



# *The Man Without a Heart*

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Scottish

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*Intermediate*  
*12 min read*

Once upon a time there were seven brothers, who were orphans, and had no sister. Therefore they were obliged to do all their own housework. This they did not like at all; so after much deliberation they decided to get married. There were, unfortunately, no young girls to be found in the place where they lived; but the elder brothers agreed to go out into the world and seek for brides, promising to bring back a very pretty wife for the youngest also if he would meanwhile stay at home and take care of the house. He consented willingly, and the six young men set off in good spirits.

On their way they came to a small cottage standing quite by itself in a wood; and before the door stood an old, old man, who accosted the brothers saying, 'Hullo, you young fellows! Whither away so fast and cheerily?'

'We are going to find bonny brides for ourselves, and one for our youngest brother at home,' they replied.

'Oh! dear youths,' said the old man, 'I am terribly lonely here; pray bring a bride for me also; only remember, she must be young and pretty.'

'What does a shrivelled old grey thing like that want with a pretty young bride?' thought the brothers, and went on their way.

Presently they came to a town where were seven sisters, as young and as lovely as anyone could wish. Each

brother chose one, and the youngest they kept for their brother at home. Then the whole party set out on the return journey, and again their path led through the wood and past the old man's cottage.

There he stood before the door, and cried: 'Oh! you fine fellows, what a charming bride you have brought me!'

'She is not for you, said the young men. 'She is for our youngest brother, as we promised.'

'What!' said the old man, 'promised! I'll make you eat your promises!' And with that he took his magic wand, and, murmuring a charm, he touched both brothers and brides, and immediately they were turned into grey stones.

Only the youngest sister he had not bewitched. He took her into the cottage, and from that time she was obliged to keep house for him. She was not very unhappy, but one thought troubled her. What if the old man should die and leave her here alone in the solitary cottage deep in the heart of the wood! She would be as 'terribly lonely' as he had formerly been.

One day she told him of her fear.

'Don't be anxious,' he said. 'You need neither fear my death nor desire it, for I have no heart in my breast! However, if I should die, you will find my wand above the door, and with it you can set free your sisters and their lovers. Then you will surely have company enough.'

'Where in all the world do you keep your heart, if not in your breast?' asked the girl.

'Do you want to know everything?' her husband said. 'Well, if you must know, my heart is in the bed-cover.'

When the old man had gone out about his business his bride passed her time in embroidering beautiful flowers on the bed quilt to make his heart happy. The old man was much amused. He laughed, and said to her: 'You are a good child, but I was only joking. My heart is really in—in—'

'Now where is it, dear husband?'

'It is in the doorway,' he replied.

Next day, while he was out, the girl decorated the door with gay feathers and fresh flowers, and hung garlands

upon it. And on his return the old fellow asked what it all meant.

'I did it to show my love for your heart,' said the girl.

And again the old man smiled, saying, 'You are a dear child, but my heart is not in the doorway.'

Then the poor young bride was very vexed, and said, 'Ah, my dear! you really have a heart somewhere, so you may die and leave me all alone.'

The old man did his best to comfort her by repeating all he had said before, but she begged him afresh to tell her truly where his heart was and at last he told her.

'Far, far from here,' said he, 'in a lonely spot, stands a great church, as old as old can be. Its doors are of iron, and round it runs a deep moat, spanned by no bridge. Within that church is a bird which flies up and down; it never eats, and never drinks, and never dies. No one can catch it, and while that bird lives so shall I, for in it is my heart.'

It made the little bride quite sad to think she could do nothing to show her love for the old man's heart. She used to think about it as she sat all alone during the long days, for her husband was almost always out.

One day a young traveller came past the house, and seeing such a pretty girl he wished her 'Good day.'

She returned his greeting, and as he drew near she asked him whence he came and where he was going.

'Alas!' sighed the youth, 'I am very sorrowful. I had six brothers, who went away to find brides for themselves and one for me; but they have never come home, so now I am going to look for them.'

'Oh, good friend,' said the girl, 'you need go no farther. Come, sit down, eat and drink, and afterwards I'll tell you all about it.'

She gave him food, and when he had finished his meal she told him how his brothers had come to the town where she lived with her sisters, how they had each chosen a bride, and, taking herself with them, had started for home. She wept as she told how the others were turned to stone, and how she was kept as the old man's bride. She left out nothing, even telling him the story of her husband's heart.

When the young man heard this he said: 'I shall go in search of the bird. It may be that God will help me to find and catch it.'

'Yes, do go,' she said; 'it will be a good deed, for then you can set your brothers and my sisters free.' Then she hid the young man, for it was now late, and her husband would soon be home.

Next morning, when the old man had gone out, she prepared a supply of provisions for her guest, and sent him off on his travels, wishing him good luck and success.

He walked on and on till he thought it must be time for breakfast; so he opened his knapsack, and was delighted to find such a store of good things. 'What a feast!' he exclaimed; 'will anyone come and share it?'

'Moo-oo,' sounded close behind him, and looking round he saw a great red ox, which said, 'I have much pleasure in accepting your kind invitation.'

'I'm delighted to see you. Pray help yourself. All I have is at your service,' said the hospitable youth. And the ox lay down comfortably, licking his lips, and made a hearty meal.

'Many thanks to you,' said the animal as it rose up. 'When you are in danger or necessity call me, even if only by a thought,' and it disappeared among the bushes.

The young man packed up all the food that was left, and wandered on till the shortening shadows and his own hunger warned him that it was midday. he laid the cloth on the ground and spread out his provisions, saying at the same time: 'Dinner is ready, and anyone who wishes to share it is welcome.'

Then there was a great rustling in the undergrowth, and out ran a wild boar, grunting, 'Umph, umph, umph; someone said dinner was ready. Was it you? and did you mean me to come?'

'By all means. Help yourself to what I have,' said the young traveller. And the two enjoyed their meal together.

Afterwards the boar got up, saying, 'Thank you; when in need you be you must quickly call for me,' and he rolled off.

For a long time the youth walked on. By evening he was miles away. He felt hungry again, and, having still

some provisions left, thought he had better make ready his supper. When it was all spread out he cried as before, 'Anyone who cares to share my meal is welcome.'

He heard a sound overhead like the flapping of wings, and a shadow was cast upon the ground. Then a huge griffin appeared, saying: 'I heard someone giving an invitation to eat; is there anything for me?'

'Why not?' said the youth. 'Come down and take all you want. There won't be much left after this.'

So the griffin alighted and ate his fill, saying, as he flew away, 'Call me if you need me.'

'What a hurry he was in!' the youth said to himself. 'He might have been able to direct me to the church, for I shall never find it alone.'

He gathered up his things, and started to walk a little farther before resting. He had not gone far when all of a sudden he saw the church!

He soon came to it, or rather to the wide and deep moat which surrounded it without a single bridge by which to cross.

It was too late to attempt anything now; and, besides, the poor youth was very tired, so he lay down on the ground and fell fast asleep.

Next morning, when he awoke, he began to wish himself over the moat; and the thought occurred to him that if only the red ox were there, and thirsty enough to drink up all the water in the moat, he might walk across it dry shod.

Scarcely had the thought crossed his brain before the ox appeared and began to drink up the water.

The grateful youth hastened across as soon as the moat was dry, but found it impossible to penetrate the thick walls and strong iron doors of the church.

'I believe that big boar would be of more use here than I am,' he thought, and lo! at the wish the wild boar came and began to push hard against the wall. He managed to loosen one stone with his tusks, and, having made a beginning, stone after stone was poked out till he had made quite a large hole, big enough to let a man go through.

The young man quickly entered the church, and saw a bird flying about, but he could not catch it.

'Oh!' he exclaimed, 'if only the griffin were here, he would soon catch it.'

At these words the griffin appeared, and, seizing the bird, gave it to the youth, who carried it off carefully, while the griffin flew away.

The young man hurried home as fast as possible, and reached the cottage before evening. He told his story to the little bride, who, after giving him some food and drink, hid him with his bird beneath the bed.

Presently the old man came home, and complained of feeling ill. Nothing, he said, would go well with him any more: his 'heart bird' was caught.

The youth under the bed heard this, and thought, 'This old fellow has done me no particular harm, but then he has bewitched my brothers and their brides, and has kept my bride for himself, and that is certainly bad enough.'

So he pinched the bird, and the old man cried, 'Ah! I feel death gripping me! Child, I am dying!'

With these words he fell fainting from his chair, and as the youth, before he knew what he was doing, had squeezed the bird to death, the old man died also.

Out crept the young man from under the bed, and the girl took the magic wand (which she found where the old man had told her), and, touching the twelve grey stones, transformed them at once into the six brothers and their brides.

Then there was great joy, and kissing and embracing. And there lay the old man, quite dead, and no magic wand could restore him to life, even had they wished it.

After that they all went away and were married, and lived many years happily together.

Note: The origin of this fairy tale is unknown, so it's been attributed to the Scottish author Andrew Lang.

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