

The Red Fairy Book

by

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Preface.....	4
The Twelve Dancing Princesses	5
The Princess Mayblossom	14
Soria Moria Castle	25
The Death Of Koshchei The Deathless.....	33
The Black Thief and Knight Of the Glen.....	42
The Master Thief.....	50
Brother and Sister	61
Princess Rosette	66
The Enchanted Pig	77
The Norka	85
The Wonderful Birch	89
Jack and the Beanstalk	97
The Little Good Mouse.....	105
Graciosa and Percinet	113
The Three Princesses of Whiteland	125
The Voice of Death.....	129
The Six Sillies	132
Kari Woodengown	134
Drakestail	142
The Ratcatcher	147
The True History of Little Golden Hood	152
The Golden Branch.....	156
The Three Dwarfs	168
Dapplegrim	173
The Enchanted Canary	180

The Twelve Brothers.....	191
Rapunzel	196
The Nettle Spinner	199
Farmer Weatherbeard.....	205
Mother Holle.....	212
Minnikin.....	215
Bushy Bride	225
Snowdrop	231
The Golden Goose	239
The Seven Foals.....	243
The Marvellous Musician	249
The Story of Sigurd.....	252

Preface

IN a second gleaning of the fields of Fairy Land we cannot expect to find a second Perrault. But there are good stories enough left, and it is hoped that some in the Red Fairy Book may have the attraction of being less familiar than many of the old friends. The tales have been translated, or, in the case of those from Madame d'Aulnoy's long stories, adapted, by Mrs. Hunt from the Norse, by Miss Minnie Wright from Madame d'Aulnoy, by Mrs. Lang and Miss Bruce from other French sources, by Miss May Sellar, Miss Farquharson, and Miss Blackley from the German, while the story of 'Sigurd' is condensed by the Editor from Mr. William Morris's prose version of the 'Volsunga Saga.' The Editor has to thank his friend, M. Charles Marelles, for permission to reproduce his versions of the 'Pied Piper,' of 'Drakestail,' and of 'Little Golden Hood' from the French, and M. Henri Carnoy for the same privilege in regard to 'The Six Sillies' from La Tradition.

Lady Frances Balfour has kindly copied an old version of 'Jack and the Beanstalk,' and Messrs. Smith and Elder have permitted the publication of two of Mr. Ralston's versions from the Russian.

A. L.

The Twelve Dancing Princesses

I

ONCE upon a time there lived in the village of Montignies-sur- Roc a little cow-boy, without either father or mother. His real name was Michael, but he was always called the Star Gazer, because when he drove his cows over the commons to seek for pasture, he went along with his head in the air, gaping at nothing.

As he had a white skin, blue eyes, and hair that curled all over his head, the village girls used to cry after him, 'Well, Star Gazer, what are you doing?' and Michael would answer, 'Oh, nothing,' and go on his way without even turning to look at them.

The fact was he thought them very ugly, with their sun-burnt necks, their great red hands, their coarse petticoats and their wooden shoes. He had heard that somewhere in the world there were girls whose necks were white and whose hands were small, who were always dressed in the finest silks and laces, and were called princesses, and while his companions round the fire saw nothing in the flames but common everyday fancies, he dreamed that he had the happiness to marry a princess.

II

One morning about the middle of August, just at mid-day when the sun was hottest, Michael ate his dinner of a piece of dry bread, and went to sleep under an oak. And while he slept he dreamt that there appeared before him a beautiful lady, dressed in a robe of cloth of gold, who said to him: 'Go to the castle of Beloeil, and there you shall marry a princess.'

That evening the little cow-boy, who had been thinking a great deal about the advice of the lady in the golden dress, told his dream to the farm people. But, as was natural, they only laughed at the Star Gazer.

The next day at the same hour he went to sleep again under the same tree. The lady appeared to him a second time, and said: 'Go to the castle of Beloeil, and you shall marry a princess.'

In the evening Michael told his friends that he had dreamed the same dream again, but they only laughed at him more than before. 'Never mind,' he thought to himself; 'if the lady appears to me a third time, I will do as she tells me.'

The following day, to the great astonishment of all the village, about two o'clock in the afternoon a voice was heard singing:

'Raleo, raleo, How the cattle go!'

It was the little cow-boy driving his herd back to the byre.

The farmer began to scold him furiously, but he answered quietly, 'I am going away,' made his clothes into a bundle, said good-bye to all his friends, and boldly set out to seek his fortunes.

There was great excitement through all the village, and on the top of the hill the people stood holding their sides with laughing, as they watched the Star Gazer trudging bravely along the valley with his bundle at the end of his stick.

It was enough to make anyone laugh, certainly.

III

It was well known for full twenty miles round that there lived in the castle of Beloeil twelve princesses of wonderful beauty, and as proud as they were beautiful, and who were besides so very sensitive and of such truly royal blood, that they would have felt at once the presence of a pea in their beds, even if the mattresses had been laid over it.

It was whispered about that they led exactly the lives that princesses ought to lead, sleeping far into the morning, and never getting up till mid-day. They had twelve beds all in the same room, but what was very extraordinary was the fact that though they were locked in by triple bolts, every morning their satin shoes were found worn into holes.

When they were asked what they had been doing all night, they always answered that they had been asleep; and, indeed, no noise was ever heard in the room, yet the shoes could not wear themselves out alone!

At last the Duke of Beloeil ordered the trumpet to be sounded, and a proclamation to be made that whoever could discover how his daughters wore out their shoes should choose one of them for his wife.

On hearing the proclamation a number of princes arrived at the castle to try their luck. They watched all night behind the open door of the princesses, but when the morning came they had all disappeared, and no one could tell what had become of them.

IV

When he reached the castle, Michael went straight to the gardener and offered his services. Now it happened that the garden boy had just been sent away, and though the Star Gazer did not look very sturdy, the gardener agreed to take him, as he thought that his pretty face and golden curls would please the princesses.

The first thing he was told was that when the princesses got up he was to present each one with a bouquet, and Michael thought that if he had nothing more unpleasant to do than that he should get on very well.

Accordingly he placed himself behind the door of the princesses' room, with the twelve bouquets in a basket. He gave one to each of the sisters, and they took them without even deigning to look at the lad, except Lina the youngest, who fixed her large black eyes as soft as velvet on him, and exclaimed, 'Oh, how pretty he is--our new flower boy!' The rest all burst out laughing, and the eldest pointed out that a princess ought never to lower herself by looking at a garden boy.

Now Michael knew quite well what had happened to all the princes, but notwithstanding, the beautiful eyes of the Princess Lina inspired him with a violent longing to try his fate. Unhappily he did not dare to come forward, being afraid that he should only be jeered at, or even turned away from the castle on account of his impudence.

V

Nevertheless, the Star Gazer had another dream. The lady in the golden dress appeared to him once more, holding in one hand two young laurel trees, a cherry laurel and a rose laurel, and in the other hand a little golden rake, a little golden bucket, and a silken towel. She thus addressed him:

`Plant these two laurels in two large pots, rake them over with the rake, water them with the bucket, and wipe them with the towel. When they have grown as tall as a girl of fifteen, say to each of them, ``My beautiful laurel, with the golden rake I have raked you, with the golden bucket I have watered you, with the silken towel I have wiped you." Then after that ask anything you choose, and the laurels will give it to you.'

Michael thanked the lady in the golden dress, and when he woke he found the two laurel bushes beside him. So he carefully obeyed the orders he had been given by the lady.

The trees grew very fast, and when they were as tall as a girl of fifteen he said to the cherry laurel, `My lovely cherry laurel, with the golden rake I have raked thee, with the golden bucket I have watered thee, with the silken towel I have wiped thee. Teach me how to become invisible.' Then there instantly appeared on the laurel a pretty white flower, which Michael gathered and stuck into his button-hole.

VI

That evening, when the princesses went upstairs to bed, he followed them barefoot, so that he might make no noise, and hid himself under one of the twelve beds, so as not to take up much room.

The princesses began at once to open their wardrobes and boxes. They took out of them the most magnificent dresses, which they put on before their mirrors, and when they had finished, turned themselves all round to admire their appearances.

Michael could see nothing from his hiding-place, but he could hear everything, and he listened to the princesses laughing and jumping with pleasure. At last the eldest said, `Be quick, my sisters, our partners will be impatient.' At the end of an hour, when the Star Gazer heard no more noise, he peeped out and saw the twelve sisters in splendid garments, with their satin shoes on their feet, and in their hands the bouquets he had brought them.

`Are you ready?' asked the eldest.

`Yes,' replied the other eleven in chorus, and they took their places one by one behind her.

Then the eldest Princess clapped her hands three times and a trap door opened. All the princesses disappeared down a secret staircase, and Michael hastily followed them.

As he was following on the steps of the Princess Lina, he carelessly trod on her dress.

'There is somebody behind me,' cried the Princess; 'they are holding my dress.'

'You foolish thing,' said her eldest sister, 'you are always afraid of something. It is only a nail which caught you.'

VII

They went down, down, down, till at last they came to a passage with a door at one end, which was only fastened with a latch. The eldest Princess opened it, and they found themselves immediately in a lovely little wood, where the leaves were spangled with drops of silver which shone in the brilliant light of the moon.

They next crossed another wood where the leaves were sprinkled with gold, and after that another still, where the leaves glittered with diamonds.

At last the Star Gazer perceived a large lake, and on the shores of the lake twelve little boats with awnings, in which were seated twelve princes, who, grasping their oars, awaited the princesses.

Each princess entered one of the boats, and Michael slipped into that which held the youngest. The boats glided along rapidly, but Lina's, from being heavier, was always behind the rest. 'We never went so slowly before,' said the Princess; 'what can be the reason?'

'I don't know,' answered the Prince. 'I assure you I am rowing as hard as I can.'

On the other side of the lake the garden boy saw a beautiful castle splendidly illuminated, whence came the lively music of fiddles, kettle-drums, and trumpets.

In a moment they touched land, and the company jumped out of the boats; and the princes, after having securely fastened their barques, gave their arms to the princesses and conducted them to the castle.

VIII

Michael followed, and entered the ball-room in their train. Everywhere were mirrors, lights, flowers, and damask hangings.

The Star Gazer was quite bewildered at the magnificence of the sight.

He placed himself out of the way in a corner, admiring the grace and beauty of the princesses. Their loveliness was of every kind. Some were fair and some were dark; some had chestnut hair, or curls darker still, and some had golden locks. Never were so many beautiful princesses seen together at one time, but the one whom the cow-boy thought the most beautiful and the most fascinating was the little Princess with the velvet eyes.

With what eagerness she danced! leaning on her partner's shoulder she swept by like a whirlwind. Her cheeks flushed, her eyes sparkled, and it was plain that she loved dancing better than anything else.

The poor boy envied those handsome young men with whom she danced so gracefully, but he did not know how little reason he had to be jealous of them.

The young men were really the princes who, to the number of fifty at least, had tried to steal the princesses' secret. The princesses had made them drink something of a philtre, which froze the heart and left nothing but the love of dancing.

IX

They danced on till the shoes of the princesses were worn into holes. When the cock crowed the third time the fiddles stopped, and a delicious supper was served by negro boys, consisting of sugared orange flowers, crystallised rose leaves, powdered violets, cracknels, wafers, and other dishes, which are, as everyone knows, the favourite food of princesses.

After supper, the dancers all went back to their boats, and this time the Star Gazer entered that of the eldest Princess. They crossed again the wood with the diamond-spangled leaves, the wood with gold-sprinkled leaves, and the wood whose leaves glittered with drops of silver, and as a proof of what he had seen, the boy broke a small branch from a tree in the last wood. Lina turned as she heard the noise made by the breaking of the branch.

‘What was that noise?’ she said.

‘It was nothing,’ replied her eldest sister; ‘it was only the screech of the barn-owl that roosts in one of the turrets of the castle.’

While she was speaking Michael managed to slip in front, and running up the staircase, he reached the princesses' room first. He flung open the window, and sliding down the vine which climbed up the wall, found himself in the garden just as the sun was beginning to rise, and it was time for him to set to his work.

X

That day, when he made up the bouquets, Michael hid the branch with the silver drops in the nosegay intended for the youngest Princess.

When Lina discovered it she was much surprised. However, she said nothing to her sisters, but as she met the boy by accident while she was walking under the shade of the elms, she suddenly stopped as if to speak to him; then, altering her mind, went on her way.

The same evening the twelve sisters went again to the ball, and the Star Gazer again followed them and crossed the lake in Lina's boat. This time it was the Prince who complained that the boat seemed very heavy.

‘It is the heat,’ replied the Princess. ‘I, too, have been feeling very warm.’

During the ball she looked everywhere for the gardener's boy, but she never saw him.

As they came back, Michael gathered a branch from the wood with the gold-spangled leaves, and now it was the eldest Princess who heard the noise that it made in breaking.

`It is nothing,' said Lina; `only the cry of the owl which roosts in the turrets of the castle.'

XI

As soon as she got up she found the branch in her bouquet. When the sisters went down she stayed a little behind and said to the cow-boy: `Where does this branch come from?'

`Your Royal Highness knows well enough,' answered Michael.

`So you have followed us?'

`Yes, Princess.'

`How did you manage it? we never saw you.'

`I hid myself,' replied the Star Gazer quietly.

The Princess was silent a moment, and then said:

`You know our secret!--keep it. Here is the reward of your discretion.' And she flung the boy a purse of gold.

`I do not sell my silence,' answered Michael, and he went away without picking up the purse.

For three nights Lina neither saw nor heard anything extraordinary; on the fourth she heard a rustling among the diamond- spangled leaves of the wood. That day there was a branch of the trees in her bouquet.

She took the Star Gazer aside, and said to him in a harsh voice:

`You know what price my father has promised to pay for our secret?'

`I know, Princess,' answered Michael.

`Don't you mean to tell him?'

`That is not my intention.'

`Are you afraid?'

`No, Princess.'

`What makes you so discreet, then?'

But Michael was silent.

XII

Lina's sisters had seen her talking to the little garden boy, and jeered at her for it.

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