



The Prince and the Princess in the Forest

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Danish

Easy
30 min read

There were, once upon a time, a king and queen of Denmark who had an only son, a handsome and clever lad. When he was eighteen, his father, the old king, fell very ill, and there was no hope that he would ever get well again. The queen and the prince were very unhappy, for they loved him dearly; but though they did all they could, he only grew worse and worse, and, one day, when the summer had come and the birds were singing, he raised his head and, taking a long look out of the window, fell back dead.

During many weeks the queen could hardly eat or sleep, so sorely did she grieve for him, and the prince feared that she would die also if she went on weeping; so he begged her to go with him to a beautiful place that he knew of on the other side of the forest, and after some time she consented. The prince was overjoyed, and arranged that they should set off early next morning.

They travelled all day, only stopping now and then to rest, and already the queen began to be better and to take a little interest in the things she saw. Just as the evening was coming on they entered the forest. Here it was quite dark, for the trees grew so close together that the sun could not shine through them, and very soon they lost the path, and wandered helplessly about wondering what they should do.

'If we sleep in this dreadful place,' said the queen, who was tired and frightened, 'the wild beasts will eat us.'

And she began to cry.

'Cheer up, mother,' answered her son, 'I have a feeling that luck is coming to us.' And at the next turning they came to a little house, in the window of which a light was burning.

'Didn't I tell you so?' cried the prince. 'Stay here a moment and I will go and see if I can get food and shelter for the night.' And away he ran as fast as he could go, for by this time they were very hungry, as they had brought very little food with them and had eaten up every scrap! When one takes a long journey on foot one does not like to have too much to carry.

The prince entered the house and looked about him, going from one room to the other, but seeing nobody and finding nothing to eat. At last, as he was going sorrowfully away, he caught sight of a sword and shirt of mail hanging on the wall in an inner room, with a piece of paper fastened under them. On the paper was some writing, which said that whoever wore the coat and carried the sword would be safe from all danger.

The prince was so delighted at the sight that he forgot how hungry he was, and instantly slipped on the coat of chain armour under his tunic, and hid the sword under his cloak, for he did not mean to say anything about what he had found. Then he went back to his mother, who was waiting impatiently for him.

'What have you been doing all this time?' she asked angrily. 'I thought you had been killed by robbers!'

'Oh, just looking round,' he answered; 'but though I searched everywhere I could find nothing to eat.'

'I am very much afraid that it is a robbers' den,' said the queen. 'We had better go on, hungry though we are.'

'No, it isn't; but still, we had better not stay here,' replied the prince, 'especially as there is nothing to eat. Perhaps we shall find another house.'

They went on for some time, until, sure enough, they came to another house, which also had a light in the window.

'We'll go in here,' said the prince.

No, no; I am afraid!' cried the queen. 'We shall be attacked and killed! It is a robbers' den: I am sure it is!'

‘Yes, it looks like it; but we can’t help that,’ said her son. ‘We have had nothing to eat for hours, and I’m nearly as tired as you.’

The poor queen was, indeed, quite worn out; she could hardly stand for fatigue, and in spite of her terror was half anxious to be persuaded.

‘And there’s going to be a storm,’ added the prince; who feared nothing now that he had the sword.

So they went into the house, where they found nobody. In the first room stood a table laid for a meal, with all sorts of good things to eat and drink, though some of the dishes were empty.

‘Well, this looks nice,’ said the prince, sitting down and helping himself to some delicious strawberries piled on a golden dish, and some iced lemonade. Never had anything tasted so nice; but, all the same, it was a robbers’ den they had come to, and the robbers, who had only just dined, had gone out into the forest to see whom they could rob.

When the queen and the prince could eat no more they remembered that they were very tired, and the prince looked about till he discovered a comfortable bed, with silken sheets, standing in the next room.

‘You get into bed, mother,’ he said, ‘and I’ll lie down by the side. Don’t be alarmed; you can sleep quite safely till the morning.’ And he lay down with his sword in his hand, and kept watch until the day began to break; then the queen woke up and said she was quite rested and ready to start again.

‘First I’ll go out into the forest and see if I can find our road,’ said the prince. ‘And while I’m gone you light the fire and make some coffee. We must eat a good breakfast before we start.’

And he ran off into the wood.

After he had gone the queen lit the fire, and then thought she would like to see what was in the other rooms; so she went from one to another, and presently came to one that was very prettily furnished, with lovely pictures on the walls, and pale blue curtains and soft yellow cushions and comfortable easy chairs. As she was looking at all these things, suddenly a trap-door opened in the floor, and the robber-chief came out of the hole and seized her ankles. The queen almost died of fright, and shrieked loudly, then fell on her knees and begged him to spare her life.

‘Yes, if you will promise me two things,’ he replied; ‘first that you will take me home to your country and let me be crowned king instead of your son; and secondly, that you will kill him in case he should try to take the throne from me — if you will not agree to this I shall kill you.’

‘Kill my own son !’ gasped the queen, staring at him in horror.

‘You need not do that exactly,’ said the robber. ‘When he returns, just lie on the bed and say that you have been taken ill, and add that you have dreamed that in a forest, a mile away, there are some beautiful apples. If you could only get some of these you would be well again, but if not you will die.’

The queen shuddered as she listened. She was fond of her son, but she was a terrible coward; and so in the end she agreed, hoping that something would occur to save the prince. She had hardly given her promise when a step was heard, and the robber hastily hid himself.

‘Well, mother,’ cried the prince as he entered, ‘I have been through the forest and found the road, so we will start directly we have had some breakfast.’

‘Oh, I feel so ill !’ said the queen. ‘I could not walk a single step; and there is only one thing that will cure me.’

‘What is that ?’ asked the prince.

‘I dreamed,’ answered the queen, in a faint voice, ‘that, a mile away, there is a forest where the most beautiful apples grow, and if I could have some of them I should soon be well again.’

‘Oh ! but dreams don’t mean anything,’ said the prince. ‘There is a magician who lives near here. I’ll go to him and ask for a spell to cure you.’

‘My dreams always mean something,’ said the queen, shaking her head. ‘If I don’t get any apples I shall die.’ She did not know why the robber wanted to send the prince to this particular forest, but as a matter of fact it was full of wild animals who would tear to pieces any traveller who entered it.

‘Well, I’ll go,’ answered the prince. ‘But I really must have some breakfast first; I shall walk all the faster.’

‘If you do not hurry you will find me dead when you come back,’ murmured the queen fretfully. She thought her son was not nearly anxious enough about her, and by this time she had begun to believe that she really was as ill as she had said.

When the prince had eaten and drunk, he set off, and soon came to the forest, and sure enough it was full of lions and tigers, and bears and wolves, who came rushing towards him; but instead of springing on him and tearing him to pieces, they lay down on the ground and licked his hands. He speedily found the tree with the apples which his mother wanted, but the branches were so high he could not reach them, and there was no way of climbing up the smooth trunk.

‘It is no use after all, I can’t get up there,’ he said to himself. ‘What am I to do now?’

But, as he turned away his sword chanced to touch the tree, and immediately two apples fell down. He picked them up joyfully, and was going away when a little dog came out of a hill close by, and running up to him, began tugging at his clothes and whining.

‘What do you want, little dog?’ asked the prince, stooping down to pat his soft black head.

The dog ran to a hole that was in the hill and sat there looking out, as much as to say: ‘Come along in with me.’

‘I may as well go and see what is in there,’ thought the prince, and he went over to the hill. But the hole was so small that he could not get through it, so he thrust his sword into it, and immediately it became larger.

‘Ha, ha!’ he chuckled; ‘it’s worth something to have a sword like that.’ And he bent down and crept through the hole.

The first thing he beheld, when he entered a room at the very end of a dark passage, was a beautiful princess, who was bound by an iron chain to an iron pillar.

‘What evil fate brought you here?’ he asked in surprise; and the lady answered:

‘It isn’t much use for me to tell you lest my lot becomes yours.’

‘I am not afraid of that. Tell me who you are and what has brought you here,’ begged the prince.

‘My story is not long,’ she said, smiling sadly. ‘I am a princess from Arabia, and twelve robbers who dwell in

this place are fighting among themselves as to which shall have me to wife.'

'Shall I save you?' asked the prince. And she answered:

'Yes; but you can't do it. To begin with, how could you break the chain I am bound with?'

'Oh, that's easy enough,' said he, taking out his sword; and directly it touched the chain the links fell apart and the princess was free.

'Come!' said the prince, taking her hand. But she drew back.

'No, I dare not!' she cried. 'If we should meet the robbers in the passage they would kill us both.'

'Not they!' said the prince, brandishing his sword. 'But how long have you been here?' he added quickly.

'About twenty years, I think,' said the princess, reckoning with her fingers.

'Twenty years!' exclaimed the prince. 'Then you had better shut your eyes, for when you have been sitting there so long it might hurt you to go too suddenly into the daylight. So you are the Princess of Arabia, whose beauty is famous throughout all the world! I, too, am a prince.'

'Will you not come back to Arabia and marry me, now you have saved my life?' asked the princess. 'Even if my father is living still, he must be old, and after his death you can be king.'

'No,' replied the prince, 'I cannot do that — I must live and die in my own country. But at the end of a year I will follow you and marry you.' And that was all he would say.

Then the princess took a heavy ring from her finger and put it on his. Her father's and her mother's names were engraved in it, as well as her own, and she asked him to keep it as a reminder of his promise.

'I will die before I part from it,' said the prince. 'And if at the end of a year I am still living, I will come. I believe I have heard that at the other side of this forest there is a port from which ships sail to Arabia. Let us hasten there at once.'

Hand in hand they set off through the forest, and when they came to the port they found a ship just ready to sail. The princess said good-bye to the prince, and went on board the vessel, and when she reached her own country there were great rejoicings, for her parents had never expected to see her again. She told them how a

prince had saved her from the robbers, and was coming in a year's time to marry her, and they were greatly pleased.

'All the same,' said the king, 'I wish he were here now. A year is a long time.'

When the princess was no longer before his eyes, the prince recollected why he had entered the forest, and made all the haste he could back to the robbers' home.

The robber-chief could smell the apples from afar, for he had a nose like an ogre, and he said to the queen:

'That is a strange fellow! If he had gone into the forest the wild beasts must have eaten him unless he has a powerful charm to protect him. If that is so we must get it away from him.'

'No, he has nothing,' answered the queen, who was quite fascinated by the robber.

But the robber did not believe her.

'We must think of a way to get it,' he said. 'When he comes in say you are well again, and have some food ready for him. Then, whilst he is eating, tell him you dreamed that he was attacked by wild beasts, and ask him how he managed to escape from them. After he has told you I can easily find a way to take his charm from him.'

Shortly after the prince came in.

'How are you, mother!' he said gaily. 'Here are your apples. Now you will soon be well again, and ready to come away with me.'

'Oh, I am better already,' she said. 'And see, your dinner is all hot for you; eat it up, and then we will start.'

Whilst he was eating she said to him: 'I had a horrible dream while you were away. I saw you in a forest full of wild animals, and they were running round you and growling fiercely. How did you manage to escape from them?'

'Oh, it was only a dream!' laughed the prince.

'But my dreams are always true,' said his mother. 'Tell me how it was.'

The prince wondered for some time whether he should tell her or not, but at last he decided to let her into the secret.

‘One should tell one’s mother everything,’ he thought. And he told her.

‘See, mother, here are a sword and a mail shirt which I found in the first house we entered in the forest, and as long as I carry them nothing can hurt me. That is what saved me from the wild beasts.’

‘How can I be thankful enough!’ exclaimed the queen. And directly the prince’s back was turned, she hurried to tell the robber.

The robber, as soon as he heard the news, made a sleeping-draught, and bade the queen give it to her son before he went to bed that night.

Accordingly, as soon as the prince began to get sleepy, the queen handed him the cup containing the draught.

‘Drink this, to please me,’ she said. ‘It will do you good after all you’ve gone through, and make you sleep well.’

‘What an odd taste it has!’ murmured the prince as he drank it.

Immediately he fell asleep; and the robber came in and took away his sword and shirt of mail.

‘These things belong to my brother,’ he said. After he had got them both in his hand the robber woke him.

I am the master now,’ said he. ‘Choose one of two things — either you must die, or your eyes will be put out, and you will be sent back to the forest.’

The prince’s blood grew cold at these words. Then a thought struck him, and he turned to his mother: ‘Is this your doing?’ he asked sternly. And though she burst into tears and denied it, the prince knew she was not telling the truth.

‘Well,’ said he, “whilst there is life there is hope.” I will go back to the forest.’

Then the robber put out his eyes, gave him a stick, and some food and drink, and drove him into the forest, hoping that the ‘wild beasts would kill him, as he no longer had the sword and shirt to protect him.

‘Now,’ he said to the queen, ‘we will return to your country.’

The next day they set sail, and as soon as they reached home, they were married, and the robber became king.

Meanwhile the poor prince was wandering about in the forest, hoping to find someone who would help him, and perhaps take him into service, for now he had no money and no home. It so happened that there had been a great hunt in the forest, and the wild beasts had all fled before the hunters and were hiding, so nothing did him any harm. At last, one day, just when his food was all gone and he had made up his mind that he must surely die of hunger, he came to the port whence the ships sailed for Arabia. One vessel was just ready to start, and the captain was going on board when he saw the prince.

‘Why, here is a poor blind fellow!’ he said. ‘No doubt that is the work of the robbers. Let us take him to Arabia with us. Would you like to come, my good man?’ he asked the prince.

Oh, how glad he was to hear someone speak kindly to him again! And he answered that he would, and the sailors helped him to climb up the side of the ship. When they got to Arabia the captain took him to the public baths, and ordered one of the slaves to wash him. Whilst he was being washed the princess’s ring slipped off his finger and was afterwards found by the slave who cleaned out the bath. The man showed it to a friend of his who lived at the palace.

‘Why, it is the princess’s ring!’ he said. ‘Where did it come from?’

‘It fell off a blind man’s finger,’ said the slave. ‘He must have stolen it; but I dare say you will be able to return it to the princess.’

So that evening the man took the ring to the palace and gave it to his daughter, who was the princess’s favourite slave, and the girl gave it to her mistress. When the princess saw it she uttered a cry of joy.

‘It is the ring I gave my betrothed!’ she said. ‘Take me to him at once.’

The bath-keeper thought it strange that the princess should be betrothed to a blind beggar, but he did as she bade him, and when she saw the prince she cried:

‘At last you have come! The year is over, and I thought you were dead. Now we will be married immediately.’ And she went home and told the king that he was to send an escort to bring her betrothed to the palace.

Naturally the king was rather surprised at the sudden arrival of the prince; but when he heard that he was blind he was very much annoyed.

'I cannot have a blind person to succeed me,' he said. 'It is perfectly absurd !

But the princess had had her own way all her life, and in the end the king gave way as he had always done. The prince was taken to the palace with much ceremony and splendour; but in spite of this the king was not contented. Still, it could not be helped, and really it was time the princess was married, though she looked as young as ever. There had been hundreds of knights and princes who had begged her to bestow her hand upon them, but she would have nothing to do with anyone; and now she had taken it into her head to marry this blind prince, and nobody else would she have.

One evening, as it was fine, the prince and princess went into the garden, and sat down under a tree.

Two ravens were perched on a bush near by, and the prince, who could understand bird language, heard one of them say: 'Do you know that it is Midsummer-eve to-night ?'

'Yes,' said the other.

'And do you know that part of the garden which is known as the Queen's Bed ?'

'Yes.'

'Well, perhaps you don't know this, that whoever has bad eyes, or no eyes at all, should bathe his eye-sockets in the dew that falls there to-night, because then he will get his sight back. Only he must do it between twelve and one o'clock.'

That was good news for the prince and princess to hear, and the young man begged the princess to lead him to the place called the Queen's Bed, which was the little plot of grass where the queen used often to lie down. and take her midday nap. Then, between twelve and one o'clock, he bathed his eyes with the dew that was falling there, and found he could see again as well as ever.

'I can see you !' he said to the princess, gazing at her as if he had never seen anything before.

'I don't believe it,' she answered.

‘Well, go and hang your handkerchief on a bush, and if I find it at once you must believe me,’ he said.

And so she did, and he went straight up to the handkerchief.

‘Yes, indeed, you can see,’ cried the princess. ‘To think that my mother’s bed has really given back your sight !’ and she went to the bank and sat down again; and by-and-by, as the day was hot, the princess fell asleep. As the prince watched her he suddenly saw something shining on her neck. It was a little golden lamp that gave out a bright light, and it hung from a golden chain. The prince thought he would like to examine it more closely, so he unfastened the chain, but as he did so the lamp fell to the ground. Before he could pick it up a hawk flew in, snatched up the little lamp and flew away again with it. The prince set off in pursuit, and ran on and on without being able to catch the bird, until at length he had lost his way. Trying to find it, he wandered on, up and down, until he came to the forest where he had found the princess.

Meantime, the princess woke up, and finding herself alone she set out to look for him. In the end she also lost her way, and as she was walking about, not knowing what to do, the robbers captured her and took her back to the cave from which the prince had rescued her. So there they were after all their trouble — no better off than before !

The prince wandered on, trying to find his way back to Arabia, until he chanced one day to meet twelve youths, walking gaily through the forest, singing and laughing. ‘Where are you going ?’ he asked. And they told him they were looking for work.

‘I’ll join you, if I may,’ said the prince. And they answered: ‘The more the merrier.’

Then the prince went with them, and they all journeyed on until they met an old troll.

‘Where are you going, my masters ?’ asked the troll.

‘To seek service,’ they told him.

‘Then come and serve me,’ he said; ‘there will be plenty to eat and drink, and not much work to do, and if, at the end of a year, you can answer three questions, I’ll give you each a sack of gold. Otherwise you must be turned into beasts.’

The youths thought this sounded easy enough, so they went home with the troll to his castle.

'You will find all that you want here,' he said; 'and all you need do is to take care of the house, for I am going away, and shall only return when the year is over.'

Then he went away, and the young men, left to themselves, had a fine time of it; for they did no work, and only amused themselves with singing and drinking. Every day they found the table laid with good things to eat and drink, and when they had finished, the plates and dishes were cleared away by invisible hands. Only the prince, who was sad for his lost princess, ate and drank sparingly, and worked hard keeping the house in order.

One day, as he sat in his own room, he heard the voice of the old troll beneath his window talking to another troll.

'To-morrow,' said he, 'the year is up.'

'And what questions will you ask?' inquired the other.

'First I shall ask how long they have been here — they don't know, the young fools! Secondly I shall ask what shines on the roof of the castle.'

'And what is that?'

'The lamp that was stolen by me from the princess as she slept in the garden.'

'And what is the third question?'

'I shall ask where the food and drink they consume every day come from. I steal it from the king's table; but they don't know that.'

The day after, the troll entered.

'Now I shall ask my questions,' said he. 'To begin with: How long have you been here?'

The young men had been so busy drinking and making merry that they had forgotten all about the agreement, so they remained silent.

'One week,' said one, at last.

'Two months,' guessed another. But the prince answered, 'One year.'

'Right,' replied the troll. But the second question was more difficult.

'What is it that shines on the roof?'

The young men guessed and guessed. 'The sun — the moon.' But none of them really knew.

'May I answer?' asked the prince.

'Yes, certainly,' replied the troll; and the prince spoke.

'The lamp that you stole from the princess whilst she was asleep in the garden.' And again the troll nodded.

The third question was harder still.

'Where does the meat and drink you have had here come from?'

None of the young men could guess.

'May I say?' asked the prince.

'Yes, if you can,' replied the troll.

'It comes from the king's table,' said the prince.

And that was all. Now they might take the sacks of gold and go, and the young men went off in such a hurry that the prince was left behind. Presently, they met an old man who asked for money.

'No, we haven't any,' they answered.

So they hurried on, and by-and-by up came the prince.

'Has your lordship a piece of money for a poor man?' asked the old fellow.

'Yes,' said the prince, and gave him his whole sackful.

'I don't want it,' said the old man, who was really the troll they had just left in disguise. 'But since you're so

generous, here is the princess's lamp, and the princess herself is in the cave where you found her; but how you're going to save her again without the magic sword I don't know.'

When he heard that, the prince knew where she was; and that was the beginning of her rescue. So he disguised himself to look like a pedlar and travelled on until he reached his own city, where his mother, the queen, and the robber-chief were living. Then he went in to a goldsmith's shop and ordered a great number of kitchen pots to be made out of pure gold. That was not an order the goldsmith had every day, but the things were ready at last, saucepans and kettles and gridirons all of pure gold. Then the prince put them in his basket and went up to the palace, and asked to see the queen.

Directly she heard about the wonderful gold pots and pans she came out at once, and began unpacking the basket and admiring the things. She was so absorbed in them that the prince soon found an opportunity to steal into the bedroom and take the sword and shirt which were hung there, and go back again without his mother having noticed his absence.

'The things are all beautiful!' she said. 'How much would you take for them?'

'Name your own price, your majesty,' answered the prince.

'I really don't know what to say,' said the queen. 'Wait till my husband comes back — men understand such things better; and then, as you are a stranger, he would like to chat with you a little.' The prince bowed, and waited silently in a corner.

Soon after the robber returned.

'Come and see all these lovely gold saucepans!' cried the queen.

But, as the robber entered the room, the prince touched him with the magic sword, and he fell to the ground.

'Perhaps, now you know me, mother,' the prince said, taking off his disguise, 'you had better repent for all the wrong you have done me, or your life will be short.'

'Oh, have mercy!' she cried, 'I could not help it. I was so frightened.'

The prince had mercy. He ordered the wicked king to be stripped of his fine clothes, and to be driven into the forest, where the wild beasts tore him to pieces. The queen he sent to her own country. Then he set off for the

cave where the princess was sitting chained as before, and with the help of the magic sword he rescued her again without any difficulty. They soon reached the port and set sail for Arabia, where they were married; and till they died, a long while after, they reigned happily over both countries.

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