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The Grimms' German Folk Tales

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TO
Dag Strömbäck
IN FRIENDSHIP AND ESTEEM

Foreword

Kinder- und Hausmärchen ("*Folk Tales for Children and the Home*"), as gathered and brought out in its more or less canonical form by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in 1857 and often loosely and inaccurately referred to as "Grimms' Fairy Tales," is a collection of eighteenth-century and earlier German folk tales, in part taken from contemporary oral tradition, in part from older printed sources. As finally presented by the Grimms, these appear in a straightforward, somewhat unadorned though by no means barren style, while a certain matter-of-factness and chattiness colors the whole. Here the translators have assumed the challenging task of trying to reproduce some of these agreeable effects though without hope of more than suggesting Wilhelm Grimm's final achievement of one of the noblest monuments of German prose.

Originally composed by intelligent, keen-witted German peasant folk and told for mutual entertainment by grown-ups for grown-ups, these famous folk tales are, contrary to popular notion, not essentially for younger children, to whom, in fact, only a few are likely to appeal. A limited number, perhaps some twenty or thirty commonly included in almost innumerable select translations especially designed for children, have, to be sure, achieved notable success among children; yet because of its false emphasis, the Grimms subsequently regretted using the word *Kinder* in their title. In favor of the present title, *German Folk Tales*, substituted for the somewhat unwieldy translation of the German original, is that it quite exactly describes the contents, disposes of the misleading emphasis on "children," and leads to no ambiguity since there are no other genuine German folk tales outside of the Grimms' collection. The tales will, as a whole, appeal essentially to grown-ups with a taste for a good story well told. In the diction, style, and development of the various narratives there is nothing childish or juvenile, still less anything mannered or from the point of view of the original teller anything

archaic. Consideration of these last points has, it may be remarked, influenced the translation.

The present work is a complete and entirely new and independent translation of the two hundred *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, together with the appended *Kinderlegenden* ("Religious Tales concerning Children"), and aims at as high a degree of fidelity to the original as has seemed compatible with appropriate and idiomatic English; it is based on the Jubilee-edition (1912) of Reinhold Steig.

This book aims to bring to the general reader a renewed or increased familiarity with the collection as a whole, to the folklorist a trustworthy rendering of the German text, which is often only in appearance easy to translate. Particular pains have been taken to find the correct English equivalents of many words connected with now obsolete occupations and crafts and of objects no longer in common use. In connection with this and for the correct interpretation of certain unusual, dialectal, and today archaic German words and phrases the Translators are grateful to many kind friends, most particularly to Professor Otto Springer, of the University of Pennsylvania.

No attempt has been made at annotation, but the tale numbers will permit ready reference to Johannes Bolte and Georg Polívka's *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (5 vols.,; Berlin, 1913 ff.). In this classic collection of variants and analogues, the wider affiliations of the tales with one another and with those of other lands is brought out. Alphabetical indexes of the English and German titles of the tales will, it is hoped, prove a useful finding list.

Finally, a special word of appreciation is owing to Mr. Ojars Kratins of the Harvard Graduate School of Arts and Sciences for help with the final check against the German text in June, 1960.

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The Folk Tales

1

The Frog King, or Iron Henry:

Der Froschkönig oder der eiserne Heinrich

In days of old when wishing still did some good, there lived a king whose daughters were all beautiful; but the youngest was so beautiful that the sun itself, which has, to be sure, seen so many things, was astonished every time it shone in her face. Near the royal manor was a big dark forest, and in that forest under an old linden was a well. Now whenever the day was quite hot, the king's daughter used to go out into the forest and sit down by the cool well. If time hung too heavy on her hands, she would take a golden ball, toss it up in the air, and catch it again; and this was her favorite pastime.

Now it once happened that the golden ball of the king's daughter did not drop into the little hand which she held up but fell to the ground and rolled straight into the water. She followed it with her eyes; but the ball disappeared, and the well was deep, so deep that one couldn't see the bottom. Then she began to weep and wept louder and louder and was unconsolable. And as she was thus lamenting, someone called out to her: "What is the matter, king's daughter? You're crying hard enough to move a stone to pity." She looked about in the direction of the voice and then saw a frog sticking its big ugly head out of the water. "Oh, it's you, old water-splasher," she said. "I'm weeping over my golden ball which fell into the well." "Be quiet and don't weep," answered the frog. "I can certainly help you. But what will you give me if I fetch your plaything up again?" "Anything you wish, dear frog," she said, "my clothes, my pearls and jewels, and even the golden crown I'm wearing." The frog answered, "I don't want your clothes, your pearls and jewels, and your golden crown; but if you'll love me and let me be your companion and playmate, sit beside you at your table, eat from your golden plate, drink out of your cup, and sleep in your bed if you'll promise me that, I'll go down and bring up your golden ball." "Oh, yes," she said,

"I'll promise you everything you want, if you'll only bring back the golden ball." She thought to herself, however, "How foolishly the silly frog's talking; it sits in the water with its kind and croaks and can't be anybody's companion."

On receiving her promise the frog dived in headfirst and in a short time came paddling up again; it had the ball in its mouth and threw it on the grass. The king's daughter was very glad to see her pretty plaything again, picked it up, and ran off with it. "Wait, wait!" cried the frog, "take me with you; I can't run like you." But what good did it do to croak after her, no matter how loud! She didn't listen but hurried home and soon forgot the poor frog, who had to crawl down again into its well.

The next day when she sat down to dinner with the king and all his court and was eating from her golden plate, suddenly, plump, plump, something came crawling up the marble stairs, and when it reached the top, there was a knock at the door and a voice cried, "King's daughter, youngest daughter! Open the door for me." She ran to see who might be outside, and when she opened the door, there was the frog. Then she hurriedly shut the door, sat down again at the table, and was quite frightened. The king saw clearly that her heart was beating furiously and said, "My child, what are you frightened of? There isn't by chance a giant at the door who wants to take you away?" "Oh, no," she answered, "it isn't a giant; it's a nasty frog." "What does the frog want of you?" "Oh, father dear, yesterday as I was sitting in the forest near the well and was playing; my golden ball fell into the water, and because I wept so hard, the frog fetched it up again. And because it insisted, I promised that it should be my companion, though I never thought it could get out of the water. Now it's outside and wants to come in here to me." Meanwhile there was a second knock, and a voice cried:

"King's daughter, youngest daughter,
Let me in.
Don't you know what yesterday
You told me
By the cool water of the well?"

King's daughter, youngest daughter,
Let me in."

Then the king said: "You must keep your promise. Go now and let it in." She went and opened the door; then the frog hopped in right behind her to her chair. There he sat and cried, "Lift me up." She hesitated, till finally the king commanded her to do so. Once the frog was on the chair, it wanted to get onto the table, and when it was sitting there, it said: "Now push your golden plate nearer me so that we may eat together." She even did this, but it was clear she didn't like doing it. The frog enjoyed its meal, but nearly every morsel stuck in her throat. Finally it said, "Now I have eaten my fill and am tired, so carry me to your room and make ready your silken bed; then we'll lie down to sleep." The king's daughter began to weep and was afraid of the cold frog, which she didn't dare touch and which was now to sleep in her pretty, clean bed. But the king grew angry and said, "You mustn't despise anyone after he has helped you when you were in trouble." Then she took it between her two fingers, carried it up, and put it in a corner; but when she was in her bed, it crawled up and said, "I'm tired and want to sleep as well as you; pick me up or I'll tell your father." Then she got very angry, picked it up, and threw it with all her might against the wall: "Now you can take a rest, you nasty frog!"

But when it fell it wasn't a frog but a king's son, with handsome kindly eyes. Now, as her father wished, he became her dear companion and husband. Then he told her how a wicked witch had laid a spell upon him and how no one could have disenchanting him out of the well except herself, and the next day they'd go together to his kingdom. Then they fell asleep, and the following morning when the sun woke them up, a coach came with a team of eight white horses with white ostrich plumes on their heads and harnessed with golden chains, and behind stood the young king's servant. That was Faithful Henry. Faithful Henry had been so distressed when his lord was transformed into a frog that he'd had three iron bands put around his heart lest it should break from sorrow and sadness. The coach, on the other hand, was to take the young king

to his kingdom. Faithful Henry helped them both into the coach, once again took up his place behind, and was very happy about the disenchantment. When they had gone some distance, the king's son heard a cracking noise behind him as if something had broken. He turned around and said:

"Henry, the coach is breaking."
 "No, my lord, not the coach;
 It's a band from my heart
 Which suffered sorely
 While you were sitting in the well,
 While you were a frog."

Again and again on the way there was a cracking noise, and every time the king's son thought that the coach was breaking; but it was only the bands snapping from Faithful Henry's heart because his lord was now disenchanted and happy.

2

A Cat and a Mouse in Partnership:
Katze und Maus in Gesellschaft

A cat made the acquaintance of a mouse and talked so much about its great love and friendship for it that the mouse finally agreed to share a house and the housekeeping with it. "But we must make provision for the winter," said the cat, "otherwise we'll suffer from hunger. You, little mouse, can't venture everywhere, and one of these days you'll fall into a trap." They acted on this good plan and bought a pot of fat, though they didn't know where to put it. Finally after long reflection the cat said, "I know of nowhere it might be kept more safely than in the church; no one dares take anything away from there; let's put it under the altar and not touch it till we need it." Thus the pot of fat was put safely away. It wasn't long, however, before the cat got a craving for it and said to the mouse: "As I was about to say, mouse, I've been asked by my cousin to stand sponsor. She's given birth to a son, white with brown

spots, and I'm to stand sponsor for him. Let me go out today, and you look after the house yourself." "Yes, of course," answered the mouse, "for goodness' sake go along and if you eat something good, think of me. I, too, should very much like a drop of the sweet, red christening wine." But all this was quite untrue: the cat had no cousin and had not been asked to stand sponsor. It went straight to the church, sneaked to the pot of fat and began to lick it and licked the top layer off. Then it took a walk over the roofs of the town, enjoyed the view, finally stretched out in the sun, and licked its whiskers every time it thought of the pot of fat. It didn't come home until nightfall. "Well, here you are back again!" said the mouse. "You've no doubt had a splendid day." "It wasn't bad," answered the cat. "What name did they give the child?" asked the mouse. "Top-Layer-Off," said the cat rather dryly. "Top-Layer-Off" exclaimed the mouse. "That's a strange and very odd name. Is it common in your family?" "What of it?" said the cat. "It's no worse than Crumb-Thief, your godparents' name."

Not long afterward the cat got a fresh craving. It said to the mouse: "You must do me the favor of once more tending the house alone; I've been asked to be sponsor a second time, and since the child has a white ring around its neck, I can't refuse." The good mouse consented, but the cat sneaked behind the town wall to the church and ate up half the pot of fat. "Nothing tastes better," it said, "than what one eats oneself," and was quite content with its day's work. When it came home, the mouse asked, "What name did they give this child?" "Half-Gone," answered the cat. "Half-Gone? Not really! I've never heard that name in all my life. I'll bet it's not in any regular list of names."

The cat's mouth soon watered again for the delicacy. "All good things go by threes," it said to the mouse. "Now I'm again to stand sponsor; the child's all black and only its paws are white; otherwise there's not a white hair on its body. Such a thing occurs only once every few years. You'll surely let me go?" "Top-Layer-Off, Half-Gone," answered the mouse. "These are such curious names and give me such food for thought." "There you sit home in your dark grey woolen coat and your long pigtail," said the cat, "and get notions; that comes from not going out in the day-time." In the cat's absence the mouse tidied the house and set it in order, but the cat with its taste for dainties emptied the pot

completely. "Only when it's all gone is one at rest," it said to itself, and, fat and full, didn't come home till after nightfall. The mouse at once asked the name given the third child. "You probably won't like it either," said the cat. "It's All-Gone." "All-Gone!" exclaimed the mouse. "That is a most suspicious name; I've never seen it in print. All-Gone! What can that mean?" It shook its head, rolled itself up in a ball, and lay down to sleep.

From now on the cat was no longer asked to stand sponsor. However, when winter came and nothing to eat was to be found outdoors, the mouse thought of their store of fat and said, "Come, cat, let's go to the pot of fat we've saved up; it'll taste good." "Yes, indeed," answered the cat "you'll relish it as much as if you stuck your tongue out the window." They set out, and when they arrived, there was the pot where they'd left it only it was empty. "Oho," said the mouse, "now I see what's happened; now it's as clear as day; you really are a true friend to me! You ate everything up while you were standing sponsor: first Top-Layer-Off, then Half-Gone, then . . ." "Will you be still!" cried the cat. "One word more and I'll eat you up." The poor mouse already had "All-Gone" on the tip of its tongue. No sooner had it said it than the cat made a jump at it, seized it and swallowed it up. See, that's the way the world goes.

3

A Child of Saint Mary:

Marienkind

On the edge of a large forest lived a woodcutter and his wife, and he had only one child, a girl three years old. They were, however, so poor that they no longer had their daily bread and did not know how they could feed her. One morning the woodcutter, bowed down by worry, went out into the forest to work, and as he was chopping wood, suddenly a tall and beautiful woman stood before him with a crown of shining stars upon her head and said "I am the Virgin Mary, mother of the Christ Child; you

are poor and needy; bring me your child, and I shall take her with me and shall be her mother and care for her." The woodcutter obeyed, fetched his child and gave her over to the Virgin Mary. She took her with her to Heaven where she fared well, ate cake and drank sweet milk, and her clothes were of gold, and the angels played with her. When she was fourteen, the Virgin once called her and said: "Dear child, I am about to make a long journey; take charge of the keys to the thirteen doors of the Kingdom of Heaven. Twelve of these doors you may unlock and marvel at the glories within, but the thirteenth door, which this little key opens, is forbidden to you. Be careful not to unlock it, otherwise misfortune will befall you." The girl promised to be obedient, and when the Virgin had gone, she began to look at the dwellings of the Heavenly Kingdom. Every day she unlocked one door until she had opened the twelve. In each dwelling an apostle was sitting in great glory. She delighted in all that pomp and splendor, and the angels who always accompanied her rejoiced with her. Now the forbidden door alone was left, and she felt a great desire to know what was hidden behind it and said to the angels, "I won't open it wide nor will I go in, but I'll unlock it so we may get a tiny peek through the crack." "Oh no," said the angels, "that would be a sin; the Virgin Mary has forbidden it, and some misfortune might easily befall you." Then she kept still, but the desire deep down in her heart did not keep still but gnawed and gnawed at her and left her no peace. Once when the angels had all gone out, she thought, "Now I'm quite alone and might as well look in; no one will know if I do." She searched out the key and when she had it in her hand, she couldn't help putting it in the lock, and once she'd put it in, she couldn't help turning it. Then the door flew open, and she saw the Holy Trinity sitting in fire and glory. She stopped a while, viewing everything with amazement; then she touched the glory a little with her finger, and her finger became all golden. At once she was seized with a great fear; she slammed the door and ran away. But her fear didn't leave her, do what she might, and her heart beat continually and couldn't be quieted. The gold, too, stayed on her finger, no matter how much she washed it and rubbed it.

Not long afterward the Virgin Mary returned from her journey. She called the girl to her and asked her to give back the keys

of Heaven. When she handed her the bunch of keys, the Virgin looked into her eyes and said, "Didn't you open the thirteenth door, too?" "No," she replied. Then the Virgin put her hand on the girl's heart, felt it beating violently, and knew very well that she'd transgressed her command and had unlocked that door. Then she said again, "Are you sure you didn't do it?" "No," answered the girl a second time. Then the Virgin looked at the finger which from touching the Heavenly fire had become all golden and saw clearly that the girl had sinned and for a third time said, "Didn't you do it?" "No," said the girl for the third time. Then the Virgin Mary said, "You disobeyed me and, besides, you lied; you are no longer worthy to be in Heaven."

Then the girl sank into a deep sleep, and when she awoke, she was lying down here on Earth in the midst of a wilderness. She wanted to call out but was unable to utter a sound. She jumped up and wanted to run away, but wherever she turned, she was held back by dense thorn hedges which she couldn't break through. In the wasteland in which she found herself there stood an old hollow tree that had to be her dwelling. When night came, she'd crawl into it and sleep there, and when it was stormy and rainy, she'd find shelter in it. But it was a miserable life, and when she thought how fine it had been in Heaven and how the angels had played with her, she wept bitterly. Roots and berries were her only food; she searched for them as far as she could walk. In the autumn she collected the fallen nuts and leaves and carried them into her hollow tree. The nuts were her food for the winter, and when snow and ice came, she'd crawl like a poor little animal into the leaves so as not to freeze. Soon her clothes became torn, and one piece after another dropped off her body. But when the sun shone warm again, she went out and sat down before the tree, and her long hair covered her on all sides like a cloak. Thus she sat year after year, feeling the woe and the misery of the world.

Once upon a time when the trees again were fresh and green, the king of the country was hunting in the forest and was chasing a roe. And because it had fled into the thicket that surrounded that spot in the forest, he dismounted, pulled the bushes apart, and cut a path with his sword. When he finally broke through, he saw a beautiful girl sitting under the tree, and her golden hair covered her to the very tip of her toes. Amazed he stopped and

looked at her, then addressed her, saying, "Who are you? Why are you sitting here in the wasteland?" But she made no reply, for she couldn't open her mouth. Then the king continued, "Will you come with me to my palace?" Then she merely nodded a little with her head. But the king took her in his arms, put her on his horse, and rode home with her. When he reached the royal palace, he had fine clothes put on her and gave her everything in plenty, and though she was unable to speak, she was so beautiful and gracious that he began to love her with all his heart, and it wasn't long before he married her.

When about a year had passed, the queen gave birth to a son. Thereupon the next night as she was lying alone in her bed, the Virgin Mary appeared to her and said, "If you will tell the truth and confess that you unlocked the forbidden door, I will unseal your mouth and restore your power of speech; but if you persist in your sin and your stubborn denial, I will take your newborn child away with me." Then the queen was given the power to answer, but she remained obstinate and said, "No, I didn't open the forbidden door," and the Virgin Mary took the newborn child from her arms and disappeared with it. The next morning when the child was not to be found, a rumor spread among the people that the queen was an ogress and had killed her own child. She heard it all yet couldn't deny it. The King, however, was unwilling to believe it because he loved her so.

A year later the queen again gave birth to a son. In the night the Virgin Mary again came to her and said, "If you will confess that you opened the forbidden door, I shall give you back your child and free your tongue, but if you persist in your sin and deny it, I shall take this newborn child with me, too." Then the queen again said, "No, I didn't open the forbidden door." The Virgin took the child out of her arms and carried it with her to Heaven. In the morning when the second child had disappeared, the people said quite openly that the queen had swallowed it, and the king's councilors demanded she be tried. The king, however, loved her so that he didn't want to believe it and ordered his councilors not to mention the subject again on pain of death.

The following year the queen gave birth to a lovely little daughter. Then at night the Virgin Mary appeared to her for the third time and said, "Follow me." She took her by the hand

and led her to Heaven and showed her there her two eldest children: they greeted her with joyous laughter and were playing with the globe of the earth. As the queen was rejoicing in all this, the Virgin said: "Is your heart not yet softened? If you admit that you opened the forbidden door, I shall give you back your two little sons." But for the third time the queen replied, "No, I didn't open the forbidden door." Then the Virgin again let her sink down to Earth and took away her third child, too.

The next morning when this became known, everybody cried out, "The queen is an ogress and must be sentenced," and the king could no longer reject his councilors' advice. Accordingly, she was tried, and because she couldn't reply and couldn't defend herself, she was condemned to die at the stake. The wood was gathered, and when she was tied to a stake and the fire began to burn round about, the hard ice of her pride melted and her heart was moved by repentance, and she thought, "If only before I die I could confess that I opened the door." Then her power of speech was restored, and she cried out in a loud voice, "Yes, Mary, I did do it." Immediately it began to rain, and the rain put out the flames, and a beam of light descended upon her, and the Virgin Mary descended with the two little sons at her side and the newborn daughter in her arms. She spoke kindly to her, "Whoever repents his sin and confesses will be forgiven," and gave her back the three children and freed her tongue and bestowed happiness upon her for the rest of her life.

4

A Tale of a Boy Who Set Out to Learn Fear:

Märchen von einem, der auszog das Fürchten zu lernen

A father had two sons: of these the elder was bright and clever and knew how to get along everywhere, but the younger was dull and couldn't understand or learn anything, and when people saw him, they'd say, "He'll be a burden to his father." Whenever something was to be done, it was always the elder who had to

do it. Nevertheless, if his father bade him fetch something late in the evening or even at night and if the way led across a churchyard or some other creepy place, he'd reply, "Oh, no, father, I won't go there, it makes me shudder," for he was afraid. Or, if of an evening stories were told by the fireside that made one shudder, those listening would sometimes say, "Oh, it makes me shudder." The younger son used then to sit in a corner and hear this and couldn't understand what it meant. "They keep saying, 'It makes me shudder, it makes me shudder'; it doesn't make me shudder, there must be some trick I don't understand."

Now his father once happened to say to him, "Listen, you over there in the corner, you're getting big and strong; you've got to learn something to earn your living by. See how hard your brother works while you're just hopeless." "Why, father," he replied, "I very much want to learn something; indeed, if possible, I'd like to learn shuddering; that's something I don't know anything about yet." On hearing that, the elder brother laughed and thought to himself: "Dear God, what a fool my brother is! He'll never get anywhere that way. As the twig is bent, the tree's inclined." The father heaved a sigh and answered, "You'll learn shuddering all right, but you won't earn your living that way."

Soon after that the sexton came to call, and the father told him his tale of woe, how his younger son was so ignorant in everything that he knew nothing and learned nothing. "Just think, when I asked him how he was going to earn his living, he actually asked to learn shuddering." "If that's all," answered the sexton, "he can learn that from me; turn him over to me and I'll plane off the rough edges all right." The father agreed, for he thought, "The boy'll at least be trimmed up a little." So the sexton took him into his home, and he had to ring the church bell. After a few days the sexton roused him at midnight, bade him get up, climb the steeple, and ring the bell. "You'll certainly learn what shuddering is," he thought, and went out secretly. When the boy was up in the steeple and turned around and was about to take hold of the bell rope, he saw a white form standing on the stairs opposite the sound hole. "Who's there?" he cried. But the form made no reply and neither moved nor stirred. "Answer me!" cried the boy, "or else get out; you've no business here at night." But the sexton remained motionless, so that the boy might think it was a specter. The boy called out a second time,

"What do you want here? If you're an honest fellow, speak, or I'll throw you down the stairs." The sexton thought, "His bark's probably worse than his bite," didn't utter a sound, and stood stock-still. Then the boy called to him a third time, and when that did no good, made a dash and pushed the specter down the stairs so that it fell ten steps and lay in a corner. Then he rang the bell, returned home, and without saying a word went to bed and fell asleep. The sexton's wife waited a long time for her husband, but he didn't come back. Finally she got frightened and woke the boy up and asked, "Do you know where my husband has got to? He climbed the steeple ahead of you." "No," answered the boy, "but somebody was standing there on the stairs opposite the sound hole, and because he didn't answer me and wouldn't go away, I took him for a rogue and pushed him downstairs. Just go there and you'll see whether it was he; I'd be sorry if it were." The woman ran off and found her husband lying in a corner; he was groaning and had broken a leg.

She carried him down and then, crying loudly, hurried to the boy's father. "Your boy," she shouted, "caused a serious accident; he threw my husband downstairs so that he broke a leg. Get the good-for-nothing out of our house." The father was frightened, came on the run, and scolded the boy: "What kind of mischief have you been up to? The Evil One must have put you up to it." "Father," he answered, "just listen! I'm quite innocent; he was standing there in the night like someone with evil intentions. I didn't know who it was. Three times I told him to speak up or else go away." "Dear me!" said his father, "you only bring me misfortune. Get out of my sight! I don't want to see you any more." "All right, father, I'll do so quite willingly, only wait till morning; then I'll get out and learn shuddering. Then I'll know at least one craft that I can earn my living by." "Learn whatever you like," said the father; "it's all the same to me. Here's fifty dollars. Take them and go out in the world, and don't tell anyone where you're from or who your father is, for I'm ashamed of you." "Yes, father, as you wish so long as you ask for nothing more. That much I can easily keep in mind."

When day broke, the boy put the fifty dollars in his pocket, went out on the highway, and kept saying to himself, "If only I could shudder; if only I could shudder." Then a man came along who heard what the boy was saying to himself, and when they