

The Twin Brothers

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Scottish

Intermediate
15 min read

Once there was a fisherman who had plenty of money but no children. One day an old woman came to his wife and said: 'What use is all your prosperity to you when you have no children?'

'It is God's will,' answered the fisherman's wife.

'Nay, my child, it is not God's will, but the fault of your husband; for if he would but catch the little gold-fish you would surely have children. To-night, when he comes home, tell him he must go back and catch the little fish. He must then cut it in six pieces—one of these you must eat, and your husband the second, and soon after you will have two children. The third piece you must give to the dog, and she will have two puppies. The fourth piece give to the mare, and she will have two foals. The fifth piece bury on the right of the house door, and the sixth on the left, and two cypress trees will spring up there.'

When the fisherman came home at evening his wife told him all that the old woman had advised, and he promised to bring home the little gold-fish. Next morning, therefore, he went very early to the water, and caught the little fish. Then they did as the old woman had ordered, and in due time the fisherman's wife had two sons, so like each other that no one could tell the difference. The dog had two puppies exactly alike, the mare had two foals, and on each side of the front door there sprang up two cypress trees precisely similar.

When the two boys were grown up, they were not content to remain at home, though they had wealth in plenty; but they wished to go out into the world, and make a name for themselves. Their father would not allow them

both to go at once, as they were the only children he had. He said: 'First one shall travel, and when he is come back then the other may go.'

So the one took his horse and his dog, and went, saying to his brother: 'So long as the cypress trees are green, that is a sign that I am alive and well; but if one begins to wither, then make haste and come to me.' So he went forth into the world.

One day he stopped at the house of an old woman, and as at evening he sat before the door, he perceived in front of him a castle standing on a hill. He asked the old woman to whom it belonged, and her answer was: 'My son, it is the castle of the Fairest in the Land!'

'And I am come here to woo her!'

'That, my son, many have sought to do, and have lost their lives in the attempt; for she has cut off their heads and stuck them on the post you see standing there.'

'And the same will she do to me, or else I shall be victor, for to-morrow I go there to court her.'

Then he took his zither and played upon it so beautifully that no one in all that land had ever heard the like, and the princess herself came to the window to listen.

The next morning the Fairest in the Land sent for the old woman and asked her, 'Who is it that lives with you, and plays the zither so well?'

'It is a stranger, princess, who arrived yesterday evening,' answered the old woman.

And the princess then commanded that the stranger should be brought to her.

When he appeared before the princess she questioned him about his home and his family, and about this and that; and confessed at length that his zither-playing gave her great pleasure, and that she would take him for her husband. The stranger replied that it was with that intent he had come.

The princess then said: 'You must now go to my father, and tell him you desire to have me to wife, and when he has put the three problems before you, then come back and tell me.'

The stranger then went straight to the king, and told him that he wished to wed his daughter.

And the king answered: 'I shall be well pleased, provided you can do what I impose upon you; if not you will lose your head. Now, listen; out there on the ground, there lies a thick log, which measures more than two fathoms; if you can cleave it in two with one stroke of your sword, I will give you my daughter to wife. If you fail, then it will cost you your head.'

Then the stranger withdrew, and returned to the house of the old woman sore distressed, for he could believe nothing but that next day he must atone to the king with his head. And so full was he of the idea of how to set about cleaving the log that he forgot even his zither.

In the evening came the princess to the window to listen to his playing, and behold all was still. Then she called to him: 'Why are you so cast down this evening, that you do not play on your zither?'

And he told her his trouble.

But she laughed at it, and called to him: 'And you grieve over that? Bring quickly your zither, and play something for my amusement, and early to-morrow come to me.'

Then the stranger took his zither and played the whole evening for the amusement of the princess.

Next morning she took a hair from her locks and gave it to him, saying: 'Take this hair, and wind it round your sword, then you will be able to cleave the log in two.'

Then the stranger went forth, and with one blow cleft the log in two.

But the king said: 'I will impose another task upon you, before you can wed my daughter.'

'Speak on,' said the stranger.

'Listen, then,' answered the king; 'you must mount a horse and ride three miles at full gallop, holding in each hand a goblet full of water. If you spill no drop then I shall give you my daughter to wife, but should you not succeed then I will take your life.'

Then the stranger returned to the house of the old woman, and again he was so troubled as to forget his zither.

In the evening the princess came to the window as before to listen to the music, but again all was still; and she called to him: 'What is the matter that you do not play on your zither?'

Then he related all that the king had ordered him to do, and the princess answered: 'Do not let yourself be disturbed, only play now, and come to me to-morrow morning.'

Then next morning he went to her, and she gave him her ring, saying: 'Throw this ring into the water and it will immediately freeze, so that you will not spill any.'

The stranger did as the princess bade him, and carried the water all the way.

Then the king said: 'Now I will give you a third task, and this shall be the last. I have a negro who will fight with you to-morrow, and if you are the conqueror you shall wed my daughter.'

The stranger returned, full of joy, to the house of the old woman, and that evening was so merry that the princess called to him; 'You seem very cheerful this evening; what has my father told you that makes you so glad?'

He answered: 'Your father has told me that to-morrow I must fight with his negro. He is only another man like myself, and I hope to subdue him, and to gain the contest.'

But the princess answered: 'This is the hardest of all. I myself am the black man, for I swallow a drink that changes me into a negro of unconquerable strength. Go to-morrow morning to the market, buy twelve buffalo hides and wrap them round your horse; fasten this cloth round you, and when I am let loose upon you to-morrow show it to me, that I may hold myself back and may not kill you. Then when you fight me you must try to hit my horse between the eyes, for when you have killed it you have conquered me.'

Next morning, therefore, he went to the market and bought the twelve buffalo hides which he wrapped round his horse. Then he began to fight with the black man, and when the combat had already lasted a long time, and eleven hides were torn, then the stranger hit the negro's horse between the eyes, so that it fell dead, and the black man was defeated.

Then said the king: 'Because you have solved the three problems I take you for my son-in-law.'

But the stranger answered: 'I have some business to conclude first; in fourteen days I will return and bring the bride home.'

So he arose and went into another country, where he came to a great town, and alighted at the house of an old woman. When he had had supper he begged of her some water to drink, but she answered: 'My son, I have no water; a giant has taken possession of the spring, and only lets us draw from it once a year, when we bring him a maiden. He eats her up, and then he lets us draw water; just now it is the lot of the king's daughter, and tomorrow she will be led forth.'

The next day accordingly the princess was led forth to the spring, and bound there with a golden chain. After that all the people went away and she was left alone.

When they had gone the stranger went to the maiden and asked her what ailed her that she lamented so much, and she answered that the reason was because the giant would come and eat her up. And the stranger promised that he would set her free if she would take him for her husband, and the princess joyfully consented.

When the giant appeared the stranger set his dog at him, and it took him by the throat and throttled him till he died; so the princess was set free.

Now when the king heard of it he gladly consented to the marriage, and the wedding took place with great rejoicings. The young bridegroom abode in the palace one hundred and one weeks. Then he began to find it too dull, and he desired to go out hunting. The king would fain have prevented it, but in this he could not succeed. Then he begged his son-in-law at least to take sufficient escort with him, but this, too, the young man evaded, and took only his horse and his dog.

He had ridden already a long way, when he saw in the distance a hut, and rode straight towards it in order to

get some water to drink. There he found an old woman from whom he begged the water. She answered that first he should allow her to beat his dog with her little wand, that it might not bite her while she fetched the water. The hunter consented; and as soon as she had touched the dog with her wand it immediately turned to stone. Thereupon she touched the hunter and also his horse, and both turned to stone. As soon as that had happened, the cypress trees in front of his father's house began to wither. And when the other brother saw this, he immediately set out in search of his twin. He came first to the town where his brother had slain the giant, and there fate led him to the same old woman where his brother had lodged. When she saw him she took him for his twin brother, and said to him: 'Do not take it amiss of me, my son, that I did not come to wish you joy on your marriage with the king's daughter.'

The stranger perceived what mistake she had made, but only said: 'That does not matter, old woman,' and rode on, without further speech, to the king's palace, where the king and the princess both took him for his twin brother, and called out: 'Why have you tarried so long away? We thought something evil had befallen you.'

When night came and he slept with the princess, who still believed him to be her husband, he laid his sword between them, and when morning came he rose early and went out to hunt. Fate led him by the same way which his brother had taken, and from a distance he saw him and knew that he was turned to stone. Then he entered the hut and ordered the old woman to disenchant his brother. But she answered: 'Let me first touch your dog with my wand, and then I will free your brother.'

He ordered the dog, however, to take hold of her, and bite her up to the knee, till she cried out: 'Tell your dog to let me go and I will set your brother free!'

But he only answered: 'Tell me the magic words that I may disenchant him myself;' and as she would not he ordered his dog to bite her up to the hip.

Then the old woman cried out: 'I have two wands, with the green one I turn to stone, and with the red one I bring to life again.'

So the hunter took the red wand and disenchanted his brother, also his brother's horse, and his dog, and ordered his own dog to eat the old woman up altogether.

While the brothers went on their way back to the castle of the king, the one brother related to the other how the

cypress tree had all at once dried up and withered, how he had immediately set out in search of his twin, and how he had come to the castle of his father-in-law, and had claimed the princess as his wife. But the other brother became furious on hearing this, and smote him over the forehead till he died, and returned alone to the house of his father-in-law.

When night came and he was in bed the princess asked him: 'What was the matter with you last night, that you never spoke a word to me?'

Then he cried out: 'That was not me, but my brother, and I have slain him, because he told me by the way that he had claimed you for his wife!'

'Do you know the place where you slew him?' asked the princess, 'and can you find the body?'

'I know the place exactly.'

'Then to-morrow we shall ride thither,' said the princess. Next morning accordingly they set out together, and when they had come to the place, the princess drew forth a small bottle that she had brought with her, and sprinkled the body with some drops of the water so that immediately he became alive again.

When he stood up, his brother said to him: 'Forgive me, dear brother, that I slew you in my anger.' Then they embraced and went together to the Fairest in the Land, whom the unmarried brother took to wife.

Then the brothers brought their parents to live with them, and all dwelt together in joy and happiness.

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