

# *First Born, First Wed*

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Swedish

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Once upon a time there was a king who had a three-year old son, and was obliged to go to war against another king. Then, when his ships sailed home again after he had gained a splendid victory, a storm broke out and his whole fleet was near sinking. But the king vowed he would sacrifice to the sea-queen the first male creature that came to meet him when he reached land and entered his capital. Thereby the whole fleet reached the harbor in safety. But the five-year old prince, who had not seen his father for the past two years, and who was delighted with the thunder of the cannon as the ships came in, secretly slipped away from his attendants, and ran to the landing; and when the king came ashore he was the first to cast himself into his arms, weeping with joy. The king was frightened when he thought of the sea-queen; but he thought that, after all, the prince was only a child, and at any rate he could sacrifice the next person to step up to him after the prince. But from that time on no one could make a successful sea-trip, and the people began to murmur because the king had not kept the promise he had made the sea-queen. But the king and queen never allowed the prince out without a great escort, and he was never permitted to enter a ship, for all his desire to do so. After a few years they gradually forgot the sea-queen, and when the prince was ten years old, a little brother came to join him. Not long after the older of the princes was out walking with his tutor and several other gentlemen. And when they reached the end of the royal gardens by the sea-shore—it was a summer's day, unusually clear—they were suddenly enveloped by a thick cloud, which disappeared as swiftly as it had come. And when it vanished, the

prince was no longer there; nor did he return, to the great sorrow of the king, the queen and the whole country. In the meantime the young prince who was now the sole heir to the crown and kingdom grew up; and when he was sixteen, they began to think of finding a wife for him. For the old king and queen wished to see him marry the daughter of some powerful monarch to whom they were allied, before they died. With this in view, letters were written and embassies sent out to the most distant countries.

While these negotiations were being conducted, it began to be said that the sea-shore was haunted; various people had heard cries, and several who had walked by the sea-shore late in the evening had fallen ill. At length no one ventured to go there after eleven at night, because a voice kept crying from out at sea: "First born, first wed!" And when some one did venture nearer he did so at the risk of his life. At last these complaints came to the king's ear; he called together his council, and it was decided to question a wise woman, who had already foretold many mysterious happenings, which had all taken place exactly as she had said they would. When the wise woman was brought before the king she said it was the prince who had been taken into the sea who was calling, and that they would have to find him a bride, young, beautiful, and belonging to one of the noblest families of the land, and she must be no less than fifteen and no more than seventeen years old. That seemed a serious difficulty; for no one wished to give their daughter to a sea-king.

Yet, when there was no end to the cries and the commotion, the wise woman said, that first it might be well to build a little house by the sea, perhaps then the turmoil might die away. At any rate, she said, no phantoms would haunt the place while the building was in progress. Hence no more than four workmen need be employed, and they might first prepare a site, then lay the stone foundation, and finally erect the small house, comprising no more than two pleasant, handsome rooms, one behind the other, and a good floor. The house was carefully erected, and the royal architect himself had to superintend the work, so that everything might be done as well as possible. And while the building was going on, there were no mysterious noises, and every one could travel peacefully along the sea-shore. For that reason the four workmen did not hurry with their work; yet not one of them could stay away for a day, because when they did the tumult along the shore would begin again, and one could hear the cries: "First born, first wed!" When the little house was finally completed, the best carpenters came and worked in it, then painters and other craftsmen, and at last it was furnished, because when the work stopped for no more than a single day the cries were heard again by night. The rooms were fitted out as sumptuously as possible, and a great mirror was hung in the drawing-room. According to the

instructions of the wise woman, it was hung in such wise that from the bed in the bed-room, even though one's face were turned to the wall, one could still see who stepped over the threshold into the drawing-room; for the door between each room was always to stand open.

When all was finished, and the little house had been arranged with regal splendor, the cries of "First born, first wed!" again began to sound from the shore. And it was found necessary, though all were unwilling, to follow the wise woman's counsel, and choose three of the loveliest maidens between the ages of fifteen and seventeen, belonging to the first families of the land. They were to be taken to the castle, said the wise woman, and to be treated like ladies of the blood royal, and one after another they were to be sent to the little house by the sea-shore; for should one of them find favor in the eyes of the sea-prince, then the commotion and turmoil would surely cease. In the meantime the negotiations for the marriage of the younger prince were continued, and the bride selected for him was soon expected to arrive. So the girls were also chosen for the sea-prince. The three chosen, as well as their parents, were quite inconsolable over their fate; even the fact that they were to be treated like princesses did not console them; yet had they not yielded it would have been all the worse for them and for the whole land. The first girl destined to sleep in the sea-palace was the oldest, and when she sought out the wise woman, and asked her advice, the latter said she should lie down in the handsome bed; but should turn her face to the wall, and under no circumstances turn around curiously, and try and see what was going on. She had only the right to behold what she saw reflected in the mirror in the drawing-room as she lay with her face to the wall. At ten o'clock that night the royal sea-bride was led with great pomp to the little house.

Her relatives and the court said farewell to her with many tears, left her before eleven, locked the door on the outside, and took the keys with them to the castle. The wise woman was also there, consoled the people, and assured them that if the maiden only forbore to speak, and did not turn around, she would come out in the morning fresh and blooming. The poor girl prayed and wept until she grew sleepy; but toward twelve o'clock the outer door suddenly opened, and then the door of the drawing-room. She was startled and filled with fear when, her face turned toward the wall, she saw in the great mirror, how a tall, well-built youth entered, from whose garments the water ran in streams to the floor. He shook himself as though freezing, and said "Uh hu!" Then he went to the window, and there laid down an unusually large and handsome apple, and hung a bottle in the casement. Next he stepped to the bed, bent over the sleeping girl and looked at her, strode up and down a few times, shaking the water from his clothes and saying "Uh hu!" Then he went back to the bed, undressed

hurriedly, lay down and fell asleep. The poor girl, had not been sleeping; but had only closed her eyes when the prince bent over her. Now she was glad to think he was fast asleep, and forgot the wise woman's warning not to turn around. Her curiosity got the better of her, and she wanted to find out if this were a real human being. She turned around softly, lest she wake him; but just as she sat up quietly in bed, in order to take a good look at her neighbor, he swiftly seized her right hand, hewed it off, and flung it under the bed. Then he at once lay down and fell asleep again. As soon as it was day, he rose, dressed without casting even a glance at the bed, took the bottle and the apple from the window, went hastily out and locked the door after him. One can imagine how the poor girl suffered in the meantime, and when her friends and relatives came to fetch her they found her weeping and robbed of her hand. She was brought to the castle and the wise woman sent for, and overwhelmed with bitter reproaches. But she said that if the maiden had not turned around, and had overcome her curiosity, she would not have lost her hand. They were to treat her as though she were really and truly a princess; but that it would be as much as her life were worth to allow her to return to the neighborhood of the little house.

The two girls were all the more discouraged by this mishap, and thought themselves condemned to death, though the wise woman consoled them as well as she knew how. The second promised her faithfully not to turn around; yet it happened with her as it had with the first. The prince came in at twelve o'clock dripping, shook himself so that the water flew about, said "Uh hu!" went to the window, laid down the beautiful apple, hung up the bottle, came into the bed-room, bent over the bed, strode up and down a few times, said "Uh hu!" hastily undressed, and at once fell asleep. Her curiosity gained the upper hand, and when she made sure that he was sleeping soundly, she carefully turned around in order to look at him. But he seized her right hand, hewed it off and cast it under the bed, and then laid down again and slept on. At dawn he rose, dressed without casting a glance at the bed, took the apple and the bottle, went out and locked the door after him. When her friends and relatives came to fetch the girl in the morning, they found her weeping and without a right hand. She was taken to the castle, where she found herself just as little welcome as her predecessor, and the wise woman insisted that the girl must have turned around, though at first she denied it absolutely.

Then the youngest, sweetest and loveliest of the three maidens had to go to the sea-castle amid the mourning of the entire court. The wise woman accompanied her, and implored her not to turn around; since there was no other means of protection against the spell.

The maiden promised to heed her warning, and said that she would pray God to help her if she were plagued with curiosity. All happened as before: the prince came on the stroke of twelve, dripping wet, said "Uh hu!" shook himself, laid the apple on the window, hung up the bottle, went into the bed-room, bent over the bed, strode up and down for a few times, said "Uh hu!" undressed, and at once fell asleep. The poor girl was half-dead with fear and terror, and prayed and struggled against her curiosity till at length she fell asleep, and did not awake until the prince rose and dressed. He stepped up to the bed, bent over it for a moment, went out, turned at the door and took the bottle and the apple, and then locked the door after him. In the morning the entire court, the girl's parents and the wise woman came to fetch her. She came to meet them weeping with joy, and was conducted to the castle in triumph and with joy indescribable. The king and queen embraced her, and she was paid the same honors destined for the princess who was to arrive in the course of the next few days to marry the heir to the throne. Now the maiden had to sleep every night in the little house by the strand, and every evening the prince came in with his apple and his bottle, and every morning went away at dawn. But it seemed to her that each succeeding evening and morning he looked at her a little longer; though she, always silent, timid, and turned toward the wall, did not dare see more than her mirror showed her of his coming and going. But the two other girls, who had lost their hands, and who now no longer lived in the castle, were jealous of the honor shown the youngest, and threatened to have her done away with if she did not restore their hands. The maiden went weeping to the wise woman; and the latter said that when the prince had lain down as usual she should say—keeping her face turned toward the wall:

"The maidens twain will see me slain, Or else have back their hands again!"

But she was to offer no further information nor say another word. With a beating heart the poor girl waited until the prince came, and when he had bent over the bed longer than usual, sighed, then hastily undressed and lain down, the maiden said, quivering and trembling:

"The maidens twain will see me slain, Or else have back their hands again!"

The prince at once replied: "Take the hands—they are lying under the bed—and the bottle hanging in the window, and pour some of the contents of the bottle on their arms and hands, join them together, bind them up, take away the bandages in three days' time and the hands will have been healed!" The maiden made no reply and fell asleep. In the morning the prince rose as usual, stepped over to the bed several times and looked at her from its foot; but she did not dare look up, and closed her eyes. He sighed, took his apple; but left the bottle, and went. When the maiden rose she did as he had told her, and in three days' time removed the bandages, and the girls' hands were well and whole.

Now the foreign princess arrived and the wedding was to be celebrated as soon as possible. Yet she was not fitted out with any more magnificence than the bride of the sea-prince, and both were equally honored by the king and court. This annoyed the two other girls, and they again threatened to have the youngest done away with if she did not let them taste the apple which the prince always brought with him. Again the maiden sought the advice of the wise woman, in whom she had confidence. And that night, when the prince had lain down, she said:

"The maidens twain will see me slain, Or else your apple they would gain!"

Then the prince said: "Take the apple lying in the window, and when you go out, lay it on the ground and follow wherever it may roll. And when it stops, pick as many apples as you wish, and return the same way you came." The maiden made no reply, and fell asleep. On the following morning it seemed harder than ever for the prince to resolve to go away. He appeared excited and restless, sighed often, bent over the maiden several times, went into the living room, then turned around and looked at her once more. Finally, when the sun rose, he hurried out and locked the door after him. When the maiden rose, she could not help weeping, for she had really begun to love the prince.

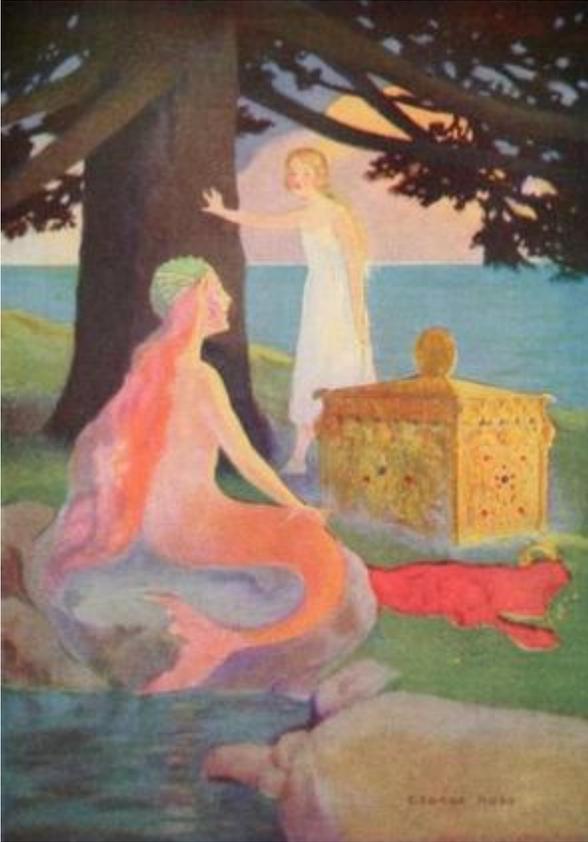
Then she took the apple, and when she was outside the door, laid it on the ground, and it rolled and rolled, and she followed it, a long, long way, to a region unknown to her. There she came to a high garden wall, over which hung the branches of trees, loaded with beautiful fruit. Finally she reached a great portal, adorned with gold and splendid ornaments, which opened of its own accord as the apple rolled up to it. And the apple rolled through the portal and the maiden followed it into the garden, which was the most beautiful she ever had seen. The apple rolled over to a low-growing tree weighed with the most magnificent apples, and there it stopped.

The maiden picked all that her silken apron would hold, and turned to see from which direction she had come, and where the portal stood through which she would have to pass on her way back. But the garden was so lovely that she felt like enjoying its charms a while longer, and without thinking of the prince's words, she touched the apple with her foot, and it began to roll again. Suddenly the portal closed with a great crash. Then the maiden was much frightened, and regretted having done what had been forbidden her; yet now she could not get out, and was compelled to follow the apple once more. It rolled far into the beautiful garden and stopped at a little fire-place, where stood two kettles of water, one small, the other large. There was a great fire burning under the large kettle; but only a weak fire beneath the smaller one. Now when the apple stopped there the maiden did not know what to do. Then it occurred to her to scrape away the fire beneath the large kettle and thrust it under the little one; and soon the kettle over the small fire began to boil and the kettle over the large one simmered down. But she could not stay there. And since she had already disobeyed the order given her, she expected to die, nothing less, and was quite resigned to do so, because she had lost all hope of winning the prince.

So she gave the apple another push, and it rolled into a meadow in the middle of the garden, and there lay two little children, asleep, with the hot sun beating straight down upon them. The maiden felt sorry for the children, and she took her apron and laid it over them to protect them from the sun, and only kept the apples she could put in her little basket. But she could not stay here either, so again she touched the apple, and it rolled on and before she knew it the girl found herself by the sea-shore. There, under a shady tree lay the prince asleep; while beside him sat the sea-queen. Both rose when the maiden drew near, and the prince looked at her with alarm and tenderness in his flashing eyes. Then he leaped into the sea, and the white foam closed over him. But the sea-queen was enraged and seized the girl, who thought that her last moment had struck, and begged for a merciful death. The sea-queen looked at her, and asked her who had given her permission to pass beyond the apple-tree. The maiden confessed her disobedience, and said that she had done so without meaning any harm, whereupon the sea-queen said she would see how she had conducted herself and punish her accordingly. Thereupon the sea-queen gave the apple a push, and it rolled back through the portal to the apple-tree. The sea-queen saw that the apple-tree was uninjured, again pushed the apple and it rolled on to the little fire-place. But when the sea-queen saw the small kettle boiling furiously, while the large one was growing cold, she became very angry, seized the girl's arm savagely and rising to her full height, asked: "What have you dared do here? How dared you take the fire from under my kettle and put it under your own?" The maiden did

not know that she had done anything wrong, and said that she did not know why. Then the sea-queen replied: "The large kettle signified the love between the prince and myself; the small one the love between the prince and you. Since you have taken the fire from under my kettle and laid it under your own, the prince is now violently in love with you, while his love for me is well-nigh extinguished. "Look," she cried, angrily, "now my kettle has stopped boiling altogether, and yours is boiling over! But I will see what other harm you have done and punish you accordingly." And the sea-queen again pushed the apple with her foot, and it rolled to the sleeping children, who had been covered with the apron. Then the sea-queen said: "Did you do that?" "Yes," replied the maiden, weeping, "but I meant no harm. I covered the little ones with my apron so that the sun might not burn down on them so fiercely, and I left with them the apples I could not put in my basket." The sea-queen said: "This deed and your truthfulness are your salvation. I see that you have a kind heart. These children belong to me and to the prince; but since he now loves you more than he does me, I will resign him to you. Go back to the castle and there say what I tell you: that your wedding with my prince is to be celebrated at the same time as that of his younger brother. And all your jewels, your ornaments, your wedding-dress and your bridal chair, are to be exactly like those of the other princess. From the moment on that the priest blesses the prince and yourself I have no further power over him. But since I have seen to it that he has all the qualities which adorn a ruler, I demand that he be made the heir to his father's kingdom; for he is the oldest son. The younger prince may rule over the kingdom which his bride brings him. All this you must tell them, for only under these conditions will I release the prince. And when you are arrayed in your bridal finery, come to me here, without anyone's knowledge, so that I may see how they have adorned you. Here is the apple which will show you the way without any one being able to tell where you go." With that the sea-queen parted from her, and gave the apple a push. It rolled out of the garden and to the castle, where the maiden, with mingled joy and terror, delivered the sea-queen's message to the king, and told him what she demanded for the prince. The king gladly promised all that was desired, and great preparations were at once made for the double wedding. Two bridal chairs were set up side by side, two wedding gowns, and two sets of jewels exactly similar were made ready. When the maiden had been dressed in her bridal finery she pretended to have forgotten something, which she had to fetch from a lower floor, went downstairs with her apple, and laid it on the ground. It at once rolled to the spot by the sea-shore where she had found the sea-queen and the prince, and where the sea-queen was now awaiting her. "It is well that you have come," said the sea-queen, "for the slightest disobedience would have meant misfortune for you! But how do you look? Are you dressed just as the princess is? And has the

princess no better clothes or jewels?" The maiden answered timidly, that they were dressed exactly alike. Then the sea-queen tore her gown from her body, unclasped the jewels from her hair and flinging them on the ground cried: "Is that the way the bride of my prince should look! Since I have given him to you I will give you my bridal outfit as well."



"A shrine adorned with gold and precious stones appeared." Illustration by George W. Hood. Published in *The Swedish Fairy Book* by Klara Strobe (1921), Fredrick A. Stokes Company.

And with that she raised up a sod beneath the great tree, and a shrine adorned with gold and precious stones appeared, from which she drew out her bridal outfit, which fitted the maiden as though made for her. And it was so costly and so covered with gems that the maiden was almost blinded by its radiance. The crown, too, glowed with light, and was set with the most wonderful emeralds, and all was magnificent beyond what any princess had ever worn. "Now," said the sea-queen, when she had finished adorning the maiden, "now go back

to the castle, and show them how I was dressed when I wedded the prince. All this I give as a free gift to you and your descendants; but you must always conduct yourself so that the prince will be content with you, and you must make his happiness your first thought all your life long.”

This the maiden promised, with honest tears, and the sea-queen bade her go. When she was again in the castle, all were astonished at the beauty and costliness of her dress and jewels, in comparison to which those of the other princess were as nothing. The treasures of the whole kingdom would not have sufficed to pay for such a bridal outfit. And none any longer dared envy the lovely maiden, for never had a princess brought a richer bridal dower into the country. Now all went in solemn procession to the church, and the priests stood before the bridal chairs with their books open, and waited for the prince who, according to the sea-queen’s word, would not come until the blessing was to be spoken. They waited impatiently, and the king finally told one of the greatest nobles to seat himself in the bridal chair in the prince’s place, which he did. But the very moment the priest began to pray, the two wings of the church portal quickly flew open, and a tall, strong, handsome man with flashing eyes, royally clad, came in, stepped up to the bridal chair, thrust his proxy out so hastily that he nearly fell, and cried: “This is my place! Now, priest, speak the blessing!” While the blessing was spoken the prince became quiet again, and then greeted his parents and the whole court with joy, and before all embraced his wife, who now for the first time ventured to take a good look at him. Thenceforward the prince was like any other human being, and in the end he inherited his father’s kingdom, and became a great and world-renowned ruler, beloved by his subjects, and adored by his wife. They lived long and happily, and their descendants are still the rulers of the land over which he reigned.

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