

Aching and leaping lion lark

Once upon a time there lived a man who was about to undertake a great journey, and at his farewell he asked his three daughters what gifts he should bring them.

Then the eldest wished for pearls, the second for diamonds, and the third said: "Father, bring me a singing and leaping lark-lion." The father replied: "Very well, if I can find it, I will bring it to you," kissed all three daughters, and departed.

When he was already on his way back home, he carried with him the pearls and diamonds for his two elder daughters, but the singing and leaping lark-lion for his youngest daughter he had sought in vain everywhere, which grieved him all the more since this daughter was his favorite.

His road led through a forest, and in the midst of that forest stood a magnificent castle, and near the castle grew a tree, upon whose very top sang and leaped the lark-lion. "Ah, how opportune that you have appeared before my eyes," he said, quite delighted, and called to his servant to climb the tree and catch the bird.

But scarcely had he approached the tree when a lion sprang out from beneath it, shook itself, and roared so loudly that leaves fell from the trees. "I shall tear apart anyone who dares steal my singing and leaping lark-lion!" cried the lion fiercely.

Then the father said: "I did not know nor suspect that the bird belonged to you; I am ready to make amends for my fault and pay you a costly ransom—I ask only that you spare my life."

The lion answered: "Nothing can save you unless you promise to give me whatever first meets you upon your return home; if you promise me this, then I shall grant you your life and furthermore give you my lark-lion for your daughter."

The father hesitated to agree and said: "It might easily be my youngest daughter who meets me first, for she loves me more than all my other daughters and always runs out to meet me when I return home from my journeys."

But the servant, frightened for his master, said: "Why must it necessarily be your daughter who meets you first, and not a cat or a dog?"

Thus the father allowed himself to be persuaded, took with him the singing and leaping lark-lion, and promised to surrender to the lion as his full property whatever should first meet him upon his return home.

When he arrived home and entered the house, his youngest, beloved daughter was the first to come out to meet him. She ran to him, kissed and embraced him, and when she saw that he had brought her the singing and leaping lark-lion, she was beside herself with joy.

But the father could not rejoice; on the contrary, he wept and said: "My dear child, I bought this little bird at a dear price—for it I had to promise to deliver you to a wild lion to be torn apart," and, telling her everything exactly as it happened, he begged her not to go to the lion, no matter what might occur.

But the daughter comforted him and said: "Dear father! Your promise must be fulfilled; I will go to the lion and try to soften him, and I hope to return to you again unharmed."

The next morning she asked to be shown the road to that castle, bade farewell to her father, and calmly entered the forest.

Now that lion was an enchanted prince who by day bore the form of a lion, and all his people were likewise lions; but by night they all resumed their human shapes.

The fair maiden was received by the lion very warmly and conducted into the castle.

At nightfall he transformed into a handsome youth and solemnly celebrated his wedding with the fair maiden. They lived together in complete contentment and harmony; sleeping by day and waking by night.

One day the lion came to his wife and said to her: "Tomorrow there is a great feast at your father's house—your eldest sister is getting married, and if you wish to attend that feast, my lions will take you there." She replied that she would gladly see her father again, set off for her parental home, accompanied by the lions.

Everyone rejoiced at her arrival, for they had long believed that the lion had torn her apart and that she was no longer alive.

She told them what a wonderful husband she had and how well she lived, and after spending with them all the time while the wedding festivities lasted, she returned to the forest to her lion-husband.

When her second sister was married and she was again invited to the wedding, she said to the lion: "This time I will not go alone; you too must come with me."

But the lion answered that this journey threatened him with great danger: if there, in her father's house, a ray from a lit candle should touch him, he would turn into a

dove and for seven years would have to fly among doves. "Oh, come with me!" she said. "I will surely protect you and guard you from any light."

So they set out on the journey together, even taking along a small child. She ordered that a special hall be prepared there and so securely protected from light that no ray could penetrate it from the wedding candles when they were lit in the house; there the lion was to remain constantly. But the door to this hall was made of green wood, which developed a tiny crack, almost invisible to the human eye.

The wedding was celebrated with great splendor; yet when the wedding procession, returning from the church, passed by the lion's hall carrying many lit candles and torches, a beam of light thin as a hair fell upon the enchanted prince, and scarcely had it touched him when he already turned into a dove...

When the wife came to her lion-husband, she found instead of him a white dove! The dove said to her: "For seven years I must fly about the world in the form of a dove; but at every seventh step I shall drop a drop of blood and a white feather, which will show you my path; and if you follow this trail, you will be able to free me from the enchantment."

And so the dove flew away, and she followed after it, and at every seventh step there fell before her eyes onto the ground a drop of blood and a white feather—which showed her the way.

Thus she walked farther and farther across God's earth, without looking back, and nearly all seven years had already passed: she began to rejoice and thought that soon they would be freed from the evil spells, meanwhile much still remained for them to endure!

One day, while she was walking along her usual path, the drops of blood and feathers suddenly ceased falling from above, and when she looked up, the dove had vanished from her sight!

It occurred to her that people could not help her in her misfortune; therefore she went to the sun and said to it: "You illuminate every crevice and roam across the whole wide world, have you not seen how the white dove flew?"—"No," answered the sun, "I have seen no white dove; but here I can give you a little box, which you must open only when you are on the brink of destruction."

She thanked the sun and continued onward, walking until evening, and when the moon rose, she asked it: "You shine all night long over dark forests and flooded meadows—have you not seen how the white dove flew?"—"No," said the moon, "I have seen no dove; but here I give you an egg, and break that egg only when you are on the brink of destruction."

She thanked the moon, continued onward and walked until the night wind began blowing upon her. Then she said to it also: "You blow everywhere, over trees, over bushes, over branches, over leaves—have you not seen how the white dove flew?"—"No," answered the night wind, "I have seen no white dove; but wait, I shall ask the other three winds—perhaps they have seen it."

The eastern and western winds had seen nothing; but the southern wind said: "I have seen the white dove; it flew toward the Red Sea and there turned again into a lion, for its seven years as a dove had ended, and now that lion fights there with a dragon, and that dragon is none other than an enchanted princess."

Then the night wind said to her: "Here is my advice for you—go to the Red Sea; there on the right bank grow tall reeds; count off the eleventh among them, cut it, and strike the dragon with it; then the lion will overcome it, and both the lion and the dragon will regain their human forms. Then look around yourself and you will see a griffin sitting by the Red Sea; throw yourself together with your beloved onto its back: it will carry you home across the sea. And that little nut which you possess, when you are in the middle of the sea, let it fall, and it will immediately sprout, and a large walnut tree will grow out of the water, upon which the griffin can rest, for if it does not rest in the middle of the sea, it will lack the strength to carry you across the sea

carry it. Do not forget to drop the nut—or else the griffin will drop you yourselves into the sea."

She came to the Red Sea and found everything exactly as the night wind had told her. She counted the rods on the shore and cut off the eleventh one; she struck the dragon with the rod, and the lion overcame it—and immediately both turned into people.

But as soon as the princess, who had been transformed into a dragon, was freed from the spell, she seized the youth by the hand, leaped with him onto the griffin's back, and vanished.

Then the poor wanderer was left again all alone, abandoned by everyone, and she sank to the ground and began to weep. At last she took courage and said: "I will go seek my beloved, and I will seek him everywhere where the wind howls and where the rooster crows, until I find him."

And she went, and walked long or short, until she reached the castle where her husband lived with the princess. There she heard that their wedding would soon take place in the castle, and, calling upon God for help, she opened the little box

given to her as a gift by the sun: inside that box lay a dress that shone as brightly as the sun itself.

She took out this dress, put it on, and went into the castle, and all the guests gathered for the feast, and the bride herself, looked at her in amazement; and the dress pleased the bride so much that she herself wished to wear it at the wedding, and asked: "Is it for sale?"—"The dress is not for sale, but sacred," answered the abandoned woman, "I will give it neither for gold nor for silver, but for my own good."

The bride asked what she meant by this. And she replied: "Let me spend one night alone in the room where your groom sleeps." The bride did not agree at first, yet she very much wanted to obtain the dress, and so finally she consented, but ordered her groom's servant to give him a sleeping draught for the night.

When night fell, and the youth had already fallen asleep, his lawful wife was led into his bedchamber. And she stood at his headboard and began to speak: "Seven years in a row I followed after you, visited the sun and the moon, and all four winds, everywhere I inquired about you, helped you in the fight against the dragon—can it be that you wish to forget me altogether?" But the prince slept so soundly that he did not hear her words—it only seemed to him as though the wind rustled among the fir trees...

As soon as morning came, the wife was again led out of the bedchamber, and she had to give her golden dress to the cruel bride.

When this too proved useless, the unhappy wife grew sorrowful, left the castle for the meadow, sat down there, and began to weep. And as she sat there, she remembered the egg which the moon had given her: she broke it, and from that egg emerged a golden hen with twelve golden chicks, which ran around her pecking at feed, then crept again under their mother's wing, and all this was so beautiful that nothing dearer existed in the whole wide world.

So she rose up and drove them across the meadow before her, driving them until the bride saw them from the window; and the little chicks pleased her so much that she immediately came down to the meadow and asked: "Are they for sale?"—"I will sell them neither for gold nor for silver," answered the abandoned wife, "but for my own good; allow me yet another night to sleep in the room where your groom rests."

The bride agreed and intended to deceive her just as before. But when the prince came to his bedchamber, he asked the servant what that muttering and noise meant which he had heard the previous night.

And the servant told him that he had been forced to give him a sleeping draught, because some unfortunate woman had secretly spent the night in his room; and that tonight too he had been ordered to give the prince a sleeping draught. "Pour the drink beside my bed," said the prince to him.

And so when night fell, the lawful wife was again led into his bedchamber, and when she began telling him of her sorrows and misfortunes, then he immediately recognized his beloved spouse by her voice, rushed to her, and exclaimed: "Only now am I freed from the spell by you, for until now I wandered as if in a dream, because that foreign princess bewitched me and tried to lead me away from you, but God brought me to my senses in time."

And so they secretly fled the castle at night, fearing the princess's father, the evil sorcerer, and mounted the griffin, who carried them beyond the Red Sea; and when they were right in the middle of the sea, she dropped her sacred nut.

Immediately a great walnut tree grew from it, upon which the griffin could rest, and then he brought them home, where they found their child already grown and handsome.

And they lived there in plenty and happiness until their death.