

The Complete Fairy Tales
of the
BROTHERS GRIMM

Translated and With an Introduction by
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Illustrations by John B. Gruelle



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“What have you seen?”

“I saw a black man on your stairs.”

“That was a charcoal burner.”

“Then I saw a green man.”

“That was a huntsman.”

“After that I saw a bloodred man.”

“That was a butcher.”

“Oh, Mother Trudy, I was so petrified. I looked through the window and didn't see you, but I saw the devil with a fiery head.”

“Oho!” she said. “Then you've seen the witch in her proper dress. I've been wanting you here and waiting for a long time. Now you shall provide me with light!”

Then she changed the girl into a block of wood and threw it into the fire. And when the wood was blazing, she sat down next to it, warmed herself, and said, “That really does give off a bright light.”

◆ 44 ◆

Godfather Death

A poor man had twelve children and had to work day and night just to feed them. When the thirteenth was born, the man was in such great distress that he did not know what to do. So he just ran out onto the large highway, having decided to ask the first man he met to be godfather. The first man he encountered was the good Lord, who already knew what was on his mind, and he said to him, “Poor man, I feel sorry for you. I shall hold your child at the christening, and I shall take care of him and see that he's happy on earth.”

“Who are you?” asked the man.

“I am your dear Lord.”

“Then I don't want you to be godfather,” said the man. “You give to the rich and let the poor go hungry.”

The man said that because he did not know how wisely God distributes wealth and poverty. Thus he turned away from God and moved on. Then the devil came up to him and said, “What are you looking for? If you make me your child's godfather, I'll give him plenty of gold and all the pleasures of the world as well.”

“Who are you?” asked the man.

“I'm the devil.”

“Then I don't want you to be godfather,” the man said. “You deceive people and lead them astray.”

He continued on his way, and soon spindle-legged Death came toward him and said, “Take me as godfather.”



"Who are you?" the man asked.

"I'm Death, and I make all people equal."

"You're just the right one," said the man. "You take the rich and poor alike without making distinctions. I want you to be my child's godfather."

"I shall make your child rich and famous," Death answered. "Indeed, whoever has me for a friend shall never know need."

"Next Sunday is the christening," said the man. "Make sure you're there on time."

Death appeared as he had promised, and he made for a very proper godfather.

When the boy was old enough, his godfather appeared one day and told him to come along with him. He led him into the forest, showed him an herb that grew there, and said, "Now you shall receive your christening gift. I'm going to make you into a famous doctor. Whenever you are summoned to a sick person, I shall appear on each occasion. If I stand at the head of the patient, you can firmly declare that you'll make him well again. Then give him some of the herb, and he'll recover. However, if I stand at the feet of the patient, he's mine, and you must say there's nothing you can do, and no doctor in the world can save him. But beware that you don't use the herb against my will or you shall be in for trouble!"

It did not take long for the young man to become the most famous doctor in the whole world. His reputation was such that people said, "He only has to look at a sick person, and he can tell the condition and whether the person will get well or must die." People came from far and wide to seek his help in curing the sick, and they gave him so much money that he was soon a rich man.

Now it happened that the king fell ill. The doctor was summoned and was supposed to determine whether recovery was possible. When he approached the bed, Death was standing at the feet of the king. So he knew no cure was possible.

If only I could outwit Death just once! thought the doctor. Of course, he'll hold it against me, but since I'm his godson, perhaps he'll let it pass. It's worth a try. So he took the sick man and turned him the other way around so that Death stood at his head. Then he gave him some of the herb, and the king began recovering and became well again. But Death went to the doctor, pointed his finger at him, and threatened him with angry and sinister looks.

"Well, you've pulled the wool over my eyes. I'll forgive you this once because you're my godson. But if you try it again, you'll be risking your own neck. I myself shall come and take you away!"

Soon thereafter, the king's daughter fell seriously ill. She was his only child, and he wept day and night until he could no longer see out of his eyes. Then he issued a proclamation that whoever saved his daughter from death would become her husband and inherit the crown. When the doctor approached her bed, he saw Death at her feet. He should have recalled his godfather's warning, but he was swayed by the great beauty of the princess and the happiness he envisioned having as her husband, so he threw caution to the winds. Death gave him angry looks, raised his hand, and threatened him with his withered fist, but the doctor refused to take notice. Instead he lifted the sick maiden, put her head where the feet had been, and gave her the herb. Immediately her cheeks flushed red, and life could be seen stirring in her once more.

When Death found himself cheated out of his claim a second time, he strode up to the doctor and said, "It's all over for you! Now it's your turn to die."

He grabbed the doctor so hard with his icy hand that the young man

could not resist. Then he led him down into an underground cave. There the doctor saw thousands and thousands of candles burning in countless rows, some large, some medium, others small. With every moment some went out and others flared up again, so that the little flames seemed to be constantly changing and popping up and down.

"You see," said Death, "these candles are the lights of people's lives. The large ones belong to the children, the medium ones to married couples in their best years, the small ones to old people. But often children and young people can have small candles too."

"Show me my life candle," the doctor said, for he thought it would still be quite large.

Death pointed to a tiny stub that was just about to go out and said, "There it is. You see it?"

"Oh, dear godfather," the doctor was struck by horror, "light a new one for me! Please do me this favor so I can enjoy my life and become king and marry the beautiful princess."

"I can't," replied Death. "First one candle must go out before a new one can be lit."

"Then put the old one on top of a new candle so it will continue to burn after it goes out," the doctor pleaded.

Death pretended that he wanted to fulfill his wish. He reached for a large new candle, but since he really wanted revenge, he purposely made a mistake in transferring the stub, and it went out. All at once the doctor fell to the ground and had indeed fallen into the hands of Death.

◆ 45 ◆

Thumbling's Travels

A tailor had a son who turned out to be small, not much bigger than a thumb. He was, therefore, called Thumbling. However, he had plenty of courage and said to his father, "I intend to go out into the world, and I shall do it."

"That's right, my son," said the old man, who took a long darning needle, held it over a candle, and made a knob of sealing wax on it. "Now you've got a sword to take with you on the way."

The little tailor wanted to eat one more meal with his family and hopped into the kitchen to see what his mother was cooking for the last time. She had just finished, and the dish stood on the hearth.

"Mother," he said, "what's there to eat today?"

"See for yourself," said his mother. So Thumbling jumped onto the hearth and looked inside the dish. However, he stuck his neck out too far, and the steam from the food caught hold of him and carried him up and out