



The Fairy Nightingale

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Easy
8 min read

A very interesting story was once told me of a King who built a splendid church. It took the architects seven years to finish the building. The King went to dedicate the church and to pray in it, and lo! there was a fog so dense that the King was almost suffocated. In the very midst of the dense fog a monk stood before the King, saying:

“Long live the King! You have built a fine church, but it lacks one thing.”

The monk then quickly disappeared. The King came out and ordered his men to take down the building and to put up another one finer than the first. It took them another seven years to finish the second building. The King again went to dedicate the church and pray in it, and lo! again there was a dense fog, and the same monk stood before the King, saying:

“Long live the King! You have built a beautiful church, but it lacks one thing.”

Again the monk mysteriously disappeared. The King again ordered his men to take down the building and to put up a new one. It took them another seven years to finish the third building, and it was this time so splendid that there was nothing like it in all the world. The King again went to dedicate it and to pray in it, and lo! again there was a dense fog, and the same monk stood before the King saying:

“Long live the King! You have built a church incomparably beautiful, but it lacks one thing.”

The monk was again about to make his exit when the King took hold of his collar, saying:

“Tell me what is the one thing lacking in my church. This is the third time that you compel me to take down my building, upon which so much labor and time have been spent.”

“The Fairy Nightingale is the only thing that is lacking in this magnificent church,” said the monk, and disappeared in the fog.

The King returned to his palace, and thereafter was very sad. He had three sons, who seeing their father sad, asked:

“Long live the King! What grieves you, father?”

“My sons,” said the King, “I am getting old, and the Fairy Nightingale is needed for the church. I do not know how to get it.”

“Be of good cheer, father,” said the lads; “we will go and bring it.”

And they started. After a long journey they came to a place where the road divided into three branches, with a sign on each. The sign of the broad road was,—“He who goes on this road returns safely.” The sign on the middle road was,—“He who goes on this road may return or may not return.” And the sign on the third narrow road was,—“He who goes on this road never returns.” The oldest brother took the broad road; the second brother took the middle road, and the youngest brother took the narrow road. The oldest lad soon came to a large city, at sight of which he said to himself:

“Why should I go farther and be killed? I would better stay in this place.” And he became a servant in one of the inns of the city.

The second brother turned toward the other side of the mountain, and came to a green meadow with shady trees here and there, and benches under the trees. He was tired, and at once sat down upon one of the benches. Soon a giant as black as night came along with an iron rod in his hand. He gave the lad one stroke with the rod, and lo! the lad turned into a round stone, and rolled under the bench.

The youngest of the three brothers started on the road along which there could be no return. A dense fog

covered him, and lo! the monk who had talked with his father appeared to him, saying:

“God speed thee, son! Whither are you going?”

“I am going to bring the Fairy Nightingale for our new church,” said the lad.

“Good,” said the monk; “but this way is dangerous; let me advise you. The owner of the Fairy Nightingale is the Fairy Queen, a very beautiful maiden. On your way you will soon come to a river which the Fairy Queen has by her arts changed into a poisoned stream, and she does not drink of it. But you must drink of it, and say: ‘O happy! this is the water of immortality.’ After crossing the river you will come to a grove which the queen has changed into a jungle of thorns and thistles. You must smell the trees and shrubs, and say: ‘O happy! this grove is the flower of Paradise.’ Then you will come to a narrow pass on one side of which there is a wolf bound with chains, and on the other side there is a lamb bound with chains. There is a bundle of grass before the wolf, and a piece of meat before the lamb. You must put the grass before the lamb, and the meat before the wolf. You will then come to a large gate with double doors, one open and one closed. You must open the closed door and shut the open one. Entering in you will find the Fairy Queen, owner of the Fairy Nightingale, sleeping in a splendid bedchamber. She sleeps seven days and nights, and is awake seven days and nights. If you can do what I have told you, and reach there at a time when the Queen is asleep, you can bring the Nightingale; if not, you are lost.”

The lad started, and came successively to the river, the grove, the lamb and the wolf, and the gate. He did all that the monk had told him, and entering in, saw an exquisite bedchamber where a maiden as beautiful as the sun was sleeping on a purple bed embroidered with gold and jewelry. The Fairy Nightingale came down from its cage, and standing on the Queen’s bedside, sang to her a thousand songs with enchanting melody, and lulled her to sound sleep. The lad, who was watching from behind the arras, seeing the maiden asleep, and that the Nightingale had returned to its cage, crept in slowly, took the Nightingale’s cage, pressed a kiss upon the forehead of the sleeping maiden, thus stamping the sign of his lips there, and started back on his way.

The Queen awoke, and seeing the Nightingale had been stolen, exclaimed:

“Doors, catch the thief!”

“God speed him!” said the doors; “he closed the open one of us and opened the closed one of us.”

“Wolf and lamb, catch the thief!” exclaimed the Fairy Queen.

“God speed him!” said the wolf and the lamb; “he gave the meat to the wolf, and the grass to the lamb.”

“Grove, catch the thief!” exclaimed the Queen.

“God speed him!” said the grove; “you made me thorns and thistles; he made me a flower of Paradise.”

“River, catch the thief!” exclaimed the Queen.

“God speed him!” said the river; “you made me a stream of poison; he made me the water of immortality.”

When the Queen saw that all her charms were unavailing, she mounted her horse and started in pursuit of the lad.

But let us return to the lad. He passed all the dangerous places and came to the square where the road divided into the three branches. He saw the monk waiting for him.

“Here is the Fairy Nightingale, holy father,” said the lad, and seeing that his brothers had not yet come back, he give the cage to the monk and he himself started in search of his brothers. He went first along the broad road, until he came to the inn where his brother was serving. He secretly made himself known to him, and taking him away brought him to the monk. He then took the next road, and went as far as the green meadow and sat down upon one of the benches. Soon the giant appeared with his iron rod and tried to strike the lad. But the lad cleverly avoided the blow, and snatching the rod from the giant’s hand, struck him. Immediately the giant fell down and was changed into a huge round black stone.

“My brother must have been lost somewhere in this place,” thought the lad, and began to strike with the iron rod the stones scattered here and there upon the meadow, and lo! the stones were changed into men, who began to run away; but his brother was not among them. He saw a stone under the bench, and struck it. It was changed into his brother, and began to run.

“Brother! brother, do not run, it is I,” exclaimed the lad.

He stopped and both returned to the monk. All three, taking the Fairy Nightingale, went toward their father’s city. On the way they were thirsty, and came to a well.

They lowered the youngest brother to draw water, and as soon as he reached the bottom of the well, the two older brothers said to one another:

“When we go home to our father all praise and glory will be given to that fellow who is now in the well, and we shall be despised. It shall not be; he shall never come up from that well.”

They cut the rope, and leaving the hero in the well, took the Nightingale and went to their father, saying:

“Our youngest brother was killed in our attempt to get the Fairy Nightingale, but we two succeeded in bringing it.”

They hung the cage in the new church, but the Fairy Nightingale did not warble a single song; it was sad and silent. Soon the Fairy Queen came riding to the King, and said:

“Who is the hero that has brought my Nightingale?”

“We brought it,” said the two brothers.

“Well, what did you meet on the way?” inquired the Queen.

“Nothing,” said the lads.

“Then it was not you who brought it,” said the Queen; “you are thieves.” And she caused them to be arrested and cast into prison, saying:

“You shall not be released until the real hero who brought the Fairy Nightingale is presented to me.”

Some women who were gleaning barley in the fields happened to pass near the well where the lad was left, and hearing him groan took him out; one of them, who had no children, adopted him as her son. After a few weeks news came from the city to the village to the effect that the King’s sons had brought the Fairy Nightingale, but the Fairy Queen, the owner of the Nightingale, also had come after it. One day the lad asked permission of his adopted mother, saying:

“A new church has been built, let me go and see it.”

The old woman consented, and he went to the city as a peasant boy. He went to his father’s house and heard that his brothers were imprisoned. He went directly to the prison and set them free. The Fairy Queen, hearing

this, came and said to the lad:

“I am the Fairy Queen, the owner of the Nightingale; are you not afraid of me?”

“I am he who brought the Fairy Nightingale,” said the lad, “I am not afraid of you.”

“What did you see on the way?” asked the Queen.

The lad told her what he had seen and what he had done.

“And moreover,” said the lad, “I have put a sign upon your forehead with my own lips. Look at your image in yonder pond, and you will see that you are my betrothed.”

The Queen looked at her reflected image in the water, and seeing the mark of the lad’s kiss, exclaimed:

“Hero, you are worthy of me; I am yours hereafter.”

A wedding festival for forty days and forty nights was celebrated. After this the couple went to the church to be married. The Fairy Nightingale began to warble, and sang them a thousand and one songs. It is still singing, and all the world is wondering at its sweet melodies.

Three apples fell from heaven; one for me, one for the story-teller, and one for him who entertained the company.

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