea tendrils might have something to twine round. And the plant shot up so fast that one could almost see it grow from day to day.

"A flower is really coming," said the mother one morning. At last she was beginning to let herself hope that her little sick daughter might indeed recover. She remembered that for some time the child had spoken more cheerfully, and that during the last few days she had raised herself in bed in the morning to look with sparkling eyes at her little garden which contained but a single pea plant.

A week later the invalid sat up by the open window a whole hour, feeling quite happy in the warm sunshine, while outside grew the little plant, and on it a pink pea blossom in full bloom. The little maiden bent down and gently kissed the delicate leaves. This day was like a festival to her.

"Our heavenly Father himself has planted that pea and made it grow and flourish, to bring joy to you and hope to me, my blessed child," said the happy mother, and she smiled at the flower as if it had been an angel from God.

But what became of the other peas? Why, the one who flew out into the wide world and said, "Catch me if you can," fell into a gutter on the roof of a house and ended his travels in the crop of a pigeon. The two lazy ones were carried quite as far and were of some use, for they also were eaten by pigeons; but the fourth, who wanted to reach the sun, fell into a sink and lay there in the dirty water for days and weeks, till he had swelled to a great size.

"I am getting beautifully fat," said the pea; "I expect I shall burst at last; no pea could do more than that, I think. I am the most remarkable of all the five that were in the shell." And the sink agreed with the pea.

But the young girl, with sparkling eyes and the rosy hue of health upon her cheeks, stood at the open garret window and, folding her thin hands over the pea blossom, thanked God for what He had done.

THE STORKS

ON the last house in the village there lay a stork's nest. The mother stork sat in it with her four little ones, who were stretching out their heads with their pointed black bills that had not yet turned red. At a little distance, on the top of the roof, stood the father stork, bolt upright and as stiff as could be. That he might not appear quite idle while standing sentry, he had drawn one leg up under him, as is the manner of storks. One might have taken him to be carved in marble, so still did he stand.

"It must look very grand for my wife to have a sentinel to guard her nest," he thought. "They can't know that I am her husband and will, of course, conclude that I am commanded to stand here by her nest. It looks aristocratic!"

Below, in the street, a crowd of children were playing. When they chanced to catch sight of the storks, one of the boldest of the boys began to sing the old song about the stork. The others soon joined him, but each sang the words that he happened to have heard. This is one of the ways:

"Stork, stork, fly away;
Stand not on one leg to-day.
Thy dear wife sits in the nest,
To lull the little ones to rest.

"There's a halter for one,
There's a stake for another,
For the third there's a gun,
And a spit for his brother!"

"Only listen," said the young storks, "to what the boys are singing. Do you hear them say we're to be hanged and shot?"

"Don't listen to what they say; if you don't mind, it won't hurt you," said the mother.

But the boys went on singing, and pointed mockingly at the sentinel stork. Only one boy, whom they called Peter, said it was a shame to make game of animals, and he would not join in the singing at all.

The mother stork tried to comfort her young ones. "Don't mind them," she said; "see how quiet your father stands on one leg there."

"But we are afraid," said the little ones, drawing back their beaks into the nest.

The children assembled again on the next day, and no sooner did they see the storks than they again began their song:

"The first will be hanged,
The second be hit."

"Tell us, are we to be hanged and burned?" asked the young storks.

"No, no; certainly not," replied the mother. "You are to learn to fly, and then we shall pay a visit to the frogs. They will bow to us in the water and sing 'Croak! croak!' and we shall eat them up, and that will be a great treat."

"And then what?" questioned the young storks.

"Oh, then all the storks in the land will assemble, and the autumn sports will begin; only then one must be able to fly well, for that is very important. Whoever does not fly as he should will be pierced to death by the general's beak, so mind that you learn well, when the drill begins."

"Yes, but then, after that, we shall be killed, as the boys say. Hark! they are singing it again."

"Attend to me and not to them," said the mother stork. "After the great review we shall fly away to warm countries, far from here, over hills and forests. To Egypt we shall fly, where are the three-cornered houses of stone, one point of which reaches to the clouds; they are called pyramids and are older than a stork can imagine. In that same land there is a river which overflows its banks and turns the whole country into mire. We shall go into the mire and eat frogs."

"Oh! oh!" exclaimed all the youngsters.

"Yes, it is indeed a delightful place. We need do nothing all day long but eat; and while we are feasting there so comfortably, in this country there is not a green leaf left on the trees. It is so cold here that the very clouds freeze in lumps or fall down in little white rags." It was hail and snow that she meant, but she did not know how to say it better.

"And will the naughty boys freeze in lumps?" asked the young storks.

"No, they will not freeze in lumps, but they will come near it, and they will sit moping and cowering in gloomy rooms while you are flying about in foreign lands, amid bright flowers and warm sunshine."

Some time passed, and the nestlings had grown so large and strong that they could stand upright in the nest and look all about them. Every day the father stork came with delicious frogs, nice little snakes, and other such dainties that storks delight in. How funny it was to see the clever feats he performed to amuse them! He would lay his head right round upon his tail; and sometimes he would clatter with his beak, as if it were a little rattle; or he would tell them stories, all relating to swamps and fens.

"Come, children," said the mother stork one day, "now you must learn to fly." And all the four young storks had to go out on the ridge of the roof. How they did totter and stagger about! They tried to balance themselves with their wings, but came very near falling to the ground.

"Look at me!" said the mother. "This is the way to hold your head. And thus you must place your feet. Left! right! left! right! that's what will help you on in the world."

Then she flew a little way, and the young ones took a clumsy little leap. Bump! plump! down they fell, for their bodies were still too heavy for them.

"I will not fly," said one of the young storks, as he crept back to the nest. "I don't care about going to warm countries."

"Do you want to stay here and freeze when the winter comes? Will you wait till the boys come to hang, to burn, or to roast you? Well, then, I'll call them."

"Oh, no!" cried the timid stork, hopping back to the roof with the rest.

By the third day they actually began to fly a little. Then they had no doubt that they could soar or hover in the air, upborne by their wings. And this they attempted to do, but down they fell, flapping their wings as fast as they could.

Again the boys came to the street, singing their song, "Storks, storks, fly home and rest."

"Shall we fly down and peck them?" asked the young ones.

"No, leave them alone. Attend to me; that's far more important. One – two – three! now we fly round to the right. One – two – three! now to the left, round the chimney. There! that was very good. That last flap with your wings and the kick with your feet were so graceful and proper that to-morrow you shall fly with me to the marsh. Several of the nicest stork families will be there with their children. Let me see that mine are the best bred of all. Carry your heads high and mind you strut about proudly, for that looks well and helps to make one respected."

"But shall we not take revenge upon the naughty boys?" asked the young storks.

"No, no; let them scream away, as much as they please. You are to fly up to the clouds and away to the land of the pyramids, while they are freezing and can neither see a green leaf nor taste a sweet apple."

"But we will revenge ourselves," they whispered one to another. And then the training began again.

Among all the children down in the street the one that seemed most bent upon singing the song that made game of the storks was the boy who had begun it, and he was a little fellow hardly more than six years old. The young storks, to be sure, thought he was at least a hundred, for he was much bigger than their parents, and, besides, what did they know about the ages of either children or grown men? Their whole vengeance was to be aimed at this one boy. It was always he who began the song and persisted in mocking them. The young storks were very angry, and as they grew larger they also grew less patient under insult, and their mother was at last obliged to promise them that they might be revenged – but not until the day of their departure.

"We must first see how you carry yourselves at the great review. If you do so badly that the general runs his beak through you, then the boys will be in the right – at least in one way. We must wait and see!"

"Yes, you shall see!" cried all the young storks; and they took the greatest pains, practicing every day, until they flew so evenly and so lightly that it was a pleasure to see them.

The autumn now set in; all the storks began to assemble, in order to start for the warm countries and leave winter behind them. And such exercises as there were! Young fledglings were set to fly over forests and villages, to see if they were equal to the long journey that was before them. So well did our young storks acquit themselves, that, as a proof of the satisfaction they had given, the mark they got was, "Remarkably well," with a present of a frog and a snake, which they lost no time in eating.

"Now," said they, "we will be revenged."

"Yes, certainly," said their mother; "and I have thought of a way that will surely be the fairest. I know a pond where all the little human children lie till the stork comes to take them to their parents. There lie the pretty little babies, dreaming more sweetly than they ever dream afterwards. All the parents are wishing for one of these little ones, and the children all want a sister or a brother. Now we'll fly to the pond and bring back a baby for every child who did not sing the naughty song that made game of the storks."

"But the very naughty boy who was the first to begin the song," cried the young storks, "what shall we do with him?"

"There is a little dead child in the pond – one that has dreamed itself to death. We will bring that for him. Then he will cry because we have brought a little dead brother to him.

"But that good boy, – you have not forgotten him! – the one who said it was a shame to mock at the animals; for him we will bring both a brother and a sister. And because his name is Peter, all of you shall be called Peter, too."

All was done as the mother had said; the storks were named Peter, and so they are called to this day.

THE WILD SWANS

FAR away, in the land to which the swallows fly when it is winter, dwelt a king who had eleven sons, and one daughter, named Eliza.

The eleven brothers were princes, and each went to school with a star on his breast and a sword by his side. They wrote with diamond pencils on golden slates and learned their lessons so quickly and read so easily that every one knew they were princes. Their sister Eliza sat on a little stool of plate-glass and had a book full of pictures, which had cost as much as half a kingdom.

Happy, indeed, were these children; but they were not long to remain so, for their father, the king, married a queen who did not love the children, and who proved to be a wicked sorceress.

The queen began to show her unkindness the very first day. While the great festivities were taking place in the palace, the children played at receiving company; but the queen, instead of sending them the cakes and apples that were left from the feast, as was customary, gave them some sand in a teacup and told them to pretend it was something good. The next week she sent the little Eliza into the country to a peasant and his wife. Then she told the king so many untrue things about the young princes that he gave himself no more trouble about them.

"Go out into the world and look after yourselves," said the queen. "Fly like great birds without a voice." But she could not make it so bad for them as she would have liked, for they were turned into eleven beautiful wild swans.

With a strange cry, they flew through the windows of the palace, over the park, to the forest beyond. It was yet early morning when they passed the peasant's cottage where their sister lay asleep in her room. They hovered over the roof, twisting their long necks and flapping their wings, but no one heard them or saw them, so they at last flew away, high up in the clouds, and over the wide world they sped till they came to a thick, dark wood, which stretched far away to the seashore.

Poor little Eliza was alone in the peasant's room playing with a green leaf, for she had no other playthings. She pierced a hole in the leaf, and when she looked through it at the sun she seemed to see her brothers' clear eyes, and when the warm sun shone on her cheeks she thought of all the kisses they had given her.

One day passed just like another. Sometimes the winds rustled through the leaves of the rosebush and whispered to the roses, "Who can be more beautiful than you?" And the roses would shake their heads and say, "Eliza is." And when the old woman sat at the cottage door on Sunday and read her hymn book, the wind would flutter the leaves and say to the book, "Who can be more pious than you?" And then the hymn book would answer, "Eliza." And the roses and the hymn book told the truth.

When she was fifteen she returned home, but because she was so beautiful the witch-queen became full of spite and hatred toward her. Willingly would she have turned her into a swan like her brothers, but she did not dare to do so for fear of the king.

Early one morning the queen went into the bathroom; it was built of marble and had soft cushions trimmed with the most beautiful tapestry. She took three toads with her, and kissed them, saying to the first, "When Eliza comes to bathe seat yourself upon her head, that she may become as stupid as you are." To the second toad she said, "Place yourself on her forehead, that she may become as ugly as you are, and that her friends may not know her." "Rest on her heart," she whispered to the third; "then she will have evil inclinations and suffer because of them." So she put the toads into the clear water, which at once turned green. She next called Eliza and helped her undress and get into the bath.

As Eliza dipped her head under the water one of the toads sat on her hair, a second on her forehead, and a third on her breast. But she did not seem to notice them, and when she rose from the water there were three red poppies floating upon it. Had not the creatures been venomous or had they

not been kissed by the witch, they would have become red roses. At all events they became flowers, because they had rested on Eliza's head and on her heart. She was too good and too innocent for sorcery to have any power over her.

When the wicked queen saw this, she rubbed Eliza's face with walnut juice, so that she was quite brown; then she tangled her beautiful hair and smeared it with disgusting ointment until it was quite impossible to recognize her.

The king was shocked, and declared she was not his daughter. No one but the watchdog and the swallows knew her, and they were only poor animals and could say nothing. Then poor Eliza wept and thought of her eleven brothers who were far away. Sorrowfully she stole from the palace and walked the whole day over fields and moors, till she came to the great forest. She knew not in what direction to go, but she was so unhappy and longed so for her brothers, who, like herself, had been driven out into the world, that she was determined to seek them.

She had been in the wood only a short time when night came on and she quite lost the path; so she laid herself down on the soft moss, offered up her evening prayer, and leaned her head against the stump of a tree. All nature was silent, and the soft, mild air fanned her forehead. The light of hundreds of glowworms shone amidst the grass and the moss like green fire, and if she touched a twig with her hand, ever so lightly, the brilliant insects fell down around her like shooting stars.

All night long she dreamed of her brothers. She thought they were all children again, playing together. She saw them writing with their diamond pencils on golden slates, while she looked at the beautiful picture book which had cost half a kingdom. They were not writing lines and letters, as they used to do, but descriptions of the noble deeds they had performed and of all that they had discovered and seen. In the picture book, too, everything was living. The birds sang, and the people came out of the book and spoke to Eliza and her brothers; but as the leaves were turned over they darted back again to their places, that all might be in order.

When she awoke, the sun was high in the heavens. She could not see it, for the lofty trees spread their branches thickly overhead, but its gleams here and there shone through the leaves like a gauzy golden mist. There was a sweet fragrance from the fresh verdure, and the birds came near and almost perched on her shoulders. She heard water rippling from a number of springs, all flowing into a lake with golden sands. Bushes grew thickly round the lake, and at one spot, where an opening had been made by a deer, Eliza went down to the water.

The lake was so clear that had not the wind rustled the branches of the trees and the bushes so that they moved, they would have seemed painted in the depths of the lake; for every leaf, whether in the shade or in the sunshine, was reflected in the water.

When Eliza saw her own face she was quite terrified at finding it so brown and ugly, but after she had wet her little hand and rubbed her eyes and forehead, the white skin gleamed forth once more; and when she had undressed and dipped herself in the fresh water, a more beautiful king's daughter could not have been found anywhere in the wide world.

As soon as she had dressed herself again and braided her long hair, she went to the bubbling spring and drank some water out of the hollow of her hand. Then she wandered far into the forest, not knowing whither she went. She thought of her brothers and of her father and mother and felt sure that God would not forsake her. It is God who makes the wild apples grow in the wood to satisfy the hungry, and He now showed her one of these trees, which was so loaded with fruit that the boughs bent beneath the weight. Here she ate her noonday meal, and then placing props under the boughs, she went into the gloomiest depths of the forest.

It was so still that she could hear the sound of her own footsteps, as well as the rustling of every withered leaf which she crushed under her feet. Not a bird was to be seen, not a sunbeam could penetrate the large, dark boughs of the trees. The lofty trunks stood so close together that when she looked before her it seemed as if she were enclosed within trelliswork. Here was such solitude as she had never known before!

The night was very dark. Not a glowworm was glittering in the moss. Sorrowfully Eliza laid herself down to sleep. After a while it seemed to her as if the branches of the trees parted over her head and the mild eyes of angels looked down upon her from heaven.

In the morning, when she awoke, she knew not whether this had really been so or whether she had dreamed it. She continued her wandering, but she had not gone far when she met an old woman who had berries in her basket and who gave her a few to eat. Eliza asked her if she had not seen eleven princes riding through the forest.

"No," replied the old woman, "but I saw yesterday eleven swans with gold crowns on their heads, swimming in the river close by." Then she led Eliza a little distance to a sloping bank, at the foot of which ran a little river. The trees on its banks stretched their long leafy branches across the water toward each other, and where they did not meet naturally the roots had torn themselves away from the ground, so that the branches might mingle their foliage as they hung over the water.

Eliza bade the old woman farewell and walked by the flowing river till she reached the shore of the open sea. And there, before her eyes, lay the glorious ocean, but not a sail appeared on its surface; not even a boat could be seen. How was she to go farther? She noticed how the countless pebbles on the shore had been smoothed and rounded by the action of the water. Glass, iron, stones, everything that lay there mingled together, had been shaped by the same power until they were as smooth as her own delicate hand.

"The water rolls on without weariness," she said, "till all that is hard becomes smooth; so will I be unwearied in my task. Thanks for your lesson, bright rolling waves; my heart tells me you will one day lead me to my dear brothers."

On the foam-covered seaweeds lay eleven white swan feathers, which she gathered and carried with her. Drops of water lay upon them; whether they were dewdrops or tears no one could say. It was lonely on the seashore, but she did not know it, for the ever-moving sea showed more changes in a few hours than the most varying lake could produce in a whole year. When a black, heavy cloud arose, it was as if the sea said, "I can look dark and angry too"; and then the wind blew, and the waves turned to white foam as they rolled. When the wind slept and the clouds glowed with the red sunset, the sea looked like a rose leaf. Sometimes it became green and sometimes white. But, however quietly it lay, the waves were always restless on the shore and rose and fell like the breast of a sleeping child.

When the sun was about to set, Eliza saw eleven white swans, with golden crowns on their heads, flying toward the land, one behind the other, like a long white ribbon. She went down the slope from the shore and hid herself behind the bushes. The swans alighted quite close to her, flapping their great white wings. As soon as the sun had disappeared under the water, the feathers of the swans fell off and eleven beautiful princes, Eliza's brothers, stood near her.

She uttered a loud cry, for, although they were very much changed, she knew them immediately. She sprang into their arms and called them each by name. Very happy the princes were to see their little sister again; they knew her, although she had grown so tall and beautiful. They laughed and wept and told each other how cruelly they had been treated by their stepmother.

"We brothers," said the eldest, "fly about as wild swans while the sun is in the sky, but as soon as it sinks behind the hills we recover our human shape. Therefore we must always be near a resting place before sunset; for if we were flying toward the clouds when we recovered our human form, we should sink deep into the sea.

"We do not dwell here, but in a land just as fair that lies far across the ocean; the way is long, and there is no island upon which we can pass the night – nothing but a little rock rising out of the sea, upon which, even crowded together, we can scarcely stand with safety. If the sea is rough, the foam dashes over us; yet we thank God for this rock. We have passed whole nights upon it, or we should never have reached our beloved fatherland, for our flight across the sea occupies two of the longest days in the year.

"We have permission to visit our home once every year and to remain eleven days. Then we fly across the forest to look once more at the palace where our father dwells and where we were born, and at the church beneath whose shade our mother lies buried. The very trees and bushes here seem related to us. The wild horses leap over the plains as we have seen them in our childhood. The charcoal burners sing the old songs to which we have danced as children. This is our fatherland, to which we are drawn by loving ties; and here we have found you, our dear little sister. Two days longer we can remain here, and then we must fly away to a beautiful land which is not our home. How can we take you with us? We have neither ship nor boat."

"How can I break this spell?" asked the sister. And they talked about it nearly the whole night, slumbering only a few hours.

Eliza was awakened by the rustling of the wings of swans soaring above her. Her brothers were again changed to swans. They flew in circles, wider and wider, till they were far away; but one of them, the youngest, remained behind and laid his head in his sister's lap, while she stroked his wings. They remained together the whole day.

Towards evening the rest came back, and as the sun went down they resumed their natural forms. "To-morrow," said one, "we shall fly away, not to return again till a whole year has passed. But we cannot leave you here. Have you courage to go with us? My arm is strong enough to carry you through the wood, and will not all our wings be strong enough to bear you over the sea?"

"Yes, take me with you," said Eliza. They spent the whole night in weaving a large, strong net of the pliant willow and rushes. On this Eliza laid herself down to sleep, and when the sun rose and her brothers again became wild swans, they took up the net with their beaks, and flew up to the clouds with their dear sister, who still slept. When the sunbeams fell on her face, one of the swans soared over her head so that his broad wings might shade her.

They were far from the land when Eliza awoke. She thought she must still be dreaming, it seemed so strange to feel herself being carried high in the air over the sea. By her side lay a branch full of beautiful ripe berries and a bundle of sweet-tasting roots; the youngest of her brothers had gathered them and placed them there. She smiled her thanks to him; she knew it was the same one that was hovering over her to shade her with his wings. They were now so high that a large ship beneath them looked like a white sea gull skimming the waves. A great cloud floating behind them appeared like a vast mountain, and upon it Eliza saw her own shadow and those of the eleven swans, like gigantic flying things. Altogether it formed a more beautiful picture than she had ever before seen; but as the sun rose higher and the clouds were left behind, the picture vanished.

Onward the whole day they flew through the air like winged arrows, yet more slowly than usual, for they had their sister to carry. The weather grew threatening, and Eliza watched the sinking sun with great anxiety, for the little rock in the ocean was not yet in sight. It seemed to her as if the swans were exerting themselves to the utmost. Alas! she was the cause of their not advancing more quickly. When the sun set they would change to men, fall into the sea, and be drowned.

Then she offered a prayer from her inmost heart, but still no rock appeared. Dark clouds came nearer, the gusts of wind told of the coming storm, while from a thick, heavy mass of clouds the lightning burst forth, flash after flash. The sun had reached the edge of the sea, when the swans darted down so swiftly that Eliza's heart trembled; she believed they were falling, but they again soared onward.

Presently, and by this time the sun was half hidden by the waves, she caught sight of the rock just below them. It did not look larger than a seal's head thrust out of the water. The sun sank so rapidly that at the moment their feet touched the rock it shone only like a star, and at last disappeared like the dying spark in a piece of burnt paper. Her brothers stood close around her with arms linked together, for there was not the smallest space to spare. The sea dashed against the rock and covered them with spray. The heavens were lighted up with continual flashes, and thunder rolled from the clouds. But the sister and brothers stood holding each other's hands, and singing hymns.

In the early dawn the air became calm and still, and at sunrise the swans flew away from the rock, bearing their sister with them. The sea was still rough, and from their great height the white foam on the dark-green waves looked like millions of swans swimming on the water. As the sun rose higher, Eliza saw before her, floating in the air, a range of mountains with shining masses of ice on their summits. In the center rose a castle that seemed a mile long, with rows of columns rising one above another, while around it palm trees waved and flowers as large as mill wheels bloomed. She asked if this was the land to which they were hastening. The swans shook their heads, for what she beheld were the beautiful, ever-changing cloud-palaces of the Fata Morgana, into which no mortal can enter.

Eliza was still gazing at the scene, when mountains, forests, and castles melted away, and twenty stately churches rose in their stead, with high towers and pointed Gothic windows. She even fancied she could hear the tones of the organ, but it was the music of the murmuring sea. As they drew nearer to the churches, these too were changed and became a fleet of ships, which seemed to be sailing beneath her; but when she looked again she saw only a sea mist gliding over the ocean.

One scene melted into another, until at last she saw the real land to which they were bound, with its blue mountains, its cedar forests, and its cities and palaces. Long before the sun went down she was sitting on a rock in front of a large cave, the floor of which was overgrown with delicate green creeping plants, like an embroidered carpet.

"Now we shall expect to hear what you dream of to-night," said the youngest brother, as he showed his sister her bedroom.

"Heaven grant that I may dream how to release you!" she replied. And this thought took such hold upon her mind that she prayed earnestly to God for help, and even in her sleep she continued to pray. Then it seemed to her that she was flying high in the air toward the cloudy palace of the Fata Morgana, and that a fairy came out to meet her, radiant and beautiful, yet much like the old woman who had given her berries in the wood, and who had told her of the swans with golden crowns on their heads.

"Your brothers can be released," said she, "if you only have courage and perseverance. Water is softer than your own delicate hands, and yet it polishes and shapes stones. But it feels no pain such as your fingers will feel; it has no soul and cannot suffer such agony and torment as you will have to endure. Do you see the stinging nettle which I hold in my hand? Quantities of the same sort grow round the cave in which you sleep, but only these, and those that grow on the graves of a churchyard, will be of any use to you. These you must gather, even while they burn blisters on your hands. Break them to pieces with your hands and feet, and they will become flax, from which you must spin and weave eleven coats with long sleeves; if these are then thrown over the eleven swans, the spell will be broken. But remember well, that from the moment you commence your task until it is finished, even though it occupy years of your life, you must not speak. The first word you utter will pierce the hearts of your brothers like a deadly dagger. Their lives hang upon your tongue. Remember all that I have told you."

And as she finished speaking, she touched Eliza's hand lightly with the nettle, and a pain as of burning fire awoke her.

It was broad daylight, and near her lay a nettle like the one she had seen in her dream. She fell on her knees and offered thanks to God. Then she went forth from the cave to begin work with her delicate hands. She groped in amongst the ugly nettles, which burned great blisters on her hands and arms, but she determined to bear the pain gladly if she could only release her dear brothers. So she bruised the nettles with her bare feet and spun the flax.

At sunset her brothers returned, and were much frightened when she did not speak. They believed her to be under the spell of some new sorcery, but when they saw her hands they understood what she was doing in their behalf. The youngest brother wept, and where his tears touched her the pain ceased and the burning blisters vanished. Eliza kept to her work all night, for she could not rest

till she had released her brothers. During the whole of the following day, while her brothers were absent, she sat in solitude, but never before had the time flown so quickly.

One coat was already finished and she had begun the second, when she heard a huntsman's horn and was struck with fear. As the sound came nearer and nearer, she also heard dogs barking, and fled with terror into the cave. She hastily bound together the nettles she had gathered, and sat upon them. In a moment there came bounding toward her out of the ravine a great dog, and then another and another; they ran back and forth barking furiously, until in a few minutes all the huntsmen stood before the cave. The handsomest of them was the king of the country, who, when he saw the beautiful maiden, advanced toward her, saying, "How did you come here, my sweet child?"

Eliza shook her head. She dared not speak, for it would cost her brothers their deliverance and their lives. And she hid her hands under her apron, so that the king might not see how she was suffering.

"Come with me," he said; "here you cannot remain. If you are as good as you are beautiful, I will dress you in silk and velvet, I will place a golden crown on your head, and you shall rule and make your home in my richest castle." Then he lifted her onto his horse. She wept and wrung her hands, but the king said: "I wish only your happiness. A time will come when you will thank me for this."

He galloped away over the mountains, holding her before him on his horse, and the hunters followed behind them. As the sun went down they approached a fair, royal city, with churches and cupolas. On arriving at the castle, the king led her into marble halls, where large fountains played and where the walls and the ceilings were covered with rich paintings. But she had no eyes for all these glorious sights; she could only mourn and weep. Patiently she allowed the women to array her in royal robes, to weave pearls in her hair, and to draw soft gloves over her blistered fingers. As she stood arrayed in her rich dress, she looked so dazzlingly beautiful that the court bowed low in her presence.

Then the king declared his intention of making her his bride, but the archbishop shook his head and whispered that the fair young maiden was only a witch, who had blinded the king's eyes and ensnared his heart. The king would not listen to him, however, and ordered the music to sound, the daintiest dishes to be served, and the loveliest maidens to dance before them.

Afterwards he led her through fragrant gardens and lofty halls, but not a smile appeared on her lips or sparkled in her eyes. She looked the very picture of grief. Then the king opened the door of a little chamber in which she was to sleep. It was adorned with rich green tapestry and resembled the cave in which he had found her. On the floor lay the bundle of flax which she had spun from the nettles, and under the ceiling hung the coat she had made. These things had been brought away from the cave as curiosities, by one of the huntsmen.

"Here you can dream yourself back again in the old home in the cave," said the king; "here is the work with which you employed yourself. It will amuse you now, in the midst of all this splendor, to think of that time."

When Eliza saw all these things which lay so near her heart, a smile played around her mouth, and the crimson blood rushed to her cheeks. The thought of her brothers and their release made her so joyful that she kissed the king's hand. Then he pressed her to his heart.

Very soon the joyous church bells announced the marriage feast; the beautiful dumb girl of the woods was to be made queen of the country. A single word would cost her brothers their lives, but she loved the kind, handsome king, who did everything to make her happy, more and more each day; she loved him with her whole heart, and her eyes beamed with the love she dared not speak. Oh! if she could only confide in him and tell him of her grief. But dumb she must remain till her task was finished.

Therefore at night she crept away into her little chamber which had been decked out to look like the cave and quickly wove one coat after another. But when she began the seventh, she found she had no more flax. She knew that the nettles she wanted to use grew in the churchyard and that she must

pluck them herself. How should she get out there? "Oh, what is the pain in my fingers to the torment which my heart endures?" thought she. "I must venture; I shall not be denied help from heaven."

Then with a trembling heart, as if she were about to perform a wicked deed, Eliza crept into the garden in the broad moonlight, and passed through the narrow walks and the deserted streets till she reached the churchyard. She prayed silently, gathered the burning nettles, and carried them home with her to the castle.

One person only had seen her, and that was the archbishop – he was awake while others slept. Now he felt sure that his suspicions were correct; all was not right with the queen; she was a witch and had bewitched the king and all the people. Secretly he told the king what he had seen and what he feared, and as the hard words came from his tongue, the carved images of the saints shook their heads as if they would say, "It is not so; Eliza is innocent."

But the archbishop interpreted it in another way; he believed that they witnessed against her and were shaking their heads at her wickedness. Two tears rolled down the king's cheeks. He went home with doubt in his heart, and at night pretended to sleep. But no real sleep came to his eyes, for every night he saw Eliza get up and disappear from her chamber. Day by day his brow became darker, and Eliza saw it, and although she did not understand the reason, it alarmed her and made her heart tremble for her brothers. Her hot tears glittered like pearls on the regal velvet and diamonds, while all who saw her were wishing they could be queen.

In the meantime she had almost finished her task; only one of her brothers' coats was wanting, but she had no flax left and not a single nettle. Once more only, and for the last time, must she venture to the churchyard and pluck a few handfuls. She went, and the king and the archbishop followed her. The king turned away his head and said, "The people must condemn her." Quickly she was condemned to suffer death by fire.

Away from the gorgeous regal halls she was led to a dark, dreary cell, where the wind whistled through the iron bars. Instead of the velvet and silk dresses, they gave her the ten coats which she had woven, to cover her, and the bundle of nettles for a pillow. But they could have given her nothing that would have pleased her more. She continued her task with joy and prayed for help, while the street boys sang jeering songs about her and not a soul comforted her with a kind word.

Toward evening she heard at the grating the flutter of a swan's wing; it was her youngest brother. He had found his sister, and she sobbed for joy, although she knew that probably this was the last night she had to live. Still, she had hope, for her task was almost finished and her brothers were come.

Then the archbishop arrived, to be with her during her last hours as he had promised the king. She shook her head and begged him, by looks and gestures, not to stay; for in this night she knew she must finish her task, otherwise all her pain and tears and sleepless nights would have been suffered in vain. The archbishop withdrew, uttering bitter words against her, but she knew that she was innocent and diligently continued her work.

Little mice ran about the floor, dragging the nettles to her feet, to help as much as they could; and a thrush, sitting outside the grating of the window, sang to her the whole night long as sweetly as possible, to keep up her spirits.

It was still twilight, and at least an hour before sunrise, when the eleven brothers stood at the castle gate and demanded to be brought before the king. They were told it could not be; it was yet night; the king slept and could not be disturbed. They threatened, they entreated, until the guard appeared, and even the king himself, inquiring what all the noise meant. At this moment the sun rose, and the eleven brothers were seen no more, but eleven wild swans flew away over the castle.

Now all the people came streaming forth from the gates of the city to see the witch burned. An old horse drew the cart on which she sat. They had dressed her in a garment of coarse sackcloth. Her lovely hair hung loose on her shoulders, her cheeks were deadly pale, her lips moved silently while her fingers still worked at the green flax. Even on the way to death she would not give up her task. The ten finished coats lay at her feet; she was working hard at the eleventh, while the mob jeered her

and said: "See the witch; how she mutters! She has no hymn book in her hand; she sits there with her ugly sorcery. Let us tear it into a thousand pieces."

They pressed toward her, and doubtless would have destroyed the coats had not, at that moment, eleven wild swans flown over her and alighted on the cart. They flapped their large wings, and the crowd drew back in alarm.

"It is a sign from Heaven that she is innocent," whispered many of them; but they did not venture to say it aloud.

As the executioner seized her by the hand to lift her out of the cart, she hastily threw the eleven coats over the eleven swans, and they immediately became eleven handsome princes; but the youngest had a swan's wing instead of an arm, for she had not been able to finish the last sleeve of the coat.

"Now I may speak," she exclaimed. "I am innocent."

Then the people, who saw what had happened, bowed to her as before a saint; but she sank unconscious in her brothers' arms, overcome with suspense, anguish, and pain.

"Yes, she is innocent," said the eldest brother, and related all that had taken place. While he spoke, there rose in the air a fragrance as from millions of roses. Every piece of fagot in the pile made to burn her had taken root, and threw out branches until the whole appeared like a thick hedge, large and high, covered with roses; while above all bloomed a white, shining flower that glittered like a star. This flower the king plucked, and when he placed it in Eliza's bosom she awoke from her swoon with peace and happiness in her heart. Then all the church bells rang of themselves, and the birds came in great flocks. And a marriage procession, such as no king had ever before seen, returned to the castle.

THE LAST DREAM OF THE OLD OAK

IN THE forest, high up on the steep shore and not far from the open seacoast, stood a very old oak tree. It was just three hundred and sixty-five years old, but that long time was to the tree as the same number of days might be to us. We wake by day and sleep by night, and then we have our dreams. It is different with the tree; it is obliged to keep awake through three seasons of the year and does not get any sleep till winter comes. Winter is its time for rest – its night after the long day of spring, summer, and autumn.

During many a warm summer, the Ephemeras, which are flies that exist for only a day, had fluttered about the old oak, enjoyed life, and felt happy. And if, for a moment, one of the tiny creatures rested on the large, fresh leaves, the tree would always say: "Poor little creature! your whole life consists of but a single day. How very short! It must be quite melancholy."

"Melancholy! what do you mean?" the little creature would always reply. "Why do you say that? Everything around me is so wonderfully bright and warm and beautiful that it makes me joyous."

"But only for one day, and then it is all over."

"Over!" repeated the fly; "what is the meaning of 'all over'? Are you 'all over' too?"

"No, I shall very likely live for thousands of your days, and my day is whole seasons long; indeed, it is so long that you could never reckon it up."

"No? then I don't understand you. You may have thousands of my days, but I have thousands of moments in which I can be merry and happy. Does all the beauty of the world cease when you die?"

"No," replied the tree; "it will certainly last much longer, infinitely longer than I can think of."

"Well, then," said the little fly, "we have the same time to live, only we reckon differently." And the little creature danced and floated in the air, rejoicing in its delicate wings of gauze and velvet, rejoicing in the balmy breezes laden with the fragrance from the clover fields and wild roses, elder blossoms and honeysuckle, and from the garden hedges of wild thyme, primroses, and mint. The perfume of all these was so strong that it almost intoxicated the little fly. The long and beautiful day had been so full of joy and sweet delights, that, when the sun sank, the fly felt tired of all its happiness and enjoyment. Its wings could sustain it no longer, and gently and slowly it glided down to the soft, waving blades of grass, nodded its little head as well as it could, and slept peacefully and sweetly. The fly was dead.

"Poor little Ephemera!" said the oak; "what a short life!" And so on every summer day the dance was repeated, the same questions were asked and the same answers given, and there was the same peaceful falling asleep at sunset. This continued through many generations of Ephemeras, and all of them felt merry and happy.

The oak remained awake through the morning of spring, the noon of summer, and the evening of autumn; its time of rest, its night, drew near – its winter was coming. Here fell a leaf and there fell a leaf. Already the storms were singing: "Good night, good night. We will rock you and lull you. Go to sleep, go to sleep. We will sing you to sleep, and shake you to sleep, and it will do your old twigs good; they will even crackle with pleasure. Sleep sweetly, sleep sweetly, it is your three hundred and sixty-fifth night. You are still very young in the world. Sleep sweetly; the clouds will drop snow upon you, which will be your coverlid, warm and sheltering to your feet. Sweet sleep to you, and pleasant dreams."

And there stood the oak, stripped of all its leaves, left to rest during the whole of a long winter, and to dream many dreams of events that had happened, just as men dream.

The great tree had once been small; indeed, in its cradle it had been an acorn. According to human reckoning, it was now in the fourth century of its existence. It was the largest and best tree in the forest. Its summit towered above all the other trees and could be seen far out at sea, so that it served as a landmark to the sailors. It had no idea how many eyes looked eagerly for it. In its topmost

branches the wood pigeon built her nest, and the cuckoo sang his well-known song, the familiar notes echoing among the boughs; and in autumn, when the leaves looked like beaten copper plates, the birds of passage came and rested on the branches before beginning their flight across the sea.

But now that it was winter, the tree stood leafless, so that every one could see how crooked and bent were the branches that sprang forth from the trunk. Crows and rooks came by turns and sat on them, and talked of the hard times that were beginning, and how difficult it was in winter to obtain a living.

It was just at the holy Christmas time that the tree dreamed a dream. The tree had doubtless a feeling that the festive time had arrived, and in its dream fancied it heard the bells of the churches ringing. And yet it seemed to be a beautiful summer's day, mild and warm. The tree's mighty summit was crowned with spreading, fresh green foliage; the sunbeams played among its leaves and branches, and the air was full of fragrance from herb and blossom; painted butterflies chased each other; the summer flies danced around it as if the world had been created merely that they might dance and be merry. All that had happened to the tree during all the years of its life seemed to pass before it as if in a festive pageant.

It saw the knights of olden times and noble ladies ride through the wood on their gallant steeds, with plumes waving in their hats and with falcons on their wrists, while the hunting horn sounded and the dogs barked. It saw hostile warriors, in colored dress and glittering armor, with spear and halberd, pitching their tents and again taking them down; the watchfires blazed, and men sang and slept under the hospitable shelter of the tree. It saw lovers meet in quiet happiness near it in the moonshine, and carve the initials of their names in the grayish-green bark of its trunk.

Once, but long years had passed since then, guitars and Æolian harps had been hung on its boughs by merry travelers; now they seemed to hang there again, and their marvelous notes sounded again. The wood pigeons cooed as if to express the feelings of the tree, and the cuckoo called out to tell it how many summer days it had yet to live.

Then it appeared to it that new life was thrilling through every fiber of root and stem and leaf, rising even to its highest branches. The tree felt itself stretching and spreading out, while through the root beneath the earth ran the warm vigor of life. As it grew higher and still higher and its strength increased, the topmost boughs became broader and fuller; and in proportion to its growth its self-satisfaction increased, and there came a joyous longing to grow higher and higher – to reach even to the warm, bright sun itself.

Already had its topmost branches pierced the clouds, which floated beneath them like troops of birds of passage or large white swans; every leaf seemed gifted with sight, as if it possessed eyes to see. The stars became visible in broad daylight, large and sparkling, like clear and gentle eyes. They brought to the tree's memory the light that it had seen in the eyes of a child and in the eyes of lovers who had once met beneath the branches of the old oak.

These were wonderful and happy moments for the old oak, full of peace and joy; and yet amidst all this happiness, the tree felt a yearning desire that all the other trees, bushes, herbs, and flowers beneath it might also be able to rise higher, to see all this splendor and experience the same happiness. The grand, majestic oak could not be quite happy in its enjoyment until all the rest, both great and small, could share it. And this feeling of yearning trembled through every branch, through every leaf, as warmly and fervently as through a human heart.

The summit of the tree waved to and fro and bent downwards, as if in its silent longing it sought something. Then there came to it the fragrance of thyme and the more powerful scent of honeysuckle and violets, and the tree fancied it heard the note of the cuckoo.

At length its longing was satisfied. Up through the clouds came the green summits of the forest trees, and the oak watched them rising higher and higher. Bush and herb shot upward, and some even tore themselves up by the roots to rise more quickly. The quickest of all was the birch tree. Like a lightning flash the slender stem shot upwards in a zigzag line, the branches spreading round it like

green gauze and banners. Every native of the wood, even to the brown and feathery rushes, grew with the rest, while the birds ascended with the melody of song. On a blade of grass that fluttered in the air like a long green ribbon sat a grasshopper cleaning its wings with its legs. May beetles hummed, bees murmured, birds sang – each in its own way; the air was filled with the sounds of song and gladness.

"But where is the little blue flower that grows by the water, and the purple bellflower, and the daisy?" asked the oak. "I want them all."

"Here we are; here we are," came the reply in words and in song.

"But the beautiful thyme of last summer, where is that? And where are the lilies of the valley which last year covered the earth with their bloom, and the wild apple tree with its fragrant blossoms, and all the glory of the wood, which has flourished year after year? And where is even what may have but just been born?"

"We are here; we are here," sounded voices high up in the air, as if they had flown there beforehand.

"Why, this is beautiful, too beautiful to be believed," cried the oak in a joyful tone. "I have them all here, both great and small; not one has been forgotten. Can such happiness be imagined? It seems almost impossible."

"In heaven with the Eternal God it can be imagined, for all things are possible," sounded the reply through the air.

And the old tree, as it still grew upwards and onwards, felt that its roots were loosening themselves from the earth.

"It is right so; it is best," said the tree. "No fetters hold me now. I can fly up to the very highest point in light and glory. And all I love are with me, both small and great. All – all are here."

Such was the dream of the old oak at the holy Christmas time. And while it dreamed, a mighty storm came rushing over land and sea. The sea rolled in great billows toward the shore. A cracking and crushing was heard in the tree. Its roots were torn from the ground, just at the moment when in its dream it was being loosened from the earth. It fell; its three hundred and sixty-five years were ended like the single day of the Ephemera.

On the morning of Christmas Day, when the sun rose, the storm had ceased. From all the churches sounded the festive bells, and from every hearth, even of the smallest hut, rose the smoke into the blue sky, like the smoke from the festive thank-offerings on the Druids' altars. The sea gradually became calm, and on board a great ship that had withstood the tempest during the night, all the flags were displayed as a token of joy and festivity.

"The tree is down! the old oak – our landmark on the coast!" exclaimed the sailors. "It must have fallen in the storm of last night. Who can replace it? Alas! no one." This was the old tree's funeral oration, brief but well said.

There it lay stretched on the snow-covered shore, and over it sounded the notes of a song from the ship – a song of Christmas joy, of the redemption of the soul of man, and of eternal life through Christ.

Sing aloud on this happy morn,
All is fulfilled, for Christ is born;
With songs of joy let us loudly sing,
"Hallelujahs to Christ our King."

Thus sounded the Christmas carol, and every one on board the ship felt his thoughts elevated through the song and the prayer, even as the old tree had felt lifted up in its last beautiful dream on that Christmas morn.

THE PORTUGUESE DUCK

A DUCK once arrived from Portugal. There were some who said she came from Spain, but that is almost the same thing. At all events, she was called the Portuguese duck, and she laid eggs, was killed and cooked, and that was the end of her.

The ducklings which crept forth from her eggs were also called Portuguese ducks, and about that there may be some question. But of all the family only one remained in the duck yard, which may be called a farmyard, since the chickens were admitted to it and the cock strutted about in a very hostile manner.

"He annoys me with his loud crowing," said the Portuguese duck, "but still, he's a handsome bird, there's no denying that, even if he is not a duck. He ought to moderate his voice, like those little birds who are singing in the lime trees over there in our neighbor's garden – but that is an art only acquired in polite society. How sweetly they sing there; it is quite a pleasure to listen to them! I call it Portuguese singing. If I only had such a little singing bird, I'd be as kind and good to him as a mother, for it's in my Portuguese nature."

While she was speaking, one of the little singing birds came tumbling head over heels from the roof into the yard. The cat was after him, but he had escaped from her with a broken wing and so came fluttering into the yard. "That's just like the cat; she's a villain," said the Portuguese duck. "I remember her ways when I had children of my own. How can such a creature be allowed to live and wander about upon the roofs? I don't think they allow such things in Portugal."

She pitied the little singing bird, and so did all the other ducks, who were not Portuguese.

"Poor little creature!" they said, one after another, as they came up. "We can't sing, certainly; but we have a sounding board, or something of the kind, within us, though we don't talk about it."

"But I can talk," said the Portuguese duck. "I'll do something for the little fellow; it's my duty." So she stepped into the watering trough and beat her wings upon the water so strongly that the little bird was nearly drowned. But the duck meant it kindly. "That is a good deed," she said; "I hope the others will take example from it."

"Tweet, tweet!" said the little bird. One of his wings was broken and he found it difficult to shake himself, but he quite understood that the bath was meant kindly, so he said, "You are very kind-hearted, madam." But he did not wish for a second bath.

"I have never thought about my heart," replied the Portuguese duck; "but I know that I love all my fellow creatures, except the cat, and nobody can expect me to love her, for she ate up two of my ducklings. But pray make yourself at home; it is easy to make oneself comfortable. I myself am from a foreign country, as you may see by my bearing and my feathery dress. My husband is a native of these parts; he's not of my race, but I am not proud on that account. If any one here can understand you, I may say positively that I am that person."

"She's quite full of *portulak*," said a little common duck, who was witty. All the common ducks considered the word "portulak" a good joke, for it sounded like "Portugal." They nudged each other and said, "Quack! that was witty!"

Then the other ducks began to notice the newcomer. "The Portuguese has certainly a great flow of language," they said to the little bird. "For our part, we don't care to fill our beaks with such long words, but we sympathize with you quite as much. If we don't do anything else, we can walk about with you everywhere; that is the best we can do."

"You have a lovely voice," said one of the eldest ducks; "it must be a great satisfaction to you to be able to give as much pleasure as you do. I am certainly no judge of your singing, so I keep my beak shut, which is better than talking nonsense as others do."

"Don't plague him so," interrupted the Portuguese duck; "he requires rest and nursing. My little singing bird, do you wish me to prepare another bath for you?"

"Oh, no! no! pray let me be dry," implored the little bird.

"The water cure is the only remedy for me when I am not well," said the Portuguese. "Amusement, too, is very beneficial. The fowls from the neighborhood will soon be here to pay you a visit. There are two Cochinchinese among them; they wear feathers on their legs and are well educated. They have been brought from a great distance, and consequently I treat them with greater respect than I do the others."

Then the fowls arrived, and the cock was polite enough to keep from being rude. "You are a real songster," he said, "and you do as much with your little voice as it is possible to do; but more noise and shrillness is necessary if one wishes others to know who he is."

The two Chinese were quite enchanted with the appearance of the singing bird. His feathers had been much ruffled by his bath, so that he seemed to them quite like a tiny Chinese fowl. "He's charming," they said to each other, and began a conversation with him in whispers, using the most aristocratic Chinese dialect.

"We are of the same race as yourself," they said. "The ducks, even the Portuguese, are all aquatic birds, as you must have noticed. You do not know us yet – very few, even of the fowls, know us or give themselves the trouble to make our acquaintance, though we were born to occupy a higher position in society than most of them. But that does not disturb us; we quietly go our way among them. Their ideas are certainly not ours, for we look at the bright side of things and only speak of what is good, although that is sometimes difficult to find where none exists. Except ourselves and the cock, there is not one in the yard who can be called talented or polite. It cannot be said even of the ducks, and we warn you, little bird, not to trust that one yonder, with the short tail feathers, for she is cunning. Then the curiously marked one, with the crooked stripes on her wings, is a mischief-maker and never lets any one have the last word, though she is always in the wrong. The fat duck yonder speaks evil of every one, and that is against our principles; if we have nothing good to tell, we close our beaks. The Portuguese is the only one who has had any education and with whom we can associate, but she is passionate and talks too much about Portugal."

"I wonder what those two Chinese are whispering about," whispered one duck to another. "They are always doing it, and it annoys me. We never speak to them."

Now the drake came up, and he thought the little singing bird was a sparrow. "Well, I don't understand the difference," he said; "it appears to me all the same. He's only a plaything, and if people will have playthings, why let them, I say."

"Don't take any notice of what he says," whispered the Portuguese; "he is very well in matters of business, and with him business is first. Now I shall lie down and have a little rest. It is a duty we owe to ourselves, so that we shall be nice and fat when we come to be embalmed with sage and onions and apples."

So she laid herself down in the sun and winked with one eye. She had a very comfortable place and felt so at ease that she fell asleep. The little singing bird busied himself for some time with his broken wing, and at last he too lay down, quite close to his protectress. The sun shone warm and bright, and he found it a very good place. But the fowls of the neighborhood were all awake, and, to tell the truth, they had paid a visit to the duck yard solely to find food for themselves. The Chinese were the first to leave, and the other fowls soon followed them.

The witty little duck said of the Portuguese that "the old lady" was getting to be quite a "doting ducky." All the other ducks laughed at this. "Doting ducky," they whispered; "oh, that's too witty!" Then they repeated the joke about "portulak" and declared it was most amusing. After that they all lay down to have a nap.

They had been lying asleep for quite a while, when suddenly something was thrown into the yard for them to eat. It came down with such a bang that the whole company started up and clapped their wings. The Portuguese awoke, too, and rushed over to the other side of the yard. In doing this she trod upon the little singing bird.

"Tweet," he cried; "you trod very hard upon me, madam."

"Well, then, why do you lie in my way?" she retorted. "You must not be so touchy. I have nerves of my own, but I do not cry 'Tweet.'"

"Don't be angry," said the little bird; "the 'Tweet' slipped out of my beak before I knew it."

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