



The Nine Pea-Hens and Golden Apples

Andrew Lang'S Fairy Books

Bulgarian

*Intermediate
25 min read*

There was once upon a time an emperor who had three sons, and in his yard a golden apple-tree, which flowered and ripened every night; but somebody robbed it, and the emperor was utterly unable to discover who the robber was.

Once he was conversing with his sons, and said to them: 'I do not know whither goes the fruit from our apple-tree.'

Then the eldest son answered him: 'I will go to-night to see who takes it.' When it became dark, the eldest son did as he had said: went out, and lay down under it. Well, when the apples began to ripen in the course of the night, slumber overtook him, and he fell asleep; and when he awoke at dawn he looked—but where were the apples? Taken away! When he saw this, he went and related all to his father just as it really happened.

The second son said to his father: 'I will go to-night to watch, that I may see who takes it.' But he, too, watched it even as the first one. About the time when the apples began to ripen, he fell asleep. When he woke up in the morning, where were the apples? Taken away!

Now came the turn of the third and youngest brother. He went out at eventide under the apple-tree, placed a sofa there, lay down, and went to sleep. About midnight, when the apples began to ripen, he woke up and looked at the apple-tree. It had just begun to ripen, and illuminated all the yard from the brightness of its fruit. Just then up flew nine peahens, eight of which settled upon the apple-tree, and the ninth on the ground beside his sofa, and, as soon as she had alighted, became a damsel, who shone with beauty like a bright sun.

They conversed together while the other eight were rifling the tree, and when dawn came, she thanked him for the apples, and he begged her to leave just one behind her. She gave him two—one for himself, and one to take to his father—transformed herself into a peahen, and flew away, followed by the other eight.

In the morning the prince rose up, and took one apple to his father, who did not know what to do for joy, and commended him without ceasing. The next evening the youngest prince went out again to watch the apple-tree, and as soon as he had gone out, lay down as before, and watched it that night also. In the morning he again brought his father an apple. This went on for a few days, when his brothers began to envy him, because they could not watch it, whereas he watched it successfully. They could not make out how to discover the manner in which he watched the apple-tree.

So they sought out an old witch, who promised them to find out how their young brother watched the apple-tree. At the approach of evening, when the youngest prince was about to go out to watch the apple-tree, the accursed witch stole out and went off before him, lay down under his sofa, and there concealed herself. The prince came, lay down without knowing that the old woman was under his sofa, and went to sleep as previously. About midnight, when the prince had just woke up, the nine peahens arrived; eight of them settled on the tree, and the other on the ground beside his sofa, transformed herself into a damsel, and they began to converse together.

While these were talking to each other, the accursed old witch softly raised herself up, and cut off a piece of the damsel's long hair. As soon as she felt this, the damsel sprang on one side, transformed herself into a peahen,

and flew away, with the other eight behind her. The prince, on seeing this, sprang off his sofa, and shouted: 'What is this?' He ere long espied the old woman under the sofa, seized and hauled her from under it, and, when morning came, ordered her to be fastened to the tails of two horses and torn asunder. The peahens came no more to the apple-tree, and the prince was much grieved on this account, and wept and mourned day after day.

At last he determined to go to seek them all over the world, and went and told his father what his intention was, and his father endeavoured to comfort him, and said: 'Stay, my son! I will find you another damsel in my empire, such an one as you wish for.' But in vain; he would not follow his father's advice, and made preparations to go; took with him one of his servants, and went into the world to find the peahen. When he had travelled a long time, he came to a lake, in the midst of which was a rich palace, and in the palace an aged empress, who had one daughter.

The prince, on coming to the old empress, asked her to tell him about the nine peahens, if she knew about them; and the old woman replied that she did, and that the nine peahens came daily to bathe in the lake. On telling him this, she began to try to over-persuade him with these words: 'Never mind those nine peahens, my son. I have a handsome damsel, and abundance of wealth—it will all remain yours.' But as soon as the prince heard where the peahens were, he would not listen to her talk, but in the morning ordered his servant to get the horses ready to go to the lake.

Before they started for the lake, the old woman called his servant, bribed him, and gave him a little whistle, saying to him: 'When the time approaches for the peahens to come to the lake, do you secretly look out, and blow the whistle behind your master's neck; he will immediately fall asleep, and will not see them.'

The accursed servant hearkened to her, took the whistle, and did as the old woman told him. When they arrived at the shore of the lake, he calculated the time when the peahens would arrive, blew the whistle behind his master's neck, and he immediately fell as sound asleep as if he were dead.

Scarcely had he fallen asleep, when the peahens arrived; eight of them settled on the lake, and the ninth perched upon his horse, and began to try to awaken him: 'Arise, my birdie! arise, my lamb! arise, my dove!' But he heard nothing, but slept on as if dead. When the peahens had finished bathing, they all flew away, and he awoke, and asked his servant: 'What is it? Did they come?' The servant replied: 'They did come,' and told him

how eight of them settled on the lake, and the ninth on his horse, and that she tried to wake him. When the unhappy prince heard this from his servant, he was ready to kill himself from pain and anger. The next morning they visited the shore of the lake again, but his accursed servant calculated the time to blow the whistle behind his neck, and he immediately fell asleep as if he were dead.

Scarcely had he fallen asleep, when the nine peahens arrived; eight settled on the lake, and the ninth on his horse, and began to try to awake him: 'Arise, my birdie! arise, my lamb! arise, my dove!' But he slept on as if he were dead, hearing nothing. When the peahen failed to wake him, and they were about to fly away again, the one which had been trying to wake him turned and said to his servant: 'When your master wakes, tell him that to-morrow it will once more be possible for him to see us, but after that, never more.'

On saying this she took flight, and the others from the lake after her. Scarcely had they flown away, when the prince awoke, and asked his servant: 'Did they come?' He told him: 'They did come, and eight of them settled on the lake, and the ninth on your horse, and tried to wake you, but you slept soundly. As she departed, she told me to tell you that you will see her here once again to-morrow, and never more.'

When the prince heard this, he was ready to kill himself in his unhappiness, and did not know what to do for sorrow. On the third day he got ready to go to the lake, mounted his horse, went to the shore, and, in order not to fall asleep, kept his horse continually in motion. But his wicked servant, as he followed him, calculated the time, and blew the whistle behind his neck, and he immediately leant forward on his horse and fell asleep. As soon as he fell asleep, the nine peahens flew up; eight settled on the lake, and the ninth on his horse, and endeavored to wake him: 'Arise, my birdie! arise, my lamb! arise, my dove!' But he slept as if he were dead, and heard nothing.

Then, when they were about to fly away again, the one which had perched on his horse turned round, and said to his servant: 'When your master wakes up, tell him to roll the upper peg on the under one, and then he will find me.'

Then she flew off, and those from the lake after her. When they had flown away, he awoke again, and asked his servant: 'Did they come?' He replied: 'They did; and the one that had perched on your horse told me to tell you to roll the upper peg on the under one, and then you would find her. When the prince heard this, he drew his sword, and cut off his servant's head. When he had done this, he started to travel on alone. When he had

travelled a long time, he came at dusk to the cottage of a hermit, and lodged there for the night. In the evening the prince asked the hermit: Grandfather, have you heard of nine golden peahens?’

The hermit answered: ‘Yes, my son; you are fortunate in having come to me to ask about them. They are not far hence; it is not more than half a day’s journey to them from here.’ In the morning, when the prince departed to seek them, the hermit came out to accompany him, and said to him: ‘Go to the right, and you will find a large gate. When you enter that gate, turn to the right, and then you will go right into their town, and in that town is their palace. He went on his way according to the hermit’s words, and went on till he came to that gate; then turned to the right, and descried the town upon a hill. When he saw the town he was much rejoiced. When he entered the town he inquired where the palace of the nine peahens was. It was pointed out to him. At the gate a watchman stopped him, and inquired whence and who he was. The prince told him all, whence he was and who he was. After this the watchman went off to announce him to the empress. When she heard it, she ran breathless, and stood in the form of a damsel before him, took him by the hand, and led him upstairs. Then the two rejoiced together, and in a day or two were wedded.

When a few days had elapsed after their marriage, the empress departed to go on a journey, and the prince remained alone. When she was about to start, she took out and gave him the keys of twelve cellars, and said to him: ‘Open all the cellars, but do not have any nonsense with the twelfth.’ She went away. When the prince remained alone in the palace, he bethought himself: ‘What does this mean, that I am to open all the cellars, but not to open the twelfth? Glory to the Lord God! what can there be in it?’ He then began to open them one after the other. He came to the twelfth, and at first would not open it; but as he had no occupation, he began to brood and to say to himself: How can it be in this cellar that she told me not to open it?’ At last he opened it too, and found standing in the midst of it a cask bound with iron hoops, and a voice out of it was heard, saying: ‘I pray you, brother—I am athirst for water—give me a cup of water.’

On hearing this voice, the prince took a cup of water, and sprinkled it on the bung; and as soon as he had sprinkled it, one of the hoops of the cask burst. The voice then cried: ‘Give me one more cup of water; I am athirst.’ He took a cup of water and sprinkled it on the bung; and as soon as he had done so, another hoop burst on the cask. The voice then cried: ‘I am athirst; give me, brother, one more cup of water.’ The prince took another cup of water and poured it on the bung; but as soon as he had finished pouring it, the third hoop of the cask burst, the cask split asunder, and out of it flew a dragon, found the empress on her way, and carried her

off. Thus it happened, and the attendants came and told their master that a dragon had carried the empress away.

Finally he set off to seek her in the world. When he had travelled a long time, he came to a marsh, and in that marsh he spied a little fish, which was endeavouring to jump into the water, but was unable to do so. This little fish, on seeing the prince, addressed itself to him: 'I pray you, brother, do a good action: throw me into the water; I shall some time be of use to you; only take a scale from me, and when you are in want of me, rub it between your fingers.' On hearing this he took a scale off it, threw the fish into the water, put the scale into a handkerchief, and went on his way.

When he had gone a little further, he espied a fox caught in a trap. When the fox saw him, it called out: 'I pray you, brother, let me out of this trap; I shall some day be of use to you; only take one or two hairs from my fur, and when I am wanted for you, rub them between your fingers.' He let it out of the trap, took one or two hairs from it, and went on his way. Thus he proceeded onwards, till, as he went, he came to a hill, and found a crow caught in a trap just like the fox before. As soon as the crow saw him, it cried out: 'I pray you, be a brother to me, traveller; let me out of this trap; I shall some day be of use to you; only take a feather or two from me, and when you are in want of me, rub them between your fingers.' The prince took one or two feathers from the crow, let it out of the trap, and then went on his way. As he went on to find the empress, he met a man, and asked him: 'I pray you, brother, do you not know where is the palace of the dragon emperor?' The man showed him the way, and also told him at what time he was at home, that he might find him. The prince thanked him, and said: 'Farewell.'

He then went on, and gradually came to the palace of the dragon emperor. On his arrival there he found his beloved, and when she saw him and he saw her, they were both full of joy. Now they began to plan together how to escape. Finally they agreed to saddle their horses and take to flight. They saddled them, mounted, and off. When they had ridden off, the dragon arrived and looked about, but the empress was not to be found. 'Now what shall we do?' said the dragon to his horse. 'Shall we eat and drink, or pursue them?' The horse replied to him: 'Don't trouble yourself; eat and drink.' When he had dined, the dragon mounted his horse and galloped after them, and in course of time overtook them, and took the empress away, but said to the prince: 'Go in safety; this time you are forgiven, because you gave me water in the cellar; but do not come a second time if your life is dear to you.' The poor prince remained as if thunderstricken, then started and proceeded a little

way; but as he could not overcome his heart, he returned to the dragon's palace. There he found the empress weeping. When they saw each other and met, they began to consult how to get away so as to escape. Then said the prince to the empress: 'When the dragon comes, ask him from whom he bought that horse, and tell me, that I may obtain such another, that we may escape.' After saying this to her he went out, that the dragon might not find him on his arrival. When the dragon came, the empress began to coax him and make herself agreeable to him, and said to him: 'What a swift horse yours is! From whom did you buy him? Tell me, I pray you.' He answered: 'Where I bought him nobody can make a purchase. On a certain hill lives an old woman who has twelve horses in her stable, such that you don't know which is better than another. One of them is in the corner, and this one looks skinny; but he is the best of all, and is brother of mine: this one could fly to the sky. Whoever seeks to obtain a horse from the old woman must serve her three days. The old woman has a mare with a foal; whoever watches the mare successfully for three days, to him the old woman gives the choice of whichever horse he wishes. Whoever engages himself to watch the mare, and fails to watch her successfully for three days and three nights, loses his life.'

On the morrow the dragon went away, and the prince came in. The empress told him what the dragon had said. Then the prince started off and went to the hill where the old woman was to be found. When he entered her house, he said to her: 'Good-day, old woman!' The old woman replied: 'The Lord give you prosperity, my son!' She said to him: 'What brings you here, my son?' He replied: 'I should like to take service with you.' The old woman said to him: 'Very good, my son. I have a mare with a foal. If you watch her successfully for three days, I will give you one of these twelve horses of mine to take away, whichever you choose; but if you fail to watch her successfully, I shall take off your head.' Then she took him into the yard. In the yard post after post was fixed in the ground, and on each was stuck a human head; only one remained vacant, and this cried out continually: 'Old woman, give me a head!' When the old woman had shown him all, she said: 'Know that all these engaged to watch the mare and the foal, but were unable to watch her successfully.' But the prince was in no wise terrified thereby. In the afternoon he mounted the mare and galloped uphill and downhill, and the foal galloped after her. Thus till midnight, and then, would he nould he, sleep crept over him, and he fell asleep. When he woke up at dawn his arms were round a stump instead of the mare, but he held the halter in his hand. When he perceived this, the poor fellow became dizzy from terror, and started off to look for her; and while he was looking for her, came to a sheet of water, and when he came to the water, he remembered the little fish, unfolded the handkerchief, and took out the scale and rubbed it between his fingers. Up sprang the little fish

out of the water, and lay before him. What is the matter, adopted brother?' said the fish. He replied: 'The old woman's mare has escaped from me, and I don't know where she is.' The fish said to him: 'Here she is amongst us; she has transformed herself into a fish, and her foal into a little fish; but do you flap the halter on the water, and call out: "Coop! coop! old woman's mare!"' He flapped the water with the halter, and called out: 'Coop! coop! old woman's mare!' and immediately she transformed herself again into a mare, and, pop! there she was on the brink of the water before him! He put the halter on her and mounted her, and trot! trot! and at the old woman's. When he brought her in, the old woman gave him his dinner, but led the mare into the stable, scolded her, and said: 'Among the fish, good-for-nothing rogue?' The mare replied: 'I was among the fish, but they told of me, because they are his friends.' The old woman said to her: 'Go among the foxes.' The second day he mounted the mare, and galloped uphill and downhill, and the foal galloped after. Thus till midnight. When it was about midnight sleep overcame him, and he fell asleep upon the mare's back. At dawn, when he awoke, his arms were round a stump, but he held the halter in his hand. When he perceived this, he sprang off again to seek her. As he was seeking her, it came at once into his head what the old woman had said to the mare when she was leading it into the stable. Then he unwrapped the fox's hairs out of the handkerchief, rubbed them between his fingers, and the fox immediately jumped out before him. 'What is it, adopted brother?' He replied: 'The old woman's mare has run away.' The fox said to him: 'Here she is amongst us; she has become a fox, and the foal a fox-cub. But do you flap the ground with the halter, and call out: "Coop! coop! old woman's mare!"' He flapped and called, and the mare leaped out before him. Then he caught her and put the halter on her, mounted her, and rode to the old woman's.

When he brought her home, the old woman gave him his dinner, led the mare off to the stable, and said: 'Among the foxes, good-for-nothing rogue?' The mare replied: 'I was among them, but they are his friends, and told of me.' The old woman said to her: 'Be among the crows.' The third day the prince again mounted the mare, and galloped her uphill and downhill, and the foal galloped after. Thus till midnight. About midnight he became sleepy, and fell asleep, and woke up at dawn; but his arms were round a stump, and he held the halter in his hand. As soon as he perceived this, he darted off again to seek the mare, and as he was seeking her, it came into his head what the old woman had said the day before when scolding the mare. He took out the handkerchief and unwrapped the crow's feathers, rubbed them between his fingers, and, pop! the crow was before him. 'What is it, adopted brother?' The prince replied: 'The old woman's mare has run away, and I don't know where she is.' The crow answered: 'Here she is amongst us; she has become a crow, and the foal a young

crow. But flap the halter in the air, and cry: "Coop! coop! old woman's mare!" He flapped the halter in the air, and cried: 'Coop! coop! old woman's mare and the mare transformed herself from a crow into a mare, just as she had been, and came before him. Then he put the halter on her, and mounted her, and galloped off, the foal following behind, to the old woman's. The old woman gave him his dinner, caught the mare, led her into the stable, and said to her: 'Among the crows, good-for-nothing rogue?' The mare replied: 'I was among them, but they are his friends, and told of me.' Then when the old woman came out, the prince said to her: 'Well, old woman, I have served you honestly; now I ask you to give me that which we agreed upon.' The old woman replied: 'My son, what is agreed upon must be given. Here are twelve horses—choose whichever you please.'

He replied: 'Why shall I pick and choose? Give me that one where he is in the corner; there is none better in my eyes.' Then the old woman began to dissuade him: 'Why chose that skinny one when there are so many good ones?' He then insisted once for all: 'Give me the one which I ask, for such was our agreement.'

The old woman twisted, turned, and without more ado gave him the one which he asked for. Then he mounted it, and 'Farewell, old woman!'

'Good-bye, my son!'

When he took it to a wood and groomed it, it glittered like gold. Afterwards, when he mounted it and gave it its head, it flew, flew like a bird, and in a jiffy arrived at the dragon's palace. As soon as he entered the courtyard, he bade the empress to get ready for flight. She was not long in getting ready they both mounted the horse and set off. They had not long started in flight when the dragon arrived—looked about. No empress. Then he said to his horse: Shall we eat and drink, or shall we pursue?' 'Eat or not, drink or not, pursue or not, you won't catch him.'

When the dragon heard this, he immediately mounted his horse, and started to pursue them. When the prince and empress perceived that he was pursuing them, they were terrified, and urged their horse to go quickly, but the horse answered them: 'Never fear; there's no need to hurry.'

The dragon came trot, trot, and the horse he rode called to that which bore the prince and the empress: 'Bless you, brother, wait! for I shall break my wind from pursuing you.' The other replied: 'Whose fault is it, if you're such a fool as to carry that spectre on your back? Buck, and throw him on the ground, and then follow me.'

When the dragon's horse heard this, up with his head, a jump with his hind-quarters, and bang went the dragon against a stone. The dragon was smashed to pieces, and his horse followed the prince and empress. Then the empress caught and mounted it, and they arrived safe and sound in the empress's dominions, and reigned honourably as long as they lived.

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