



# *The Little Lame Fox - The Story of the Youngest Brother Who Found the Magic Grape-Vine and Married the Golden Maiden*

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*Intermediate*  
*35 min read*

There was once a wealthy farmer who had three sons. The oldest was a selfish overbearing fellow. The second was a weak chap who always did everything his brother suggested. The youngest whose name was Janko was not as bright and clever as his brothers but he was honest and, moreover, he had a good heart and in this world a good heart, you know, is more likely to bring its owner happiness than wicked brains.

“That booby!” the oldest brother would say whenever he saw Janko. And the second would snicker and repeat the ugly word, “Booby!”

The father was proud of his three sons and happy to see them grow up strong and healthy.

“They’re good boys,” he’d say to himself, “and I’m a fortunate father.”

Now there was one very curious thing about this farmer that nobody understood. One of his eyes was always laughing and the other was always weeping.

“What’s the matter with your father’s eyes?” people used to ask the sons.

The sons didn’t know any more than any one else. One day they were in the garden discussing the matter among themselves.

“Why don’t we just go and ask him?” Janko suggested.

“If anybody is to ask him, I will!” declared the oldest brother importantly.

So he went indoors to his father and said:

“Father, people are forever talking about your eyes. Now I wish you would tell me why one of them is always laughing and the other always weeping.”

“My eyes, indeed!” cried the farmer, and in a rage he snatched up a knife and hurled it straight at his son. The young man dodged aside and fled and the knife stuck in the door jamb.

All out of breath the oldest brother returned to the others but of course he was ashamed to tell them what had happened. So he said to them:

“If you want to know what’s the matter with father’s eyes, you’ll have to ask him yourselves.”

So the second brother went in to the farmer and he had exactly the same experience. When he came out he gave his older brother a wink and said to Janko:

“Now it is your turn, Booby. Father is waiting for you.”

So Janko went in to his father and said:

“You have told my brothers why one of your eyes is always laughing and the other always weeping. Now please tell me for I, too, want to know.”

In a rage the farmer snatched up the knife again and lifted his arm to hurl it. But Janko stood perfectly still.

Why should he turn and run away as though he had done something wrong? He had only asked his father a civil question and if his father did not wish to answer it, he could tell him so.

The farmer when he saw that the boy was not to be frightened smiled and laid the knife aside.

“Thank God,” he said, “I have one son who is not a coward! I have been waiting these many years to have my sons ask me this very question. My right eye laughs because God has blessed me and made me rich and has allowed my three sons to grow to manhood, strong and healthy. My left eye weeps because I can never forget a Magic Grape-Vine which once grew in my garden. It used to give me a bucket of wine every hour of the twenty-four! One night a thief came and stole my Magic Vine and I have never heard of it since. Do you wonder that my left eye weeps at the memory of this wonderful Vine? Alas, the bucket of wine that used to flow out of it every hour of the day and night—I have never tasted its like since!”

“Father,” Janko said, “dry your weeping eye! I and my brothers will go out into the world and find your Magic Grape-Vine wherever it is hidden!”

With that Janko ran out to his brothers and when they heard what he had to say they laughed and called him, “Booby!” and asked him didn’t he suppose that they had already planned to do just this thing. Of course they hadn’t, but they were so jealous and ill-natured that they couldn’t bear the thought of his being the first to suggest anything.

“We mustn’t lose any more time,” Janko said.

“It doesn’t matter how much time you lose, Mr. Booby! As for us we two are going to start out to-morrow at sunrise.”

“But, brothers,” Janko begged, “please let me go, too!”

“No!” they told him shortly. “You can stay home and look after the farm!”

But their father when he heard the discussion said, no, Janko was also to go as he was the bravest of them all. After that the brothers, because they didn’t want their father to tell how they had been afraid and run away, had to agree.

So the next morning early the three of them started out, each with a wallet well-stocked with food.

“How are we going to get rid of the Booby?” the second one whispered.

“Trust me!” the oldest one whispered back with a wink.

Presently they came to a crossroads where three roads branched. Now the oldest brother knew that after a short distance two of the roads came together again. So he motioned the second brother slyly that he was to take the middle road. Then he said:

“Brothers, let us part here and each take a different road. Do you agree?”

“Yes,” the other two said, “we agree.”

“Then suppose Janko take the left-hand road.”

“And I’ll take the middle road,” the second cried.

“And I,” the eldest said, “will take the one that’s left. So farewell, brothers, and let us meet here in a year’s time.”

“God bless us all,” Janko called out, “and grant that one of us may find our dear father’s Magic Grape-Vine.”

The two older brothers of course met in a short time when their roads joined and they had a good laugh to think how they had outwitted the Booby.

“Time enough to look for that old Grape-Vine when we’ve had a little fun!” the eldest said. “Let us sit down here and eat a bite and then push on to the next village. There’s an inn there where we can try our luck at cards.”

So they sat down by the roadside, opened their wallets, and laid out some bread and cheese. Just then a Little Lamé Fox came limping up on three feet, and whimpering and fawning it begged for something to eat.

“Get out!” bawled the older brother and the second, picking up a handful of stones, threw them at the Fox.

The little animal shied and then came timidly back, again begging for something to eat.

“Let’s kill it!” cried one of the brothers.

They both jumped up and tried to strike the little creature with their sticks. The Fox limped off and they followed, hitting at it as they ran and always just missing it. It was so weak and lame that they expected every minute to overtake it and so kept on chasing it until it had led them pretty far into the woods. Then suddenly it disappeared and there was nothing left for the brothers to do but make their way back to the roadside grumbling and cursing. In their absence some shepherd dogs had found their open wallets and eaten all their food. So now they really had something to curse about.

Janko meanwhile had been trudging along steadily on the third road. At last when he began to feel hungry, he sat down by the wayside and opened his wallet. Instantly the same Little Lame Fox came limping up and whimpered and fawned and begged for something to eat.

“You poor little creature,” Janko said, “are you hungry?”

He held out his hand coaxingly and the animal gave it a timid sniff.

“Of course I’ll give you something to eat,” Janko said. “There’s enough for both of us.”

With that he divided his bread and cheese and gave the Little Fox half. Then they ate together and the Little Fox allowed Janko to pat her head.

When they finished eating the Fox sat up on her haunches and said:

“Now, Janko, tell me about yourself. Who are you and where are you going?”

The Fox seemed such a sensible little person that it didn’t surprise Janko in the least to have her sit up and talk. Janko’s brothers would have said that he hadn’t sense enough to be surprised. But he had a good heart, Janko had, and as you’ll soon hear a good heart is a much better guide for conduct than wicked brains.

Janko answered the Fox simply and truthfully. He told about his father and his two brothers and about his father’s weeping eye and the Magic Grape-Vine for which he and his brothers were gone in search.

“You’ve been good to me,” the Little Fox said. “You’ve shared your bread with me and that makes us friends. So

from now on if you'll be a brother to me, I'll be a little sister to you."

Goodness knows Janko's own brothers weren't very good to him, but Janko understood what the Little Fox meant and he agreed.

"Well then, brother," the Fox said, "I know where that Grape-Vine is and I'm going to help you to get it. If you do just as I say I don't believe you'll have any trouble. Now take hold of my tail and away we'll go."

So Janko took hold of the Little Fox's tail and sure enough away they went. Whether they sailed through the air or just ran fleetly along the ground I don't know. But I do know that they went a great distance and that when they stopped Janko didn't feel in the least tired or breathless.

"Now, my brother," the Little Fox said, "listen carefully to what I tell you. The king of this country has a wonderful garden. In the midst of it your father's Grape-Vine is planted. We are close to the garden now. It is protected by twelve watches each of which is composed of twelve guards. To get to the Grape-Vine you will have to pass them all. Now as you approach each watch look carefully. If the eyes of all the guards are open and staring straight at you, have no fear. They sleep with their eyes open and they won't see you. But if their eyes are closed, then be careful for when their eyes are closed they are awake and ready to see you. You will find the Grape-Vine in the very center of the garden. Standing near it you will see two spades, a wooden spade and a golden spade. Take the wooden spade and dig up the Vine as quickly as you can. Under no condition touch the golden spade. Now, Janko, do you understand?"

Yes, Janko thought he understood. He slipped into the garden and the first thing he saw were twelve fierce looking guards who were staring at him with great round eyes. He was much frightened until he remembered that the Little Fox had said that if their eyes were open they were fast asleep. So he picked up courage and walked straight by them and sure enough they didn't see him. He passed watch after watch in the same way and at last reached the center of the garden. He saw the Grape-Vine at once. There was no mistaking it for at that very moment it was pouring out wine of itself into a golden bucket. Near it were two spades, Janko in great excitement snatched up the first that came to his hand and began to dig. Alas, it was the golden spade and as Janko drove it into the earth it sent out a loud ringing sound that instantly woke the guards. They came running from all directions with their eyes tightly closed for now, of course, they were awake. They caught Janko and dragged him to the king to whom they said:

"A thief! A thief! We found him trying to steal your Magic Grape-Vine!"

"My Magic Grape-Vine!" thundered the king. "Young man, what do you mean trying to steal my Magic Grape-Vine?"

"Well, you see," Janko answered simply, "the Grape-Vine really belongs to my father. It was stolen from him years ago and ever since then his left eye has wept over the loss of it. Give me the Vine, O king, for if you don't I shall have to come back and try again to steal it for it belongs to my father and I have sworn to get it!"

The king frowned in thought and at last he said:

"I can't give away my precious Grape-Vine for nothing, young man, but I tell you what I'll do: I'll give it to you provided you get for me the Golden Apple-Tree that bears buds, blossoms, and golden fruit every twenty-four hours."

With that Janko was dismissed and turned out of the garden.

The Little Fox was waiting for him and Janko had the shame of confessing that he had forgotten the warning about the golden spade and had been caught.

“But the king says he will give me the Grape-Vine provided I get for him the Golden Apple-Tree that bears buds, blossoms, and golden fruit every twenty-four hours.”

“Well, brother,” the Little Fox said, “you were good to me, so I’ll help you again. Take hold of my tail and away we’ll go.”

Janko took hold of the Little Fox’s tail and away they went a greater distance than before. In spite of going so quickly it took them a long time but whether it was weeks or months I don’t know. Whichever it was when they stopped Janko didn’t feel in the least tired or breathless.

“Now, brother,” the Little Fox said, “here we are in another country close to the king’s garden where the Golden Apple-Tree grows. To reach it you will have to pass twenty-four watches of twelve guards each. Take care that you pass each guard as before when his eyes are wide open and staring straight at you for that means he is asleep. When you reach the Golden Apple-Tree you will see two long poles on the ground—a wooden pole and a golden pole. Take the wooden pole and beat down some of the golden fruit. Don’t touch the golden pole. Remember!”

So Janko crept into the second garden and succeeded in passing all the guards of the twenty-four watches when their eyes were wide open and staring straight at him. He reached the Golden Apple-Tree and saw at once the two long poles that were lying near it on the ground. Now whether because he was excited or because he forgot what the Fox said—he had a good heart, Janko had, but he was a little careless sometimes—I don’t know. But I do know that instead of taking the wooden pole as the Fox had told him, he took the golden pole. At the first stroke of the golden pole against the golden branches of the tree, the golden branches sent out a loud clear whistle that woke all the sleeping guards. Every last one of them came running to the Apple-Tree and in no time at all they had captured poor Janko and carried him to their master, the king.

“Trying to steal my Golden Apple-Tree, is he?” roared the king in a great rage. “What do you want with my Golden Apple-Tree, young man?”

“Well, you see,” Janko answered simply, “I have to have the Golden Apple-Tree to exchange it for the Magic Grape-Vine that really belongs to my father. It was stolen from him years ago and ever since then his left eye has wept over the loss of it. Give me the Golden Apple-Tree, O king, for if you don’t I shall have to come back

and try again to steal it.”

The king seemed impressed with Janko’s words for after a moment he said:

“Janko, I can’t give you the Golden Apple-Tree for nothing, but I tell you what I’ll do: I’ll let you have it provided you get for me the Golden Horse that can race around the world in twenty-four hours.”

With that Janko was dismissed and turned out of the garden.

As usual the Little Fox was waiting for him and again Janko had the shame of confessing that he had forgotten the warning about the golden pole and had been caught.

“But the king says he will give me the Golden Apple-Tree provided I get him the Golden Horse that can race around the world in twenty-four hours. I wonder, dear Little Fox, will you help me again?”

“Yes, brother, I will help you again for you were good to me. Take hold of my tail and away we’ll go.”

So Janko took hold of the Little Fox’s tail and away they went. How far they went and how long they were gone I don’t know, but it was a great distance and a long time. However they arrived without feeling in the least tired or breathless.

“Now, brother,” the Little Fox said, “this time listen carefully to what I tell you. Here we are in another kingdom close to the king’s own stable where the Golden Horse is guarded by thirty-six watches of twelve guards each. When night comes you must slip into the stable and pass all those guards when they are asleep with their eyes wide open and staring straight at you. When you reach the Golden Horse you will see hanging beside him a golden bridle and a common bridle made of hempen rope. Slip the hempen bridle over the Horse’s head and lead him quietly out of the stable. But mind you don’t touch the golden bridle! This time don’t forget!”

Janko promised faithfully to remember what the Little Fox said and when night came he crept into the stable and cautiously made his way through the sleeping guards. He reached at last the stall of the Golden Horse. It was the most beautiful horse in the world and the gleam of its shining flanks was like sunshine in the dark stable.

Janko stroked its golden mane and whispered softly into its ear. The horse responded to his touch and rubbed

its muzzle against his shoulder.

Janko reached over to take the hempen bridle and then he paused. "It would be an outrage," he thought to himself, "to put a common rope on this glorious creature!"

Just think of it! For the third time Janko forgot the Little Fox's warning! I have no excuse to make for him. I don't see how he could have forgotten a third time! But he did. He took the golden bridle instead of the hempen one and put it over the head of the Golden Horse. The Horse neighed and instantly all the sleeping guards awoke and came running to the stall. They caught Janko, of course, and when morning broke carried him to their master, the king.

He questioned Janko as the others had done and Janko answered him simply:

"You see I have to have the Golden Horse, O king, to exchange it for the Golden Apple-Tree. And I have to have the Golden Apple-Tree to exchange it for the Magic Grape-Vine that really belongs to my father. It was stolen from him years ago and ever since then his left eye has wept over the loss of it. Give me the Golden Horse, O king, for if you don't give him to me I shall have to come back and try again to steal him."

"But, Janko," the king said, "I can't give you the Golden Horse for nothing! But I tell you what I'll do: I will give him to you provided you get for me the Golden Maiden who has never seen the sun."

With that Janko was dismissed and led out of the stable.

Janko really was awfully ashamed this time when he had again to confess to the Little Fox that he had forgotten her warning and had touched the golden bridle.

"Janko! Janko!" the Little Fox said. "Where are your wits! Now what shall we do?"

Then Janko told the Little Fox of the king's offer:

"He will give me the Golden Horse provided I get for him the Golden Maiden who has never seen the sun. Dear Little Fox, will you help me this one time more? I know I am very stupid but I promise you faithfully that this time I will not forget."

"Of course, brother," the Little Fox said, "I'll help you again. But this will have to be the last time. If you forget

this time I won't be able to help you any more. Take hold of my tail and away we'll go."

So for the fourth time Janko took hold of the Little Fox's tail and away they went. They went and they went—I can't tell you how far! But they weren't tired when they arrived, they weren't even breathless.

"Now, brother," the Little Fox said, "listen carefully to what I tell you. Here we are in another kingdom close to a great cavern where for sixteen years the Golden Maiden has been kept a prisoner under the enchantment of her wicked mother and never allowed to see the golden light of the sun. There are forty-eight chambers in the cavern and each chamber is guarded by a watch of twelve guards. Steal softly through each chamber when the eyes of all the guards are wide open and staring straight at you. In the last chamber of all you will find the Golden Maiden playing in her Golden Cradle. Over the Cradle stands a fearful ghost who will cry out to you to go away and threaten to kill you. But don't be afraid. It is only an empty ghost which the wicked mother has placed there to frighten men off from rescuing the Golden Maiden. Take the Golden Maiden by the hand, put the Golden Cradle on your shoulder, and hurry back to me. But one thing: As you leave each chamber be sure to lock the door after you so that the guards when they wake cannot follow you."

Janko crept into the cavern and cautiously made his way from chamber to chamber through the wide-eyed guards. In the forty-eighth chamber he found the Golden Maiden playing in her Golden Cradle. He ran to take her when a horrible creature rose above the Cradle and in hollow tones cried: "Back! Back! Back!" For a moment Janko was frightened, then he remembered that the awful creature was only an empty ghost. So he went boldly up to the Golden Cradle and sure enough the ghost faded away.

"You have come to rescue me, haven't you?" the Golden Maiden cried.

She gave Janko her hand and he helped her to her feet. Then he put the Golden Cradle on his shoulder and together they hurried out from chamber to chamber. And I am happy to tell you that this time Janko remembered the Little Fox's warning and locked the door of every chamber as they left it. So they reached the upper world safely and found the Little Fox waiting for them.

"There's no time to lose," the Little Fox said. "Put the Cradle across my back, Janko, and take hold of my tail with one hand and give your other hand to the Golden Maiden and away we'll go."

Janko did as the Little Fox said and away they all three went.

When they reached the stable of the Golden Horse, the Little Fox said:

“It doesn’t seem right to give the Golden Maiden to the king of the Golden Horse unless she wants us to, does it?”

The Golden Maiden at once begged them to keep her.

“Don’t give me to the king of the Golden Horse!” she said. “I want to stay with Janko who has rescued me!”

“But unless I give up the Golden Maiden,” Janko asked, “how can I get the Golden Horse?”

“Perhaps I can help you,” the Little Fox said. “Perhaps I can enchant myself into looking like the Golden Maiden.”

With that the Little Fox leaped up in the air, turned this way and that, and lo! you might have thought her the Golden Maiden except that her eyes were still fox’s eyes.

“Now leave the Maiden outside here hidden in her Golden Cradle and take me in to the master of the stable. Exchange me for the Golden Horse and make off at once. Then pick up the Golden Maiden in her Golden Cradle and ride away and soon I’ll join you.”

Janko did this very thing. He took in the fox maiden and exchanged her for the Golden Horse and instantly rode off as the Little Fox had told him.

The king of the stable at once called all his courtiers together and showed them the fox maiden.

“See,” he said, “this is the Golden Maiden who has never seen the sun! She is the most beautiful maiden in the world and she now belongs to me!”

The courtiers looked at her and admired her, but one of them a little keener than the others said:

“Yes, she’s very beautiful and all that but look at her eyes. They don’t look like maiden’s eyes but like fox’s eyes!”

Instantly at the word fox the false maiden turned to a fox and went scampering off.

“See what you’ve done!” cried the king in a fury. “You have changed my Golden Maiden into a fox with your nonsense! You shall pay for this with your life!” And he had him executed at once.

The Little Fox meantime had caught up with Janko and the Golden Maiden and the Golden Horse. As they neared the garden of the king of the Golden Apple-Tree the Fox said:

“It would be a pity to give away the Golden Horse. Rightly it belongs to the Golden Maiden and was taken from her by her wicked mother.”

“Don’t give my Golden Horse away!” the Golden Maiden begged.

“But how else can I get the Golden Apple-Tree?” Janko asked.

“Perhaps I can help you,” the Little Fox said. “Perhaps I can enchant myself into looking like the Golden Horse.”

With that the Little Fox leaped up in the air, turned this way and that, and lo! you might have thought her the Golden Horse except that her tail was still a fox’s tail.

When they reached the garden of the Golden Apple-Tree, Janko left the Golden Horse and the Golden Maiden outside and took the fox horse in to the king.

The king was delighted and at once had his servants deliver to Janko the Golden Apple-Tree.

When Janko was safely gone, the king called all his courtiers together and showed them the fox horse.

“See my Golden Horse!” he said. “Isn’t it the most beautiful horse in the world!”

“It is! It is!” they all told him.

But one courtier, a little keener than the rest, remarked:

“What a curious tail for a horse to have! It is like a fox’s tail!”

At the word fox the false horse changed back into a fox and went scampering off.

“See what you’ve done with your nonsense!” cried the king. “You have lost me my Golden Horse and now you shall lose your own life!” And he ordered the courtier to be executed at once.

The Fox soon caught up with the real Golden Horse and with Janko and the Golden Maiden who were holding in their arms the Golden Cradle and the Golden Apple-Tree.

“It will never do to give up the Golden Apple-Tree,” the Fox said, “for it, too, rightly belongs to the Golden Maiden. I’ll have to see again if I can help you.”

So when they neared the garden of the Magic Grape-Vine, the Little Fox leaped in the air, turned this way; and that, and lo! you might have thought her the Golden Apple-Tree except that her fruit instead of being round was long and pointed like a fox’s head.

Janko gave the king the fox tree and received in return the Magic Grape-Vine that really belonged to his father and not to the king at all. He hurried back to the Golden Maiden who was waiting for him with the Golden Horse and the Golden Apple-Tree and the Golden Cradle and off they all went.

The king was delighted with his fox tree and called his courtiers to come and admire it.

“Beautiful! Beautiful!” they all said, and one of them examining the fruit carefully remarked:

“But see these apples! They are not round like apples but long and pointed like a fox’s head!”

He had no sooner said the word fox than the tree turned into a fox and went scampering off.

“See what you’ve done with your nonsense!” cried the king. “You have lost me my Golden Apple-Tree and now I shall lose you your head!” And he ordered the courtier to be executed at once.

When the Fox caught up with the Golden Horse, she said to Janko:

“Now, my brother, it is time for us to part. You have the Magic Grape-Vine and soon your father’s left eye will no longer weep. Besides, you are carrying home the Golden Maiden on her own Golden Horse and with her Golden Apple-Tree and her Golden Cradle. God has blessed you in your undertaking and will continue to bless

you so long as you are good and kind. Farewell now and think sometimes of your sister, the Little Lamé Fox.”

Janko wept at thought of parting with the Little Fox and the Little Fox promised him that she would help him again if ever he needed her. Then she turned and trotted off into the woods and Janko rode homewards without her.

When he reached the crossroads where he had parted from his brothers just one year before he came upon a crowd of angry farmers belaboring two men who had been robbing their barns. Janko found that the two men were his own brothers who since he had seen them had fallen into bad company, lost all their money at cards, and had finally taken to thieving. Janko paid the farmers for the damage his brothers had done them and took his brothers home with him.

You can imagine the old farmer’s happiness at seeing all three of his sons after a whole year’s absence. It was even greater than his delight at getting back his Magic Grape-Vine. But that doesn’t mean that he wasn’t delighted to have back the Grape-Vine. At the first cup of wine that the Vine poured him, his left eye ceased weeping and it was never known to weep again.

He was delighted, too, at having the Golden Maiden in the house and pleased when people came from far and near to see the Maiden’s Golden Horse and Golden Apple-Tree and Golden Cradle. He even began to hope that she might marry one of his sons before some prince came along and snatched her away. He thought the Maiden would make a wonderful bride for the oldest. Unfortunately Janko had not told him what reprobates the two older sons were, and the older brothers themselves had given their father to understand that it was really they who had found the Magic Grape-Vine and rescued the Golden Maiden. You see instead of being grateful to Janko for having saved their necks from the angry farmers, they hated him worse than ever.

“That Booby!” the older brother growled. “Just because he took the left-hand road and found the Magic Grape-Vine he thinks himself so much better than us! It was just luck—that’s all it was! Any one who took the left-hand road could have found the old Grape-Vine!”

“And do you notice the way the Golden Maiden always smiles on him?” the other said. “The first thing we know she’ll be marrying him and giving him the Golden Horse and the Golden Apple-Tree and the Golden Cradle! Then where will we be?”

“Brother,” whispered the first, “let us make away with him!”

So they plotted together and they asked Janko to go hunting with them the next day. Suspecting nothing Janko went. When they came to a deep well in the woods they asked Janko to reach them a cup of water. As he stooped over into the well they pushed him all the way in and drowned him. That’s the kind of brothers they were! Then they went home and pretended to be surprised that Janko hadn’t come home before them.

He didn’t come that night or the next day either, and the Golden Maiden grew sad and quiet, the Magic Grape-Vine no longer poured out its precious wine every hour, the Golden Apple-Tree stopped putting forth its buds and blossoms and golden fruit, and the Golden Horse languished and drooped its lovely head.

“Everything goes wrong when Janko isn’t here!” the farmer said. “Where can he be?”

On the third day the Golden Maiden suddenly began to laugh and sing, the Magic Grape-Vine again poured forth a bucket of precious wine every hour, the Golden Apple-Tree put out buds and blossoms and golden fruit, and the Golden Horse lifted its beautiful head and neighed loud and happily. And do you know why? Because the Little Lambe Fox had just rescued Janko and brought him back to life! She pulled him out of the well, and rolled him about on the ground, and worked over him until all the water was emptied from his lungs and he was able to breathe again.

Then as he opened his eyes the Little Fox said:

“I told you, brother, I’d come again if you needed my help. I was just in time for a little longer and I could never have brought you back to life. And now, brother, the enchantment that held me is broken and I need no longer go about as a Little Lambe Fox. My mother was a wicked witch and she enchanted me because she was angry with me for saving a man whom she wanted to kill. So she turned me into a little fox and she said I should have to remain a fox forever unless I succeeded in bringing back to life my benefactor. You are my benefactor, Janko, for you shared your bread and cheese with me the first time we met, and now I have been able to bring

you back to life.”

As she spoke she changed into a lovely maiden.

“Good-by, Janko,” she said. “Go home now and tell your father how your evil brothers have treated you. Unless you do this they will plot against the Golden Maiden and you may not be able to protect her.”

So Janko and the maiden kissed each other as a brother and sister might and the maiden went her way and Janko returned to his father’s house.

The Golden Maiden and the old farmer were not in the least surprised to see him for things were so happy again that they just knew it must be because Janko was coming back. But his two brothers when they caught sight of him alive and well were so frightened that they took to their heels and ran off as fast as they could go and what’s more they’ve never shown themselves since. And good riddance, too, I say, for they were wicked evil fellows and would only have injured Janko further if they could.

When Janko told his father all the wicked things they had done, the old farmer could scarcely believe his ears.

“And to think,” he said, “I had been hoping the Golden Maiden would marry one of them! Mercy me! Mercy me!”

“But, father,” the Golden Maiden said—she called him father now and it pleased him mightily; “father, I should rather marry Janko!”

“Marry Janko!” the farmer cried. “Why, my dear, Janko is a stupid lad, not nearly so clever as his two brothers!”

“I don’t care if he is stupid. He’s got a good heart and that’s more than the other two have. And besides that he’s got a brave heart for he rescued me from the dark cavern and he faced the awful ghost that stood over my Golden Cradle. Why, father, I’d rather marry Janko than any prince in the world!”

You can imagine Janko’s feelings when he heard this!

“I’d feel like a prince if you did marry me, dear Golden One!” he cried.

Well, she did marry him, and sure enough he did feel like a prince. What prince, I’d like to know, had a lovelier

bride? None! And was there any prince in the world whose bride brought him greater riches than the Golden Apple-Tree, the Golden Horse, and Golden Cradle? No, not one! And furthermore the farmer promised that, when he died, he would leave him the Magic Grape-Vine.

So Janko lived happy and prosperous. And it all came about through his having a good honest heart.

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