



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

The Iron Stove

From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock



n the days when magic was still of some avail, a king's son was enchanted by an old witch, and compelled to spend his life sitting inside a great Iron Stove in a wood. There he passed many years, and nobody could release him.

Once a king's daughter came into the wood. She had gone astray, and could not find her father's kingdom again; and having wandered about for nine days, at last she stood before the Iron Stove. Then a voice came out of it, and said, "Whence do you come, and where do you want to go?"

She answered, "I have wandered from my father's kingdom, and lost myself, and cannot get home again."

Then the voice spoke out of the Iron Stove: "I will help you home again, and that, too, in a short time, if you will promise to do what I desire. I am a greater prince than you are a princess, and I wish to marry you."

She was very much frightened, and thought, "Oh, what shall I do! How can I marry an Iron Stove?"

However, as she wanted very much to go home to her father, she promised what was demanded of her. "Very well," said the voice "you must come again, and bring a knife with you, and scrape a hole in the iron."

And the Iron Stove gave her for a companion something, or somebody—she was not quite sure what—who walked by her side and did not speak, but took her safe home within two hours. Then there was great joy in her father's palace, and the old king fell on her neck, and kissed her many times. But she was very sorrowful, and said: "Dear father, you little know what has happened to me; I should never have come home again out of the great wild wood, if I had not passed by an Iron Stove. But I had to promise faithfully that I would return back to it, and marry it."

The old king was so terrified that he nearly fell into a swoon; for he had only this one child. They therefore consulted together, and decided to send, not the princess, but a miller's daughter, who was very beautiful; and leading her out, they gave her a knife, and told her how she was to scrape the Iron Stove. When she reached the wood, she scraped away for four-and-twenty hours, but could not make the slightest impression. But when day began to break, a voice in the Iron Stove called out, "It seems to me that it is day out there."

She answered: "It seems so to me too; I think I hear my father's mill turning."

"Oh, then, you are a miller's daughter; go straight back and send the king's daughter here!"

Then she returned and told the old king that the Iron Stove would not have her; he wanted the princess only. The old king was greatly frightened, and the princess wept. But they had still a swineherd's daughter, who was still more beautiful than the miller's girl; so they gave her a piece of gold, in order that she might be persuaded to go, instead of the king's

daughter, to the Iron Stove. She was taken to the wood as before, and had also to scrape for four-and-twenty hours; but she could make no impression.

Now, when dawn broke, a voice called out of the Stove, "It seems to me it is day out there."

Then she answered, "It seems so to me too; I think I hear my father's little horn sounding."

"So you are the swineherd's daughter; go away directly, and bid the king's daughter come, and tell her it shall happen to her as I forewarned her; if she does not come, everything in the kingdom shall fall to pieces and tumble down, and no stone remain upon another."

When the king's daughter heard this, she began to cry; but there was nothing else to be done—she must keep her promise. She took leave of her father, put a knife in her pocket, and went out to the Iron Stove in the wood. When she arrived there, she began to scrape and scrape; the iron yielded, and in two hours she had already scraped a little hole. She looked in and saw a most beautiful youth: oh! he shone so with gold and precious stones, that he pleased her to the very bottom of her heart. She scraped away faster than ever, till she made the hole so large that he was able to get out.

Then he said, "You are mine, and I am yours, you have freed me, and you are my bride."

He wished to take her home to his kingdom, but she begged that she might go once more to see her father; and the prince gave her leave, on condition that she should speak no more than three words with him, and come back again. So she went home; but, alas! being a little chatter-box, she spoke more than three words. The Iron Stove disappeared instantly, and was removed far away, over glass mountains and sharp swords; but the king's son, being now freed, was not shut up in it.

The princess took leave of her father, and took some money with her, but not much, and went again into the great wood. There she looked everywhere for the Iron Stove, but it was not to be found.

She sought it for nine days, until her hunger was so great that she did not know what to do; for she had eaten all the food she could find, and had nothing left to keep her alive. At evening-tide she climbed up into a little tree, and purposed spending the night there, for fear of the wild beasts. But when midnight came she saw afar off a little glimmering light, and thinking, "Oh! there I should be safe," climbed down and went towards it.

Then she came to a little old house, overgrown with grass, with a little heap of wood before the door. Wondering how it came there, she looked in through the window, and saw nothing inside but a number of fat little frogs, and a table beautifully spread. There were on it roast meats and wines, and the plates and cups were all of silver. So she took heart, and knocked. Immediately the fattest frog called out—

"Maiden sweet and small,

Hutzelbein I call;

Hutzelbein's little dog.

Creep about and see

Who this can be.”

Then a little frog came and opened the door for her; and as soon as she came in, the frogs all bade her welcome, and persuaded her to sit down. They asked—”Whence do you come? where do you want to go?”

Then she told them all that had happened to her, and how, because she had disobeyed the command not to speak to her father more than three words, the Stove had disappeared, as well as the king's son; now she was determined to seek him, and to wander over mountain and valley till she found him.

The old fat frog said—

“Maiden sweet and small,

Hutzelbein I call;

Hutzelbein's little dog,

Creep about and see;

Bring the great box to me.”

Then the little frog went and brought the box. Afterwards they gave the princess food and drink, and took her to a beautifully-made bed, all of silk and velvet; she laid herself in it, and slept peacefully.

When day came she arose, and the old frog gave her three needles out of the great box, and told her to take them with her. They would be very necessary to her, for she would have to go over a high glass mountain, and three sharp swords, and a great sea; if she passed all those, she would recover her dearest prince. The frog also gave her, besides the three needles, other gifts, which she was to take great care of—namely, a plough-wheel, and three nuts.

With these she set off, and when she came to the slippery glass mountain, she stuck the three needles into it as she walked—some before her feet, and some behind—and so managed to get across. When she was on the other side, she hid the needles, in a place which she had noticed particularly, and went on her way. Afterwards she came to the sharp-cutting swords, but she set herself on her plough-wheel and rolled safely over them. At last she came before a great lake, which she had to sail across, and when she had done so she saw a great castle. She went in and said she was a poor maiden, who wished very much to hire herself out, if she might be taken in there as a servant. For the frogs had told her that the

king's son, whom she had released out of the Iron Stove in the great wood, dwelt there; so she was content to be taken as kitchen-maid, for very small pay.

Now the king's son had thought the princess was dead; and there was now with him another maiden, whom he had been persuaded he ought to marry, which grieved the poor kitchen-maid very much.

In the evening, when she had washed up the dishes, and had done all her work, she felt in her pocket, and found the three nuts which the old frog had given her. She bit one open, and was going to eat the kernel, when, behold, inside it was the most beautiful dress imaginable—so beautiful that the bride soon heard of it, came and asked to see it, and wanted to buy it, saying it was no dress for a kitchen-maid. But the kitchen-maid thought differently, and refused to sell it, but offered to give it as a present, if the bride would grant her one favour—namely, to sleep one night on the mat outside the bridegroom's door. The bride gave her leave, because the dress was so beautiful, and she had none like it.

Now when it was evening, she said to her bridegroom: "The foolish kitchen-maid wants to sleep on the mat outside your door."

"If you are content, I am," said he.

But the bride gave him a glass of wine, in which she had put a sleeping draught; so that he slept so soundly, nothing could wake him. While, outside the door, the princess wept the whole night, saying: "I have released you out of the wild wood—out of an Iron Stove; in seeking you, I have gone over a glass mountain, over three sharp swords, and over a great lake; yet, now that I find you, you will not hear me."

Next evening, when she had washed up everything, she bit the second nut open; and inside it was a far more beautiful dress than the first which, when the bride saw, she wished to buy also. But the girl again refused to take money and again begged that she might spend the night outside the bridegroom's door. Once more, the bride gave him a sleeping-draught, and he slept so soundly, that he could hear nothing. But the kitchen-maid wept the whole night long, crying: "I have released you out of a wild wood, and out of an Iron Stove; and have gone over a glass mountain, over three sharp swords, and over a great lake, before I found you; and yet, when I find you, you will not hear me."

The third evening, she bit open the third nut; and there was in it a still more beautiful dress, which shone stiff with pure gold. When the bride saw it, she wished more earnestly than ever to have it; but the kitchen-maid would only give it to her on condition that she might sleep, for the third time, on the mat at the bridegroom's door. But this time the prince was cautious, and left the sleeping-draught untouched. Now, when she began to weep, and to call out, "Dearest treasure, I have released you out of the horrible wild wood, and out of an Iron Stove," the king's son sprang up, crying out: "This is my right true love—she is mine, and I am hers." Then he declared he would not marry the other bride, whom he did not love; and so, still in the middle of the night, he got into a carriage with the kitchen-maid, and drove away.

When they came to the great lake, they sailed over; and at the three sharp swords, they seated themselves on the plough-wheel; and at the glass mountain, they found the three needles, and stuck them in step by step. So they came at last to the little old house; but, as they went in, lo! it changed to a great castle; the frogs turned to princes and princesses, all kings' children, and received them both with great joy. There the wedding was celebrated, and they remained in the castle, which was much larger than that which belonged to the princess's father. But as the old man lamented very much his daughter's loss, and his own loneliness, they soon went and fetched him home to themselves. So they had two kingdoms, instead of one, and lived happily together all their days.

To get more stories

Go to www.tonightsbedtimestory.com

License

While the text and the illustrations used in this work are out of copyright, the unique presentation created for those elements is copyrighted. You may use, copy and distribute this work freely but you are not authorized to use this work for commercial purpose and you may not alter, transform, or build upon this work in any way.