

Adventures of Aladdin

Once upon a time, a widow had an only son whose name was Aladdin. They were very poor and lived from hand to mouth, though Aladdin did what he could to earn some pennies, by picking bananas in faraway places.

One day, as he was looking for wild figs in a grove some way from the town, Aladdin met a mysterious stranger. This smartly dressed dark-eyed man with a trim black beard and a splendid sapphire in his turban, asked Aladdin an unusual question:

"Come here, boy," he ordered. "How would you like to earn a silver penny?"

"A silver penny!" exclaimed Aladdin. "Sir, I'd do anything for that kind of payment."

"I'm not going to ask you to do much. Just go down that manhole. I'm much too big to squeeze through myself. If you do as I ask, you'll have your reward." The stranger helped Aladdin lift the manhole cover, for it was very heavy. Slim and agile as he was, the boy easily went down. His feet touched stone and he carefully made his way down some steps . . . and found himself in a large chamber. It seemed to sparkle, though dimly lit by the flickering light of an old oil lamp. When Aladdin's eyes became used to the gloom, he saw a wonderful sight: trees dripping with glittering jewels, pots of gold and caskets full of priceless gems. Thousands of precious objects lay scattered about. It was a treasure trove! Unable to believe his eyes, Aladdin was standing dazed when he heard a shout behind him.

"The lamp! Put out the flame and bring me the lamp!" Surprised and suspicious, for why should the stranger, out of all such a treasure want only an old lamp, Aladdin wondered. Perhaps he was a wizard. He decided to be on his guard. Picking up the lamp, he retraced his steps up to the entrance.

"Give me the lamp," urged the wizard impatiently. "Hand it over," he began to shout, thrusting out his arm to grab it, but Aladdin cautiously drew back.

"Let me out first . . ."

"Too bad for you," snapped the stranger, slamming down the manhole cover, never noticing that, as he did so, a ring slid off his finger. A terrified Aladdin was left in pitch darkness, wondering what the wizard would do next. Then he trod on the ring. Aimlessly putting it on his finger, he twisted it round and round. Suddenly the room was flooded with a rosy light and a great genie with clasped hands appeared on a cloud.

"At your command, sire," said the genie. Now astounded, Aladdin could only stammer: "I want to go home!" In a flash he was back in his own home, though the door was tightly shut.

"How did you get in?" called his mother from the kitchen stove, the minute she set eyes

on him. Excitedly, her son told her of his adventures.

"Where's the silver coin?" his mother asked. Aladdin clapped a hand to his brow. For all he had brought home was the old oil lamp "Oh, mother! I'm so sorry. This is all I've got."

"Well, let's hope it works. It's so dirty . . ." and the widow began to rub the lamp. Suddenly out shot another genie, in a cloud of smoke.

"You've set me free, after centuries! I was a prisoner in the lamp, waiting to be freed by someone rubbing it. Now, I'm your obedient servant. Tell me your wishes." And the genie bowed respectfully, awaiting Aladdin's orders. The boy and his mother gaped wordlessly at this incredible apparition, then the genie said with a hint of impatience in his voice.

"I'm here at your command. Tell me what you want. Anything you like!" Aladdin gulped, then said: "Bring us . . . bring . . ." His mother not having yet begun to cook the dinner, went on to say: ". . . a lovely big meal."

From that day on, the widow and her son had everything they could wish for: food, clothes and a fine home, for the genie of the lamp granted them everything they asked him. Aladdin grew into a tall handsome young man and his mother felt that he ought to find himself a wife, sooner or later.

One day, as he left the market, Aladdin happened to see the Sultan's daughter Halima in her sedan chair being carried through the streets. He only caught a fleeting glimpse of the princess, but it was enough for him to want to marry her. Aladdin told his mother and she quickly said: "I'll ask the Sultan for his daughter's hand. He'll never be able to refuse. Wait and see!"

And indeed, the Sultan was easily persuaded by a casket full of big diamonds to admit the widow to the palace. However, when he learned why she had come, he told the widow that her son must bring proof of his power and riches. This was mostly the Chamberlain's idea, for he himself was eager to marry the beautiful black-eyed Sultan's daughter.

"If Aladdin wants to marry Halima," said the Sultan, "he must send me forty slaves tomorrow. every slave must bring a box of precious stones. And forty Arab warriors must escort the treasure."

Aladdin's mother went sadly home. The genie of the magic lamp had already worked wonders, but nothing like this. Aladdin however, when he heard the news, was not at all dismayed. He picked up the lamp, rubbed it harder than ever and told the genie what he required. The genie simply clapped his hands three times. Forty slaves magically appeared, carrying the gemstones, together with their escort of forty Arab warriors. When he saw all this the next day, the Sultan was taken aback. He never imagined such wealth could exist. Just as he was about to accept Aladdin as his daughter's

bridegroom, the envious Chamberlain broke in with a question.

"Where will they live?" he asked. The Sultan pondered for a moment, then allowing greed to get the better of him, he told Aladdin to build a great, splendid palace for Halima. Aladdin went straight home and, in what was once a wilderness, the genie built him a palace. The last obstacle had been overcome. The wedding took place with great celebrations and the Sultan was especially happy at finding such a rich and powerful son-in-law.

News of Aladdin's sudden fortune and wealth spread like wildfire, until . . . one day, a strange merchant stopped beneath the palace window.

"Old lamps for new," he called to the princess, standing on the balcony. Now, Aladdin had always kept his secret to himself. Only his mother knew it and she had never told a soul. Halima, alas, had been kept in the dark. And so, now, wanting to give Aladdin a surprise as well as make a good bargain, she fetched the old oil lamp she had seen Aladdin tuck away, and gave it to the merchant in exchange for a new one. The merchant quickly began to rub it . . . and the genie was now at the service of the wizard who had got his magic lamp back.

In a second he whisked away all Aladdin's possessions and magically sent the palace and the princess to an unknown land. Aladdin and the Sultan were at their wits' end. Nobody knew what had happened. Only Aladdin knew it had something to do with the magic lamp. But as he wept over the lost genie of the lamp, he remembered the genie of the ring from the wizard's finger. Slipping the ring on his finger, Aladdin twisted it round and round.

"Take me to the place where the wizard has hidden my wife," he ordered the genie. In a flash, he found himself inside his own palace, and peeping from behind a curtain, he saw the wizard and the princess, now his servant.

"Psst! Psst!" hissed Aladdin. "Aladdin! It's you . . .!"

"Ssh. Don't let him hear you. Take this powder and put it into his tea. Trust me." The powder quickly took effect and the wizard fell into a deep sleep. Aladdin hunted for the lamp high and low, but it was nowhere to be seen. But it had to be there. How, otherwise, had the wizard moved the palace? As Aladdin gazed at his sleeping enemy, he thought of peering underneath the pillow. "The lamp! At last," sighed Aladdin, hastily rubbing it.

"Welcome back, Master!" exclaimed the genie. "Why did you leave me at another's service for so long?" "Welcome," replied Aladdin. "I'm glad to see you again. I've certainly missed you! It's just as well I have you by me again." "At your command," smiled the genie.

"First, put this wicked wizard in chains and take him far away where he'll never be found

again." The genie grinned with pleasure, nodded his head, and the wizard vanished. Halima clutched Aladdin in fear: "What's going on? Who is that genie?"

"Don't worry, everything is all right," Aladdin reassured her, as he told his wife the whole story of how he had met the wizard and found the magic lamp that had enabled him to marry her. Everything went back to normal and the happy pair hugged each other tenderly.

"Can we return to our own kingdom?" the princess asked timidly, thinking of her father, so far away. Aladdin glanced at her with a smile. "The magic that brought you here will take you back, but with me at your side, forever."

The Sultan was almost ill with worry. His daughter had disappeared along with the palace, and then his son-in-law had vanished too. Nobody knew where they were, not even the wise men hastily called to the palace to divine what had happened. The jealous Chamberlain kept on repeating: "I told you Aladdin's fortune couldn't last."

Everyone had lost all hope of ever seeing the missing pair again, when far away, Aladdin rubbed the magic lamp and said to the genie, "Take my wife, myself and the palace back to our own land, as fast as you can."

"In a flash, Sire," replied the genie. At the snap of a finger, the palace rose into the air and sped over the Sultan's kingdom, above the heads of his astonished subjects. It gently floated down to earth and landed on its old site. Aladdin and Halima rushed to embrace the Sultan.

To this very day, in that distant country, you can still admire the traces of an ancient palace which folk call the palace that came from the skies.

Bald Knight

Once upon a time, there was a knight who was growing old. His hair fell off, and he became bald. To hide this imperfection, he wore a wig.

As he was riding with some others during a hunting trip, a sudden gust of wind blew off the wig and exposed his bald head. Everyone in the hunting party could not resist laughing at the accident, because the knight looked so silly.

The knight himself laughed a loud as anybody, saying, "How could I expect to keep that fake hair on my head when my own would not stay there?"

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Emperor's New Clothes

Once upon a time, there lived a vain emperor whose only worry in life was to dress in elegant clothes. He changed clothes almost every hour and loved to show them off to his people.

Word of the Emperor's refined habits spread over his kingdom and beyond. Two scoundrels who had heard of the Emperor's vanity decided to take advantage of it. They introduced themselves at the gates of the palace with a scheme in mind.

"We are two very good tailors and after many years of research we have invented an extraordinary method to weave a cloth so light and fine that it looks invisible. As a matter of fact it is invisible to anyone who is too stupid and incompetent to appreciate its quality."

The chief of the guards heard the scoundrel's strange story and sent for the court chamberlain. The chamberlain notified the prime minister, who ran to the Emperor and disclosed the incredible news. The Emperor's curiosity got the better of him and he decided to see the two scoundrels.

"Besides being invisible, your Highness, this cloth will be woven in colors and patterns created especially for you." The emperor gave the two men a bag of gold coins in exchange for their promise to begin working on the fabric immediately.

"Just tell us what you need to get started and we'll give it to you." The two scoundrels asked for a loom, silk, gold thread and then pretended to begin working. The Emperor thought he had spent his money quite well: in addition to getting a new extraordinary suit, he would discover which of his subjects were ignorant and incompetent. A few days later, he called the old and wise prime minister, who was considered by everyone as a man with common sense.

"Go and see how the work is proceeding," the Emperor told him, "and come back to let me know."

The prime minister was welcomed by the two scoundrels.

"We're almost finished, but we need a lot more gold thread. Here, Excellency! Admire the colors, feel the softness!" The old man bent over the loom and tried to see the fabric that was not there. He felt cold sweat on his forehead.

"I can't see anything," he thought. "If I see nothing, that means I'm stupid! Or, worse, incompetent!" If the prime minister admitted that he didn't see anything, he would be discharged from his office.

"What a marvelous fabric, he said then. "I'll certainly tell the Emperor." The two scoundrels rubbed their hands gleefully. They had almost made it. More thread was

requested to finish the work.

Finally, the Emperor received the announcement that the two tailors had come to take all the measurements needed to sew his new suit.

"Come in," the Emperor ordered. Even as they bowed, the two scoundrels pretended to be holding large roll of fabric.

"Here it is your Highness, the result of our labor," the scoundrels said. "We have worked night and day but, at last, the most beautiful fabric in the world is ready for you. Look at the colors and feel how fine it is." Of course the Emperor did not see any colors and could not feel any cloth between his fingers. He panicked and felt like fainting. But luckily the throne was right behind him and he sat down. But when he realized that no one could know that he did not see the fabric, he felt better. Nobody could find out he was stupid and incompetent. And the Emperor didn't know that everybody else around him thought and did the very same thing.

The farce continued as the two scoundrels had foreseen it. Once they had taken the measurements, the two began cutting the air with scissors while sewing with their needles an invisible cloth.

"Your Highness, you'll have to take off your clothes to try on your new ones." The two scoundrels draped the new clothes on him and then held up a mirror. The Emperor was embarrassed but since none of his bystanders were, he felt relieved.

"Yes, this is a beautiful suit and it looks very good on me," the Emperor said trying to look comfortable. "You've done a fine job."

"Your Majesty," the prime minister said, "we have a request for you. The people have found out about this extraordinary fabric and they are anxious to see you in your new suit." The Emperor was doubtful showing himself naked to the people, but then he abandoned his fears. After all, no one would know about it except the ignorant and the incompetent.

"All right," he said. "I will grant the people this privilege." He summoned his carriage and the ceremonial parade was formed. A group of dignitaries walked at the very front of the procession and anxiously scrutinized the faces of the people in the street. All the people had gathered in the main square, pushing and shoving to get a better look. An applause welcomed the regal procession. Everyone wanted to know how stupid or incompetent his or her neighbor was but, as the Emperor passed, a strange murmur rose from the crowd.

Everyone said, loud enough for the others to hear: "Look at the Emperor's new clothes. They're beautiful!"

"What a marvelous train!"

"And the colors! The colors of that beautiful fabric! I have never seen anything like it in my life." They all tried to conceal their disappointment at not being able to see the clothes, and since nobody was willing to admit his own stupidity and incompetence, they all behaved as the two scoundrels had predicted.

A child, however, who had no important job and could only see things as his eyes showed them to him, went up to the carriage.

"The Emperor is naked," he said.

"Fool!" his father reprimanded, running after him. "Don't talk nonsense!" He grabbed his child and took him away. But the boy's remark, which had been heard by the bystanders, was repeated over and over again until everyone cried:

"The boy is right! The Emperor is naked! It's true!"

The Emperor realized that the people were right but could not admit to that. He thought it better to continue the procession under the illusion that anyone who couldn't see his clothes was either stupid or incompetent. And he stood stiffly on his carriage, while behind him a page held his imaginary mantle.

Fox and The Geese

Once upon a time, a fox came to a meadow in which was a flock of fine fat geese. He smiled at them and said, "I come in the nick of time; you are sitting together quite beautifully, so that I can eat you up one after the other."

The geese crackled with terror, sprang up, and began to ail and beg piteously for their lives. But the fox would listen to nothing and said, "There is no mercy to be had! You must die."

At length one of them took heart and said, "If we poor geese are to yield up our vigorous young lives, show us the only possible favor and allow us one more prayer, that we may not die in our sins. Then we shall place ourselves in a row, so that you can always pick yourself the fattest."

"Yes," said the fox, "that is reasonable, and a pious request. Pray away, I will wait till you are done."

Then the first began a good long prayer, forever saying, "Ga! Ga!" And as she would make no end, the second did not wait until her turn came, but began also, "Ga! Ga!" The third and fourth followed her, and soon they were all cackling together.

When they were done praying, the story shall be continued further, but at present, they are still praying without stopping . . .

Goldilocks and The Three Bears

Once upon a time, in a large forest, close to a village, stood the cottage where the Teddy Bear family lived. They were not really proper Teddy Bears, for Father Bear was very big, Mother Bear was middling in size, and only Baby Bear could be described as a Teddy Bear.

Each bear had its own size of bed. Father Bear's was large and nice and comfy. Mother Bear's bed was middling in size, while Baby Bear had a fine little cherry wood bed that Father Bear had ordered from a couple of beaver friends.

Beside the fireplace, around which the family sat in the evenings, stood a large carved chair for the head of the house, a delightful blue velvet armchair for Mother Bear, and a very little chair for Baby Bear.

Neatly laid out on the kitchen table stood three china bowls. A large one for Father Bear, a smaller one for Mother Bear, and a little bowl for Baby Bear.

The neighbors were all very respectful to Father Bear and people raised their hats when he went by. Father Bear liked that and he always politely replied to their greetings. Mother Bear had lots of friends. She visited them in the afternoons to exchange good advice and recipes for jam and bottled fruit. Baby Bear, however, had hardly any friends. This was partly because he was rather a bully and liked to win games and arguments. He was a pest too and always getting into mischief. Not far away, lived a fair-haired little girl who had a similar nature to Baby Bear, only she was haughty and stuck-up as well, and though Baby Bear often asked her to come and play at his house, she always said no.

One day, Mother Bear made a nice pudding. It was a new recipe, with blueberries and other crushed berries. Her friends told her it was delicious. When it was ready, she said to the family:

"It has to be left to cool now, otherwise it won't taste nice. That will take at least an hour. Why don't we go and visit the Beavers' new baby? Mummy Beaver will be pleased to see us." Father Bear and Baby Bear would much rather have tucked into the pudding, warm or not, but they liked the thought of visiting the new baby.

"We must wear our best clothes, even for such a short visit. Everyone at the Beavers' will be very busy now, and we must not stay too long!" And so they set off along the pathway towards the river bank. A short time later, the stuck-up little girl, whose name was Goldilocks, passed by the Bears' house as she picked flowers.

"Oh, what an ugly house the Bears have!" said Goldilocks to herself as she went down the hill. "I'm going to peep inside! It won't be beautiful like my house, but I'm dying to see where Baby Bear lives." Knock! Knock! The little girl tapped on the door. Knock! Knock! Not a sound . . .

"Surely someone will hear me knocking," Goldilocks said herself, impatiently. "Anyone at home?" she called, peering round the door. Then she went into the empty house and started to explore the kitchen.

"A pudding!" she cried, dipping her finger into the pudding Mother Bear had left to cool. "Quite nice!" she murmured, spooning it from Baby Bear's bowl. In a twinkling, the bowl lay empty on a messy table. With a full tummy, Goldilocks went on exploring.

"Now then, this must be Father Bear's chair, this will be Mother Bear's, and this one . . . must belong to my friend, Baby Bear. I'll just sit on it a while!" With these words, Goldilocks sat herself down onto the little chair which, quite unused to such a sudden weight, promptly broke a leg. Goldilocks crashed to the floor, but not in the least dismayed by the damage she had done, she went upstairs.

There was no mistaking which was Baby Bear's bed.

"Mm! Quite comfy!" she said, bouncing on it. "Not as nice as mine, but nearly! Then she yawned. I think I'll lie down, only for a minute . . . just to try the bed." And in next to no time, Goldilocks lay fast asleep in Baby Bear's bed. In the meantime, the Bears were on their way home.

"Wasn't the new Beaver baby ever so small?" said Baby Bear to his mother. Was I as tiny as that when I was born?"

"Not quite, but almost," came the reply, with a fond caress. From a distance, Father Bear noticed the door was ajar.

"Hurry!" he cried. "Someone is in our house . . ." Was Father Bear hungry or did a thought strike him? Anyway, he dashed into the kitchen. "I knew it! Somebody has gobbled up the pudding . . ."

"Someone has been jumping up and down on my armchair!" complained Mother Bear.

". . . and somebody's broken my chair!" wailed Baby Bear.

Where could the culprit be? They all ran upstairs and tiptoed in amazement over to Baby Bear's bed. In it lay Goldilocks, sound asleep. Baby Bear prodded her toe . . .

"Who's that? Where am I?" shrieked the little girl, waking with a start. Taking fright at the scowling faces bending over her, she clutched the bedclothes up to her chin. Then she jumped out of bed and fled down the stairs.

"Get away! Away from that house!" she told herself as she ran, forgetful of all the trouble she had so unkindly caused. But Baby Bear called from the door, waving his arm:

"Don't run away! Come back! I forgive you . . . come and play with me!"

And this is how it all ended. From that day onwards, haughty rude Goldilocks became a pleasant little girl. She made friends with Baby Bear and often went to his house. She invited him to her house too, and they remained good friends, always.

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Hole That Was Too Narrow

Once upon a time, a goat was so greedy that he would eat anything that came his way. But he was punished for his greed. He found some old stale eggs in a barn and, as usual, gobbled the lot. However, he soon started to feel agonizing pains in his tummy, his eyes grew dim and he broke out in a cold sweat.

For days, he lay between life and death, then the fever dropped. The first time he dared climb a tree to rob a nest, thin and weak with his trousers dangling over an empty stomach, he became dizzy and fell. That is how he twisted his ankle. Sick with hunger, he limped about in search of food, but that made him feel even hungrier than before. Then good luck came his way.

Although wary of venturing too close to human habitations, he was so hungry he went up to a tavern on the outskirts of the village. The air was full of lovely smells and the poor goat felt his mouth watering as he pictured all the nice things inside.

An inviting smell coming from a crack in the wall seemed to be stronger than the others. Thrusting his nose into the crack, he was greeted by a waft of delicious scents. The goat frantically clawed at the crack with his paws and teeth, trying to widen it. Slowly the plaster between the blocks of rubble began to crumble, till all he had to do was move a stone. Shoving with all his might, the goat made a hole. And then a really wonderful sight met his gaze.

He was inside the pantry, where hams, salamis, cheeses, honey, jam and nuts were stored. Overwhelmed by it all, the goat could not make up his mind what to taste first. He jumped from one thing to another, munching all the time, till his tummy was full. Satisfied at last, he fell asleep. Then he woke again, had another feast and went back to sleep. With all this food, his strength returned, and next day, the goat was strong enough to climb up to the topmost shelves and select the tastiest delicacies. By this time, he was just having a nibble here and a nibble there. But he never stopped eating: he went on and on and on.

By now, he was very full indeed, as he chattered to himself: "Salami for starters . . . no, the ham's better! Some soft cheese and a spot of mature cheese as well . . . I think I'll have a pickled sausage too . . ."

In only a few days, the goat had become very fat and his trouser button had popped off over a bulging tummy. But of course, the goat's fantastic luck could not last for ever. One afternoon, the goat froze in mid-munch at the creak of a door. Heavy footsteps thumped down the stairs, and the goat looked helplessly round. Fear of discovery sent him hunting for a way to escape. He ran towards the hole in the wall through which he had come. But though his head and shoulders entered the hole, his tummy, which had grown much larger since the day he had come in, simply would not pass. The goat was in a dangerous position: he was stuck!

Two thick hands grabbed him by the tail.

"You horrid little robber! So you thought you'd get away, did you? I'll soon deal with you!"

Strange though it may sound, the only thought in the greedy goat's head was a longing to be starving of hunger again . . .

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Little Mermaid

Once upon a time, in a splendid palace on the bed of the bluest ocean, lived the Sea King, a wise old triton with a long flowing white beard. He lived in a magnificent palace, built of gaily colored coral and seashells, together with his five daughters, very beautiful mermaids.

Sirenetta, the youngest and loveliest of them all, also had a beautiful voice, and when she sang, the fishes flocked from all over the sea to listen to her. The shells gaped wide, showing their pearls and even the jellyfish stopped to listen. The young mermaid often sang, and each time, she would gaze upwards, seeking the faint sunlight that scarcely managed to filter down into the depths.

"Oh, how I'd love to go up there and at last see the sky, which everyone says is so pretty, and hear the voices of humans and smell the scent of the flowers!"

"You're still too young!" said her mother. "In a year or two, when you're fifteen. Only then will the King let you go up there, like your sisters!" Sirenetta spent her time wishing for the world of humans, she listened to her sisters' stories, and every time they returned from the surface, she would ask them questions, to satisfy her curiosity.

And as she waited for the day when she too would be allowed to reach the surface of the sea and meet the unknown world, Sirenetta spent her time in her wonderful sea garden. The seahorses kept her company, and sometimes a dolphin would come and play. Only the unfriendly starfish never replied when she called. At last, her long-desired birthday came. The night before, Sirenetta could not sleep a wink. In the morning, her father called her and, stroking her long golden hair, slipped a lovely carved flower into her locks . . .

"There! Now you can go to the surface. You'll breathe air and see the sky. But remember! It's not our world! We can only watch it and admire! We're children of the sea and have no soul, as men do. Be careful and keep away from them; they can only bring bad luck!" In a second, Sirenetta had kissed her father and was darting smoothly towards the surface of the sea. She swam so fast with flicks of her slender tail, that even the fish could not keep up with her.

Suddenly she popped out of the water. How wonderful! For the first time, she saw the great blue sky, in which as dusk began to fall, the first stars were peeping out and twinkling. The sun, already over the horizon, trailed a golden reflection that gently faded on the heaving waves. High overhead, a flock of gulls spotted the little mermaid and greeted her arrival with shrieks of pleasure.

"It's so lovely!" she exclaimed happily. But another nice surprise was in store for her: a ship was slowly sailing towards the rock on which Sirenetta was sitting. The sailors dropped anchor and the ship swayed gently in the calm sea. Sirenetta watched the men go about their work aboard, lighting the lanterns for the night. She could clearly hear

their voices.

"I'd love to speak to them!" she said to herself. But then she gazed sadly at her long flexible tail, her equivalent of legs, and said to herself: "I can never be like them!" Aboard ship, a strange excitement seemed to seize the crew, and a little later, the sky became a spray of many colored lights and the crackle of fireworks filled the sky.

"Long live the captain! Hurray for his 20th birthday. Hurray! Hurray . . . many happy returns!" Astonished at all this, the little mermaid caught sight of the young man in whose honor the display was being held. Tall and dignified, he was smiling happily, and Sirenetta could not take her eyes from him. She followed his every movement, fascinated by all that was happening. The party went on, but the sea grew more agitated. Sirenetta anxiously realized that the men were now in danger: an icy wind was sweeping the waves, the ink black sky was torn by flashes of lightning, then a terrible storm broke suddenly over the helpless ship. In vain Sirenetta screamed: "Look out! Beware of the sea . . ." But the howling wind carried her words away, and the rising waves swept over the ship. Amidst the sailors' shouts, masts and sails toppled onto the deck, and with a sinister splintering sound, the ship sank.

By the light of one of the lamps. Sirenetta had seen the young captain fall into the water, and she swam to his rescue. But she could not find him in the high waves and, tired out, was about to give up, when suddenly there he was on the crest of a nearby wave. In an instant, he was swept straight into the mermaid's arms.

The young man was unconscious and the mermaid held his head above water in the stormy sea, in an effort to save his life. She clung to him for hours trying to fight the tiredness that was overtaking her.

Then, as suddenly as it had sprung up, the storm died away. In a gray dawn over a still angry sea, Sirenetta realized thankfully that land lay ahead. Aided by the motion of the waves, she pushed the captain's body onto the shore, beyond the water's edge. Unable herself to walk, the mermaid sat wringing her hands, her tail lapped by the rippling water, trying to warm the young captain with her own body. Then the sound of approaching voices startled Sirenetta and she slipped back into deeper water.

"Come quickly! Quickly!" came a woman's voice in alarm. "There's a man here! Look, I think he's unconscious!" The captain was now in good hands.

"Let's take him up to the castle!"

"No, no! Better get help . . ." And the first thing the young man saw when he opened his eyes again was the beautiful face of the youngest of a group of three ladies.

"Thank you! Thank you . . . for saving my life . . . he murmured to the lovely unknown lady.

From the sea Sirenetta watched the man she had snatched from the waves turn towards the castle, without knowing that a mermaid had saved his life. Slowly swimming out to sea, Sirenetta felt that there on the beach she had left behind something she could never bring herself to forget. How wonderful those tremendous hours in the storm had been, as she had battled with the elements. And as she swam down towards her father's palace, her sisters came to meet her, anxious to know what had kept her so long on the surface. Sirenetta started to tell her story, but suddenly a lump came to her throat and, bursting into tears, she fled to her room. She stayed there for days, refusing to see anyone or to touch food. She knew that her love for the young captain was without hope, for she was a mermaid and could never marry a human. Only the Witch of the Deeps could help her. But what price would she have to pay? Sirenetta decided to ask the Witch.

". . . so you want to get rid of your fishy tail, do you? I expect you'd like to have a pair of woman's legs, isn't that so?" said the nasty Witch scornfully, from her cave guarded by a giant squid.

"Be warned!" she went on. "You will suffer horribly, as though a sword were cutting you apart. And every time you place your feet on the earth, you will feel dreadful pain!"

"It doesn't matter!" whispered Sirenetta, with tears in her eyes. "As long as I can go back to him!"

"And that's not all!" exclaimed the Witch. "In exchange for my spell, you must give me your lovely voice. You'll never be able to utter a word again! And don't forget! If the man you love marries someone else, you will not be able to turn into a mermaid again. You will just dissolve in water like the foam on the wave!"

"All right!" said Sirenetta, eagerly taking the little jar holding the magic potion. The Witch had told Sirenetta that the young captain was actually a prince, and the mermaid left the water at a spot not far from the castle. She pulled herself onto the beach, then drank the magic potion. An agonizing pain made her faint, and when she came to her senses, she could mistily see the face she loved, smiling down at her.

The witch's magic had worked the spell, for the prince had felt a strange desire to go down to the beach, just as Sirenetta was arriving. There he had stumbled on her, and recalling how he too had once been washed up on the shore, gently laid his cloak over the still body, cast up by the waves.

"Don't be frightened! he said quickly. "You're quite safe! Where have you come from?" But Sirenetta was now dumb and could not reply, so the young man softly stroke her wet cheek.

"I'll take you to the castle and look after you," he said. In the days that followed, the mermaid started a new life. She wore splendid dresses and often went out on horseback with the prince. One evening, she was invited to a great ball at Court.

However, as the Witch had foretold, every movement and each step she took was torture. Sirenetta bravely put up with her suffering, glad to be allowed to stay near her beloved prince. And though she could not speak to him, he was fond of her and showered kindness on her, to her great joy. However, the young man's heart really belonged to the unknown lady he had seen as he lay on the shore, though he had never met her since, for she had returned at once to her own land.

Even when he was in the company of Sirenetta, fond of her as he was, the unknown lady was always in his thoughts. And the little mermaid, guessing instinctively that she was not his true love, suffered even more.

She often crept out of the castle at night, to weep by the seashore. Once she thought she could spy her sisters rise from the water and wave at her, but this made her feel sadder than ever.

Fate, however, had another surprise in store. From the Castle ramparts one day, a huge ship was sighted sailing into the harbor. Together with Sirenetta, the prince went down to meet it. And who stepped from the vessel, but the unknown lady who had been for long in the prince's heart. When he saw her, he rushed to greet her. Sirenetta felt herself turn to stone and a painful feeling pierced her heart: she was about to lose the prince for ever. The unknown lady too had never forgotten the young man she had found on the sea and soon after, he asked her to marry him. Since she too was in love, she happily said "yes."

A few days after the wedding, the happy couple were invited for a voyage on the huge ship, which was still in the harbor. Sirenetta too went on board, and the ship set sail. Night fell, and sick at heart over the loss of the prince, Sirenetta went on deck. She remembered the Witch's prophecy, and was now ready to give up her life and dissolve in the sea. Suddenly she heard a cry from the water and dimly saw her sisters in the darkness. ". . . Sirenetta! Sirenetta! It's us . . . your sisters! We've heard all about what happened! Look! Do you see this knife? It's magic! The Witch gave it to us in exchange for our hair. Take it! Kill the prince before dawn, and you will become a mermaid again and forget all your troubles!"

As though in a trance, Sirenetta clasped the knife and entered the cabin where the prince and his bride lay asleep. But as she gazed at the young man's sleeping face, she simply blew him a furtive kiss, before running back on deck. When dawn broke, she threw the knife into the sea. Then she shot a parting glance at the world she was leaving behind, and dived into the waves, ready to turn into the foam of the sea from whence she had come, and vanish.

As the sun rose over the horizon, it cast a long golden ray of light across the sea, and in the chilly water, Sirenetta turned towards it for the last time. Suddenly, as though by magic, a mysterious force drew her out of the water, and she felt herself lifted high into the sky. The clouds were tinged with pink, the sea rippled in the early morning breeze, and the little mermaid heard a whisper through the tinkling of bells: "Sirenetta, Sirenetta!"

Come with us . . ."

"Who are you?" asked the mermaid, surprised to find she had recovered the use of her voice. "Where am I?"

"You're with us in the sky. We're the fairies of the air! We have no soul as men do, but our task is to help them. We take amongst us only those who have shown kindness to men!"

Greatly touched, Sirenetta looked down over the sea towards the prince's ship, and felt tears spring to her eyes. The fairies of the air whispered to her: "Look! The earth flowers are waiting for our tears to turn into the morning dew! Come along with us."

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Obstinate Goats

Once upon a time, two mountain goats happened to be going down the opposite slopes of a valley, through which flowed a rushing river.

Now, some of the mountain dwellers had bridged the river by placing a large tree trunk that had been struck by lightning, to join the steep rocky banks.

The two goats met head on half way across the tree trunk for each wanted to cross to the other side. But the trunk was not nearly wide enough for them to pass each other, and neither goat was inclined to give way. Obstinate, they began to bicker, but neither would budge an inch. Words soon led to action and they started to fight, till finally both tumbled off the tree trunk into the river below.

Wouldn't it have been much simpler if only one of the goats had been courteous enough to allow the other to pass?

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Princess and The Pea

Once upon a time, there was a prince who, after wandering the land searching for a wife, returned to his castle and told his unhappy parents that he had been unable to find a bride.

Now, this young man was difficult to please, and he had not been greatly taken with any of the noble young ladies he had met on his travels. He was looking for a bride who was not only beautiful, but also well-born, with the elegance and manners found only in those of noble birth and background.

One evening, during a fierce hurricane that had suddenly blown up, a persistent knocking was heard at the castle door. The prince's father sent a servant to find out who was there. Standing on the steps, lit by flashes of lightning, in the driving rain, was a young lady. "I'm a princess," she said, "seeking shelter for myself and my page. My carriage has broken down and the coachman can't repair it till tomorrow."

In the meantime, the prince's mother had appeared to welcome the guest. She stared disapprovingly at the girl's muddy wet garments, and decided to find out if she really was of gentle birth.

"Prepare a soft soft bed in the Blue Room," she said, "I'll come myself and make sure everything is in order." She told the servants to lay a pile of soft quilts on top of the mattress, and under the mattress she hid a pea. Then she showed the girl to her room. The rain beat down all night and lightning streaked the sky. In the morning, the prince's mother asked her guest: "Did you sleep well? Was the bed comfortable?" The girl politely replied:

"It was a lovely soft bed, so soft that I could feel something hard under the mattress. This morning, I discovered it was a pea. It kept me awake all night!" The prince's mother offered her apologies, before rushing off to her son.

"A real princess at last! Just think! She could feel the pea I hid under the mattress! Now, only a well-born lady could do that!

The prince had finally found the bride of his dreams. After the wedding, the pea was placed inside a gold and crystal box and exhibit it in the castle museum.

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These Fairy Tales and Fables are from:

Aesop's Fables
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Italian Legends
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Tail of The Bear

Once upon a time, there lived a fisherman who earned a living selling fish, making his rounds to the customers on a horse-drawn cart loaded with his catch of the day.

One cold winter day, while the fisherman was crossing the woods, a fox smelled the fish and began following the cart at a close distance. The fisherman kept his trout in long wicker baskets and the sight of the fish made the fox's mouth water. The fox, however, was reluctant to jump on the cart to steal a fish because the fisherman had a long whip that he cracked from time to time to spur on the horse. But the smell of fresh fish was so enticing that the fox overcame her fear of the whip, leapt on to the cart and with a quick blow of her paw, dropped a wicker basket on the snow. The fisherman did not notice anything and continued his journey undisturbed.

The fox was very happy. She opened the basket and got ready to enjoy her meal. She was about to taste the first bite when a bear appeared.

"Where did you get all that marvelous trout?" the big bear asked with a hungry look on its face.

"I've been fishing," the fox answered, unperturbed.

"Fishing? How? The lake is frozen over," the bear said, incredulously. "How did you manage to fish?"

The fox was aware that, unless she could get rid of the bear with some kind of excuse, she would have had to share her fish. But the only plausible answer she could come up with was:

"I fished with my tail."

"With your tail?" said the bear, who was even more astonished.

"Sure, with my tail. I made a hole in the ice, I dropped my tail in the water and when I felt a bite I pulled it out and a fish was stuck on its end," the fox told the bear. The bear touched his tail and his mouth began watering. He said:

"Thanks for the tip. I'm going fishing too."

The lake was not too far away, but the ice was very thick and the bear had a hard time making a hole in it. Finally, his long claws got the job done. As time went by and evening approached, it got colder and colder. The bear shivered but he kept sitting by the hole with his tail in the water. No fish had bitten yet.

The bear was very cold and the water of the lake began freezing again around his tail. It was then that the bear felt something like a bite on the end of his frozen tail. The bear

pulled with all his strength, heard something tear and at the same time felt a very sharp pain. He turned around to find out what kind of fish he had caught, and right then he realized that his tail, trapped in the ice, had been torn off.

Ever since then, bears have had a little stump instead of a long and thick tail.

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Three Wishes

Once upon a time, a woodcutter lived happily with his wife in a pretty little log cabin in the middle of a thick forest. Each morning he set off singing to work, and when he came home in the evening, a plate of hot steaming soup was always waiting for him.

One day, however, he had a strange surprise. He came upon a big fir tree with strange open holes on the trunk. It looked somehow different from the other trees, and just as he was about to chop it down, the alarmed face of an elf popped out of a hole.

"What's all this banging?" asked the elf. "You're not thinking of cutting down this tree, are you? It's my home. I live here!" The woodcutter dropped his axe in astonishment.

"Well, I . . ." he stammered.

"With all the other trees there are in this forest, you have to pick this one. Lucky I was in, or I would have found myself homeless."

Taken aback at these words, the woodcutter quickly recovered, for after all the elf was quite tiny, while he himself was a big hefty chap, and he boldly replied: "I'll cut down any tree I like, so . . ."

"All right! All right!" broke in the elf. "Shall we put it this way: if you don't cut down this tree, I grant you three wishes. Agreed?" The woodcutter scratched his head.

"Three wishes, you say? Yes, I agree." And he began to hack at another tree. As he worked and sweated at his task, the woodcutter kept thinking about the magic wishes.

"I'll see what my wife thinks . . ."

The woodcutter's wife was busily cleaning a pot outside the house when her husband arrived. Grabbing her round the waist, he twirled her in delight.

"Hooray! Hooray! Our luck is in!"

The woman could not understand why her husband was so pleased with himself and she shrugged herself free. Later, however, over a glass of fine wine at the table, the woodcutter told his wife of his meeting with the elf, and she too began to picture the wonderful things that the elf's three wishes might give them. The woodcutter's wife took a first sip of wine from her husband's glass.

"Nice," she said, smacking her lips. "I wish I had a string of sausages to go with it, though..."

Instantly she bit her tongue, but too late. Out of the air appeared the sausages while the woodcutter stuttered with rage.

". . . what have you done! Sausages . . . What a stupid waste of a wish! You foolish woman. I wish they would stick up your nose!" No sooner said than done. For the sausages leapt up and stuck fast to the end of the woman's nose. This time, the woodcutter's wife flew into a rage.

"You idiot, what have you done? With all the things we could have wished for . . ." The mortified woodcutter, who had just repeated his wife's own mistake, exclaimed:

"I'd chop . . ." Luckily he stopped himself in time, realizing with horror that he'd been on the point of having his tongue chopped off. As his wife complained and blamed him, the poor man burst out laughing.

"If only you knew how funny you look with those sausages on the end of your nose!" Now that really upset the woodcutter's wife. She hadn't thought of her looks. She tried to tug away the sausages but they would not budge. She pulled again and again, but in vain. The sausages were firmly attached to her nose. Terrified, she exclaimed: "They'll be there for the rest of my life!"

Feeling sorry for his wife and wondering how he could ever put up with a woman with such an awkward nose, the woodcutter said: "I'll try." Grasping the string of sausages, he tugged with all his might. But he simply pulled his wife over on top of him. The pair sat on the floor, gazing sadly at each other.

"What shall we do now?" they said, each thinking the same thought.

"There's only one thing we can do . . ." ventured the woodcutter's wife timidly.

"Yes, I'm afraid so . . ." her husband sighed, remembering their dreams of riches, and he bravely wished the third and last wish "I wish the sausages would leave my wife's nose."

And they did. Instantly, husband and wife hugged each other tearfully, saying "Maybe we'll be poor, but we'll be happy again!"

That evening, the only reminder of the woodcutter's meeting with the elf was the string of sausages. So the couple fried them, gloomily thinking of what that meal had cost them.

Ugly Duckling

Once upon a time, down on an old farm, lived a duck family, and Mother Duck had been sitting on a clutch of new eggs. One nice morning, the eggs hatched and out popped six chirpy ducklings. But one egg was bigger than the rest, and it didn't hatch. Mother Duck couldn't recall laying that seventh egg. How did it get there? TOCK! TOCK! The little prisoner was pecking inside his shell.

"Did I count the eggs wrongly?" Mother Duck wondered. But before she had time to think about it, the last egg finally hatched. A strange looking duckling with gray feathers that should have been yellow gazed at a worried mother. The ducklings grew quickly, but Mother Duck had a secret worry.

"I can't understand how this ugly duckling can be one of mine!" she said to herself, shaking her head as she looked at her last born. Well, the gray duckling certainly wasn't pretty, and since he ate far more than his brothers, he was outgrowing them. As the days went by, the poor ugly duckling became more and more unhappy. His brothers didn't want to play with him, he was so clumsy, and all the farmyard folks simply laughed at him. He felt sad and lonely, while Mother Duck did her best to console him.

"Poor little ugly duckling!" she would say. "Why are you so different from the others?" And the ugly duckling felt worse than ever. He secretly wept at night. He felt nobody wanted him.

"Nobody loves me, they all tease me! Why am I different from my brothers?"

Then one day, at sunrise, he ran away from the farmyard. He stopped at a pond and began to question all the other birds. "Do you know of any ducklings with gray feathers like mine?" But everyone shook their heads in scorn.

"We don't know anyone as ugly as you." The ugly duckling did not lose heart, however, and kept on making enquiries. He went to another pond, where a pair of large geese gave him the same answer to his question. What's more, they warned him: "Don't stay here! Go away! It's dangerous. There are men with guns around here!" The duckling was sorry he had ever left the farmyard.

Then one day, his travels took him near an old countrywoman's cottage. Thinking he was a stray goose, she caught him.

"I'll put this in a hutch. I hope it's a female and lays plenty of eggs!" said the old woman, whose eyesight was poor. But the ugly duckling laid not a single egg. The hen kept frightening him:

"Just wait! If you don't lay eggs, the old woman will wring your neck and pop you into the pot!" And the cat chipped in: "Hee! Hee! I hope the woman cooks you, then I can gnaw at your bones!" The poor ugly duckling was so scared that he lost his appetite,

though the old woman kept stuffing him with food and grumbling: "If you won't lay eggs, at least hurry up and get plump!"

"Oh, dear me!" moaned the now terrified duckling. "I'll die of fright first! And I did so hope someone would love me!"

Then one night, finding the hutch door ajar, he escaped. Once again he was all alone. He fled as far away as he could, and at dawn, he found himself in a thick bed of reeds. "If nobody wants me, I'll hid here forever." There was plenty a food, and the duckling began to feel a little happier, though he was lonely. One day at sunrise, he saw a flight of beautiful birds wing overhead. White, with long slender necks, yellow beaks and large wings, they were migrating south.

"If only I could look like them, just for a day!" said the duckling, admiringly. Winter came and the water in the reed bed froze. The poor duckling left home to seek food in the snow. He dropped exhausted to the ground, but a farmer found him and put him in his big jacket pocket.

"I'll take him home to my children. They'll look after him. Poor thing, he's frozen!" The duckling was showered with kindly care at the farmer's house. In this way, the ugly duckling was able to survive the bitterly cold winter.

However, by springtime, he had grown so big that the farmer decided: "I'll set him free by the pond!" That was when the duckling saw himself mirrored in the water.

"Goodness! How I've changed! I hardly recognize myself!" The flight of swans winged north again and glided on to the pond. When the duckling saw them, he realized he was one of their kind, and soon made friends.

"We're swans like you!" they said, warmly. "Where have you been hiding?"

"It's a long story," replied the young swan, still astounded. Now, he swam majestically with his fellow swans. One day, he heard children on the river bank exclaim: "Look at that young swan! He's the finest of them all!"

And he almost burst with happiness.

