



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

The Sleeping Beauty in the Wood

From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock



nce there was a royal couple who grieved excessively because they had no children. When at last, after long waiting, the queen presented her husband with a little daughter, his majesty showed his joy by giving a christening feast, so grand that the like of it was never known. He invited all the fairies in the land—there were seven altogether—to stand godmothers to the little princess; hoping that each might bestow on her some good gift, as was the custom of good fairies in those days.

After the ceremony, all the guests returned to the palace, where there was set before each fairy-godmother a magnificent covered dish, with an embroidered table-napkin, and a knife and fork of pure gold, studded with diamonds and rubies. But alas! as they placed themselves at table, there entered an old fairy who had never been invited, because more than fifty years since she had left the king's dominion on a tour of pleasure, and had not been heard of until this day. His majesty, much troubled, desired a cover to be placed for her, but it was of common delf, for he had ordered from his jeweller only seven gold dishes for the seven fairies aforesaid. The elderly fairy thought herself neglected, and muttered angry menaces, which were overheard by one of the younger fairies, who chanced to sit beside her. This good godmother, afraid of harm to the pretty baby, hastened to hide herself behind the tapestry in the hall. She did this, because she wished all the others to speak first—so that if any ill gift were bestowed on the child, she might be able to counteract it.

The six now offered their good wishes—which, unlike most wishes, were sure to come true. The fortunate little princess was to grow up the fairest woman in the world; to have a temper sweet as an angel; to be perfectly graceful and gracious; to sing like a nightingale; to dance like a leaf on a tree; and to possess every accomplishment under the sun. Then the old fairy's turn came. Shaking her head spitefully, she uttered the wish that when the baby grew up into a young lady, and learned to spin, she might prick her finger with the spindle and die of the wound.

At this terrible prophecy all the guests shuddered; and some of the more tender-hearted began to weep. The lately happy parents were almost out of their wits with grief. Upon which the wise young fairy appeared from behind the tapestry, saying cheerfully “Your majesties may comfort yourselves; the princess shall not die. I have no power to alter the ill-fortune just wished her by my ancient sister—her finger must be pierced; and she shall then sink, not into the sleep of death, but into a sleep that will last a hundred years. After that time is ended, the son of a king will find her, awaken her, and marry her.”

Immediately all the fairies vanished.

The king, in the hope of avoiding his daughter's doom, issued an edict, forbidding all persons to spin, and even to have spinning-wheels in their houses, on pain of instant death. But it was in vain. One day, when she was just fifteen years of age, the king and queen left their daughter alone in one of their castles, when, wandering about at her will, she came to an ancient donjon tower, climbed to the top of it, and there found a very old woman—so old and deaf that she had never heard of the king's edict—busy with her wheel.

“What are you doing, good old woman?” said the princess.

“I’m spinning, my pretty child.”

“Ah, how charming! Let me try if I can spin also.”

She had no sooner taken up the spindle than, being lively and obstinate, she handled it so awkwardly and carelessly that the point pierced her finger. Though it was so small a wound, she fainted away at once, and dropped silently down on the floor. The poor frightened old woman called for help; shortly came the ladies in waiting, who tried every means to restore their young mistress, but all their care was useless. She lay, beautiful as an angel, the colour still lingering in her lips and cheeks; her fair bosom softly stirred with her breath: only her eyes were fast closed. When the king her father and the queen her mother beheld her thus, they knew regret was idle—all had happened as the cruel fairy meant. But they also knew that their daughter would not sleep for ever, though after one hundred years it was not likely they would either of them behold her awakening. Until that happy hour should arrive, they determined to leave her in repose. They sent away all the physicians and attendants, and themselves sorrowfully laid her upon a bed of embroidery, in the most elegant apartment of the palace. There she slept and looked like a sleeping angel still.

When this misfortune happened, the kindly young fairy who had saved the princess by changing her sleep of death into this sleep of a hundred years, was twelve thousand leagues away in the kingdom of Mataban. But being informed of everything, she arrived speedily, in a chariot of fire drawn by dragons. The king was somewhat startled by the sight, but nevertheless went to the door of his palace, and, with a mournful countenance, presented her his hand to descend.

The fairy condoled with his majesty, and approved of all he had done. Then, being a fairy of great common sense and foresight, she suggested that the princess, awakening after a hundred years in this ancient castle, might be a good deal embarrassed, especially with a young prince by her side, to find herself alone. Accordingly, without asking any one’s leave, she touched with her magic wand the entire population of the palace—except the king and queen; governesses, ladies of honour, waiting-maids, gentlemen ushers, cooks, kitchen-girls, pages, footmen—down to the horses that were in the stables, and the grooms that attended them, she touched each and all. Nay, with kind consideration for the feelings of the princess, she even touched the little fat lap-dog, Puffy, who had laid himself down beside his mistress on her splendid bed. He, like all the rest, fell fast asleep in a moment. The very spits that were before the kitchen-fire ceased turning, and the fire itself went out, and everything became as silent as if it were the middle of the night, or as if the palace were a palace of the dead.

The king and queen—having kissed their daughter and wept over her a little, but not much, she looked so sweet and content—departed from the castle, giving orders that it was to be approached no more. The command was unnecessary; for in one quarter of an hour there sprung up around it a wood so thick and thorny that neither beasts nor men could attempt to penetrate there. Above this dense mass of forest could only be perceived the top of the high tower where the lovely princess slept.

A great many changes happen in a hundred years. The king, who never had a second child, died, and his throne passed into another royal family. So entirely was the story of the poor princess forgotten, that when the reigning king's son, being one day out hunting and stopped in the chase by this formidable wood, inquired what wood it was and what were those towers which he saw appearing out of the midst of it, no one could answer him. At length an old peasant was found who remembered having heard his grandfather say to his father, that in this tower was a princess, beautiful as the day, who was doomed to sleep there for one hundred years, until awakened by a king's son, her destined bridegroom.

At this, the young prince, who had the spirit of a hero, determined to find out the truth for himself. Spurred on by both generosity and curiosity, he leaped from his horse and began to force his way through the thick wood. To his amazement the stiff branches all gave way, and the ugly thorns sheathed themselves of their own accord, and the brambles buried themselves in the earth to let him pass. This done, they closed behind him, allowing none of his suite to follow: but, ardent and young, he went boldly on alone. The first thing he saw was enough to smite him with fear. Bodies of men and horses lay extended on the ground; but the men had faces, not death-white, but red as peonies, and beside them were glasses half filled with wine, showing that they had gone to sleep drinking. Next he entered a large court, paved with marble, where stood rows of guards presenting arms, but motionless as if cut out of stone; then he passed through many chambers where gentlemen and ladies, all in the costume of the past century, slept at their ease, some standing, some sitting. The pages were lurking in corners, the ladies of honour were stooping over their embroidery frames, or listening apparently with polite attention to the gentlemen of the court, but all were as silent as statues and as immovable. Their clothes, strange to say, were fresh and new as ever: and not a particle of dust or spider-web had gathered over the furniture, though it had not known a broom for a hundred years. Finally the astonished prince came to an inner chamber, where was the fairest sight his eyes had ever beheld.

A young girl of wonderful beauty lay asleep on an embroidered bed, and she looked as if she had only just closed her eyes. Trembling, the prince approached and knelt beside her. Some say he kissed her, but as nobody saw it, and she never told, we cannot be quite sure of the fact. However, as the end of the enchantment had come, the princess awakened at once, and looking at him with eyes of the tenderest regard, said drowsily, "Is it you, my prince? I have waited for you very long."

Charmed with these words, and still more with the tone in which they were uttered, the prince assured her that he loved her more than his life. Nevertheless, he was the most embarrassed of the two; for, thanks to the kind fairy, the princess had plenty of time to dream of him during her century of slumber, while he had never even heard of her till an hour before. For a long time did they sit conversing, and yet had not said half enough. Their only interruption was the little dog Puffy, who had awakened with his mistress, and now began to be exceedingly jealous that the princess did not notice him as much as she was wont to do.

Meantime all the attendants, whose enchantment was also broken, not being in love, were ready to die of hunger after their fast of a hundred years. A lady of honour ventured to intimate that dinner was served; whereupon the prince handed his beloved princess at once

to the great hall. She did not wait to dress for dinner, being already perfectly and magnificently attired, though in a fashion somewhat out of date. However, her lover had the politeness not to notice this, nor to remind her that she was dressed exactly like her royal grandmother, whose portrait still hung on the palace walls.

During the banquet a concert took place by the attendant musicians, and considering they had not touched their instruments for a century they played extremely well. They ended with a wedding march: for that very evening the marriage of the prince and princess was celebrated, and though the bride was nearly one hundred years older than the bridegroom, it is remarkable that the fact would never have been discovered by any one unacquainted therewith.

After a few days they went together out of the castle and enchanted wood, both of which immediately vanished, and were never more beheld by mortal eyes. The princess was restored to her ancestral kingdom, but it was not generally declared who she was, as during a hundred years people had grown so very much cleverer that nobody then living would ever have believed the story. So nothing was explained, and nobody presumed to ask any questions about her, for ought not a prince be able to marry whomsoever he pleases?

Nor—whether or not the day of fairies was over—did the princess ever see anything further of her seven godmothers. She lived a long and happy life, like any other ordinary woman, and died at length, beloved, regretted, but, the prince being already no more, perfectly contented.

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.