



The Dancing Water, the Singing Apple and the Speaking Bird

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Italian

Intermediate

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There was once an herb-gatherer who had three daughters who earned their living by spinning. One day their father died and left them all alone in the world. Now the king had a habit of going about the streets at night, and listening at the doors to hear what the people said of him. One night he listened at the door of the house where the three sisters lived, and heard them disputing about something. The oldest said: "If I were the wife of the royal butler, I would give the whole court to drink out of one glass of water, and there would be some left." The second said: "If I were the wife of the keeper of the royal wardrobe, with one piece of cloth I would clothe all the attendants, and have some left." The youngest said: "Were I the king's wife, I would bear him three children: two sons with apples in their hands, and a daughter with a star on her brow."

The king went back to his palace, and the next morning sent for the sisters, and said to them: "Do not be frightened, but tell me what you said last night." The oldest told him what she had said, and the king had a glass of water brought, and commanded her to prove her words. She took the glass, and gave all the attendants to drink, and there was some water left. "Bravo!" cried the king, and summoned the butler. "This is your husband.

Now it is your turn," said the king to the next sister, and commanded a piece of cloth to be brought, and the young girl at once cut out garments for all the attendants, and had some cloth left. "Bravo!" cried the king again, and gave her the keeper of the wardrobe for her husband. "Now it is your turn," said the king to the youngest. "Your Majesty, I said that were I the king's wife, I would bear him three children: two sons with apples in their hands, and a daughter with a star on her brow." The king replied: "If that is true, you shall be queen; if not, you shall die," and straightway he married her.

Very soon the two older sisters began to be envious of the youngest. "Look," said they: "she is going to be queen, and we must be servants!" and they began to hate her. A few months before the queen's children were to be born, the king declared war, and was obliged to depart; but he left word that if the queen had three children: two sons with apples in their hands and a girl with a star on her brow, the mother was to be respected as queen; if not, he was to be informed of it, and would tell his servants what to do. Then he departed for the war.

When the queen's children were born, as she had promised, the envious sisters bribed the nurse to put little dogs in the place of the queen's children, and sent word to the king that his wife had given birth to three puppies. He wrote back that she should be taken care of for two weeks, and then put into a tread-mill.

Meanwhile the nurse took the little babies, and carried them out of doors, saying: "I will make the dogs eat them up," and she left them alone. While they were thus exposed, three fairies passed by and exclaimed: "Oh how beautiful these children are!" and one of the fairies said: "What presents shall we make these children?" One answered: "I will give them a deer to nurse them." "And I a purse always full of money." "And I," said the third fairy, "will give them a ring which will change color when any misfortune happens to one of them."

The deer nursed and took care of the children until they grew up. Then the fairy who had given them the deer came and said: "Now that you have grown up, how can you stay here any longer?" "Very well," said one of the brothers, "I will go to the city and hire a house." "Take care," said the deer, "that you hire one opposite the royal palace." So they all went to the city and hired a palace as directed, and furnished it as if they had been royal personages. When the aunts saw these three youths, imagine their terror! "They are alive!" they said. They could not be mistaken, for there were the apples in their hands, and the star on the girl's brow. They called the nurse and said to her: "Nurse, what does this mean? are our nephews and niece alive?" The nurse watched at the window until she saw the two brothers go out, and then she went over as if to make a visit to the new house. She entered and said: "What is the matter, my daughter; how do you do? Are you

perfectly happy? You lack nothing. But do you know what is necessary to make you really happy? It is the Dancing Water. If your brothers love you, they will get it for you!" She remained a moment longer and then departed.

When one of the brothers returned, his sister said to him: "Ah! my brother, if you love me go and get me the Dancing Water." He consented, and next morning saddled a fine horse, and departed. On his way he met a hermit, who asked him, "Where are you going, cavalier?" "I am going for the Dancing Water." "You are going to your death, my son; but keep on until you find a hermit older than I." He continued his journey until he met another hermit, who asked him the same question, and gave him the same direction. Finally he met a third hermit, older than the other two, with a white beard that came down to his feet, who gave him the following directions: "You must climb yonder mountain. On top of it you will find a great plain and a house with a beautiful gate. Before the gate you will see four giants with swords in their hands. Take heed; do not make a mistake; for if you do that is the end of you! When the giants have their eyes closed, do not enter; when they have their eyes open, enter. Then you will come to a door. If you find it open, do not enter; if you find it shut, push it open and enter. Then you will find four lions. When they have their eyes shut, do not enter; when their eyes are open, enter, and you will see the Dancing Water." The youth took leave of the hermit, and hastened on his way.

Meanwhile the sister kept looking at the ring constantly, to see whether the stone in it changed color; but as it did not, she remained undisturbed.

A few days after leaving the hermit the youth arrived at the top of the mountain, and saw the palace with the four giants before it. They had their eyes shut, and the door was open. "No," said the youth, "that won't do." And so he remained on the lookout a while. When the giants opened their eyes, and the door closed, he entered, waited until the lions opened their eyes, and passed in. There he found the Dancing Water, and filled his bottles with it, and escaped when the lions again opened their eyes.

The aunts, meanwhile, were delighted because their nephew did not return; but in a few days he appeared and embraced his sister. Then they had two golden basins made, and put into them the Dancing Water, which leaped from one basin to the other. When the aunts saw it they exclaimed: "Ah! how did he manage to get that water?" and called the nurse, who again waited until the sister was alone, and then visited her. "You see," said she, "how beautiful the Dancing Water is! But do you know what you want now? The Singing Apple." Then she

departed. When the brother who had brought the Dancing Water returned, his sister said to him: "If you love me you must get for me the Singing Apple." "Yes, my sister, I will go and get it."

Next morning he mounted his horse, and set out. After a time he met the first hermit, who sent him to an older one. He asked the youth where he was going, and said: "It is a difficult task to get the Singing Apple, but hear what you must do: Climb the mountain; beware of the giants, the door, and the lions; then you will find a little door and a pair of shears in it. If the shears are open, enter; if closed, do not risk it." The youth continued his way, found the palace, entered, and found everything favorable. When he saw the shears open, he went in a room and saw a wonderful tree, on top of which was an apple. He climbed up and tried to pick the apple, but the top of the tree swayed now this way, now that. He waited until it was still a moment, seized the branch, and picked the apple. He succeeded in getting safely out of the palace, mounted his horse, and rode home, and all the time he was carrying the apple it kept making a sound.

The aunts were again delighted because their nephew was so long absent; but when they saw him return, they felt as though the house had fallen on them. Again they summoned the nurse, and again she visited the young girl, and said: "See how beautiful they are, the Dancing Water and the Singing Apple! But should you see the Speaking Bird, there would be nothing left for you to see." "Very well," said the young girl; "we will see whether my brother will get it for me."

When her brother came she asked him for the Speaking Bird, and he promised to get it for her. He met, as usual on his journey, the first hermit, who sent him to the second, who sent him on to a third one, who said to him: "Climb the mountain and enter the palace. You will find many statues. Then you will come to a garden, in the midst of which is a fountain, and on the basin is the Speaking Bird. If it should say anything to you, do not answer. Pick a feather from the bird's wing, dip it into a jar you will find there, and anoint all the statues. Keep your eyes open, and all will go well."

The youth already knew well the way, and soon was in the palace. He found the garden and the bird, which, as soon as it saw him, exclaimed: "What is the matter, noble sir; have you come for me? You have missed it. Your aunts have sent you to your death, and you must remain here. Your mother has been sent to the tread-mill." "My mother in the tread-mill?" cried the youth, and scarcely were the words out of his mouth when he became a statue like all the others.

When the sister looked at her ring she saw that it had changed its color to blue. "Ah!" she exclaimed, and sent her other brother after the first. Everything happened to him as to the first. He met the three hermits, received his instructions, and soon found himself in the palace, where he discovered the garden with the statues, the fountain, and the Speaking Bird.

Meanwhile the aunts, who saw that both their nephews were missing, were delighted; and the sister, on looking at her ring, saw that it had become clear again.

Now when the Speaking Bird saw the youth appear in the garden it said to him: "What has become of your brother? Your mother has been sent to the tread-mill." "Alas, my mother in the tread-mill!" And when he had spoken these words he became a statue.

The sister looked at her ring, and it had become black. Poor child! not having anything else to do, she dressed herself like a page and set out.

Like her brothers, she met the three hermits, and received their instructions. The third concluded thus: "Beware, for if you answer when the bird speaks you will lose your life." She continued her way, followed exactly the hermit's directions, and reached the garden in safety. When the bird saw her it exclaimed: "Ah! you here, too? Now you will meet the same fate as your brothers. Do you see them? one, two, and you make three. Your father is at the war. Your mother is in the tread-mill. Your aunts are rejoicing." She did not reply, but let the bird sing on. When it had nothing more to say it flew down, and the young girl caught it, pulled a feather from its wing, dipped it into the jar, and anointed her brothers' nostrils, and they at once came to life again. Then she did the same with all the other statues, with the lions and the giants, until all became alive again. Then she departed with her brothers, and all the noblemen, princes, barons, and kings' sons rejoiced greatly. Now when they had all come to life again the palace disappeared, and the hermits disappeared, for they were the three fairies

The day after the brothers and sister reached the city where they lived, they summoned a goldsmith, and had him make a gold chain, and fasten the bird with it. The next time the aunts looked out they saw in the window of the palace opposite the Dancing Water, the Singing Apple, and the Speaking Bird. "Well," said they, "the real trouble is coming now!"

The bird directed the brothers and sister to procure a carriage finer than the king's, with twenty-four attendants, and to have the service of their palace, cooks and servants, more numerous and better than the king's. All of which the brothers did at once. And when the aunts saw these things they were ready to die of rage.

At last the king returned from the war, and his subjects told him all the news of the kingdom, and the thing they talked about the least was his wife and children. One day the king looked out of the window and saw the palace opposite furnished in a magnificent manner. "Who lives there?" he asked, but no one could answer him. He looked again and saw the brothers and sister, the former with the apples in their hands, and the latter with the star on her brow. "Gracious! if I did not know that my wife had given birth to three puppies, I should say that those were my children," exclaimed the king. Another day he stood by the window and enjoyed the Dancing Water and the Singing Apple, but the bird was silent. After the king had heard all the music, the bird said: "What does your Majesty think of it?" The king was astonished at hearing the Speaking Bird, and answered: "What should I think? It is marvellous." "There is something more marvellous," said the bird; "just wait." Then the bird told his mistress to call her brothers, and said: "There is the king; let us invite him to dinner on Sunday. Shall we not?" "Yes, yes," they all said. So the king was invited and accepted, and on Sunday the bird had a grand dinner prepared and the king came. When he saw the young people, he clapped his hands and said: "I cannot persuade myself; they seem my children."

He went over the palace and was astonished at its richness. Then they went to dinner, and while they were eating the king said: "Bird, every one is talking; you alone are silent." "Ah! your Majesty, I am ill; but next Sunday I shall be well and able to talk, and will come and dine at your palace with this lady and these gentlemen." The next Sunday the bird directed his mistress and her brothers to put on their finest clothes; so they dressed in royal style and took the bird with them. The king showed them through his palace and treated them with the greatest ceremony: the aunts were nearly dead with fear. When they had seated themselves at the table, the king said: "Come, bird, you promised me you would speak; have you nothing to say

?"Then the bird began and related all that had happened from the time the king had listened at the door until his poor wife had been sent to the tread-mill; then the bird added: "These are your children, and your wife was sent to the mill, and is dying."



"The king begs pardon." Illustration by John Batten, published in Europa's Fairy Book by Joseph Jacobs (1916), G.P. Putnam's Sons.

When the king heard all this, he hastened to embrace his children, and then went to find his poor wife, who was reduced to skin and bones and was at the point of death. He knelt before her and begged her pardon, and then summoned her sisters and the nurse, and when they were in his presence he said to the bird: "Bird, you who have told me everything, now pronounce their sentence." Then the bird sentenced the nurse to be thrown out of the window, and the sisters to be cast into a cauldron of boiling oil. This was at once done. The king was never tired of embracing his wife. Then the bird departed and the king and his wife and children lived together in peace.

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