

**1812**

**GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES**

**THE DEVIL'S THREE GOLD HAIRS**

***Jacob Ludwig Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm***

Grimm, Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) - German philologists whose collection "Kinder- und Hausmarchen," known in English as "Grimm's Fairy Tales," is a timeless literary masterpiece. The brothers transcribed these tales directly from folk and fairy stories told to them by common villagers. The Devil's Three Gold Hairs (1812) - A child of fortune marries the king's daughter against the king's wishes. The king then insists that the child of fortune bring him three gold hairs from the demon of the Black Forest.

**DEVILS THREE GOLD HAIRS**

ONCE THERE WAS a very poor woman who was delighted when her son was born with a caul enveloping his head. This was supposed to bring good fortune, and it was predicted that he would marry the King's daughter when he became nineteen. Soon after, a King came to the village, but no one knew that it was the King. When he asked for news, they told him that a few days before a child had been born in the village, with a caul, and it was prophesied that he would be very lucky. Indeed, it had been said that in his nineteenth year he would have the King's daughter for his wife.

The King, who had a wicked heart, was very angry when he heard this; but he went to the parents in a most friendly manner, and said to them kindly, "Good people, give up your child to me. I will take the greatest care of him." At first they refused; but when the stranger offered them a large amount of gold, and then mentioned that if their child was born to be lucky everything must turn out for the best with him, they willingly at last gave him up.

The King placed the child in a box and rode away with it for a long distance, till he came to deep water, into which he threw the box containing the child, saying to himself as he rode away, "From this unwelcome suitor have I saved my daughter."

But the box did not sink; it swam like a boat on the water, and so high above it that not a drop got inside. It sailed on to a spot about two miles from the chief town of the King's dominions, where there were a mill and a weir, which stopped it, and on which it rested.

The miller's man, who happened to be standing near the bank, fortunately noticed it, and thinking it would most likely contain something valuable, drew it on shore with a hook; but when he opened it, there lay a beautiful baby, who was quite awake and lively.

He carried it in to the miller and his wife, and as they had no children they were quite delighted, and said Heaven had sent the little boy as a gift to them.

They brought him up carefully, and he grew to manhood clever and virtuous.

It happened one day that the King was overtaken by a thunderstorm while passing near the mill and stopped to ask for shelter. Noticing the youth, he asked the miller if that tall young man was his son.

"No," he replied; "he is a foundling. Nineteen years ago a box was seen sailing on the mill stream by one of our men, and when it was caught in the weir he drew it out of the water and found the child in it." Then the King knew that this must be the child of fortune, and therefore the one which he had thrown into the water. He hid his vexation, however, and presently said kindly, "I want to send a letter to the Queen, my wife; if that young man will take it to her I will give him two gold-pieces for his trouble."

"We are at the King's service," replied the miller, and called to the young man to prepare for his errand. Then the King wrote a letter to the Queen, containing these words: "As soon as the boy who brings this letter arrives, let him be killed, and I shall expect to find him dead and buried when I come back." The youth was soon on his way with this letter. He lost himself, however, in a large forest. But when darkness came on he saw in the distance a glimmering light, which he walked to, and found a small house. He entered and saw an old woman sitting by the fire, quite alone. She appeared frightened when she saw him, and said: "Where do you come from, and what do you want?" "I am come from the mill," he replied, "and I am carrying a letter to the wife of the King, and, as I have lost my way, I should like very much to stay here during the night." "You poor young man," she replied, "you are in a den of

robbers, and when they come home they may kill you.” “They may come when they like,” said the youth; “I am not afraid; but I am so tired that I cannot go a step further.” Then he stretched himself on a bench and fell fast asleep.

Soon after the robbers came home, and asked angrily what that youth was lying there for.

“Ah,” said the old woman, “he is an innocent child who has lost himself in the wood, and I took him in out of compassion. He is carrying a letter to the Queen, which the King has sent.” Then the robbers went softly to the sleeping youth, took the letter from his pocket, and read in it that as soon as the bearer arrived at the palace he was to lose his life. Then pity arose in the hard-hearted robbers, and their chief tore up the letter and wrote another, in which it was stated that as soon as the boy arrived he should be married to the King’s daughter. Then they left him to lie and rest on the bench till the next morning, and when he awoke they gave him the letter and showed him the road he was to take.

As soon as he reached the palace and sent in the letter, the Queen read it, and she acted in exact accordance with what was written—ordered a grand marriage feast, and had the Princess married at once to the fortunate youth. He was very handsome and amiable, so that the King’s daughter soon learned to love him very much, and was quite happy with him.

Not long after, when the King returned home to his castle, he found the prophecy respecting the child of fortune fulfilled, and that he was married to a King’s daughter. “How has this happened?” said he. “I have in my letter given very different orders!” Then the Queen gave him the letter, and said: “You may see for yourself what is stated there.”

The King read the letter and saw very clearly that it was not the one he had written. He asked the youth what he had done with the letter he had entrusted to him, and where he had brought the other from. “I know not,” he replied, “unless it was changed during the night while I slept in the forest.” Full of wrath, the King said, “You shall not get off so easily, for whoever marries my daughter must first bring me three golden hairs from the head of the demon of the Black Forest. If you bring them to me before long, then shall you keep my daughter as a wife, but not otherwise.” Then said the child of fortune, “I will fetch these golden hairs very quickly; I am not the least afraid of the demon.” Thereupon he said farewell, and started on his travels. His way led him to a large city, and as he stood at the gate and asked admission, a watchman said to him,

“What trade do you follow, and how much do you know?” “I know everything,” he replied.

“Then you can do us a favor,” answered the watchman, “if you can tell why our master’s fountain, from which wine used to flow, is dried up, and never gives us even water now.” “I will tell you when I come back,” he said; “only wait till then.” He traveled on still further, and came by and by to another town, where the watchman also asked him what trade he followed, and what he knew. “I know everything,” he answered.

“Then,” said the watchman, “you can do us a favor, and tell us why a tree in our town, which once bore golden apples, now only produces leaves.” “Wait till I return,” he replied, “and I will tell you.” On he went again, and came to a broad river, over which he must pass in a ferryboat, and the ferryman asked him the same question about his trade and his knowledge. He gave the same reply, that he knew everything.

“Then,” said the man, “you can do me a favor, and tell me how it is that I am obliged to go backward and forward in my ferryboat every day, without a change of any kind.” “Wait till I come back,” he replied, “then you shall know all about it.” As soon as he reached the other side of the water he found the entrance to the Black Forest, in which was the demon’s cove. It was very dark and gloomy, and the demon was not at home; but his old mother was sitting in a large arm-chair, and she looked up and said, “What do you want? You don’t look wicked enough to be one of us.” “I just want three golden hairs from the demon’s head,” he replied; “otherwise my wife will be taken away from me.” “That is asking a great deal,” she replied; “for if the demon comes home and finds you here, he will have no mercy on you. However, if you will trust me, I will try to help you.”

Then she turned him into an ant, and said: “Creep into the folds of my gown; there you will be safe.” “Yes,” he replied, “that is all very good; but I have three things besides that I want to know. First, why a well, from which formerly wine used to flow, should be dry now, so that not even water can be got from it. Secondly, why a tree that once bore golden apples should now produce nothing but leaves. And, thirdly, why a ferryman is obliged to row forward and back every day, without ever leaving off.” “These are difficult questions,” said the old woman; “but keep still and quiet, and when the demon comes in, pay great attention to what he says, while I pull the golden hairs out of his head.” Late in the evening the demon came home, and as soon as he entered he declared that

the air was not clear. "I smell the flesh of man," he said, "and I am sure that there is some one here." So he peeped into all the corners, and searched everywhere, but could find nothing.

Then his old mother scolded him well, and said, "Just as I have been sweeping, and dusting, and putting everything in order, then you come home and give me all the work to do over again. You have always the smell of something in your nose. Do sit down and eat your supper." The demon did as she told him, and when he had eaten and drunk enough, he complained of being tired. So his mother made him lie down so that she could place his head in her lap; and he was soon so comfortable that he fell fast asleep and snored.

Then the old woman lifted up a golden hair, twitched it out, and laid it by her side. "Oh!" screamed the demon, waking up; "what was that for?" "I have had a bad dream," answered she, "and it made me catch hold of your hair." "What did you dream about?" asked the demon. "Oh, I dreamed of a well in a market-place from which wine once used to flow, but now it is dried up, and they can't even get water from it. Whose fault is that?" "Ah, they ought to know that there sits a toad under a stone in the well, and if he were dead wine would again flow." Then the old woman combed his hair again, till he slept and snored so loud that the windows rattled, and she pulled out the second hair. "What are you about now?" asked the demon in a rage. "Oh, don't be angry," said the woman; "I have had another dream." "What was this dream about?" he asked. "Why, I dreamed that in a certain country there grows a fruit tree which used to bear golden apples, but now it produces nothing but leaves. What is the cause of this?" "Why, don't they know," answered the demon, "that there is a mouse gnawing at the root? Were it dead the tree would again bear golden apples; and if it gnaws much longer the tree will wither and dry up. Bother your dreams; if you disturb me again, just as I am comfortably asleep, you will have a box on the ear."

Then the old woman spoke kindly to him, and smoothed and combed his hair again, till he slept and snored. Then she seized the third golden hair and pulled it out.

The demon, on this, sprang to his feet, roared out in a greater rage than ever, and would have done some mischief in the house, but she managed to appease him this time also, and said: "How can I help my bad dreams?" "And whatever did you dream?" he asked, with some curiosity. "Well, I dreamed about a ferryman, who complains that he is obliged to take people across the river, and is

never free.” “Oh, the stupid fellow!” replied the wizard, “he can very easily ask any person who wants to be ferried over to take the oar in his hand, and he will be free at once.” Then the demon laid his head down once more; and as the old mother had pulled out the three golden hairs, and got answers to all the three questions, she let the old fellow rest and sleep in peace till the morning dawned.

As soon as he had gone out next day, the old woman took the ant from the folds of her dress and restored the lucky youth to his former shape. “Here are the three golden hairs for which you wished,” said she; “and did you hear all the answers to your three questions?” “Yes,” he replied, “every word, and I will not forget them.” “Well, then, I have helped you out of your difficulties, and now get home as fast as you can.” After thanking the old woman for her kindness, he turned his steps homeward, full of joy that everything had succeeded so well.

When he arrived at the ferry the man asked for the promised answer. “Ferry me over first,” he replied, “and then I will tell you.” So when they reached the opposite shore he gave the ferryman the demon’s advice, that the next person who came and wished to be ferried over should have the oar placed in his hand, and from that moment he would have to take the ferryman’s place.

Then the youth journeyed on till he came to the town where the unfruitful tree grew, and where the watchman was waiting for his answer. To him the young man repeated what he had heard, and said, “Kill the mouse that is gnawing at the root; then will your tree again bear golden apples.” The watchman thanked him, and gave him in return for his information two asses laden with gold, which were led after him. He very soon arrived at the city which contained the dried-up fountain. The sentinel came forward to receive his answer. Said the youth, “Under a stone in the fountain sits a toad; it must be searched for and killed; then will wine again flow from it.” To show how thankful he was for this advice, the sentinel also ordered two asses laden with gold to be sent after him.

At length the child of fortune reached home with his riches, and his wife was overjoyed at seeing him again, and hearing how well he had succeeded in his undertaking. He placed before the King the three golden hairs he had brought from the head of the black demon; and when the King saw these and the four asses laden with gold he was quite satisfied, and said, “Now that you have performed all the required conditions, I am quite ready to sanction

your marriage with my daughter; but, my dear son-in-law, tell me how you obtained all this gold. It is indeed a very valuable treasure; where did you find it?" "I crossed the river in a ferryboat, and on the opposite shore I found the gold lying in the sand." "Can I find some if I go?" asked the King eagerly. "Yes, as much as you please," replied he. "There is a ferryman there who will row you over, and you can fill a sack in no time." The greedy old King set out on his journey in all haste, and when he came near the river he beckoned to the ferryman to row him over the ferry.

The man told him to step in, and just as they reached the opposite shore he placed the rudder-oar in the King's hand, and sprang out of the boat; and so the King became a ferryman as a punishment for his sins.

I wonder if he still goes on ferrying people over the river! It is very likely, for no one has ever been persuaded to touch the oar since he took it.

**THE END**