



Jack My Hedgehog

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

German

Advanced
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There was once a farmer who lived in great comfort. He had both lands and money, but, though he was so well off, one thing was wanting to complete his happiness; he had no children. Many and many a time, when he met other farmers at the nearest market town, they would tease him, asking how it came about that he was childless. At length he grew so angry that he exclaimed: 'I must and will have a child of some sort or kind, even should it only be a hedgehog!'

Not long after this his wife gave birth to a child, but though the lower half of the little creature was a fine boy, from the waist upwards it was a hedgehog, so that when his mother first saw him she was quite frightened, and said to her husband, 'There now, you have cursed the child yourself.' The farmer said, 'What's the use of making a fuss? I suppose the creature must be christened, but I don't see how we are to ask anyone to be sponsor to him, and what are we to call him?'

'There is nothing we can possibly call him but Jack my Hedgehog,' replied the wife.

So they took him to be christened, and the parson said: 'You'll never be able to put that child in a decent bed on account of his prickles.' Which was true, but they shook down some straw for him behind the stove, and there he lay for eight years. His father grew very tired of him and often wished him dead, but he did not die, but lay on there year after year.

Now one day there was a big fair at the market town to which the farmer meant to go, so he asked his wife

what he should bring her from it. 'Some meat and a couple of big loaves for the house,' said she. Then he asked the maid what she wanted, and she said a pair of slippers and some stockings. Lastly he said, 'Well, Jack my Hedgehog, and what shall I bring you?'

'Daddy,' said he, 'do bring me a bagpipe.' When the farmer came home he gave his wife and the maid the things they had asked for, and then he went behind the stove and gave Jack my Hedgehog the bagpipes.

When Jack had got his bagpipes he said, 'Daddy, do go to the smithy and have the house cock shod for me; then I'll ride off and trouble you no more.' His father, who was delighted at the prospect of getting rid of him, had the cock shod, and when it was ready Jack my Hedgehog mounted on its back and rode off to the forest, followed by all the pigs and asses which he had promised to look after.

Having reached the forest he made the cock fly up to the top of a very tall tree with him, and there he sat looking after his pigs and donkeys, and he sat on and on for several years till he had quite a big herd; but all this time his father knew nothing about him.

As he sat up in his tree he played away on his pipes and drew the loveliest music from them. As he was playing one day a King, who had lost his way, happened to pass close by, and hearing the music he was much surprised, and sent one of his servants to find out where it came from. The man peered about, but he could see nothing but a little creature which looked like a cock with a hedgehog sitting on it, perched up in a tree. The King desired the servant to ask the strange creature why it sat there, and if it knew the shortest way to his kingdom.

On this Jack my Hedgehog stepped down from his tree and said he would undertake to show the King his way home if the King on his part would give him his written promise to let him have whatever first met him on his return.

The King thought to himself, 'That's easy enough to promise. The creature won't understand a word about it, so I can just write what I choose.'

So he took pen and ink and wrote something, and when he had done Jack my Hedgehog pointed out the way and the King got safely home.

Now when the King's daughter saw her father returning in the distance she was so delighted that she ran to meet him and threw herself into his arms. Then the King remembered Jack my Hedgehog, and he told his

daughter how he had been obliged to give a written promise to bestow whatever he first met when he got home on an extraordinary creature which had shown him the way. The creature, said he, rode on a cock as though it had been a horse, and it made lovely music, but as it certainly could not read he had just written that he would not give it anything at all. At this the Princess was quite pleased, and said how cleverly her father had managed, for that of course nothing would induce her to have gone off with Jack my Hedgehog.

Meantime Jack minded his asses and pigs, sat aloft in his tree, played his bagpipes, and was always merry and cheery. After a time it so happened that another King, having lost his way, passed by with his servants and escort, wondering how he could find his way home, for the forest was very vast. He too heard the music, and told one of his men to find out whence it came. The man came under the tree, and looking up to the top there he saw Jack my Hedgehog astride on the cock.

The servant asked Jack what he was doing up there. 'I'm minding my pigs and donkeys; but what do you want?' was the reply. Then the servant told him they had lost their way, and wanted some one to show it them. Down came Jack my Hedgehog with his cock, and told the old King he would show him the right way if he would solemnly promise to give him the first thing he met in front of his royal castle.

The King said 'Yes,' and gave Jack a written promise to that effect.

Then Jack rode on in front pointing out the way, and the King reached his own country in safety.

Now he had an only daughter who was extremely beautiful, and who, delighted at her father's return, ran to meet him, threw her arms round his neck and kissed him heartily. Then she asked where he had been wandering so long, and he told her how he had lost his way and might never have reached home at all but for a strange creature, half-man, half-hedgehog, which rode a cock and sat up in a tree making lovely music, and which had shown him the right way. He also told her how he had been obliged to pledge his word to give the creature the first thing which met him outside his castle gate, and he felt very sad at the thought that she had been the first thing to meet him.

But the Princess comforted him, and said she should be quite willing to go with Jack my Hedgehog whenever he came to fetch her, because of the great love she bore to her dear old father.

Jack my Hedgehog continued to herd his pigs, and they increased in number till there were so many that the forest seemed full of them. So he made up his mind to live there no longer, and sent a message to his father

telling him to have all the stables and outhouses in the village cleared, as he was going to bring such an enormous herd that all who would might kill what they chose. His father was much vexed at this news, for he thought Jack had died long ago. Jack my Hedgehog mounted his cock, and driving his pigs before him into the village, he let every one kill as many as they chose, and such a hacking and hewing of pork went on as you might have heard for miles off.

Then said Jack, 'Daddy, let the blacksmith shoe my cock once more; then I'll ride off, and I promise you I'll never come back again as long as I live.' So the father had the cock shod, and rejoiced at the idea of getting rid of his son.

Then Jack my Hedgehog set off for the first kingdom, and there the King had given strict orders that if anyone should be seen riding a cock and carrying a bagpipe he was to be chased away and shot at, and on no account to be allowed to enter the palace. So when Jack my Hedgehog rode up the guards charged him with their bayonets, but he put spurs to his cock, flew up over the gate right to the King's windows, let himself down on the sill, and called out that if he was not given what had been promised him, both the King and his daughter should pay for it with their lives. Then the King coaxed and entreated his daughter to go with Jack and so save both their lives.

The Princess dressed herself all in white, and her father gave her a coach with six horses and servants in gorgeous liveries and quantities of money. She stepped into the coach, and Jack my Hedgehog with his cock and pipes took his place beside her. They both took leave, and the King fully expected never to set eyes on them again. But matters turned out very differently from what he had expected, for when they had got a certain distance from the town Jack tore all the Princess's smart clothes off her, and pricked her all over with his bristles, saying: 'That's what you get for treachery. Now go back, I'll have no more to say to you.' And with that he hunted her home, and she felt she had been disgraced and put to shame till her life's end.

Then Jack my Hedgehog rode on with his cock and bagpipes to the country of the second King to whom he had shown the way. Now this King had given orders that, in the event of Jack's coming the guards were to present arms, the people to cheer, and he was to be conducted in triumph to the royal palace.

When the King's daughter saw Jack my Hedgehog, she was a good deal startled, for he certainly was very peculiar looking; but after all she considered that she had given her word and it couldn't be helped. So she made Jack welcome and they were betrothed to each other, and at dinner he sat next her at the royal table, and

they ate and drank together.

When they retired to rest the Princess feared lest Jack should kiss her because of his prickles, but he told her not to be alarmed as no harm should befall her. Then he begged the old King to place a watch of four men just outside his bedroom door, and to desire them to make a big fire. When he was about to lie down in bed he would creep out of his hedgehog skin, and leave it lying at the bedside; then the men must rush in, throw the skin into the fire, and stand by till it was entirely burnt up.

And so it was, for when it struck eleven, Jack my Hedgehog went to his room, took off his skin and left it at the foot of the bed. The men rushed in, quickly seized the skin and threw it on the fire, and directly it was all burnt Jack was released from his enchantment and lay in his bed a man from head to foot, but quite black as though he had been severely scorched.

The King sent off for his physician in ordinary, who washed Jack all over with various essences and salves, so that he became white and was a remarkably handsome young man. When the King's daughter saw him she was greatly pleased, and next day the marriage ceremony was performed, and the old King bestowed his kingdom on Jack my Hedgehog.

After some years Jack and his wife went to visit his father, but the farmer did not recognize him, and declared he had no son; he had had one, but that one was born with bristles like a hedgehog, and had gone off into the wide world. Then Jack told his story, and his old father rejoiced and returned to live with him in his kingdom.

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