# **Grimm Brothers Fairytales**

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## THE WOLF AND THE SEVEN KIDS

Once upon a time . . . a Mother Goat lived in a pretty little house with her seven kids. Mother often had to leave home to do the shopping, and on that fateful day, she had given her children the usual warnings, before setting off to market. "You mustn't open the door to anyone. Don't forget, there's a wicked wolf lurking about here. It's black, with horrible paws and a nasty deep voice. If it knocks, keep the door tightly shut!" Mother Goat's words were wise indeed, for as she was telling one of her neighbours about her fears, the wolf disguised as a peasant was hiding close by, listening to every word. "Good! Very good!" said the wolf to himself. "If the goat goes market, I'll drop by her house and gobble the kids!' Then, trying not to look too conspicuous, the wolf hurried along to the goat's house. There, he threw off his disguise. He then growled in a deep voice: "Open the door! Open the door! I t's Mother! I've just come back from market! Open the door!" When the kids heard the deep voice, they remembered their mother's warning. From behind the barred door, they said to the wolf: "We know who you are! You're the wolf! Our mother has a sweet gentle voice, not a deep nasty one like yours! Go away! We'll never open the door to you!" And though the wolf banged furiously on the door, the kids, though trembling with terror, refused to let him into the house, and so the door remained shut. Then the wolf had a brainwave. He dashed off to the baker's and got a big cake dripping with honey. He hoped this would sweeten his voice. And in fact, after eating it, his voice didn't sound quite so deep. Over and over again, he practised imitating Mother Goat's voice. You see, he'd heard it in the woods. When he felt certain he could easily be mistaken for Mother Goat herself, he rushed back to the house and the seven kids. "Open the door! Open the door! It's Mother! I've just come back from market! Open the door!" he called. This time, the kids had doubts: the voice did rather sound like mother's, and they were about to unlock the door, when the black kid suspiciously cried: "Mother, let us see your foot!" Without thinking, the wolf raised a black hairy paw. And the kids knew that the wolf had come back. "You're not our mother! She doesn't have horrid black paws!" cried the kids. "Go away, you wicked wolf!" And once more, in spite of all his hard work, the wolf found the door locked against him. The wolf ran down to the mill, and found a sack of flour. He thrust his paws into it until they were pure white. "I'll trick them this time," he said. "Mmm! My mouth's watering already! I'm hungry! My tummy's empty and my trousers are falling off! I'll swallow these tender kids whole!" Again he knocked on the door. "Open the door! Open the door! It's Mother! I've just come back from market! Open the door!" The voice seemed exactly like mother's, but the wary kids quickly called out: "Mother, let us see your foot!" The wily wolf lifted a snow white paw, and the kids, now reassured, threw open the door. What a shock they received! An enormous set of jaws with sharp fangs growled fiercely. Cruel claws reached out for their prey. The kids scattered in terror. One dived under the table, while other crawled below the bed. Another kid hid in the cupboard and one tried to hide in the oven, though the stove was still hot. One kid crouched inside a barrel and one hid in the grandfather clock. There he huddled, holding his breath, as the wolf hunted down his brothers. One by one, the kids were pulled from their hiding places. All except for the kid in the clock. The wicked wolf's appetite did not pass until he had found them and swallowed each in a single gulp. The only one to escape was the little black kid, for the wolf never imagined that there was room for a kid inside the very narrow grandfather clock. In the meantime, Mother Goat had really come back from market. When, from a distance, she noticed that the door was ajar, she rushed home, her heart in her mouth. She had a sinking feeling: what she feared had really happened. The wicked wolf had gobbled up all her children. She dropped into a chair, sobbing bitterly, but as she cried, the door of the grandfather clock swung open and out ran the black kid. "Mummy! Mummy!" wept the kid. "It was terrible! The wolf came, and I think he's eaten all my brothers!" "My poor child!" sobbed Mother Goat. "You're the only one left! That evil brute has gobbled them all!" Not long after, Mother Goat and her son left the house to take a stroll in the garden. Suddenly, she heard a low wheezing sound: someone was snoring heavily. It was the greedy wolf. His feast of kids had been too much for him and he was fast asleep, dead to the world. In a flash, Mother Goat had a brainwave. She said to her son: "Run and fetch me a needle and thread and a pair of scissors!" With these, she swiftly slit open the wolf's stomach. As she had hoped, the ravenous

brute had swallowed every kid whole. There they were all still alive inside his tummy. One by one, out they popped from the wolf's tummy. "Hurry! Hurry! Not a sound! We must get away before he wakens up! Wait! Fetch me a heap of stones!" And so they filled the wolf's stomach with stones and stitched it up again. The wolf woke later with a raging thirst. "What a heavy tummy I have!" he said. "I 've eaten too much! All these kids!" But when he went down the river to drink, his tummy full of stones tipped him over and he fell into the water. The weight took him straight to the bottom, and the goat and her kids shrieked with joy as he sank. The wicked wolf was dead and the kids trotted home happily with Mother.

#### THE WOLF AND THE LAMB

Once upon a time . . . in the forest lived a wolf, known to be savage and ruthless. One day, feeling thirsty, the wolf went down to a stream, and as he drank the sparkling water, he saw a lamb drinking, further downstream. The minute he set eyes on the hapless lamb, he decided to make a meal of it. "A nice plump lamb! Fine and tender! Yummy! That will be delicious! I haven't had such luck in ages! Now, I must find an excuse for picking a quarrel, so that nobody can accuse me of gobbling it unjustly!" Unaware of the wolf, the lamb was still happily sipping the water when it heard a deep growl from above its head. "You down there! You're muddying my drinking water!" The lamb gasped in surprise: "I'm sorry, Mr. Wolf, but I can't possibly be muddying your drinking water. I'm below you and the water is flowing downhill, not up!" The wicked wolf was taken aback by this reply, but only for an instant. He quickly hit upon another excuse to be angry. "I hear you went around six months ago telling people that I'm violent and a bully!" At that, the now frightened lamb began to tremble, and it replied in a tiny voice: "How can you believe such a thing, Mr. Wolf? I've never said a bad word about you! Indeed, I'll be able only to speak well of you in the future." To its relief, the lamb remembered that it could prove its innocence. "I wasn't even born six months ago! So I couldn't have spread gossip about you." But the wolf was only interested in gobbling up his prey, so he hastily broke in: "Well, if it wasn't you, it was your father," and, pouncing on the little white lamb, he quickly ate it. Alas and alack! Innocence does not always save us from the clutches of a tyrant.

#### THE STORY OF THUMBELINA

Once upon a time . . . there lived a woman who had no children. She dreamed of having a little girl, but time went by, and her dream never came true. She then went to visit a witch, who gave her a magic grain of barley. She planted it in a flowerpot. And the very next day, the grain had turned into a lovely flower, rather like a tulip. The woman softly kissed its half-shut petals. And as though by magic, the flower opened in full blossom. Inside sat a tiny girl, no bigger than a thumb. The woman called her Thumbelina. For a bed she had a walnut shell, violet petals for her mattress and a rose petal blanket. In the daytime, she played in a tulip petal boat, floating on a plate of water. Using two horse hairs as oars, Thumbelina sailed around her little lake, singing and singing in a gentle sweet voice. Then one night, as she lay fast asleep in her walnut shell, a large frog hopped through a hole in the window pane. As she gazed down at Thumbelina, she said to herself: "How pretty she is! She'd make the perfect bride for my own dear son!" She picked up Thumbelina, walnut shell and all, and hopped into the garden. Nobody saw her go. Back at the pond, her fat ugly son, who always did as mother told him, was pleased with her choice. But mother frog was afraid that her pretty prisoner might run away. So she carried Thumbellina out to a water lily leaf in the middle of the pond. "She can never escape us now," said the frog to her son. "And we have plenty of time to prepare a new home for you and your bride." Thumbelina was left all alone. She felt so desperate. She knew she would never be able to escape the fate that awaited her with the two horrid fat frogs. All she could do was cry her eyes out. However, one or two minnows who had been enjoying the shade below the water lily leaf, had overheard the two frogs talking, and the little girl's bitter sobs. They decided to do something about it. So they nibbled away at the lily stem till it broke and drifted away in the weak current. A dancing butterfly had an idea: "Throw me the end of your belt! I'll help you to move a little faster!" Thumbelina gratefully did so, and the leaf soon floated away from the frog pond. But other dangers lay ahead. A large beetle snatched Thumbelina with his strong feet and took her away to his home at the top of a leafy tree. "Isn't she pretty?" he said to his friends. But they pointed out that she was far too different. So the beetle took her down the tree and set her free. It was summertime, and Thumbelina wandered all by herself amongst the flowers and through the long grass. She had pollen for her meals and drank the dew. Then the rainy season came, bringing nasty weather. The poor child found it hard to find food and shelter. When winter set in, she suffered from the cold and felt terrible pangs of hunger. One day, as Thumbelina roamed helplessly over the bare meadows, she met a large spider who promised to help her. He took her to a hollow tree and guarded the door with a stout web. Then he brought her some dried chestnuts and called his friends to come and admire her beauty. But just like the beetles, all the other spiders persuaded Thumbelina's rescuer to let her go. Crying her heart out, and quite certain that nobody wanted her because she was ugly, Thumbelina left the spider's house. As she wandered, shivering with the cold, suddenly she came across a solid little cottage, made of twigs and dead leaves. Hopefully, she knocked on the door. It was opened by a field mouse. "What are you doing outside in this weather?" he asked. "Come in and warm yourself." Comfortable and cozy, the field mouse's home was stocked with food. For her keep, Thumbelina did the housework and told the mouse stories. One day, the field mouse said a friend was coming to visit them. "He's a very rich mole, and has a lovely house. He wears a splendid black fur coat, but he's dreadfully shortsighted. He needs company and he'd like to marry you!" Thumbelina did not relish the idea. However, when the mole came, she sang sweetly to him and he fell head over heels in love. The mole invited Thumbelina and the field mouse to visit him, but ... to their surprise and horror, they came upon a swallow in the tunnel. It looked dead. Mole nudged it with his foot, saying: "That'll teach her! She should have come underground instead of darting about the sky all summer!" Thumbelina was so shocked by such cruel words that later, she crept back unseen to the tunnel. And every day, the little girl went to nurse the swallow and tenderly give it food. In the meantime, the swallow told Thumbelina its tale. Jagged by a thorn, it had been unable to follow its companions to a warmer climate. "It's kind of you to nurse me," it told Thumbelina. But, in spring, the swallow flew away, after offering to take the little girl with it. All summer, Thumbelina did her best to avoid marrying the mole. The little girl thought fearfully of how she'd have to live underground forever. On the eve of her wedding, she asked to spend a day in the open air. As she gently fingered a flower, she heard a familiar song: "Winter's on its way and I'll be off to warmer lands. Come with me!" Thumbelina quickly clung to her swallow friend, and the bird soared into the sky. They flew over plains and hills till they reached a country of flowers. The swallow gently

laid Thumbelina in a blossom. There she met a tiny, white-winged fairy: the King of the Flower Fairies. I nstantly, he asked her to marry him. Thumbelina eagerly said "yes", and sprouting tiny white wings, she became the Flower Queen!

## THE 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.

#### **BEAUTY AND THE BEAST**

Once upon a time . . . as a merchant set off for market, he asked each of his three daughters what she would like as a present on his return. The first daughter wanted a brocade dress, the second a pearl necklace, but the third, whose name was Beauty, the youngest, prettiest and sweetest of them all, said to her father: "All I'd like is a rose you've picked specially for me!" When the merchant had finished his business, he set off for home. However, a sudden storm blew up, and his horse could hardly make headway in the howling gale. Cold and weary, the merchant had lost all hope of reaching an inn when he suddenly noticed a bright light shining in the middle of a wood. As he drew near, he saw that it was a castle, bathed in light. "I hope I'll find shelter there for the night," he said to himself. When he reached the door, he saw it was open, but though he shouted, nobody came to greet him. Plucking up courage, he went inside, still calling out to attract attention. On a table in the main hall, a splendid dinner lay already served. The merchant lingered, still shouting for the owner of the castle. But no one came, and so the starving merchant sat down to a hearty meal. Overcome by curiosity, he ventured upstairs, where the corridor led into magnificent rooms and halls. A fire crackled in the first room and a soft bed looked very inviting. It was now late, and the merchant could not resist. He lay down on the bed and fell fast asleep. When he woke next morning, an unknown hand had placed a mug of steaming coffee and some fruit by his bedside. The merchant had breakfast and after tidying himself up, went downstairs to thank his generous host. But, as on the evening before, there was nobody in sight. Shaking his head in wonder at the strangeness of it all, he went towards the garden where he had left his horse, tethered to a tree. Suddenly, a large rose bush caught his eye. Remembering his promise to Beauty, he bent down to pick a rose. Instantly, out of the rose garden, sprang a horrible beast, wearing splendid clothes. Two bloodshot eyes, gleaming angrily, glared at him and a deep, terrifying voice growled: "Ungrateful man! I gave you shelter, you ate at my table and slept in my own bed, but now all the thanks I get is the theft of my favourite flowers! I shall put you to death for this slight!" Trembling with fear, the merchant fell on his knees before the Beast. "Forgive me! Forgive me! Don't kill me! I'll do anything you say! The rose wasn't for me, it was for my daughter Beauty. I promised to bring her back a rose from my journey!" The Beast dropped the paw it had clamped on the unhappy merchant. "I shall spare your life, but on one condition, that you bring me your daughter!" The terror-stricken merchant, faced with certain death if he did not obey, promised that he would do so. When he reached home in tears, his three daughters ran to greet him. After he had told them of his dreadful adventure, Beauty put his mind at rest immediately. "Dear father, I'd do anything for you! Don't worry, you'll be able to keep your promise and save your life! Take me to the castle. I'll stay there in your place!" The merchant hugged his daughter. "I never did doubt your love for me. For the moment I can only thank you for saving my life." So Beauty was led to the castle. The Beast, however, had quite an unexpected greeting for the girl. I nstead of menacing doom as it had done with her father, it was surprisingly pleasant. In the beginning, Beauty was frightened of the Beast, and shuddered at the sight of it. Then she found that, in spite of the monster's awful head, her horror of it was gradually fading as time went by. She had one of the finest rooms in the Castle, and sat for hours, embroidering in front of the fire. And the Beast would sit, for hours on end, only a short distance away, silently gazing at her. Then it started to say a few kind words, till in the end, Beauty was amazed to discover that she was actually enjoying its conversation. The days passed, and Beauty and the Beast became good friends. Then one day, the Beast asked the girl to be his wife. .-- Taken by surprise, Beauty did not know what to say. Marry such an ugly monster? She would rather die! But she did not want to hurt the feelings of one who, after all, had been kind to her. And she remembered too that she owed it her own life as well as her father's. "I really can't say yes," she began shakily. "I'd so much like to . . . " The Beast interrupted her with an abrupt gesture. "I quite understand! And I'm not offended by your refusal!" Life went on as usual, and nothing further was said. One day, the Beast presented Beauty with a magnificent magic mirror. When Beauty peeped into it, she could see her family, far away. "You won't feel so lonely now," were the words that accompanied the gift. Beauty stared for hours at her distant family. Then she began to feel worried. One day, the Beast found her weeping beside the magic mirror. "What's wrong?" he asked, kindly as always. "My father is gravely ill and close to dying! Oh, how I wish I could see him again, before it's too late!" But the Beast only shook its head. "No! You will never leave this castle!" And off it stalked in a rage. However, a little later, it returned and spoke solemnly to the girl. "If you swear that you will return here in seven days time, I'll let you go and visit your father!" Beauty threw herself at the Beast's feet in delight. "I swear! I swear! will! How kind you are! You've made a loving daughter so happy!" In reality, the merchant had fallen ill from a broken heart at knowing his daughter was being kept prisoner. When he embraced her again, he was soon on the road to recovery. Beauty stayed beside him for hours on end, describing her life at the Castle, and explaining that the Beast was really good and kind. The days flashed past, and at last the merchant was able to leave his bed. He was completely well again. Beauty was happy at last. However, she had failed to notice that seven days had gone by. Then one night she woke from a terrible nightmare. She had dreamt that the Beast was dying and calling for her, twisting in agony. "Come back! Come back to me!" it was pleading. The solemn promise she had made drove her to leave home immediately. "Hurry! Hurry, good horse!" she said, whipping her steed onwards towards the castle, afraid that she might arrive too late. She rushed up the stairs, calling, but there was no reply. Her heart in her mouth, Beauty ran into the garden and there crouched the

Beast, its eyes shut, as though dead. Beauty threw herself at it and hugged it tightly. "Don't die! Don't die! I'll marry you . . . " At these words, a miracle took place. The Beast's ugly snout turned magically into the face of a handsome young man. "How I've been longing for this moment!" he said. "I was suffering in silence, and couldn't tell my frightful secret. An evil witch turned me into a monster and only the love of a maiden willing to accept me as I was, could transform me back into my real self. My dearest! I'll be so happy if you'll marry me . . . " The wedding took place shortly after and, from that day on, the young Prince would have nothing but roses in his gardens. And that's why, to this day, the castle is known as the Castle of the Rose.

## **CINDERELLA**

Once upon a time... there lived an unhappy young girl. Unhappy she was, for her mother was dead, her father had married another woman, a widow with two daughters, and her stepmother didn't like her one little bit. All the nice things, kind thoughts and loving touches were for her own daughters. And not just the kind thoughts and love, but also dresses, shoes, shawls, delicious food, comfy beds, as well as every home comfort. All this was laid on for her daughters. But, for the poor unhappy girl, there was nothing at all. No dresses, only her stepsisters' hand-me-downs. No lovely dishes, nothing but scraps. No nice rests and comfort. For she had to work hard all day, and only when evening came was she allowed to sit for a while by the fire, near the cinders. That is how she got her nickname, for everybody called her Cinderella. Cinderella used to spend long hours all alone talking to the cat. The cat said, "Miaow", which really meant, "Cheer up! You have something neither of your stepsisters have and that is beauty." It was quite true. Cinderella, even dressed in rags with a dusty gray face from the cinders, was a lovely girl. While her stepsisters, no matter how splendid and elegant their clothes, were still clumsy, lumpy and ugly and always would be. One day, beautiful new dresses arrived at the house. A ball was to be held at Court and the stepsisters were getting ready to go to it. Cinderella, didn't even dare ask, "What about me?" for she knew very well what the answer to that would be: "You? My dear girl, you're staying at home to wash the dishes, scrub the floors and turn down the beds for your stepsisters. They will come home tired and very sleepy." Cinderella sighed at the cat. "Oh dear, I'm so unhappy!" and the cat murmured, "Miaow". Suddenly something amazing happened. In the kitchen, where Cinderella was sitting all by herself, there was a burst of light and a fairy appeared. "Don't be alarmed, Cinderella," said the fairy. "The wind blew me your sighs. I know you would love to go to the ball. And so you shall!" "How can I, dressed in rags?" Cinderella replied. "The servants will turn me away!" The fairy smiled. With a flick of her magic wand... Cinderella found herself wearing the most beautiful dress, the loveliest ever seen in the realm. "Now that we have settled the matter of the dress," said the fairy, "we'll need to get you a coach. A real lady would never go to a ball on foot!" "Quick! Get me a pumpkin!" she ordered. "Oh of course," said Cinderella, rushing away. Then the fairy turned to the cat. "You, bring me seven mice!" "Seven mice!" said the cat. "I didn't know fairies ate mice too!" "They're not for eating, silly! Do as you are told!... and, remember they must be alive!" Cinderella soon returned with a fine pumpkin and the cat with seven mice he had caught in the cellar. "Good!" exclaimed the fairy. With a flick of her magic wand... wonder of wonders! The pumpkin turned into a sparkling coach and the mice became six white horses, while the seventh mouse turned into a coachman, in a smart uniform and carrying a whip. Cinderella could hardly believe her eyes. "I shall present you at Court. You will soon see that the Prince, in whose honour the ball is being held, will be enchanted by your loveliness. But remember! You must leave the ball at midnight and come home. For that is when the spell ends. Your coach will turn back into a pumpkin, the horses will become mice again and the coachman will turn back into a mouse... and you will be dressed again in rags and wearing clogs instead of these dainty little slippers! Do you understand?" Cinderella smiled and said, "Yes, I understand!" When Cinderella entered the ballroom at the palace, a hush fell. Everyone stopped in mid-sentence to admire her elegance, her beauty and grace. "Who can that be?" people asked each other. The two stepsisters also wondered who the newcomer was, for never in a month of Sundays, would they ever have guessed that the beautiful girl was really poor Cinderella who talked to the cat! When the prince set eyes on Cinderella, her beauty struck him. Walking over to her, he bowed deeply and asked her to dance. And to the great disappointment of all the young ladies, he danced with Cinderella all evening. "Who are you, fair maiden?" the Prince kept asking her. But Cinderella only replied: "What does it matter who I am! You will never see me again anyway." "Oh, but I shall, I'm quite certain!" he replied. Cinderella had a wonderful time at the ball... But, all of a sudden, she heard the sound of a clock: the first stroke of midnight! She remembered what the fairy had said, and without a word of goodbye she slipped from the Prince's arms and ran down the steps. As she ran she lost one of her slippers, but not for a moment did she dream of stopping to pick it up! If the last stroke of midnight were to sound... oh... what a disaster that would be! Out she fled and vanished into the night. The Prince, who was now madly in love with her, picked up her slipper and said to his ministers, "Go and search everywhere for the girl whose foot this slipper fits. I will never be content until I find her!" So the ministers tried the slipper on the foot of all the girls... and on Cinderella's foot as well... Surprise! The slipper fitted perfectly. "That awful untidy girl simply cannot have been at the ball," snapped the stepmother. "Tell the Prince he ought to marry one of my two daughters! Can't you see how ugly Cinderella is! Can't you see?" Suddenly she broke off, for the fairy had appeared. "That's enough!" she exclaimed, raising her magic wand. In a flash, Cinderella appeared in a splendid dress, shining with youth and beauty. Her stepmother and stepsisters gaped at her in amazement, and the ministers said, "Come with us, fair maiden! The Prince awaits to present you with his engagement ring!" So Cinderella joyfully went with them, and lived happily ever after with her Prince. And as for the cat, he just said "Miaow"!

## **BLUEBEARD**

Once upon a time... in the fair land of France, there lived a very powerful lord, the owner of estates, farms and a great splendid castle, and his name was Bluebeard. This wasn't his real name, it was a nickname, and due to the fact he had a long shaggy black beard with glints of blue in it. He was very handsome and charming, but, if the truth were told, there was something about him that made you feel respect, and a little uneasy... Bluebeard often went away to war, and when he did, he left his wife in charge of the castle... He had had lots of wives, all young, pretty and noble. As bad luck would have it, one after the other, they had all died, and so the noble lord was forever getting married again. "Sire," someone would ask now and again, "what did your wives die of?" "Hah, my friend," Bluebeard would reply, "one died of smallpox, one of a hidden sickness, another of a high fever, another of a terrible infection... Ah, I'm very unlucky, and they're unlucky too! They're all buried in the castle chapel," he added. Nobody found anything strange about that. Nor did the sweet and beautiful young girl that Bluebeard took as a wife think it strange either. She went to

the castle accompanied by her sister Anna, who said: "Oh, aren't you lucky marrying a lord like Bluebeard?" "He really is very nice... and when you're close, his beard doesn't look as blue as folk say!" said the bride, and the two sisters giggled delightedly. Poor souls! They had no idea what lay in store for them! A month or so later, Bluebeard had the carriage brought round and said to his wife, "Darling, I must leave you for a few weeks. But keep cheerful during that time, invite whoever you like and look after the castle. Here," he added, handing his bride a bunch of keys, "you'll need these, the keys of the safe, the armoury and the library keys, and this one, which opens all the room doors. Now, this little key here," and he pointed to a key that was much smaller than the others, "opens the little room at the end of the great ground floor corridor. Take your friends were you want, open any door you like, but not this one! Is that quite clear?" repeated Bluebeard. "Not this one! Nobody at all is allowed to enter that little room. And if you ever did go into it, I would go into such a terrible rage that it's better that you don't!" "Don't worry, husband," said Bluebeard's wife as she took the keys, "I'll do as you say." After giving her a hug, Bluebeard got into his carriage, whipped up the horses and off he went. The days went by. The young girl invited her friends to the castle and showed them round all the rooms except the one at the end of the corridor. "Why shouldn't I see inside the little room? Why? Why is it forbidden?" Well, she thought about it so much that she ended up bursting with curiosity, until one day she opened the door and walked into the little room... Of all ghastly horrors! Inside, hanging on the walls were the bodies of Bluebeard's wives: he had strangled them all with his own hands! Terror stricken, the girl ran out of the room, but the bunch of keys slipped from her grasp. She picked them up without a glance and hurried to her own room, her heart thumping wildly in her chest. Horrors! She was living in a castle of the dead! So that is what had happened to Bluebeard's other wives! The girl summoned up her courage and she noticed that one of the keys - the very key to the little room - was stained with blood. "I must wipe it clean, before my husband comes back!" she said to herself. But try as she would, the bloodstain wouldn't wash away. She washed, she scrubbed and she rinsed it; all in vain, for the key was still red. That very evening, Bluebeard came home. Just imagine the state his poor wife was in! Bluebeard did not ask his wife for the keys that same evening, but he remarked: "You look a little upset, darling. Has anything nasty happened?" "Oh, no! No!" "Are you sorry I came back so soon?" "Oh, no! I'm delighted!" But that night, the bride didn't sleep a wink. Next day, Bluebeard said: "Darling, give me back the keys," and his wife hurriedly did so. Bluebeard remarked: "There's one missing, the key to the little room!" "Is there?" said the young girl shaking, "I must have left it in my room!" "All right, go and get it." But when Bluebeard's wife put the key into his hand, Bluebeard turned white and in a deep hoarse voice demanded: "Why is this key stained with blood?" "I don't know..." stammered his wife. "You know very well!" he retorted. "You went into the little room, didn't you? Well, you'll go back again, this time for good, along with the other ladies in there. You must die!" "Oh no! I pray you!" "You must die!" he repeated. Just then, there was a knock at the door and Anna, Bluebeard's wife's sister, entered the castle. "Good morning," she said, "you seem rather pale." "Not at all, we're quite well," replied Bluebeard. His wife whispered in his ear: "Please, please give me ten minutes to live!" Bluebeard replied: "Not more than ten!" The girl ran to her sister Anna who had gone up to one of the towers and asked her, "Anna, do you see our brothers coming? They promised they would come and see me today!" But Anna replied" "No, I don't see anyone. What's wrong? You look agitated." "Anna, please," said the shaken girl, "look again! Are you sure you can't see someone?" "No," said her sister, "only one or two peasants." Just then the voice of Bluebeard boomed up to them: "Wife, your time is up! Come here!" "I'm coming!" she called, but then said to her sister: "Oh Anna, aren't our brothers coming?" "No," replied Anna. Again Bluebeard shouted up. "Come down at once! Or I'll come up!" Trembling like a leaf, his wife went downstairs. Bluebeard was clutching a big knife and he grabbed his bride by the hair... "Sister, I can see two horsemen coming!" called out Anna from the tower that very moment. Bluebeard made a horrible face: "They too will die!" His wife knelt to implore: "Please, please don't kill me. I'll never tell anyone what I saw! I'll never say a word!" "Yes, you'll never say a word for eternity!" snarled Bluebeard, raising his knife. The poor girl screamed: "Have pity on me!" But he fiercely replied: "No! You must die!" He was about to bring the knife down on the girl's delicate neck, when two young men burst into the room: a dragoon and a musketeer. They were his wife's brothers. Drawing their swords, they leapt towards Bluebeard, who tried to flee up some stairs, but was caught and killed. And that was the end of the sad story. Bluebeard's poor wives were given a Christian burial, the castle was completely renovated and the young widow, some time later, married a good and honest young man, who helped her to forget the terrible adventure. And that young lady completely lost all her sense of curiosity...

#### THE ADVENTURES OF TOM THUMB

Once upon a time . . . there lived a giant who had quarreled with a very greedy wizard over sharing a treasure. After the quarrel, the giant said menacingly to the wizard: "I could crush you under my thumb if I wanted to! Now, get out of my sight!" The wizard hurried away, but from a safe distance, he hurled his terrible revenge. "Abracadabra! Here I cast this spell! May the son, your wife will shortly give you, never grow any taller than my own thumb!" After Tom Thumb was born, his parents were at their wits' end. They could never find him, for they could barely see him. They had to speak in whispers for fear of deafening the little boy. Tom Thumb preferred playing with the little garden creatures, to the company of parents so different from himself. He rode piggyback on the snail and danced with the ladybirds. Tiny as he was, he had great fun in the world of little things. But one unlucky day, he went to visit a froggy friend. No sooner had he scrambled onto a leaf than a large pike swallowed him up. But the pike too was fated to come to a very bad end. A little later, he took the bait cast by one of the King's fishermen, and before long, found himself under the cook's knife in the royal kitchens. And great was everyone's surprise when, out of the fish's stomach, stepped Tom Thumb, quite alive and little the worse for his adventure. "What am I to do with this tiny lad?" said the cook to himself. Then he had a brainwave. "He can be a royal pageboy! He's so tiny, I can pop him into the cake I'm making. When he marches across the bridge, sounding the trumpet everyone will gasp in wonder!" Never had such a marvel been seen at Court. The guests clapped excitedly at the cook's skill and the King himself clapped loudest of all. The King rewarded the clever cook with a bag of gold. Tom Thumb was even luckier. The cook made him a pageboy, and a pageboy he remained, enjoying all the honours of his post. He had a white mouse for a mount, a gold pin for a sword and he was allowed to eat the King's food. In exchange, he marched up and down the table at banquets. He picked his way amongst the plates and glasses amusing the quests with his trumpet. What Tom Thumb didn't know was that he had made an enemy. The cat which, until Tom's arrival, had been the King's pet, was now forgotten. And, vowing to have its revenge on the newcomer, it ambushed Tom in the garden. When Tom saw the cat, he did not run away, as the creature had intended. He whipped out his gold pin and cried to his white mouse mount: "Charge! Charge!" Jabbed by the tiny sword, the cat turned tail and fled. Since

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brute force was not the way to revenge, the cat decided to use guile. Casually pretending to bump into the King as he walked down the staircase, the cat softly miaowed: "Sire! Be on your guard! A plot is being hatched against your life!" And then he told a dreadful lie. "Tom Thumb is planning to lace your food with hemlock. I saw him picking the leaves in the garden the other day. heard him say these very words!" Now, the King had once been kept in bed with very bad tummy pains, after eating too many cherries and he feared the thought of being poisoned, so he sent for Tom Thumb. The cat provided proof of his words by pulling a hemlock leaf from under the white mouse's saddle cloth, where he had hidden it himself. Tom Thumb was so amazed, he was at a loss for words to deny what the cat had said. The King, without further ado, had him thrown into prison. And since he was so tiny, they locked him up in a pendulum clock. The hours passed and the days too. Tom's only pastime was swinging back and forth, clinging to the pendulum, until the night when he attracted the attention of a big night moth, fluttering round the room. "Let me out!" cried Tom Thumb, tapping on the glass. As it so happens, the moth had only just been set free after being a prisoner in a large box, in which she had taken a nap. So she took pity on Tom Thumb and released him. 'I'll take you to the Butterfly Kingdom, where everyone's tiny like yourself. They'll take care of you there!" And that is what happened. To this day, if you visit the Butterfly Kingdom, you can ask to see the Butterfly monument that Tom Thumb built after this amazing adventure.

## ALI AND THE SULTAN'S SADDLE

Once upon a time . . . there lived a very powerful Sultan whose kingdom stretched to the edges of the desert. One of his subjects was called Ali, a man who enjoyed making fun of his ruler. He invented all sorts of tales about the Sultan and his Court, and folk would roar with laughter at his jokes. Indeed, Ali became so well known, that people pointed him out in the street and chuckled. Ali's fun at the Sultan's expense reached the point where the Sultan himself heard about it. Angry and insulted, he ordered the guards to bring the joker before him. "I shall punish him for his cheek," said the Sultan eagerly, as he rubbed his hands, thinking of the good whipping he was about to administer. But when Ali was brought before him, he bowed so low that his forehead scraped the floor. Giving the Sultan no time to open his mouth, Ali said: "Sire! Please let me thank you for granting my dearest wish: to look upon you in person and tell you how greatly I admire your wisdom and handsome figure. I've written a poem about you. May I recite it to you?" Overwhelmed by this stream of words and delighted at Ali's unexpected praise, the Sultan told him to recite his poem. In actual fact, Ali hadn't written a single word, so he had to invent it as he went along, and this he did, loudly comparing the Sultan's splendour to that of the sun, his strength to that of the tempest and his voice to the sound of the wind. Everyone applauded and cheered. Now quite charmed, the Sultan forgot why he had called Ali before him, and clapped at the end of the poem in his honour. "Well done!" he cried. "You're a fine poet and deserve a reward. Choose one of these saddles as payment for your ability." Ali picked up a donkey's saddle and, thanking the Sultan, he hurried out of the palace with the saddle on his back. When people saw him rush along, they all asked him: "Ali, where are you going with that donkey's saddle on your back?" "I've just recited a poem in honour of the Sultan, and he's given me one of his own robes as a reward!" And winking Ali pointed to the saddle!

#### ALI BABA AND THE FORTY THIEVES

Once upon a time . . . in a distant Persian city lived two brothers called Ali Baba and Kasim. Ali Baba was terribly poor, and he lived with his wife in a mud hut. He picked up sticks in the woods and sold them in bundles at the market. Kasim, however, had a rich wife, and he lived in a big fine house and sold carpets. He became richer than ever. One day, as Ali Baba was gathering sticks in a wood some way from the city he heard a band of horsemen gallop towards him. Scared that he might be in trouble for stealing wood, he scrambled up a tree and hid amongst the foliage, seconds before the men, armed to the teeth, rode underneath. They were robbers, no doubt about that. All could tell by their evil looks, rough beards and bad language. But what made it perfectly clear to him was the booty they unloaded from their horses, obviously plundered in a raid. Their leader was a grim wicked-looking man. Followed by his men, he strode towards a rocky mountain nearby. Throwing wide his arms suddenly shouted: "Open sesame!" Ali Baba could hardly believe his eyes. For at the robber's words, the rock face swung open to become the entrance to a deep, dark cave. The robbers trooped inside, dragging their sacks. Ali Baba was struck dumb by this amazing sight, and he crouched in his tree, without moving a muscle. He could hear the robbers' voices echo in the cave, then out they came. Again opening his arms, the leader exclaimed loudly: "Close sesame!" And the rock swung tightly shut, as they leapt onto their horses and galloped away. Trembling with fear, Ali Baba climbed down the tree. He had just had the biggest shock of his life. Hardly aware of what he was doing, he muttered: "Open sesame," But the mountain stood still. Ali Baba said the words again, but this time he shouted them. Suddenly, the rock began to move. Ali Baba lit a flare and entered the cave. In front of his bulging eyes lay vast piles of treasure: pots of silver gold, precious vases, weapons studded with rubies and emeralds, diadems, carved plates and carpets, all heaped together. The poverty-stricken stick-gatherer rubbed his eyes in disbelief. His hand was shaking like a leaf, as he picked up a gold coin. "It's real!" he said in awe. Jabbering with excitement and stunned at the sight of such untold wealth, he told himself: "I'll take some coins. Nobody will ever know!" And he filled four bags full. The second he reached home, Ali Baba locked the door and emptied the sacks in front of his astounded wife. "Count them," he ordered her triumphantly, before telling her what had happened. But there were far too many coins for these poor people to count. "We can't count them all. Run to my brother's house and ask him for a corn measure. We'll use that," said Ali Baba. When Kasim's wife heard this strange request, her curiosity was aroused. "I wonder what they want to measure. It can't be corn, they're far too poor." And she quickly brushed a touch of tar across the bottom of the measuring pail. And when she got the pail back there was something stuck to it - as the clever woman had known there would be. It was a gold coin. "A gold coin. Where did that come from? They're the poorest of the poor!" And she rushed off to tell her husband. Kasim was most annoyed. "How dare my brother have gold coins without telling me about it," he snapped. And off he marched to ask Ali Baba for an explanation. Ali Baba innocently told Kasim his strange story, but asked him to keep it a secret. Of course, Kasim promised, but he quickly told his wife about it and ordered the servants to saddle ten sturdy mules for next morning. "I'll be richer than ever. Incredibly rich!" he said to himself as he went to bed. But he didn't sleep a wink for thinking of the treasure. It was still dark when Kasim and his mule train set out. When he reached the mountain, beyond the forest, he pronounced the magic words and entered the cave. With a beating heart, he crammed as much as he could into the saddle bags. But Kasim's greed led to his downfall, for the bags were so stuffed with treasure that they became too heavy to lift. Kasim realised, with a sinking feeling that he would have to leave

behind some of his precious burden. But it took him a long time, and he was still picking over what to keep and what to abandon, when ..... as fate would have it, the robber band returned. When they saw that the entrance to the cave was open, they rushed inside with drawn swords. Unlucky Kasim was quickly discovered and killed. And the robbers were so fierce that they chopped him into four and left the pieces at the entrance. "That will warn any other snooper of the end that awaits him!" shouted the leader. Kasim's wife waited in vain for two days, then in desperation, she ran to Ali Baba and told him where her husband had gone, asking for help. Ali Baba was dismayed. "He promised he would never." However, Ali Baba was fond of his brother, so he saddled a mule and rode to the mountain. When he saw, to his horror, the remains of Kasim, he broke down and wept. Then he plucked up enough courage to wrap them in a rug, which he tied to the mule's back. But Kasim's wife, when she saw what had happened to her husband, died of a broken heart. Ali Baba and his family went to live in Kasim's palace. There he met Morgantina, a clever young slave girl who had long been a servant in the palace. It was she who told Ali Baba that his brother's remains could be put together again before being buried. Mustapha, the cobbler, would do the job, for a good reward. "I have to blindfold you," Morgantina told the cobbler, "so you can't see where you're going, then there won't be any gossip." The cobbler did his work well and was led, still blindfolded, back to his shop, with a bag of gold for his trouble. In the meantime, when the robber leader saw that the body had been removed, he knew that someone else had found the treasure trove. Angry and alarmed, he ordered one of his men to sneak into the city and find out what he could. Well, by sheer chance, the spy had a hole in the sole of his boot and he went into the cobblers. Mustapha was bursting to tell someone all about his luck... "...and they gave me a bag of gold for stitching the body together again." "If you take me to the place, I'll give you another bag of gold," said the robber immediately. The robber nearly danced for joy. Then his heart sank. How was he to find the house he had never seen? "I'll blindfold you again," said the robber, "then you take your time and try to remember which way you went!" As it turned out the robber was lucky, for Mustapha had an excellent sense of direction. What's more, he had counted his footsteps. So he counted them again. "... Five hundred and ten, five hundred and eleven, five hundred and twelve. Here!" The cobbler wrenched the cloth from his eyes and found himself in front of Ali Baba's palace. The robber handed over the bag of gold and, unseen, drew a red cross on the door. Then he hurried away to give his leader the news. Dusk fell and, as Morganton was about to enter the palace, she noticed the strange mark. Her suspicions aroused, she quickly drew red cross on all the other doors in the street. At dead of night the wicked band arrived to take revenge, but at the sight of all the red crosses, they stopped in their tracks. Which was the right door? Morgantina had unknowingly saved her master from death, and the leader of the gang put his man to the sword for giving him a false lead. "You fools. Can't you do anything properly? I'll go to the city myself." Disguised as a merchant, he went to Mustapha. Delighted at the idea of earning more money, the cobbler took the robber to Ali Baba's palace. And the wicked man fixed in his mind the exact place and street. Back in his hideout, he ordered two of his men to buy a cart and thirty-nine giant jars. Now, after the murder of the messenger, there were only thirty-eight robbers left, and each one hid in a jar. The last jar was filled with oil, and loaded with the others onto the cart pulled by four horses. The robbers set off for the city. It was late when they reached the palace and Ali Baba himself came out. "What can I ad for you?" he said. "I'm an oil merchant," replied the leader, "and I must be at market tomorrow. It's late and we're weary. Can you give us a bed for the night?" Pleased at being able to help, Ali Baba, who had known what it meant to be poor, warmly welcomed the merchant and his men and had the cart taken into the courtyard. After a good meal, the leader of the band went back to the courtyard. He said he was going to make sure than none of the jars had been damaged during the journey, but in fact, he warned his men to be ready, at a signal, to leap from the jars and kill everyone in the palace. As the household slept, Morgantina lingered in the kitchen to tidy up. Suddenly, she thought she would have a sip of the merchant's oil to see if it was as tasty as her own. But when she lifted the lid from the first jar, to her horror, a gruff voice growled: ¥ "Is it time?" "No, not yet," muttered Morgantina hastily. At every jar, exactly the same thing happened, but the last one was filled with oil, which she dragged back into the kitchen. She then tipped the contents into a huge cauldron and heated it over the fire. Then, taking a jug full of boiling oil, Morgantina poured it over the head of a robber. She then poured the oil over every one of the robbers and, in this way, wiped out the whole band. Then she hid in a corner. A little later, the leader of the robber band hurried into the courtyard to give the signal to attack. But when he raised the lids, he found to his terror that every one of his men was dead. Horrified, he could not fathom what trap he had fallen into. The robber fled into the night. Next morning, Morgantina told Ali Baba of her adventure. "I'll never be able to thank you enough!" exclaimed Ali Baba. "You are an amazing girl. From this second you are no longer a slave, but a free member of this household." The dead men were buried under cover of darkness, and Ali Baba was sure he had nothing more to fear. The leader of the robber band, however, had recovered from his shock and was eager for revenge. So he shaved off his beard, changed his looks and disguised himself as a carpet seller. At the market, he met Tabit, Ali Baba s son, who took a liking to him. "Sooner or later this silly chap will invite me home," said the false carpet seller, "then I can murder them all." "That merchant has sold you some fine carpets very cheaply, remarked Ali Baba to his son. "Ask him to come to the house." When Morgantina saw the guest, she felt sure his face was familiar. Then she remembered. The carpet seller and the leader of the band were one and the same person. Without saying a word, she went back to the kitchen, but later she asked All Baba if she might dance for the guest. "If you like," said Ali Baba. When coffee was served, Morgantina entered the room in swirling-off veils to the beat of her tambourine. In her right hand she held a knife. As she stopped dancing, she thrust the knife into the carpet seller's heart. "He's one of the robbers!" she cried. "I know his face. He would have killed us all." Morgantina had once more saved their lives! Tabit hugged her, little knowing that his joy would soon turn to love and that they would marry. All Baba was the only person left who knew the secret of the treasure. He made wise use of it for many years, but he never told anyone the magic words that would open the cave of the Forty Thieves.

## **AMIN AND THE EGGS**

Once upon a time . . . a peasant called Amin lost all his crops from his miserable little plot in a drought. He decided to seek his fortune in another village, and off he went on his donkey. On credit, he obtained a dozen hard-boiled eggs from a merchant for his journey. Seven years later, Amin returned to his village. This time he was riding a fine black horse, followed by a servant on a camel laden with gold and silver coins. Amin had become a rich man and the news of this soon spread through the village. Straight away, the merchant who had given him the dozen eggs on credit knocked at Amin's door, asking for five hundred silver pieces in payment of the old debt. Amin of course refused to pay such a large sum and the matter was taken before the judge. On the day of the

hearing, the merchant appeared in court at the appointed time, but of Amin there was no sign. The judge waited impatiently for a quarter of an hour, and was on the point of adjourning the hearing, when Amin dashed in, out of breath. At once, the merchant said, in defence of his demands: "I asked Amin for payment of five hundred silver coins, because twelve chickens might have hatched from the eggs he bought from me on credit, seven years ago. These chickens would have become hens and cockerels; more eggs would have been laid, these too would have hatched, and so on. After seven years, I might have had a great flock of fowls!" "Of course," agreed the judge. "Perfectly right." And turning to Amin with a hostile air, he ordered: "What have you to say for yourself? And, by the way, why are you late?" Amin did not turn a hair. "I had a plate of boiled beans in the house and I planted them in the garden to have a good crop next year!" "Fool!" exclaimed the judge. "Since when do boiled beans grow?" To which Amin promptly retorted: "And since when do boiled eggs hatch into chickens?" He had won his case.

# THE ANIMALS AND THE PLAGUE

Once upon a time. a terrible scourge swept through a huge forest, full of animals. It was the plague. One after the other all the animals, big and small, strong and weak, died of the dreadful disease. None could hope to escape such a horrible fate, not even the lion himself, king of the forest. Indeed, it was the lion who gathered together the survivors, and said in a trembling voice: "This disaster is a punishment for our wicked ways. And I for one will admit I've been wicked. If you find me guilty, I'll gladly give up my life if you think that would help you in making amends for your own sins. So I confess that, during my lifetime, I've eaten many an innocent sheep." "But, Sire," broke in one of the animals, "surely you don't think that eating sheep is a serious sin. We too... we too ...'' And they all began to tell their own stories. One by one, the animals told of their crimes against their neighbours. The leopard had killed on more than one occasion, the eagle had snatched rabbits and lambs, the fox and the wolf had stolen and murdered. Even the placid-looking owl had little birds and mice on his conscience. Everyone had some wicked deed, serious or otherwise, to confess. But each animal, after his confession, was forgiven by the others, all just as guilty, of course. Last came the donkey, who said with a mortified air: "I did a very wicked thing too. One day, instead of just grazing here and there, I ate two clumps of grass in a clover meadow, without permission. I was sorry afterwards, and I've had a guilty conscience about it ever since!" All the animals glared at the donkey and, shouting and calling insults, they chorused: "So that's who brought the plague on us! Stealing grass from a poor peasant! Shame on you!" And the fate of the donkey was decided unanimously. How often are innocent folk made to pay for the wicked deeds of the guilty?

# THE ANT AND THE CRICKET

Once upon a time... one hot summer, a cricket sang cheerfully on the branch of a tree, while down below, a long line of ants struggled damely under the weight of their load of grains; and between one song and the next, the cricket spoke to the ants. "Why are you working so hard? Come into the shade, away from the sun, and sing a song with me." But the tireless ants went on with the work... "We can't do that," they said, "We must store away food for the winter. When the weather's cold and the ground white with snow, there's nothing to eat, and we'll survive the winter only if the pantry is full." "There's plenty of summer to come," replied the cricket, "and lots of time to fill the pantry before winter. I'd rather sing! How can anyone work in this heat and sun?" And so all summer, the cricket sang while the ants laboured. But the days turned into weeks and the weeks into months. Autumn came, the leaves began to fall and the cricket left the bare tree. The grass too was turning thin and yellow. One morning, the cricket woke shivering with cold. An early frost tinged the fields with white and turned the last of the green leaves brown: winter had come at last. The cricket wandered, feeding on the few dry stalks left on the hard frozen ground. Then the snow fell and she could find nothing at all to eat. Trembling and famished, she thought sadly of the warmth and her summer songs. One evening, she saw a speck of light in the distance, and trampling through the thick snow, made her way towards it. "Open the door! Please open the door! I'm starving. Give me some food!" An ant leant out of the window. "Who's there? Who is it?" "It's me - the cricket. I'm cold and hungry, with no roof over my head." "The cricket? Ah, yes! I remember you. And what were you doing all summer while we were getting ready for winter?" "Me? I was singing and filling the whole earth and sky with my song!" "Singing, eh?" said the ant. "Well, try dancing now!"

#### THE BOOK OF SPELLS

Once upon a time... in the middle of a forest round whose edges lay scattered some peasants cottages, an ogre used to live. He was big, cruel and heartless, but he liked his house be tidy. So he said to himself, "I'm always out hunting, fishing and causing trouble. I need somebody to look after the house, clean the floors, wash the plates and do the laundry every week..." Out he went and crouched down near one of the cottages, belonging to certain poor peasants. When he saw their children come out, a boy and a girl, he stretched out his big hand, grabbed them and carried them away. "You'll be my servants," he said, "and I will give you your food. But if you try to run away, you will be the next dish!" Terrified, the two children agreed, and they lived in the ogre's house for a long time. Then, they noticed that, every evening, the ogre pulled out a large book, which he would read carefully... it was the Book of Spells! The two children, who were intelligent, read the book when the ogre was away, and they too learned the magic spells. At last, the boy said, "Sister, I think I know enough now! Come on, let's run away!" "Oh! Are you sure you know how to cast spells?" asked the girl anxiously. "Of course!" said he. "Come on, before the ogre gets back!" So the pair ran out of the house into the forest. Suddenly, the girl cried out, "I can hear somebody running! The ogre's following us!" The ogre was determined to catch the pair and, without a doubt, with his long legs, he would soon catch up on them. So the young lad cast the first of the spells. He turned himself into a pound and his sister into a minnow! A moment later, the ogre rushed up, saw what had taken place and growled: "If only I had a line! I'll run and fetch one!" and off he went. The two children turned back into their normal selves and started to flee once more. But the ogre was soon on their heels and he was just about to lay hands on them, when the boy cast the second spell. He turned himself into a shrine and his sister into an angel painted on the wall. The ogre would have loved to kick the shrine to bits, but he didn't dare. He shouted, "I'll burn you down instead!" and ran to fetch a bundle of wood. In the meantime, however, the children were off again. They ran and ran, till they were exhausted and out of breathe... And on the point of being snatched... the boy,

working a third spell, turned himself and his sister into grains of corn, that mingled with thousands and thousands of other grains on the threshing floor... The ogre exclaimed: "You think you can beat me with my own spells, but I'm far more cunning than you!" and he turned into a cockerel that hurriedly began to peck all the grains. What awful danger. But a second before being pecked, the boy turned into a fox, pounced on the cockerel and gobbled him up! And now that the ogre was gone, the boy and his sister were able to go home again, safe and sound!

## CHICO AND THE CRANE

Once upon a time. . in the city of Florence lived Mr. Corrado, a nobleman famous for his love of hunting and for his banquets. One day, his falcon caught a beautiful crane, which Mr. Corrado handed to the cook and told him to roast to perfection. The bird was almost done when a pretty young peasant girl entered the kitchen to visit the cook. When she sniffed the savoury smell of roasting, the girl persuaded Chico to give her one of the bird's legs. In due course, the crane was carried to the nobleman's table and Mr. Corrado summoned the cook to explain what had happed to the missing leg. To his question, the unfortunate cook replied: "Sire! Cranes have only one leg!" "What? One leg?" exclaimed Mr. Corrado. "Do you think I've never seen a crane before?" But Chico insisted that these birds had only one leg: "If I had a live bird here, I'd show you!" However, the nobleman had no desire to argue in front of his guests, but he told the cook: "Very well. We'll go and see tomorrow morning, but woe betide you if it's not true." At sunrise, Mr. Corrado, angrier than ever, gave the order to saddle the horses. "Now we'll see who's telling lies," he said grimly. Chico 'I would gladly have fled in fear, but he did not dare. However, as they approached the river, the cook spotted a flock of cranes, fast asleep. Of course, they were all standing on one leg, as they do when resting. "Sire! Sire!" Chico cried. "Look, I was right. They have only one leg." "Indeed!" snorted Mr. Corrado. "I'll show you!" And so saying, he clapped his hands and gave a shout. At the sudden sound, the cranes uncurled the other leg and flapped away. "There you are, you scoundrel," growled the nobleman. "You see they have two legs!" To which Chico quickly retorted, "But Sire, if you had clapped and shouted at table yesterday, then the bird would have uncurled its other leg!" At such a clever reply, Mr. Corrado's anger turned to amusement. "Yes, Chico, you're right. I should have done just that!" And he clapped the cook's shoulder, as they parted friends.

# THE COCK, THE CAT, AND THE MOUSE

Once upon a time . . . a little mouse decided to go and see the world. Packing some food for the journey, he carefully locked his door and set off for the unknown. And what a wonderful world he saw! Tall trees, rolling countryside, flowers and butterflies he had never set eyes on before. On he hiked till, tired out, he came to a peasant's cottage. After eating some of his packed lunch, he thought he would inspect what, to him, was a peculiar sort of building. He entered the farmyard and his eyes grew round as saucers: there in front of him were two strange animals he had never seen before. One was large and handsome, with four legs, covered all over with soft fur, and sporting splendid white whiskers that gave it a solemn respectable air. It was dozing against the wall. The other, a two-legged creature, had red, yellow and green feathers and a fierce, bad-tempered look. A pair of cruel eyes in a redcrested head glared at the little mouse. "How do you do, sir? How do you do..." began the mouse's greeting, as he felt foolish at not knowing the stranger's name. But the feathered creature simply puffed out its chest, screeched a loud "Cocka-doodle-doo!" and strutted towards the mouse, now paralyzed with fear. The little mouse saw the big yellow beak hovering over him. "I must run!" he squeaked, turning tail and fleeing as fast as his legs would carry him. He spied a hole in the wall and dived into it. I nside, three faces stared at him in amazement. "Where did you appear from?" they asked. "I've come . . . " gasped the little mouse breathlessly, " . . . from far away! Where am I now?" "This is our home. We're field mice. What happened?" And the little mouse told them about the animals he had met in the farmyard: one handsome and harmless, the other brightly coloured and ferocious. The three field mice laughed. "Calm down," they said. "Have a cup of coffee. Don't you realize the danger you were in? The creature that frightened you is only a cock, but the nice harmless one is our deadliest enemy, the cat! If he'd seen you, you wouldn't be here to tell the tale. As you see, you can't always judge by appearances!"

#### THE CONCEITED STAG

Once upon a time... there was a stag with splendidly long antlers, who was very conceited. Every time he drank at a pool, he would stand and admire his reflection in the water. "I am handsome," he would tell himself. "There's no finer set of antlers in the forest!" And off he would prance. Like all stags, he had long slender legs, but folk said he'd rather break a leg than lose a single branch of his splendid antlers. Poor foolish stag! How vain he was. One day, as he gazed peacefully on the tender shoots on some low branches, he heard a distant shot. He heard with fear the baying of the hounds. Terrified, he knew what terrible enemies the hounds were and that, if they caught his scent, it would not be easy to outrun them. He had to flee at once, and as quickly as possible. Faster and faster, he sped along the woodland track, his heart in his mouth. He could hear the baying of the pack at his heels. Without ever looking back, he ran in a straight line, trying to shake off his pursuers. Then the wood thinned out into a clearing. "With luck I'll be safe now," he said to himself, running swiftly over the smooth ground. And indeed, the yelping of the hounds seemed to die away in the distance. Only a little further now, and the stag would reach safety. Suddenly, as he swept under a tree, his antlers caught in the low-hanging branches. He shook his head desperately, trying to break free, but although he struggled, his antlers were held fast. The hounds were coming closer and closer. Just before the stag met his doom, he had time to think: "What a mistake I made in regarding my antlers as the best and most precious part of my body. I should have had more respect for my legs. They tried to carry me to safety, while my antlers will be the death of me!"

## THE CONFERENCE OF THE MICE

Once upon a time . . . there was a large tabby cat which, from the minute she arrived at the farm, spread terror among the mice that lived in the cellar. Nobody dared go outside for fear of falling into the clutches of the awful cat. The fast-shrinking mouse colony decided to hold a conference to seek a way of stopping themselves from becoming extinct. Taking advantage of the cat's

absence one day, mice of all ages streamed into the conference room. And certain that they could solve the matter, each one put forward a suggestion, but none of the ideas were really practical. "Let's build an outsize trap," one mouse suggested. When this idea was turned down, another said: "What about poisoning her?" But nobody knew of a poison that would kill cats. One young widow, whose husband had fallen prey to the ferocious cat, angrily proposed: "Let's cut her claws and teeth, so she can do no more harm." But the conference did not approve of the widow's idea. At last, one of the mice, wiser than the rest, scrambled to the top of the lantern that shone over the meeting. Waving a bell, he called for silence: "We'll tie this bell to the cat's tail, so we'll always know where she is! We'll have time to escape, and the slow and weaker mice will hear her coming and be able to hide!" A round of hearty applause met the wise mouse's words, and everyone congratulated him on his original idea. "...We'll tie it so tightly that it will never come off!" "... She'll never be able to sneak quietly up on us again! Why, the other day, she suddenly loomed up right in front of me! Just imagine..." However, the wise mouse rang the bell again for silence "We must decide who is going to tie the bell on the cat's tail," he said. There was not a sound in the room except for a faint murmur: "I can't, because. ""Not me!" "I'd do it willingly, but ... ""Neither can I ... ""Not me!" "Not me!" Nobody was brave enough to come forward to put the plan into action, and the conference of the mice ended without any decision being made. I t's often very easy to have bright ideas, but putting them into practice is a more difficult matter...

## THE COUNTRY MOUSE AND THE TOWN MOUSE

Once upon a time . . . a town mouse, on a trip to the country, met a country mouse. They spent the day together and became friends. The country mouse took his new friend into the meadows and vegetable gardens, making him sample all the good things of the land. Never having seen the beauties of the countryside, the town mouse was thrilled, though the country mouse's plain food wasn't nearly as fine as his own usual meals. To thank his friend for the lovely outing, he invited the country mouse to visit him in the town. And when the country mouse saw the pantry at his friend's house, full of hams, cheese, oil, flour, honey, jam and stacks of other goodies, he stood speechless with surprise. "I've never seen anything like it! Are all those wonderful things for eating?" "Of course!" came the re-ply. "You're my guest, so tuck in!" They began to feast, while the country mouse tried not to stuff himself. He wanted to taste everything before finding his tummy full. "You're the luckiest mouse I've ever met!" said the country mouse to his town brother. The town mouse was listening with delight to his friend's praise, when suddenly, the sound of heavy footsteps interrupted their feast. "Run for it!" whispered the town mouse to his friend. They were just in time: for within an inch of them stood the lady of the house's large foot. Luckily, the lady went away and the two mice returned to enjoy their meal, so rudely interrupted. "It's all right! Come on!" said the town mouse. "Don't worry. She's gone. Now for the honey! It's delicious! Have you ever tasted it?" "Yes, once, a long time ago, "the country mouse lied, trying to sound casual. But when he tasted it, he exclaimed: "Scrumptious! By the King of Mice! I have never eaten anything so lovely in all my life!" Suddenly there came the sound of footsteps, this time thumping heavily. The two mice fled. The man of the house had come to fetch some bottles, and when he saw the spilt honey, he groaned: "Those ghastly mice again! I thought I've got rid of them. I'll send the cat!" And trembling with terror, the mice hid away. This time it was not only the sudden visit that had given them a fright, it was the man's awful words. The mice were so scared, they held their breath, making no sound. Then, since all remained quiet, they began to feel braver, and picked up enough courage to leave their hidey-hole. "We can come out now! There's nobody here!" the town mouse whispered. Suddenly, the pantry door creaked, and the two luckless mice froze in fear. Out of the dim light glowed a pair of horrid yellow eyes. A large cat was staring round the room in search of its prey. The country mouse and the town mouse tiptoed silently back to their hidey-hole. They wished their pounding hearts would stop beating, for fear of the cat hearing the noise they made. But, as luck would have it, the cat discovered a juicy sausage. Forgetting why his master had sent him into the pantry, he stopped to eat it. No longer hungry, after that, the cat decided that he might as well leave mouse-hunting for another day. Off he padded, to have forty winks elsewhere. Now, as soon as the country mouse realized that all danger was past, he did not lose a second. He hastily shook hands with his friend, saying: "Thanks so much for everything! But I must rush off now! I can't stand all these shocks! It's far rather sit down to a meal of a few acorns in peace, in the country, than face a great spread of delicious food, surrounded by dangers on all sides and with my heart in my mouth!"

## THE CRAB AND THE HERON

Once upon a time . . . an elderly heron made his home in a pond full of fish. He was stiff and slow in his old age, and he didn't find it easy to catch his lunch. However, he decided to use his wits: he went to see a crab, said to be a great chatterbox, and in a mock frightened voice, told him the latest rumour. "Certain birds, friends of mine, say that the lakeside fishermen will be coming here soon with their nets. They're going to take away all the fish. I'll have no meals left. Everything will be gone and the fish will end up in the frying pan!" The crab quickly scuttled away to the banks of the pond and dived in to tell the fish the awful news. The frightened fish begged the crab for good advice, and he returned to the heron. "... they're all scared stiff and don't know which way to turn. While you yourself snap up a few now and again, it's against your interests if they go. So what shall we do?" The heron pretended to be lost in thought. Then he said: "I'll tell you what! I can carry them, a few at a time, to a pond hidden in the forest. They'll be quite safe there. But will the fish trust me?" Whether they were scared of the fishermen, or maybe the crab had a glib tongue, at any rate, the fish agreed to this strange offer. The heron began his trips between pond and forest. But the crab noticed that the heron made excuses for dallying on the way. What was more, the crab's keen eye noticed that the heron's tummy was now a good deal plumper. Days later, when all the fish had been rescued from the pond, the heron said to the crab: "Don't you want to be rescued too?" he asked. "Certainly!" replied the crab. "Bend over. I'll climb on to your neck. I'd hate to make your beak tired!" When they were far from the pond, the crab saw that the ground was littered with fish bones. He clung tightly to the heron's neck and said: "I've no \_ intention of coming to the same end as the fish! Now, just deposit me gently into the water. I'm not letting go of your neck till I feel safe!" And from that day on, crabs and herons have always loathed each other and try to avoid meeting.

## THE DONKEY THAT THOUGHT HE WAS CLEVER

Once upon a time . . . a donkey thought he was very clever. Every day, his master harnessed him to a cart loaded with goods. They always went the same way to the village: along a wide path through the wood, down a gentle slope into farmland, then along the river to the ford and over the plain to the village. Since the route was always the same, the donkey's master had got into the habit of having a snooze on top of the cart while the donkey, who knew the way by heart plodded on. Feeling unwell one day, the man decided to risk sending the donkey by himself with a load for urgent delivery. When the animal returned, he was given a double ration of oats as reward. "Since you're so clever at remembering the way," the man said, "I'm going to send you alone always, then I can do other jobs!" And from then on, in all kinds of weather, the donkey traveled to the village by himself. His master was delighted. However, one morning, when the donkey reached the river, he decided to shorten his journey by wading across the water. But he entered the river at a deep spot, much deeper than the donkey expected, and he had to swim against the current. Luckily, he was carrying a load of salt day, and some of it dissolved in the water, easing the donkey's load, so that he reached the other side without much difficulty. "I am clever," said the donkey, pleased with himself. "I've found short cut." Next day, the man loaded the cart with sponges, and the donkey set off as usual. When he arrived at the river, he again thought he would take the short cut, and entered the water as he had done the day before. But this time, the sponges soaked up the water and made the cart heavy, so that the poor animal could not keep his head above water. And in spite of all his efforts, the donkey that thought he was so clever, sank below the surface of the water together with his load.

#### **DOPEY DENNIS**

Once upon a time, there was a little boy called Dennis. Everyone called him Dopey because . . . well, read on and you will see why. Dennis lived with his mother in a nice house with a courtyard, vegetable plot, cellar and a hen run. One day his mother, since she had to go shopping, said to him, "I'll be away for an hour or two, son. Now, the broody hen is sitting on her eggs. Make sure nobody goes near her. Keep the house tidy and don't touch the jar in the cupboard, it's full of poison." "Don't worry, Mum," the little boy said, and when his mother had gone, he went into the yard to keep guard over the broody hen. However, tired of sitting, the hen got up to stretch her legs for a little before going back to the eggs. Dennis picked up a stick and yelled: "You nasty creature, get right back on those eggs!" But the broody hen, annoyed, only said, "Cluck!", and so Dennis hit her with his stick. He didn't really mean to do her any harm, but the blow fell on the middle of her neck and the poor hen dropped dead. "Oh!" gasped the lad. "Who's going to sit on the eggs now? Well, I had better do something about that!" So he sat on the eggs . . . and broke the lot! Getting up with the seat of his trousers sticky with egg yolk, Dennis said to himself, "Mum will give me such a scolding. But to keep in her good books, I'll give her a surprise, I'll make the lunch." He picked up the hen, plucked its feathers and put it on the spit to roast. "A roast calls for a good wine!" he said to himself. He took a jug and went down to the cellar where he started to draw sparkling red wine from a barrel. "Mum will be pleased with me," he told himself. At that moment, there was a dreadful noise in the kitchen. Dennis said to himself, "Who can that be? I must go and see." And he went ... forgetting to turn off the tap on the barrel. Up he ran to the kitchen and saw the cat with the roast hen in its jaws and the spit overturned. "Hey thief!" shouted the lad. "Put my hen down!" He picked up a rolling pin and started to chase the cat which, terrified as it was, firmly held on to the roast chicken as it dashed from room to room. The pair of them knocked against the cupboards, overturned tables, sideboards and stools, smashed vases, pots, plates and glasses. The devastation ended when the cat dropped the hen, leapt out of a window and vanished from sight. Dennis picked up his roast, laid it on the table and said: "Now, I'll go and fetch the wine." He went back to the cellar . . . which was flooded with the wine that had poured out of the barrel. "Good gracious!" gasped Dennis. "What am I to do now?" He didn't dare go in, for before him stretched a lake of red wine. "I'll have to mop it all up," muttered Dennis to himself, "but how? I could go into the yard and get some sacks of sand, bring them into the cellar and scatter the sand over the floor . . . But that's much too hard work. I'd better think of something else, now then . . . " Seated on the bottom step, his elbows on his knees, holding his head in his hands, the lad tried to think of a good idea. It really was an alarming situation: there were nearly six inches of wine all over the floor and in it floated corks, bottles and bits of wood . . . "I've got it!" Dennis suddenly exclaimed. He picked up one of the bags lying on a table, opened it . . . and started to scatter all the flour it contained. "Splendid! The flour will absorb the wine and I can walk about the cellar without wetting my feet," he cried. In no time at all, he had spread not one but five bags of good flour on the floor. In the end, the floor was covered with a wine-coloured, soft, sticky paste, and as he walked on it, it stuck to his shoes. Dennis went to get the jug he had filled and carried it in great delight back to the table, leaving red footprints everywhere. "Mum is going to be really pleased," he said. Nevertheless, when he thought of all the mess he had made, he began to fear a scolding and maybe punishment too. "Never mind," he said, "I'll drink the poison and die." So he went to the cupboard and picked up the jar. He thought the poison would be a black liquid, but the jar contained a red cream. He picked up a spoon and said, "I'll eat it then instead of drinking it." Just as he was about to take his first spoonful, he realised how silly he was. Nobody should ever eat poison, not even when your name is Dopey Dennis. Instead, he decided to hide from his mother so that she would not be able to punish him. A quarter of an hour later, his mother returned. When she saw the overturned furniture, the broken plates and the red footprints, she got a fright and cried, "Dennis! What has happened? Where are you? Answer me!" There was no reply, but she suddenly noticed a pair of legs sticking out of the oven. "I'm not surprised you are hiding from me, Dennis, after causing all this mess," she said. "Well, while I am clearing up after you, you can take this roll of cloth to the market and try and sell it for a good price." And she handed the boy a roll of cloth as she spoke. "Oh, I will," said Dennis. "Leave it to me." When he got to market, Dennis began to shout, "Cloth! Who'll buy this lovely cloth?" Several women came over and asked him, "What kind of cloth is it? Is it soft? Is it hard-wearing? Is it dear? How long is it? How much does it cost"? Dennis exclaimed: "You talk too much, and I don't sell things to chatterboxes," and off he went. He passed by a statue and mistook it for a fine gentleman, so he asked it, "Sir, would you like to buy this fine cloth? Yes or no? If you don't say anything, that means you do. Look here! Do you like it? Yes? Good! Then take it," and he left the cloth beside the statue and went home. "Mum! Mum!" he cried. "I've sold the cloth to a very well-dressed gentleman!" The woman asked: "How much did he give you for it?" Dennis muttered, "Oh! I forgot to ask him for the money! Don't worry, I'll go and ask him for it." He ran back to the statue but the cloth had gone. Someone had clearly taken it away. Said Dennis to the statue, "I see you've taken the cloth home already. Fine, now give me the money!" Of course, the statue did not reply. Dennis repeated his request, then losing his

temper, he picked up a stick and began to beat the statue about the head . . . which broke off and rolled to the ground. Out of the head poured a handful of gold coins, hidden there by goodness knows who! Dennis picked up the coins, put the head back in position and went home. "Look!" he called. And his mother stared in astonishment at this small fortune. "Who gave you such a good price?" his mother asked him. The lad replied: "A very dignified-looking gentleman. He didn't speak, and do you know where he kept his money? In his head!" At this, Dennis's mother exclaimed: "Dennis, listen! You killed the broody hen, broke the eggs, flooded the cellar with wine, wasted five bags of flour, smashed plates, bottles, vases and glasses; you nearly ate the cream, if you think you're going to pull my leg as well you're badly mistaken! Get out of here!" And grabbing the broom, she chased him out of the house. "I don't want to see you again till tonight! Off you go into the vegetable plot." But, as the boy was sitting on the doorstep and did not budge, his exasperated mother picked up the first thing that came within her grasp and hurled it at Dennis's head. It was a big basket of dried figs and sultanas. Dennis shouted then: "Mum! Mum! Quick! Bring a bag! It's raining dry figs and sultanas!" His mother slumped into a chair and said sorrowfully: "What can I do with a boy like him?" Now, since Dennis went about telling folk he had a lot of gold coins, the magistrates sent for him. "Where did you find those coins?" they asked him. Dennis replied: "A gentleman gave me them in payment for a roll of cloth." "What gentleman?" said the magistrates severely. "The gentleman that is always standing at the corner of Plane Tree Street and Jasmine Road," replied the boy. "But that's a statue!" gasped the magistrates. Dennis said: "He didn't say what his name was, but maybe it is Mr. Statue. He kept his money in his head." The magistrates gaped at each other in utter astonishment. Then the chief magistrate asked: "Tell us, Dennis, when did you do this piece of business?" "It was the day it rained dry figs and sultanas!" the boy replied. Again the magistrates exchanged looks, and now certain that Dennis really was dopey, they said: "You can go home, lad, you're free!" And so Dennis went home and lived there happily with his mother. A bit dopey, yes, but he never did anybody any harm, and that's all that counts.

## THE ELVES AND THE SHOEMAKER

Once upon a time there lived a poor shoemaker. He lived in misery because as he grew old he could not see all that well anymore and, consequently he could not work like he used to. One night he went to bed sad, without finishing a repair job he had begun. In the morning he found the job done. During the day he set out all the tools and material necessary to make a new pair of shoes for a rich customer. "Tomorrow morning, when it will be sunny and bright, I will begin working on them," he thought. But the morning after, instead of the leather he had left the night before, the shoemaker was very surprised to find a beautiful pair of brand new shoes. Later on in the day, the customer went by the shop to see how his new shoes were coming along. When he found a very nice pair of shoes ready, he was very happy and paid the shoemaker twice the price they had agreed upon. The shoemaker was very confused and wondered what had happened. That night, he left out some more leather and the next morning he found another shiny and perfect pair of new shoes. These shoes were sold at an even higher price. Now the shoemaker left out leather and tools to his mysterious helper every night, and, every morning, he found a new pair of shoes. Pretty soon, the shoemaker was able to save a good sum of money. When the shoemaker's wife noticed all the money the shoemaker had saved, she grew suspicious and demanded an explanation. When she was informed of the unusual nocturnal occurrences, she proposed: "Let's wait until nightfall. We will hide and find out what's happening." And so the shoemaker and his wife hid and, around midnight, saw two elves sneak into the shoemaker's shop. The quick and skilled elves made a new pair of shoes in a flash. It was winter and the elves, dressed in ragged clothes, shivered while they worked. "Poor fellows! They must be very cold," the shoemaker's wife whispered to her husband. "Tomorrow I will make them two heavy wool jackets. That way they will be warmer and maybe, instead of one pair of shoes, they will make two!" The following midnight, next to the leather, the two elves found two elegant red jackets with gold buttons. They put on the jackets and were very happy. They danced shouting: "What beautiful jackets! We'll never be cold again." But when one of the elves said: "Let's get to work now," the other answered: "Work? What for? With two jackets like these we are rich. We will never have to work again." The two elves left the shop of the astonished shoemaker and his even more puzzled wife and were never seen again.

# THE 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 colours 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 colours, 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 marvellous 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 labour," 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 colours and feel how fine it is." Of course the Emperor did not see any colours 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 neighbour 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 marvellous train!" "And the colours! The colours 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 though 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.

#### THE EMPRESS JOWKA

Once upon a time... an Empress lived in Japan. She was young, beautiful, kindly, and wise, and her name was Jowka. She dreamt of living in peace, thinking of the welfare of her people, but in the northern mountains, a rebellion broke out led by prince Kokai. He sent a message to the Empress, "Jowka, either you must marry me and share the throne, or I will put your kingdom to the flame and sword!" Jowka, who knew the empresses never flinch at threats, replied, "Kokai, we shall fight!", and sent an army against the rebels. The army was strong and well led and it defeated the rebels in more than one battle. But, just before the most important battle of all, something terrible and magical happened. Kokai pleaded with one of the evil gods and it started to rain. The rivers grew swollen with water and broke their banks. There were appalling floods which took the I mperial army by surprise and swept it away. Every man, from the general to the humblest soldier, was drowned. And Kokai the rebel came down from the mountains and approached the capital of the Empire. Jowka sent other armies against him, but each one met the same fate: swept away in the swirling waters that obeyed Kokai's orders. The whole of Japan was terror-stricken. Was power to be seized by a merciless rebel magician? Jowka was lost in thought over this when, one night, she heard a rustle in the room where she was saying her prayers. Lifting her eyes, she saw, standing in front of her, a man wearing a long tunic and holding a stick. He had long white hair and a flowing beard, as soft as silk. The Empress jumped in surprise, but the old man said: "Have no fear, Jowka, I'm a friend, I'm the God of Fire. I heard your prayers, I know how much you are suffering, and I'm here to help. Don't worry! I shall join your armies and Kokai's magic will do nothing against me." "Tell me, God of Fire, what must I do?" the Empress murmured. "You must gather a new army to send against the rebel. I will march at the side of your general." And so the Empress ordered the greatest and biggest army ever seen in Japan to be mustered, and a huge number of men, horses and chariots set out. Everyone, including the Imperial and rebel soldiers, knew that the battle about to be fought would be final. The two opposing armies slowly drew closer on a vast plain, and the general leading the imperial troops murmured: "It is unwise to march here. Kokai could easily flood this area!" The God of Fire, marching at the general's side in the guise of a bold young officer said: "Have no fear, I'm far stronger than water." There were a few skirmishes, then Kokai, high on the mountain where he had made his camp, raised his arms invoking the help of the elements. The earth shook, there was a fierce gust of wind and an immense rush of water swept down the mountainside onto the plain. The I mperial soldiers screamed with terror, but the God of Fire simply said: "Keep calm! That water will not even lap our feet." And indeed, the huge foaming waves that seemed to gallop towards the army, suddenly slowed down when they reached the God of Fire, drew back, split with a tremendous roar and were swallowed up by the earth. "This is the end of Kokai! March on!" ordered the general, and the entire army marched on towards the mountain and defeated the enemy. Kokai saw that the rebellion was now over, his power had gone and his fortune too had disappeared. But rather than surrender to the Empress Jowka, who would have forgiven him, he hurled himself, head first, against the mountain and died. But the blow was so hard that the mountain, named Shu, cracked and from the crack gushed out fire, poisonous fumes and lava that quickly invaded the plain below, burning and suffocating everything on it. A far worse danger now threatened the empire of the wise Jowka! The Empress remained quite calm. Then she received another terrible piece of news. The crack in the mountain and the disaster that followed, had also cracked the pillars that held up the sky, damaging the pathway along which, every day, the Sun and the Moon traveled with their chariots, carrying the light. In a short time, in fact, a dreadful dark shadow fell over all the world. People were afraid of the darkness, they wept and despaired. So wise Jowka ordered huge bonfires to be kept alight, so that the flames would give them comfort, courage and new hope. And she sent word to all her subjects that they should collect blue, white, orange and red stones and bring them to the palace. When that was done, the Empress ground down the stones, and made a kind of paste, something like liquid porcelain, transparent and shiny. She put it in a pot, then with a magic spell summoned a cloud, climbed on top of it and made it carry her to the exact spot where the heavenly pillar was cracked. There, she repaired the damage using the strange coloured paste. As she went back to earth, she said to herself, "There!

Grimm Brother Fairytales fo

The pillar is mended. The chariots of the Sun and the Moon can take to the road again and the light will return." Alas! Things didn't guite happen that way! Days went by and the light had still not come back. The Sun and the Moon were nowhere to be seen. And the people, who had had such high hopes, again began to weep and wail. Everyone began to say, "Oh dear! We shall live the rest of our lives in the dark! We will go blind, we will die of the cold! Nothing will grow in the fields, and if we survive the dark and the cold, we will die of hunger!" Once again, the Empress kept calm and was unworried. She called together all the wise men of the realm and asked them to find out what had happened. Long discussions took place, then a very learned philosopher went before Jowka and told her, "Your most gracious Highness, I know exactly what has happened! When the pillar of heaven cracked the Sun and the Moon shut themselves away in their palaces in alarm. And they have never come out again. How can they possibly know the pillar has been repaired?" "Yes! Yes! That is so!" chorused the other wise men. The Empress then said, "There is only way to tell them. Send a messenger!" "A messenger?" they asked. Jowka went on. "Yes. Or rather, two! One to gallop to the Sun and the other to the Moon. We can't be discourteous, and if we were to warn one before the other, then the second one might take offense." All over the empire, a search was made for two horsemen brave enough to face such a long journey, and two horses strong enough to gallop into the heart of Day and Night. It wasn't easy to find suitable men but in the end, two young men came to Jowka, and she told them what had to be done... The messengers set off. It was a long and fearful journey, from cloud to cloud, from heaven to heaven, through winds and storms, brushing past comets and shooting stars. But they delivered the Empress's message to the Sun and the Moon. The pillar had been repaired, their chariots could return to the heavenly pathways. The Sun and the Moon thanked the messengers. The next day, the shadows disappeared from the daylight world, and light flooded back again, as before the two messengers knelt before the Empress on their return, but Jowka made them rise to their feet, saying: "No! Men like you shall always remain on their feet before anyone on earth, for you have looked the Sun and the Moon in the face!"

#### THE FLYING TRUNK

Once upon a time, many years ago in Copenhagen, in Denmark, a wealthy merchant had a son called Erik. Erik was a good-looking lad, intelligent too, but very lazy. I nstead of studying or doing some work, he liked to spend his days roaming about, amusing himself with his friends and squandering his father's money on unnecessary luxuries. When the merchant died, he left all his money to Erik, who frittered it away in a matter of months. The only thing left was an empty magic trunk. The minute anyone stepped inside, it rose into the air. One day, Erik, who had no intention of working for a living, decided to face the unknown and seek his fortune. So he stepped into the trunk and, for days on end, flew across the seas and over woodlands and deserts. At last, he found himself above a city in the East and ordered the trunk to land on the terrace of a wonderful palace. Erik stepped out of the trunk and there in front of him stood a girl, staring at him in amazement. "I'm Tamara, the Sultan's daughter," she said. "Who are you?" Quick to turn the situation to his own advantage, Erik replied: "I'm the god of your people, come to ask your hand in marriage." Fascinated by the handsome stranger and certain that he really was a god, she happily said 'yes' and called her family. The Sultan welcomed the youth with great honours and immediately started to make arrangements for the wedding. The day before the ceremony, Erik stuffed the trunk full of jewels, golden candle sticks and fine damasks and flew away from the palace towards Copenhagen. However, weighed down by its valuable load, the trunk fell into the sea off the Danish coast. Erik managed to swim ashore and return to Copenhagen, where he sang sad songs at street corners for a living. In the East, on the terrace of a magnificent palace, a young girl sadly glanced at the sky from time to time, hoping that the god who had suddenly disappeared, would come back again.

## THE FOX AND THE CROW

Once upon a time . . . a big crow stole a lump of cheese and went to perch on a branch of a tree to eat it in peace. A passing fox sniffed the air and stopped below the tree, his mouth watering. "Cheese?" he said. "Mmm. I'd love . . . if only I could . . . " he said to himself, greedily, wondering how to get hold of the morsel. After a moment or two, he spoke to the crow: "You are a fine crow! I've never seen anyone so big and strong. What lovely thick shiny feathers you have! And such slender legs, the sign of a noble bird. And a regal beak. That's it: the beak of a king! You ought to be crowned King of the Birds!" When the crow heard such glowing praise of his beauty, he stretched to his full length and triumphantly flapped his wings. In his softest voice, the fox went on: "What lovely eyes you have. You don't seem to have a single fault! You're quite perfect." The crow had never been flattered so much in all his life. "Though I haven't heard your voice yet," went on the fox, "I expect that such a perfect creature like yourself can have nothing less than a wonderful singing voice!" The crow had, till then, been blissfully drinking in the fox's praise, but he felt a prick of doubt at the sweet words about his voice. He had never heard that crows were fine singers! Of course, being a very fine crow, perhaps that meant he had a beautiful voice as well. The fox could be right! And the crow gazed down at the fox as he said: "Now then, King of the Birds, let me hear a sweet song . . ." Throwing caution to the winds, the crow opened his beak and, taking a deep breath, loudly cawed: "Cra, Cra, Cra, Cra!" The lump of cheese fell through the air and the fox caught it neatly in his jaws. "I deserved that!" he told himself as he enjoyed the tidbit. Then, licking his lips, he again spoke to the crow on the branch. "Silly crow. You're the ugliest bird I've ever seen, you have the worst voice I have ever heard, but most of all, you're the most stupid bird I've ever met! And thanks for the cheese." And off he trotted well satisfied with himself...

#### FOX AND THE GRAPES

Once upon a time . . . in a wood there lived a very crafty quick-witted fox. The rabbits, rats, the birds and all the other creatures fled at the sight of him, for they all knew how cruel and famished he was. And since his prey kept fearfully out of sight, the fox had no choice but to haunt the neighbourhood buildings in the hope of finding something to eat. The first time, he was in luck. Near a lonely peasant's cottage, only a low fence stood between him and the hen run, and there he left death and destruction behind him. "What careless men, leaving such tender fat hens unguarded," he said to himself as he trotted away, still munching. A few days later, hungry once more, he decided to visit the same hen run again. He crept up to the fence. A thread of smoke curled from the cottage chimney, but all was quiet. With a great bound, he leapt into the hen run. The cackling hens scattered, and the fox was already clutching one in his jaws when a stone hit him on the side. "Wicked brute!" yelled a man waving a stick. "Now I 've got you!"

To make matters worse, up raced a large dog, snarling viciously. The fox dropped the hen and tried to jump out of the hen run. At the first try, he fell back, perhaps weak with fright. He could almost feel the dog's fangs sink into his ear, but with a desperate jump, he got over the fence. The yells and stones streamed after the bruised fox as he ran into the wood. In a nearby glade, he glanced round to make sure that he was not being followed. "Bad luck!" he said to himself. "All those hens..." His mouth was watering and he could feel gnawing hunger pains. Right above his head stretched a vine, laden with bunches of big ripe grapes. "Well, if there's nothing else..." muttered the fox, jumping up towards the grapes. But the bunches were hanging just beyond his reach. The fox then took a running jump at them, but without success. And though he tried over and over again, the grapes remained beyond his grasp. "Craw! Craw! Craw!" laughed a crow overhead, mocking the disappointed fox. "Sour grapes!" exclaimed the fox loudly. I '11 come back when they're ripe." And thrusting out his chest to give himself airs, though still smarting from the blows he had received, he set off towards the woods with an empty stomach.

#### THE FOX AND THE STORK

Once upon a time . . . a fox made friends with a stork and decided to invite her to lunch. While he was wondering what to serve for the meal, he thought he'd play a trick on the bird. So he prepared a tasty soup and poured it into two flat plates. "Help yourself, Mrs. Stork! I'm sure you'll enjoy this! It's frog soup and chopped parsley. Taste it, you'll find it's delicious!" "Thank you very much!" said the stork, sniffing the soup. But she quickly saw the trick the fox had played on her. For no matter how she tried, she could not drink the soup from the flat plate. The sniggering fox urged her on: "Eat up! Do you like it?" But all the stork could do was bluff. With a casual air she said: "I'm afraid I've such a headache that I've lost my appetite!" And the fox fussily replied: "What a shame! And it's such good soup too! Too bad! Maybe next time . . . "To which the stork quickly replied: "Yes, of course! Next time, you must have lunch with me!" The very next day, the fox found a polite note pinned to his door: it was the stork's invitation to lunch. "Now, isn't that nice of her!" said the fox to himself. "And she hasn't taken my little trick to heart either! A real lady!" The stork's house was much plainer than the fox's, and she apologized to the fox. "My home is much humbler than yours," she said, "but I've cooked a really special meal. Freshwater shrimps with white wine and juniper berries!" The fox licked his lips at the idea of these goodies and sniffed deeply when the stork handed him his jar. But, try as he might, he was unable to eat a bite, for he could not reach down with his nose into the long neck of the jar. In the meantime, with her long beak, the stork gobbled her lunch. "Try it! Try it!" she said. "Do you like it?" But the unlucky fox, confused and outsmarted, could not think of an excuse for not eating. And as he tossed and turned hungrily in bed that night, thinking of his lost lunch, he said to himself with a sigh: "I might have known!"

## THE GAME OF CHESS

Once upon a time... in faraway Persia there was a King who had a beautiful wife and a handsome son called Gav. Life was all sunshine as far as he was concerned, but not for long. One day, as he was going hunting, he fell from his horse and was killed. Women in Persia could not succeed to the throne and so the dead ruler's brother was proclaimed King. He was a prince called May. He fell in love with the widowed Queen and married her. She gave him a son whose name was Talend. Alas, some time later, the new King died and there only remained the Queen with the two sons, brothers of course, but with different fathers. The question was soon raised:- "Which brother will become King of Persia?" "It will be Gav," was one reply, "because he is the elder." But others said, "It will be Talend, because he is the son of our last King." The Queen herself said nothing at all. However, sooner or later, she would have to come to a decision, and she did not want to disappoint either Gav or Talend. As long as the two boys were small, it didn't matter, but when they started to grow up and began to ask when one or the other was going to be crowned King, the problems began. The Queen couldn't make up her mind. When the ministers asked her to make a choice, she would reply, "Yes, I will do it tomorrow..." and so the years went by. Gav and Talend became young men, and rivals. As children they were always together, as youths, they saw little of each other, indeed, they kept out of each other's way. Each had his own set of friends. In that way, two sides were formed, one supporting Talend, the other supporting Gav. The ministers were very worried, and now insisted that the Queen choose the King. But she couldn't bring herself to do this, for fear of disappointing one of her dearly loved sons. Some years later, the kingdom drifted towards what is known as civil war, for the two princes did not see eye to eye, neither wanted to give up the throne, neither wanted to step down. Some of the provinces sided with Talend, others with Gav. Certain battalions in the army swore allegiance to Talend, others to Gav. The two young men met, but only to stare at each other coldly and to promise war instead of peace, and war was fast approaching. Two opposing armies were built up, consisting of weapons, money, horses and elephants, very important in Persia, for they carried on their backs a wickerwork turret from which the archers fired arrows at the enemy. Gav's army began to march against Talend's. All Persia held its breath, awaiting the battle that was to decide its fate. The battle was fought. both armies had the same number of foot soldiers, standard bearers and elephants. It was a terrible massacre. Neither of the brothers wanted the other to die. In spite of everything, the brothers felt the call of the family tie. Indeed, each had given an order that, if the soldiers found they were about to kill the enemy leader, they were to stop and warn him instead by shouting, "Watch out, King!" The conflict lasted for a long time, until Gav's troops were overcome and Talend found himself with only a few soldiers to defend him. Then, a little later, quite alone, he found himself surrounded on all sides by Gav's turreted elephants, slowly advancing on him. No arrows were fired on the prince, he turned his way and that, searching for a way to escape, but his heart failed at that moment and he fell dead to the ground. High in the palace tower, the Queen had watched the battle with sorrow in her heart, knowing full well that she was, at that moment, losing one of her sons. But which one? It didn't matter. She loved them both equally. When she saw that the dust had settled on the distant plain and the cries of battle had died away, the Queen came down from the tower and rushed through the palace to meet those returning from the field. She stopped in her tracks. Her son Gav, his clothes in tatters and slashed with blood, staggered sadly towards her. "Talend?" stammered the Queen. Gav shook his head, "Oh, mother," he said, "my brother Talend is dead." "Dead! Did you kill him?" "Oh, no, mother!" exclaimed Gav. "I would never have done such a thing." "But you ordered his death!" exclaimed the Queen. The young man then knelt before her and, taking the hem of her dress in his hand, said, "Mother, I swear nobody was responsible for my brother's death. He died, but not violently." "I shall never believe that is the truth," wept the Queen. But Gav said, "I shall prove that it is." He then thought of a way to show his mother how the battle had been fought. First of all, he asked a carpenter to make him a board, as flat as the plain. Then to mark the positions and maneuvers

of the two armies, the board was divided into white and black squares. A wood carver made him a miniature army of foot soldiers, a king, standard bearers, knights and towers, to take the place of the elephants and their turrets. When everything was ready, Gav called the Queen and, moving one piece at a time, acted out the various stages of battle. "You see, mother, my foot soldiers advanced like this, so Talend manoeuvred his like that. Each time my brother was about to be killed, I had the men cry out `watch out, King,' so that he could reach safety," said Gav. "In the end, though, my Talend was no longer safe," murmured the Queen. Gav sadly replied, "That's true. He was surrounded. But I would never have had him killed, mother. It was his heart that gave out. My brother realised he had lost, and so he died." The Queen then said, "I understand, son, and I forgive you. I feel you'll be a good king for our country. But I wonder why, in a battle between two kings, one must win and the other lose..." The poor Queen kept asking herself the same question for a very long time. She would sit all day long beside the little battlefield moving the pieces, foot soldiers, standard bearers and towers, always trying to save the King. In the end, she understood that, as in make-believe, so it is in real life, when there is a fight to the last, one of the opponents must fall, just as her son Talend had fallen. One day, they found the poor Queen dead on what was, by then, known as the chessboard. That is how chess originated. Nowadays it is a peaceful contest that recalls a real-life battle. Today it is fun, but then it caused a poor mother who saw her sons fight against each other, sadness and suffering...

## THE LITTLE GOLD FISH

Once upon a time...a poor fisherman lived in a humble cottage near the sea. One day, he set off as usual with his load of nets to go fishing. "Don't you dare come home empty-handed!" shouted his nagging wife from the door. Down on the shore, he had just thrown the nets into the sea, when something glittering in the meshes caught his eye. "What a strange fish!" he said to himself, picking up a golden yellow fish. And his amazement grew when he heard the fish say these words: "Kind fisherman, let me go free! I'm the son of the Sea King, and if you let me go, I'll grant any wish you care to make!" Alarmed at this miracle, without a second thought, the fisherman tossed the fish back into the water. But when he went home and told his wife what had happened she scolded him soundly: "What! When the fish said your wishes could come true, you should have asked it for something! Go back to the beach and if you see it, ask for a new washtub! Just look at the state of ours!" The poor man went back to the shore. As soon as he called the fish, it popped up from the water. "Where you calling me? Here I am!" it said. The fisherman explained what his wife wanted, and the fish quickly replied: "You were very good to me! Go home, and you'll see that your wish has come true!" Certain that his wife would be pleased, the fisherman hurried home. But the minute he opened the door, his wife screeched: "So it really is a magic fish that you allowed to go free! Just look at that old washtub! It's brand new! But if that little fish has such powers, you can't possibly be content with such a miserable little wish! Go straight back and get it to give you a new house!" The fisherman hurried back to the shore. "I wonder if I'll see it again! I hope it hasn't gone away! Little fish! Little fish!" he began to call from the water's edge. "Here I am! What do you want this time?" he heard it ask. "Well, my wife would like . . . " "I can imagine!" remarked the fish. "And what does she want now?" "A big house!" murmured the fisherman, hesitantly. "All right! You were kind to me and you shall have your wish!" The fisherman lingered on the way home, enjoying the feeling of making his wife happy with a new house. The roof of the splendid new house was already in sight, when his wife rushed up to him in a fury. "Look here! Now that we know how really powerful this fish is, we can't be content with only a house! We must ask for more! Run back and ask for a real palace, not an ordinary house like this one! And fine clothes! And jewels too!" The fisherman was quite upset. However, he had been henpecked for so many years that he was unable to say "no", so he trudged back to the water's edge. Full of doubts, he called the little fish, but it was some time before it leapt from waves. In the meantime, the sea had begun to foam . . . "I'm sorry to trouble you again, but my wife has had second thoughts, and she'd like a fine palace, and . . . and also. . . " Again the little fish granted fisherman his wishes, but he seemed less friendly than before. At last, relieved at having been able to see his wife's desires fulfilled, the good fisherman turned homewards. Home was now a magnificent palace. How wonderful it was! At the top of a flight of steps leading to the palace, stood his wife, dressed like a great lady and dripping with jewels, impatiently waiting for him. -\_ "Go back and ask for . . . " But the fisherman broke in: "What? Such a fine palace! We must be content with what we have! Don't you think that's asking too much? . . . " "Go back, I said! Do as you're told! And ask the fish to make me an Empress!" The poor fisherman set off unhappily for the seashore. In the meantime, a storm had blown up. The sky was black and terrible flashes of lightning lit the darkness, while the waves crashed angrily on the beach. Kneeling on the rock amidst the spray, in a low voice the fisherman began to call the little fish. And when it came, he told it his wife's latest request. But this time, after listening in silence, the little gold fish disappeared beneath the waves without saying a word. And though the fisherman waited, the little fish never came back. A great flash of lightning, much brighter than all the others lit up the sky, and the fisherman saw that both the new house and the palace had vanished without trace. The humble old cottage stood where it had always been. But this time, his wife was waiting for him in tears. "It serves you right! We should have been pleased with what we had, instead of always asking for more!" grumbled the fisherman angrily. But in the depths of his heart, he was glad that everything had gone back to normal. Next day and every day, he went back to his fishing, but he never saw the little goldfish again.

#### THE GOLDEN GOOSE

Once upon a time . . . there was a woodcutter called Thaddeus, a dreamy, foolish-looking lad though good-hearted. One day, his father sent him to a distant wood to chop down trees. Thaddeus thought that these trees were a kind he had never seen before and that it was hard work trying to hack through their hard trunks. Sweating after all his efforts, he had barely sat down against a sawn-off trunk to have a meal, when a strange old man with a white beard popped out from behind a bush and asked him for a bite to eat. Kindly Thaddeus gave him some bread and cheese and together they cheerily drank a flask of wine. "Of all the woodcutters that have tried to fell these trees, you're the first one who has been nice to me," said the old man, stuttering, perhaps after all the wine. "You deserve a reward. If you cut down that tree in the centre of the wood, you'll find that all the others will fall down by themselves. Have a look in its roots where there's a gift for you! You see, I'm the Wizard of the Woods!" Not particularly surprised, Thaddeus did as he was told, and in a flash, his work was done. From the roots of the tree the Wizard had pointed towards, the woodcutter took a golden goose. Slipping the bird under his arm, Thaddeus set off homewards. Now, it may have been

too much wine, or maybe the fact he was new to these parts, but the fact remains that Thaddeus lost his way. At dead of night, he reached a strange village. A tavern was still open, so the woodcutter went in. "Something to eat for myself and for the Golden Goose that the Wizard of the Woods gave me," he ordered the innkeeper's daughter. "That's a bite for me and a bite for you," he said, sharing his food with the goose across the table. The innkeeper's other two daughters came to stare at the strange sight, then all three dared ask: "Why are you so kind to a goose?" "This is a magic goose," replied Thaddeus, "and worth a fortune. I shall stay the night here and I need a secure room, for I don't want to be robbed." However, during the night, one of the sisters was persuaded to steal at least one goose feather. "If it's a magic bird, then one of its feathers will be precious too!" But the second her hand touched the goose's tail, it stuck fast, and nothing would unstick it. In a low voice, she called her sisters, but when they tried to pull her free, they too stuck fast. A little later, Thaddeus woke, not at all surprised to see the three sisters, ashamed at being discovered, stuck to the golden goose. "How can we get free?" they wailed. But the woodcutter coolly replied: "I have to leave with my goose. Too bad for you if you're stuck to her. You'll just have to come too!" And when the innkeeper saw the strange little procession trip past, he shouted "What's up?" and grabbed the last sister by the arm. It was the worst thing he could have done! For he too found himself attached to the tail of the little group. The same fate awaited a nosy village woman, the plump curate and the baker who had placed a hand on the curate's shoulder as he rushed past. Last of all came a guard who had tried to stop the procession. People laughed as Thaddeus and his row of followers went by, and crowds soon flocked the roads. Close to the village where Thaddeus had spent the night stood the Royal Palace. Though rich and powerful, the King had a great sorrow: his only daughter suffered from a strange illness that no doctor had been able to cure. She was always sad and unhappy. The King had once proclaimed that the man who succeeded in making his daughter laugh would be granted her hand in marriage. But so far, nobody had so much as brought a smile to the Princess's lips. As it so happened, the Princess chose that day to drive through the village square, just as the woodcutter with the goose under his arm, solemnly marched by with his line of unwilling followers. When she heard the people chuckle, the Princess raised the carriage curtains. The minute she set eyes on the amazing sight, she burst into peals of laughter. Everyone was amazed to hear the Princess laugh for the first time. She stepped down from the carriage for a closer look at the golden goose and that's how she got stuck to the baker! Laughing and chattering, the procession headed towards the palace, with the crowds at their heels. When the King saw his daughter in fits of laughter, he could hardly believe it. "How amazing! How amazing!" he said. But in spite of all the mirth, it was a serious situation. That is, until a large man with a tall peaked hat and a white beard stepped forward and snapped his fingers three times. Suddenly, Thaddeus and the others all became unstuck. The woodcutter was about to thank the Wizard of the Woods, for it could be none other, but he had vanished into thin air. And that's how the simple woodcutter, Thaddeus, found himself married to the King's daughter.

## **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 neighbours 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 upstalrs. '~ There was no mistaking which was Baby Bear's bed. "Mm! Quite comfy!" she said, I 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.

#### HANSEL AND GRETEL

Once upon a time . . . a very poor woodcutter lived in a tiny cottage in the forest with his two children, Hansel and Gretel. His second wife often ill-treated the children and was forever nagging the woodcutter. "There is not enough food in the house for us all. There are too many mouths to feed! We must get rid of the two brats," she declared. And she kept on trying to persuade her husband to abandon his children in the forest. "Take them miles from home, so far that they can never find their way back! Maybe someone will find them and give them a home." The downcast woodcutter didn't know what to do. Hansel who, one evening, had overheard his parents' conversation, comforted Gretel. =--= "Don't worry! If they do leave us in the forest, we'll find the way home," he said. And slipping out of the house he filled his pockets with little white pebbles, then went back to bed. All night long, the woodcutter's wife harped on and on at her husband till, at dawn, he led Hansel and Gretel away into the forest. But as they went into the depths of the trees, Hansel dropped a little white pebble here and there on the mossy green ground. At a certain point, the two children found they really were alone: the woodcutter had plucked up enough courage to desert them, had mumbled an excuse and was gone. Night fell but the woodcutter did not return. Gretel began to sob bitterly. Hansel too felt scared but he tried to hide his feelings and comfort his sister. "Don't cry, trust me! I swear I'll take you home even if Father doesn't t come back for us!" Luckily the moon was full that night and Hansel waited till its cold light filtered through the trees. "Now give me your hand!" he said. "We'll get home safely, you'll see!" The tiny white pebbles gleamed in the moonlight, and the children found their way home. They crept through a half-open window, without wakening their parents. Cold, tired but thankful to be home again, they slipped into bed. Next day, when their stepmother discovered that Hansel and Gretel had returned, she went into a rage. Stifling her anger in front of the children, she locked her bedroom door, reproaching her husband for failing to carry out her orders. The weak woodcutter protested, torn as he was between shame and fear of disobeying his cruel wife. The wicked stepmother kept Hansel and Gretel under lock and key all day with nothing for supper but a sip of water and some hard bread. All night, husband and wife quarreled, and when dawn came, the woodcutter led the children out into the forest. Hansel, however, had not eaten his bread, and as he walked through the trees, he left a trail of crumbs behind him to mark the way. But the little boy had forgotten about the hungry birds that lived in the forest. When they saw him, they flew along behind and in no time at all, had eaten all the crumbs. Again, with a lame excuse, the woodcutter left his two children by themselves. "I've left a trail, like last time!" Hansel whispered to Gretel, consolingly. But when night fell, they saw to their horror, that all the crumbs had gone. "I'm frightened!" wept Gretel bitterly. "I'm cold and hungry and I want to go home!" "Don't be afraid. I'm here to look after you!" Hansel tried to encourage his sister, but he too shivered when he glimpsed frightening shadows and evil eyes around them in the darkness. All night the two children huddled together for warmth at the foot of a large tree. When dawn broke, they started to wander about the forest, seeking a path, but all hope soon faded. They were well and truly lost. On they walked and walked, till suddenly they came upon a strange cottage in the middle of a glade. "This is chocolate!" gasped Hansel as he broke a lump of plaster from the wall. "And this is icing!" exclaimed Gretel, putting another piece of wall in her mouth. Starving but delighted, the children began to eat pieces of candy broken off the cottage. "I sn't this delicious?" said Gretel, with her mouth full. She had never tasted anything so nice. "We'll stay here," Hansel declared, munching a bit of nougat. They were just about to try a piece of the biscuit door when it quietly swung open. "Well, well!" said an old woman, peering out with a crafty look. "And haven't you children a sweet tooth?" "Come in! Come in, you've nothing to fear!" went on the old woman. Unluckily for Hansel and Gretel, however, the sugar candy cottage belonged to an old witch, her trap for catching unwary victims. The two children had come to a really nasty place . . . "You're nothing but skin and bones!" said the witch, locking Hansel into a cage. I shall fatten you up and eat you!" "You can do the housework," she told Gretel grimly, "then I'll make a meal of you too!" As luck would have it, the witch had very bad eyesight, and when Gretel smeared butter on her glasses, she could see even less. "Let me feel your finger!" said the witch to Hansel every day to check if he was getting any fatter. Now, Gretel had brought her brother a chicken bone, and when the witch went to touch his finger, Hansel held out the bone. "You're still much too thin!" she complained. When will you become plump?" One day the witch grew tired of waiting. "Light the oven," she told Gretel. "We're going to have a tasty roasted boy today!" A little later, hungry and impatient, she went on: "Run and see if the oven is hot enough." Gretel returned, whimpering: "I can't tell if it is hot enough or not." Angrily, the witch screamed at the little girl: "Useless child! All right, I'll see for myself." But when the witch bent down to peer inside the oven and check the heat, Gretel gave her a tremendous push and slammed the oven door shut. The witch had come to a fit and proper end. Gretel ran to set her brother free and they made quite sure that the oven door was tightly shut behind the witch. I ndeed, just to be on the safe side, they fastened it firmly with a large padlock. Then they stayed for several days to eat some more of the house, till they discovered amongst the witch's belongings, a huge chocolate egg. Inside lay a casket of gold coins. "The witch is now burnt to a cinder," said Hansel, "so we'll take this treasure with us." They filled a large basket with food and set off into the forest to search for the way home. This time, luck was with them, and on the second day, they saw their father come out of the house towards them, weeping. "Your stepmother is dead. Come home with me now, my dear children!" The two children hugged the woodcutter. "Promise you'll never ever desert us again," said Gretel, throwing her arms round her father's neck. Hansel opened the casket. "Look, Father! We're rich now... You'll never have to chop wood again..." And they all lived happily together ever after.

#### THE HARE AND THE ELEPHANT

Once upon a time . . . in the Indian jungle, lived a young elephant whose playmate was a very large hare. In spite of the difference in size, they were great friends and had fun playing strange guessing games. One day, the hare said to his chum: "Which of us is bigger: you or me?" At that silly question, the little elephant nearly choked on his banana. "You must be joking!" he exclaimed. "Why,

even on tiptoe, you re not as high as my knee!" But the hare went on: "That's what you think! Since I say that I'm bigger than you, we need a judge. Don't you agree?" "Oh, yes," said the elephant in surprise. "Well, let's go along to the village and see what the Humans have to say. They're the cleverest of all the animals, and the best judges!" As they reached the village, they met some of the villagers. "Look at that young elephant! I sn't he small?" folk remarked as the unusual couple strolled by. "Yes, he is indeed! But he'll soon grow up," said others. Then somebody noticed the hare. "What a huge hare!" they all cried. Now, the hare tried to keep in front of elephant and puffed out his chest. As he passed, all the villagers exclaimed: "Look at his paws! And those ears! That's the biggest hare we've ever seen!" When he heard this, the hare turned to his friend, saying, "We can go home now! That's settled! I'm huge and you're tiny!" The elephant tossed his heavy head. At a loss for words, he knew the hare had won by low cunning. But back on the jungle path, he lifted his foot and said to the hare, walking ahead, "Get out of my way before a tiny elephant crushes a big hare like you!"

## THE HARE AND THE PORCUPINE

Once upon a time . . . an old porcupine lived in a large wood with his twin sons. Apples were their favourite dish, but the youngsters sometimes raided a neighbouring vegetable plot for the turnips Dad loved to munch. One day, one of the young porcupines set off as usual to fetch the turnips. Like all porcupines, he was a slow walker, and he had just reached a large cabbage, when from behind the leaves, out popped a hare. "So you have arrived at last!" said the hare. "I've been watching you for half an hour. Do you always dawdle? I hope you're quicker at eating, or it will take you a year to finish the turnips!" I nstead of going into a huff at being teased, the porcupine decided to get his own back by being very crafty. Slow on his feet but a quick thinker, he rapidly hit on a plan. So the hare sneered at the slow porcupine, did he? Well, the hare's own turn of speed would be his downfall! "I can run faster than you if I try," said the porcupine "Ha!" the hare shrieked with laughter, raising a large paw. "You can't compete with this! My granddad was the speediest hare of his day. He even won a gold penny. He used to be my coach. And you tell me you can run faster than me? Well, I bet my granddad's gold penny that I can win without even trying!" The porcupine paid little heed to the hare's boastful words and quietly accepted the challenge. "I'll meet you tomorrow down at the ploughed field. We'll race in parallel furrows. And see wins!" The hare went away laughing. "Better stay here all night! You'll never get home and back in time for the race!" he told the porcupine. The porcupine, however, had a bright idea. When he arrived home, he told his twin brother what had happened. Just before dawn next day, he gave his instructions, and off they set for the field. Hare appeared, rudely remarking: "I'll take off my jacket so I can run faster!" Ready! Steady! Go! And in a flash, the hare streaked to the other end of the field. There, waiting for him was a porcupine, which teasingly said: "Rather late, aren't you? I've been here for ages!" Gasping and so breathless his throat was dry, the hare whispered: "Let's try again!" "All right," agreed the porcupine, "we'll run the race again." Never in all his life had the hare run so fast. Not even with the hounds snapping at his heels. But every time he reached the other end of the ploughed field, what did he find but the porcupine, who laughingly exclaimed: "What? Late again? I keep on getting here first!" Racing up and down the field the hare sped, trying to beat the porcupine. His legs grew terribly tired and he began to sag. And every time he came to the end of the field there stood a porcupine calling himself the winner. "Perhaps I ought to mention, friend hare, that my granddad was the fastest porcupine of his day. He didn't win a gold penny, but he won apples, and after the race, he ate them. But I don't want apples. I'd rather have the nice gold penny you promised me!" said one of the porcupine twins. The hare slid to the ground, dead tired. His head was spinning and his legs felt like rubber. "This race is the end of me! I shall die here in this field, where I really believed I was a sprinter! The shame of it! What a disgrace!" The hare staggered home, hot and sticky, to fetch the gold penny that he had never for a moment ever imagined he would lose. His eyes brimming with tears, he handed it over to the porcupines. "Thank goodness my granddad isn't alive to see this!" he said. "Whatever would he say? After all his coaching, here I am, beaten by a porcupine!" That evening, a party was held at the porcupines' house. The twins danced triumphantly in turn, waving aloft the gold penny. Father Porcupine brought out his old accordion for the special occasion, and the fun went on all night. As luck would have it, the hare never did find out the secret of how the race had been rigged. Which was just as well! . . .

## THE HARE AND THE TORTOISE

Once upon a time .... there was a hare who, boasting how he could run faster than anyone else, was forever teasing tortoise for its slowness. Then one day, the irate tortoise answered back: "Who do you think you are? There's no denying you're swift, but even you can be beaten!" The hare squealed with laughter. "Beaten in a race? By whom? Not you, surely! I bet there's nobody in the world that can win against me, I'm so speedy. Now, why don't you try?" Annoyed by such bragging, the tortoise accepted the challenge. A course was planned, and next day at dawn they stood at the starting line. The hare yawned sleepily as the meek tortoise trudged slowly off. When the hare saw how painfully slow his rival was, he decided, half asleep on his feet, to have a quick nap. "Take your time!" he said. "I'll have forty winks and catch up with you in a minute." The hare woke with a start from a fitful sleep and gazed round, looking for the tortoise. But the creature was only a short distance away, having barely covered a third of the course. Breathing a sigh of relief, the hare decided he might as well have breakfast too, and off he went to munch some cabbages he had noticed in a nearby field. But the heavy meal and the hot sun made his eyelids droop. With a careless glance at the tortoise, now halfway along the course, he decided to have another snooze before flashing past the winning post. And smiling at the thought of the look on the tortoise's face when it saw the hare speed by, he fell fast asleep and was soon snoring happily. The sun started to sink, below the horizon, and the tortoise, who had been plodding towards the winning post since morning, was scarcely a yard from the finish. At that very point, the hare woke with a jolt. He could see the tortoise a speck in the distance and away he dashed. He leapt and bounded at a great rate, his tongue lolling, and gasping for breath. Just a little more and he'd be first at the finish. But the hare's last leap was just too late, for the tortoise had beaten him to the winning post. Poor hare! Tired and in disgrace, he slumped down beside the tortoise who was silently smiling at him. "Slowly does it every time!" he said.

## THE HOLE THAT WAS TOO NARROW

Once upon a time... a stoat 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 stoat 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 stoat 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 stoat 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 stoat 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 stoat 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 stoat had become very fat and his trouser button had popped off over a bulging tummy. But of course, the stoat's fantastic luck could not last forever. One afternoon, the stoat froze in mid-munch at the creak of a door. Heavy footsteps thumped down the stairs, and the stoat 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 stoat 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 stoat's head was a longing to be starving of hunger again . . .

#### THE HORSE AND THE DONKEY

Once upon a time . . . an old carter kept a horse and a donkey in the same stable. He was equally fond of both his animals, but as he used the horse to pull his trap, he gave it better food and more attention than he did the donkey. However, the donkey, knowing he was not so precious as his stable mate, ate straw instead of corn and hay, without complaining. Even when both animals carried sacks to market, the donkey's was the heavier load, for the carter did not want to overwork his noble horse, though he had no such feelings about the donkey. As time went by, the horse grew more handsome and robust, while the donkey became thin and weak. One day, on their way to market, the donkey was carrying his usual he avy load, while the horse had only two lightweight sacks tied to the saddle. "I can't go much further!" moaned the donkey. "I'm much weaker today! I can hardly stand and unless I can get rid of some of this weight, I won't be able to go on. Couldn't you take some of my load?" When the horse heard this, he looked the donkey up and down in disdain, for he considered himself much superior, and said: "Our master gave you the heavy load, because he knows that donkeys are beasts of burden. Their loads ought to be heavier than those of noble horses!" So the wretched donkey stumbled on. But after a short distance, he stopped again, bleary-eyed, his tongue hanging out. "Please, please listen! If you don't help me, I'll never reach market alive." But without even a glance, the horse haughtily replied: "Rubbish! Come on, you'll manage this time too!" But this time, after a few tottering steps, the donkey dropped dead to the ground. The donkey's master, who had lingered to pick mushrooms, ran up when he saw the animal fall. "Poor thing!" he said. "He served me well for so many years. His load must have been too heavy." Then he turned to the horse: "Come here! You'll have to carry your companion's load too now!" And he hoisted the donkey's sacks onto the horse's back. "I'd have done better to help the donkey when he was alive," said the horse to himself. "A little more weight wouldn't have done me any harm. Now, I'm frightened of collapsing myself under a double load!" But feeling sorry too late did nothing to lighten his load.

#### THE HORSE AND THE WOLF

Once upon a time... a horse was gazing peacefully in a rolling green meadow. A famished wolf passing by saw the horse and his mouth began to water. "That's a fine horse! And will taste good too! He'd make a juicy steak! Pity he's so big. I don't think I'd manage to bring him down, though you never know..." The wolf approached the horse, which continued to eat the grass. "...maybe, if I take him by surprise." Now quite close, the wolf spoke to the horse, trying to sound as pleasant as he could. "Good day, Mr. Horse, I see you're enjoying a meal. Is the grass good? I must say you're looking rather pale. Aren't you well?" His mouth fool of grass, the horse replied: "Pale? Oh, no, that's my natural colour. I was born white and gray." The wolf pretended not to understand what the horse had said. "Yes, indeed, very pale. It's just as well your master has given you a holiday in the field, instead of working." "A holiday in the field? But I'm the picture of health!..." The wolf was now circling round the horse, trying to find the best point to attack. "I'm a doctor," he went on. "I can treat you. If you tell me where the pain is. I'm sure I can cure it. Take my advice. Let me examine you!" The horse, who was not usually wary of others, became suspicious of the wolf's persistent remarks, and thought he had better be on his guard. The wolf was now very close and carefully biding his time, when the horse said, in alarm: "Yes! Now that think of it, I have a sore hind foot. It's been swollen for ages..." Without a moment's thought, the wolf trotted up to the hoof which the horse had obligingly raised into the air. And when he was certain that the wolf had come within range, the horse gave a mighty kick, catching the wolf on the jawbone and sending him flying. "Would like to examine me again?" The wolf heard the words as he struggled to his feet with spinning head. "No thanks! That's enough for one day1" he mumbled, limping away, with no further thought for horse steaks.

## JACK AND THE BEANSTALK

Once upon a time there was a poor widow who lived with her son Jack in a little house. Their wealth consisted solely of a milking cow. When the cow had grown too old, the mother sent Jack to sell it. On his way to the market, the boy met a stranger. "I will give you five magic beans for your cow," the stranger offered. Jack was unsure and hesitated for a while but then, enticed by the idea of such an extraordinary deal, he decided to accept. When he returned home, his mother was furious and reprimanded him sternly: "You fool! What have you done? We needed the money to buy a calf. Now we don't have anything and we are even poorer." Jack felt guilty and sad. "Only a fool would exchange a cow for five beans," his mother fumed. Then, at the height of her exasperation, she threw the five beans out of the window and sent Jack to bed with no dinner. The morning after, when he stepped outside, Jack saw an amazing sight. A gigantic beanstalk, reaching far into the clouds, had grown overnight. "The beans must have really been magic," Jack thought happily. Being very curious, the boy climbed the plant and once he reached the top of the stalk he found himself over the clouds. While looking around in amazement, Jack saw a huge castle of gray stone. "I wonder who lives there," he thought. Jack was very surprised to see a path leading to the castle. He cautiously stepped on the clouds and, when he saw that they held him up, he walked to the castle. As he stood in front of the huge gate, his curiosity increased. He knocked several times on the gigantic door, but no one came to open it. Jack noticed that the door wasn't locked. With great effort, he was able to push it until it creaked open. "What are you doing here?" a thundering voice asked. The biggest woman he had ever seen was scowling at him. Jack could only mutter: "I am lost. May I have something to eat? I am very hungry." The woman, who did not have children, looked at him a little more kindly: "Come in, quick. I will give you a bowl of milk. But be careful because my husband, the ogre, eats children. If you hear him coming, hide at once." Jack was shaking with fear but, nonetheless, he went inside. The milk the woman gave him was very good and Jack had almost finished drinking it when they heard a tremendous noise. The ogre was home. "Fee fl fo fum! I smell the blood of an Englishman!" the ogre shouted. "Hide, quick!" the woman whispered, pushing Jack into the oven. "Do I smell a child in this room?" the ogre asked suspiciously, sniffling and looking all around. "A child?" the woman repeated. "You see and hear children everywhere. That's all you ever think about. Sit down and I'll make your dinner." The ogre, still grumbling, filled a jug of wine and drank it all with his dinner. After having counted again and again all the gold pieces of his treasure, the ogre fell asleep with his feet propped up on the table. After a little while, his thundering snoring echoed throughout the castle. The ogre's wife went to prepare the ogre's bed and Jack, who had sneaked out to the oven, saw the gold pieces on the table and filled a little bag full of them. "I hope he won't see me, otherwise he'll eat me whole, Jack thought while shivering with fear. Jack's heart was beating faster, not just faster because he feared the ogre but because he was very excited. Thanks to all the gold coins, he and his mother would be rich. Jack ran down the path over the clouds. Jack arrived at the top of the giant beanstalk and began to descend as quickly as possible, hanging on the leaves and the branches. When he finally reached the ground, he found his mother waiting for him. The poor woman had been worried sick since his disappearance. She had been frightened by the giant beanstalk. When she saw Jack come down and then triumphantly hold up the bag full of gold, she burst out crying: "Where have you been, my son? Do you want me to die worrying? What kind of plant is this? What . . . " Jack cheerfully interrupted her, emptying the contents of the bag before her. "You see, I did the right thing exchanging that cow for the magic beans. Now I'll tell you the whole story . . . " And Jack told his mother everything that had happened in detail. In the days that followed, the widow's humble house was made into a comfortable home. The gold pieces were spent to buy a lot of things Jack and his mother never had before. Mother and son were very happy. But as time went by, so did the money. When the last gold piece had been spent, Jack decided to go back to the castle above the clouds. This time the boy went inside through the kitchen and hid once again in the oven. Shortly after, the ogre came in and began to sniff about. "I smell children," he said to his wife. But since she had seen no one come in, she didn't pay any attention to him. After dinner, the ogre placed a hen on the table. The hen laid golden eggs. Jack saw the miraculous hen from a crack in the oven door. He waited for the ogre to fall asleep, jumped out of the oven, snatched the hen and ran out of the castle. The hen's squawking, however, woke up the ogre. "Thief! Thief!" he shouted. But Jack was already far away. Once again, he found his mother anxiously waiting for him at the foot of the beanstalk. "Is that all you stole? A hen?" she asked Jack, disappointed. But Jack ran, happy, to the courtyard. "Just wait," he said to his mother. As a matter of fact, a little while later the hen laid a golden egg and continued to lay such an egg every single day after that. By now, Jack and his mother were very wealthy. Their house was completely rebuilt. Teams of carpenters replaced the roof, added new rooms and elegant marble columns. Then they bought paintings, tapestries, Persian rugs, mirrors and many other beautiful fumishings. Their miserable shack was transformed into a luxurious home. Jack and his mother had not forgotten their previous years of poverty and deprivation. So they chose to welcome any traveler who needed food or shelter. But wealth doesn't always bring happiness. Jack's mother suddenly fell ill or so it seemed. But not one of the many doctors who visited her could discover what her illness was. The woman was sad, at e less and less and showed no interest in life. She rarely smiled, and then only when Jack was near to her. Her son tried to cheer her up, but nothing could save the mother from her slow but inevitable decline. Even a circus's famous clown, who had been invited especially for her entertainment, received only a sad greeting. Jack was desperate and didn't know what to do. All the hen's gold was not enough to make his mother well again. So he had another idea. "What if I went back to the ogre's castle? Maybe there I could find the answer," he thought. He shivered with fear thinking about the giant's huge hands and mouth, but the hope of helping his mother encouraged him to face the danger again. One evening he gathered all his courage and climbed once more the giant beanstalk. This time he entered the castle through an open window. He sneaked in the darkness to the kitchen and hid inside a huge pot until the following day. After dinner the ogre went to get his magic harp, an instrument that sang and played marvellous music. While listening to the harp's sweet melody, the ogre fell asleep. In his hiding place, Jack was captivated by the harp's song as well. When he finally heard the ogre snore loudly, he lifted the pot's lid and saw the extraordinary instrument: a golden harp. He quickly climbed on the table and ran away with the harp in his hands. The instrument woke up the ogre screaming: "Master, master! Wake up! A thief is taking me away!" The ogre woke up suddenly, was disorientated for a couple of seconds but then realized what was happening and began chasing Jack. The boy ran as fast as he could and the harp kept calling out. "Shut up! Shut up! I f you'll play for me, you'll be happier," Jack kept telling it breathlessly. He finally arrived to where the leafy top of the beanstalk poked through the clouds. Jack crept along the ground and slipped down the stalk quietly. The harp did not make a sound and the ogre didn't see Jack go down the plant. When Jack got down to earth he called to his mother, "Look what I've brought you!" The harp began to play an enchanting melody and his mother smiled

happily. But up there in the clouds someone else had heard the harp's beautiful song and Jack soon realized with terror that the thick beanstalk was shaking under a very heavy weight. The ogre was coming down to earth! "Hide the harp and bring me an axe! I must chop down the plant before the ogre gets here," Jack said to his mother. They could already see the ogre's huge boots when the plant and the ogre finally crashed to the ground. The ogre fell down a cliff nearby. The ogre's wife never found out what had happened to her husband and as time passed Jack no longer felt in danger. The magical sound of the harp cured his mother's sadness and she was once again happy and cheerful. The hen kept on laying golden eggs. Jack's life had gone through a lot of changes since he had accepted the magic beans. But without his courage and his wit, he and his mother could never have found happiness.

# THE LION AND THE MOSQUITO

Once upon a time . . . a tiny mosquito started to buzz round a lion he met. "Go away!" grumbled the sleepy lion, smacking his own cheek in an attempt to drive the insect away. "Why should I?" demanded the mosquito. "You're king of the jungle, not of the air! I'll fly wherever I want and land wherever I please." And so saying, he tickled the lion's ear. In the hope of crushing the insect, the lion boxed his own ears, but the mosquito slipped away from the now dazed lion. "I don't feel it any more. Either it's squashed or it's gone away." But at that very moment, the irritating buzz began again, and the mosquito flew into the lion's nose. Wild with rage, the lion leapt to his hind legs and started to rain punches on his own nose. But the insect, safe inside, refused to budge. With a swollen nose and watery eyes, the lion gave a terrific sneeze, blasting the mosquito out. Angry at being dislodged so abruptly, the mosquito returned to the attack: BUZZ . . . BUZZZ! . . . it whizzed round the lion's head. Large and tough as the lion was, he could not rid himself of his tiny tormenter. This made him angrier still, and he roared fiercely. At the sound of his terrible voice, all the forest creatures fled in fear, but paying no heed to the exhausted lion, the mosquito said triumphantly: "There you are, king of the jungle! Foiled by a tiny mosquito like me!" And highly delighted with his victory, off he buzzed. But he did not notice a spider's web hanging close by, and soon he was turning and twisting, trying to escape from the trap set by a large spider. "Bah!" said the spider in disgust, as he ate it. "Another tiny mosquito. Not much to get excited about, but better than nothing. I was hoping for something more substantial..." And that's what became of the mosquito that foiled the lion!

#### THE LION GOES TO WAR

Once upon a time... a lion decided to go to war. He summoned his ministers, and called together his army with this proclamation: "King Lion commands that all animals in the forest must come before him tomorrow to go to war. Nobody must fail to appear." The lion's subjects all presented themselves punctually and the lion issued the orders: "Elephant, you're the largest, you'll transport the guns and all the supplies. You, fox, have a reputation for cunning, so you'll help me draw up the plans of battle to beat off enemy attacks. You, monkey, nimble and good at climbing trees, will act as lookout and spy the enemy's movements from above. Bear, you're strong and agile, so you'll scale the fortress walls and terrorize the enemy." Amongst those present were also the rabbit and the donkey. When the king's ministers saw them, they shook their heads, then one said: "Sire, I don't think the donkey will make a good soldier. They say he is easily frightened." The lion looked at the donkey, then turning to his ministers, he remarked: "He brays louder than I can roar. He'll stay at my side and be the trumpet that will rally the troops." The ministers then pointed to the rabbit: "He's even more nervous than the donkey. We should send him home!" Again the lion stood thoughtfully for a moment, then going over to the rabbit he said: "You always flee from your enemies, so you've learned that you have to be faster than the others if you're to survive. So you'll act as messenger, and within seconds, all the soldiers will receive my orders." Then, turning to the crowd, he said: "Everyone can make himself useful in a war; everyone can help the common cause at best he is able!"

## THE LITTLE GOLDEN BIRD

Once upon a time . . . several Buddhist monks lived in a great temple that stood in a magnificent garden full of flowers and rare plants. The monks spent their days contentedly in prayer and meditation, and the beauty of their surroundings was all they needed to make them forget the world. Then one day, something happened to change their life in this peaceful corner, making the days seem shorter and not so monotonous. No longer did they live peacefully together, indeed they started to quarrel. But what had happened? A young monk had arrived, upsetting their lives by telling them all about the outside world beyond the garden wall. He told them about cities, the bright lights, everyday life full of entertainments and pleasure. And when the monks heard about this different world, they no longer wanted to remain in what had, till then, seemed paradise, but now turned into a lonely existence. With the young monk as their leader, first one group then another left the temple. Weeds began to sprout on the paths and the temple was almost deserted. Then the last five monks, torn between their love for the sacred spot and the wish to see the new world they'd heard about, sadly got ready to leave. But just as they were about to turn their backs on the temple, a golden bird, dangling five long white strings, fluttered over their heads. Each monk felt himself drawn to clasp one of the strings, and suddenly the little group found itself carried away to the land of their dreams. And there, they saw the outside world as it really was, full of hate, misery and violence, a world without scruples, where peace was forever banned. It was a long journey, and when the golden bird brought them back to the temple garden, they decided never to leave it again. Three times the bird circled overhead before it vanished into the sky. And the monks knew then that Buddha had come to help them find the pathway to true happiness.

# THE LITTLE MATCHGIRL

Once upon a time . . . a little girl tried to make a living by selling matches in the street. It was New Year's Eve and the snow-clad streets were deserted. From brightly lit windows came the tinkle of laughter and the sound of singing. People were getting ready to bring in the New Year. But the poor little match seller sat sadly beside the fountain. Her ragged dress and worn shawl did not keep out the cold and she tried to keep her bare feet from touching the frozen ground. She hadn't sold one box of matches all day and she was frightened to go home, for her father would certainly be angry. It wouldn't be much warmer anyway, in the draughty attic that was her home. The little girl's fingers were stiff with cold. If only she could light a match! But what would her father say at

such a waste! Falteringly she took out a match and lit it. What a nice warm flame! The little match seller cupped her hand over it, and as she did so, she magically saw in its light a big brightly burning stove. She held out her hands to the heat, but just then the match went out and the vision faded. The night seemed blacker than before and it was getting colder. A shiver ran through the little girl's thin body. After hesitating for a long time, she struck another match on the wall, and this time, the glimmer turned the wall into a great sheet of crystal. Beyond that stood a fine table laden with food and lit by a candlestick. Holding out her arms towards the plates, the little match seller seemed to pass through the glass, but then the match went out and the magic faded. Poor thing: in just a few seconds she had caught a glimpse of everything that life had denied her: warmth and good things to eat. Her eyes filled with tears and she lifted her gaze to the lit windows, praying that she too might know a little of such happiness. She lit the third match and an even more wonderful thing happened. There stood a Christmas tree hung with hundreds of candles, glittering with tinsel and coloured balls. "Oh, how lovely!" exclaimed the little match seller, holding up the match. Then, the match burned her finger and flickered out. The light from the Christmas candles rose higher and higher, then one of the lights fell, leaving a trail behind it. "Someone is dying," murmured the little girl, as she remembered her beloved Granny who used to say: "When a star falls, a heart stops beating!" Scarcely aware of what she was doing, the little match seller lit another match. This time, she saw her grandmother. "Granny, stay with me!" she pleaded, as she lit one match after the other, so that her grandmother could not disappear like all the other visions. However, Granny did not vanish, but gazed smilingly at her. Then she opened her arms and the little girl hugged her crying: "Granny, take me away with you!" A cold day dawned and a pale sun shone on the fountain and the icy road. Close by laid the lifeless body of a little girl surrounded by spent matches. "Poor little thing!" exclaimed the passersby. "She was trying to keep warm!" But by that time, the little match seller was far away where there is neither cold, hunger nor pain.

#### THE 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 coloured 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 coloured 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 honour 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 glove 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 grey 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 Serenest 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 harbour. 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 forever. The unknown lady too had never forgotten the young man she had found on the beach 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 harbour. 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 ..."

## THE LITTLE PEAR GIRL

Once upon a time, a peasant worked hard to make a living from his land. Every year his pear tree produced four basketfuls of fruit which had to be given to the king, a greedy ruler who grew rich at the expense of the poor. One year, part of the pear harvest went bad and the peasant was able to pick only three and a half baskets of fruit. The poor man was beside himself with fear, for the king refused to take less than four basketfuls, and the peasant would be cruelly punished. All he could do was put his youngest daughter into one of the baskets and cover her with a layer of pears, so that the basket looked full. The king's servants took away the four baskets without ever noticing the trick, and the little girl found herself all alone in the pantry, under the pears. One day, the cook went into the pantry and discovered her. Nobody could understand where on earth she had come from, and not knowing what to do with her, it was decided she should become a maid in the castle. Folk called her Violetta, for her eyes reminded them of the colour of violets. Violetta was a pretty girl, sweet and generous. One day, as she was watering the flowers in the royal gardens, she met the king's son, a youth of her own age, and the two became friends. The other maids, jealous of Violetta's beauty and of the affection many people in the castle felt for the girl, did everything they could to get her into trouble, by spreading nasty rumours about her. One day, the king sent for her and said severely: "I'm told you boast of being able to steal the witches' treasure trove. Is that true?" Violetta said 'no,' but the king refused to believe her and drove her out of his kingdom. "You may return only when you have laid hands on the treasure," he said. All Violetta's fondest friends, including the prince, were sorry to hear of the king's decision,

but could do nothing to stop her going. The girl wandered through the forest and, when she came to a pear tree, she climbed into its branches and fell asleep. She was wakened at dawn by an old woman calling her: "What are you doing up there, all by yourself?" Violetta told the old woman her tale. She offered to help the little girl, gave her some round loaves, a broom, a little oil and some good advice, and the girl again set off. She reached a clearing with a large wood stove and saw three women tearing their hair, using it to sweep the ashes from the stove. Violetta offered them the broom and the women pointed out the way to the witches' palace. Suddenly, two hungry mastiffs blocked her path. Violetta threw them the loaves, the dogs ate them and let her pass. Then she came to the bank of a river in flood, but remembering the old woman's advice, she sang: Clear sparkling river Let me cross over, and the minute her song wafted into the air, the water stopped flowing. Violetta thus crossed the river and at last reached the witches' palace. The door was unlocked, but Violetta could not push it open for the hinges were rusted. So she rubbed on a little oil and the door swung open. The little girl walked through the empty halls till she came to a splendid room in which lay a magnificent coffer full of jewels. Holding the coffer under her arm, Violetta made for the door, but the coffer, being enchanted, cried out: "Door! Don't let her out!" However, the door did open, for Violetta had oiled the hinges. Down at the river, the coffer cried out. This time it said: "Water! Drown her!" But the river did not stop the little girl from crossing; the two mastiffs did not attack ant the three strange women did not burn her in their stove. For each, in its own way, repaid the girl's courtesy. Back at the king's palace again, the prince ran happily to meet Violetta, telling her: "When my father asks you what you want as a reward, ask him for the basket of pears in the pantry!" And this Violetta did. Pleased at paying such a modest price, the king instantly ordered the humble basket to be brought. But nobody ever imagined for a minute that underneath the pears lay the prince. The young man came out of his hiding place, swore he was in love with Violetta and that he wanted to marry her. In this way, the king was forced to give his consent. Violetta brought her family to court and they all began a new and happy life.

## LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

Once upon a time . . . in the middle of a thick forest stood a small cottage, the home of a pretty little girl known to everyone as Little Red Riding Hood. One day, her Mummy waved her goodbye at the garden gate, saying: "Grandma is ill. Take her this basket of cakes, but be very careful. Keep to the path through the wood and don't ever stop. That way, you will come to no harm." Little Red Riding Hood kissed her mother and ran off. "Don't worry," she said, "I'll run all the way to Grandma's without stopping." Full of good intentions, the little girl made her way through the wood, but she was soon to forget her mother's wise words. "What lovely strawberries! And so red . . . " Laying her basket on the ground, Little Red Riding Hood bent over the strawberry plants. "They're nice and ripe, and so big! Yummy! Delicious! Just another one. And one more. This is the last . . . Well, this one . . . Mmmm." The red fruit peeped invitingly through the leaves in the grassy glade, and Little Red Riding Hood ran back and forth popping strawberries into her mouth. Suddenly she remembered her mother, her promise, Grandma and the basket . . . and hurried back towards the path. The basket was still in the grass and, humming to herself, Little Red Riding Hood walked on. The wood became thicker and thicker. Suddenly a yellow butterfly fluttered down through the trees. Little Red Riding Hood started to chase the butterfly. "I'll catch you! I'll catch you!" she called. Suddenly she saw some large daisies in the grass. "Oh, how sweet!" she exclaimed and, thinking of Grandma, she picked a large bunch of flowers. In the meantime, two wicked eyes were spying on her from behind a tree . . a strange rustling in the woods made Little Red Riding Hood's heart thump. Now quite afraid she said to herself. "I must find the path and run away from here!" At last she reached the path again but her heart leapt into her mouth at the sound of a gruff voice which said: "Where ' . . are you going, my pretty girl, all alone in the woods?" "I'm taking Grandma some cakes. She lives at the end of the path," said Little Riding Hood in a faint voice. When he heard this, the wolf (for it was the big bad wolf himself) politely asked: "Does Grandma live by herself?" "Oh, yes," replied Little Red Riding Hood, "and she never opens the door to strangers!" "Goodbye. Perhaps we'll meet again," replied the wolf. Then he loped away thinking to himself "I'll gobble the grandmother first, then lie in wait for the grandchild!" At last, the cottage came in sight. Knock! Knock! The wolf rapped on the door. --- "Who's there?" cried Grandma from her bed. "It's me, Little Red Riding Hood. I've brought you some cakes because you're ill," replied the wolf, trying hard to hide his gruff voice. "Lift the latch and come in," said Grandma, unaware of anything amiss, till a horrible shadow appeared on the wall. Poor Grandma! For in one bound, the wolf leapt across the room and, in a single mouthful, swallowed the old lady. Soon after, Little Red Riding Hood tapped on the door. "Grandma, can I come in?" she called. Now, the wolf had put on the old lady's shawl and cap and slipped into the bed. Trying to imitate Grandma's quavering little voice, he replied: "Open the latch and come in! "What a deep voice you have," said the little girl in surprise. "The better to greet you with," said the wolf. "Goodness, what big eyes you have." "The better to see you with." "And what big hands you have!" exclaimed Little Red Riding Hood, stepping over to the bed. "The better to hug you with," said the wolf. "What a big mouth you have," the little girl murmured in a weak voice. "The better to eat you with!" growled the wolf, and jumping out of bed, he swallowed her up too. Then, with a fat full tummy, he fell fast asleep. In the meantime, a hunter had emerged from the wood, and on noticing the cottage, he decided to stop and ask for a drink. He had spent a lot of time trying to catch a large wolf that had been terrorizing the neighbourhood, but had lost its tracks. The hunter could hear a strange whistling sound; it seemed to be coming from inside the cottage. He peered through the window ... and saw the large wolf himself, with a fat full tummy, snoring away in Grandma's bed. "The wolf! He won't get away this time!" Without making a sound, the hunter carefully loaded his gun and gently opened the window. He pointed the barrel straight at the wolf's head and ... BANG! The wolf was dead. "Got you at last!" shouted the hunter in glee. "You'll never frighten anyone again. He cut open the wolf's stomach and to his amazement, out popped Grandma and Little Red Riding Hood, safe and unharmed. "You arrived just in time," murmured the old lady, quite overcome by all the excitement. ~ "It's safe to go home now," the hunter told Little Red Riding Hood. "The big bad wolf is dead and gone, and there is no danger on the path. Still scared, the little girl hugged her grandmother. Oh, what a dreadful fright!" Much later, as dusk was falling, Little Red Riding Hood's mother arrived, all out of breath, worried because her little girl had not come home. And when she saw Little Red Riding Hood, safe and sound, she burst into tears of joy. After thanking the hunter again, Little Red Riding Hood and her mother set off towards the wood. As they walked quickly through the trees, the little girl told her mother: "We must always keep to the path and never stop. That way, we come to no harm!"

## THE MAGIC TINDERBOX

Once upon a time . . . a brave soldier returned from the wars. In spite of his courage, his pockets were empty and his only possession was his sword. As he walked through a forest, he met a witch, who said to him: "I say, good soldier, would you like to earn a bag of money?" "Money? I'd do anything for money . . . " "Good!" went on the witch. "It won't be difficult, you'll see! All you have to do is go down that hollow tree till you reach a cave. There, you'll find three doorways. When you open the first door, you'll see a big dog with eyes like saucers, guarding a large chest of copper coins. Behind the second door lies a treasure of silver coins, guarded by a dog with eyes the size of mill stones. When you open the third door, you'll come upon another dog, with eyes the size of a castle tower, beside a treasure of gold. Now, if you lay this old apron of mine before these dogs, they'll crouch on it and do you no harm. You'll be able to carry away all the coins you want. What do think of that?" However, the soldier suspiciously asked: "What do you want in return?" "Just bring me back an old tinderbox my grandfather left down there, long ago!" So the young soldier tied a rope round his waist and, not forgetting his trusty sword, he lowered himself into the hollow tree. To his great surprise, he found the three doorways and the three dogs, just as the witch had said. Soon he was back, his pockets bulging with coins, but before he handed the tinderbox to the old witch, he asked her: "What do you want it for?" The witch hurled herself at the soldier, screaming: "Give it to me! Give it to me at once, or else . . . ", as she tried to scratch him. When the witch attacked him, the soldier exclaimed: "Aha! So this is the thanks I get! Now I'll show you!" He undid the rope from around his waist and tied up the old woman. Then away he went, whistling cheerfully. When he reached the town, he said to himself: "Now I can feast as much as I like - at last!" After years of scrimping on a miserable pay, with his sudden wealth, the soldier felt like a prince. He bought a new pair of boots and he went to the best tailor in the town. Some days later, he was clad in a fine new uniform and people turned in the street to admire him. Lavish with his money, the soldier was surrounded by folk guick to tell him how to spend his coins, and it all went on a round of dances, fine carriages, theatres and, most of all, on drinking sprees. Of course, his money soon ran out and when this happened, his "friends" vanished. When the innkeeper discovered that the soldier could no longer pay his board, he rudely put him out. So the poor soldier ended up in a garret and every day he had to draw in his belt a little more. All the fun was over. One evening, he realized he had never used the old witch's tinderbox. So he rubbed it, and as it sparked, the dog with the eyes like saucers suddenly appeared. "Tell me your wish, sir," it said. "... bring me heaps of money!" gasped the soldier in amazement. A second later, the dog was back with a bag of coins. Every time he rubbed the tinderbox, the dog brought him more money. Then when he rubbed it quickly twice in succession, the dog with eyes like mill stones stood before him, carrying silver coins. And when the soldier rubbed the tinderbox three times in a row, the third dog came carrying gold. Rich all over again, the soldier chose the best hotel in the town and went back to leading the life of a fine gentleman. The soldier was told that the King would not allow anyone to meet his beautiful daughter, for he believed in a saying that the Princess's destiny was to marry a simple solder. That evening, the soldier rubbed the tinderbox. "Bring me the Princess," was his new order. I mmediately the dog returned with the beautiful Princess, fast asleep. The soldier kissed her. Next morning, the girl told her parents that she had had a dream. But the Queen, suspiciously ordered one of the ladies-in-waiting to guard her daughter day and night. The dog was seen when it came next evening and the alarm raised. The king's guards followed the dog and the soldier was arrested at dawn. The King's revenge was terrible: the soldier was to be hanged! In a dark prison, the soldier calmly awaited his fate. When the day of execution came, a mob crushed round the scaffold. The soldier asked if he could smoke his pipe, and placed it between his lips, as he rubbed the tinderbox over and over again. In a flash, the three dogs appeared with gaping jaws and bloodshot eyes. At the soldier's sharp command, they leapt on the guards and the crowd cheered in delight. Awestruck at this magic feat, the King bowed his head and whispered to the Queen. "The saying is true!" he said. A little while after, the young soldier married the Princess and the tinderbox was rubbed and rubbed, but this time to invite the three dogs to the splendid wedding. I

## THE MONKEY KING

Once upon a time . . . a long time ago, there was a thick jungle where many kinds of animals lived in harmony together. Their ruler was a wise old lion. But one sad day, the king died and the animals had to decide who was to be their new ruler. The dead king had a gold crown, encrusted with precious gems, and it was decided that all the candidates for the throne were to come forward and each would try on the crown, and the ruler would be the animal whose head it fitted. Now, though many tried on the crown, it fitted no one. Some heads were too big, others too small, a few had horns and some had big ears. The fact was that the old king's crown did not fit any of the animals. Then a cheeky monkey snatched up the crown and started to amuse the crowd with clever tricks. First, he slipped the crown round his waist and whirled it round and round his middle without letting it fall to the ground. Then he tossed it higher and higher into the air and caught it as it came down. He then stood on his head and twirled the crown on the tips of his toes, before jumping to his feet again and catching it in his hands. All the animals laughed delightedly at the nimble monkey's skill and clapped in excitement. Pleased at the great applause, the monkey went on with his show, till the enthusiastic crowd decided to award him the crown and proclaim him king. The only animal to disagree was the fox. "A silly creature like that can't be our king!" he said. "I'm going to do all I can to make him lose the throne." One day, having just managed to avoid a trap that men had set at the edge of the jungle, the fox took it unseen to the tree where the monkey lived. Covering the trap with dead leaves, the fox picked a large bunch of bananas and called up to the monkey: "Sire! Sire! Can you help me? I have some ripe bananas I'd like to present you with, but I can't climb trees as easily as you do! Would you please come down and accept my gift?" The unsuspecting monkey shinned down the tree, and just as he reached for the bananas, the trap suddenly clamped shut over his legs. The fox began to laugh: "What a foolish king we have! Fancy falling into a trap for a handful of bananas!" And calling all the other animals, he went on: "Just look at our sovereign! I sn't he stupid? He can't even avoid being caught in a trap. If he isn't able to watch out for himself, how can we expect him to look after us?" All the animals let themselves be persuaded by the fox's words, and in a twinkling the monkey king was deprived of the crown. And from that day on, this particular jungle was the only one whose animals made do without a king.

#### THE MUSICIANS OF BREMEN

Once upon a time . . . an old donkey was ill-treated by his master. Tired of such unkindness, he decided to run away, and when he heard that Bremen was looking for singers with the town band, he decided that someone with a fine braying voice like his might be accepted. As he went along the road, the donkey met a skinny dog, covered with sores. "Come with me. If you have a good bark, you'll find a job with the band too. Just wait and see!" A little later, a stray cat, no longer able to catch mice, joined them and the trio trotted hopefully on towards the town. As they passed a farmyard, they stopped to admire an elderly cockerel who, with outstretched wings, was crowing to the skies. "You sing well," they told him. "What are you so happy about?" "Happy?" muttered the cockerel with tears in his eyes. "They want to put me in the pot and make broth of me. I'm singing as hard as I can today, for tomorrow I'll be gone." But the donkey told him, "Run away with us. With a voice like yours, you'll be famous in Bremen!" Now there were four of them. The way was long, night fell, and very frightened, the four creatures found themselves in a thick forest. They scarcely knew whether to press on or to hide in some caves and rest. Suddenly, in the distance they saw a light amongst the trees. It came from a little cottage and they crept up to the window. The donkey placed his front hoofs on the window ledge. Anxious to see, the dog jumped on the donkey's back, the cat climbed onto the dog and the cockerel flew on top of the cat to watch what was going on inside. Now, the cottage was the hideaway of a gang of bandits who were busily celebrating their latest robbery. The hungry donkey and his friends became excited when they saw the food on the table. Upset by the Jittery crew on his back, the donkey stuck his head through the window and toppled his three companions on to the lamp. The light went out and the room rang with the braying of the donkey who had cut his nose on the glass, the barking of the dog and the snarling of the cat. The cockerel screeched along with the others. Taken completely by surprise, the terrified bandits fled screaming: "The Devil!" And their abandoned meal ended up in the four friends' stomachs. Later, however, just as the donkey and his companions were dropping off to sleep, one of the bandits crept back to the now quiet house and went in to find out what had taken place. He opened the door, and with his pistol in his hand, he stepped trembling towards the fire. However, mistaking the glow of the cat's eyes for burning coals, he thrust a candle between them and instantly the furious cat sank its claws into the bandit's face. The man fell backwards on to the dog, dropping his gun, which went off, and the animal's sharp teeth sank into his leg. When the donkey saw the bandit's figure at the door, he gave a tremendous kick, sending the man flying right through the doorway. The cockerel greeted this feat with a grim crowing sound. "Run!" screamed the bandit. "Run! A horrible witch in there scratched my face, a demon bit me on the leg and a monster beat me with a stick! And ... " But the other bandits were no longer listening, for they had taken to their heels and fled. And so the donkey, the dog, the cat and the cockerel took over the house without any trouble and, with the booty left behind by the bandits, always had food on the table, and lived happy and contented for many years.

## **NARCISSUS**

Once upon a time . . . in Ancient Greece lived a young man called Narcissus, who was greatly admired, for he was very handsome. Narcissus was very proud of his perfect face and graceful body, and never lost the chance to look at his reflection in any sheet of water he happened to pass. He would lie for hours admiring his gleaming dark eyes, slender nose, slim hips and the mop of curly hair that crowned the perfect oval of his face. You would think a sculptor had come down from heaven to carve such a faultless body as a living image of mankind's love of beauty. One day, Narcissus was walking close to a precipice where the clear waters of a cold mountain pool mirrored his beautiful face. "You are handsome, Narcissus!" he told himself as he bent down to admire his reflection. "There's nobody so handsome in the whole world! I'd love to kiss you." Narcissus was suddenly seized by the desire to kiss his own reflection and he leant closer to the water. But he lost his balance and toppled into the pool. Narcissus could not swim and so he drowned. But when the gods discovered that the most beautiful being on earth had died, they decided that such beauty could not be forgotten. The gods turned Narcissus into a scented flower which, to this day, blossoms in the mountains in spring, and which is still called Narcissus.

# PRINCE OMAR AND PRINCESS SHEHERAZADE

Once upon a time, on the island of Kaledan, lived a king who was famous all over the East, well-loved by his subjects and respected even by his enemies. In spite of having a good and beautiful wife, his life was not always happy. After years of marriage, they had no children and were afraid they would never know the joy of a family. However, at long last, one splendid spring morning, a handsome baby boy was born and his delighted parents called him Omar. In the language of Kaledan, this means "shining light". The years went by and Omar grew into a fine-looking youth, brave, intelligent and kind-hearted. On his eighteenth birthday, the king sent for his son. "Omar, now that you've come of age, you must find a wife. Choose one of the many princesses you've met and whose only dream is of marrying you." "Father," said Omar respectfully, "I've no intention of getting married. I'm still young and I'd rather wait till the time is ripe. I want to think about it for at least another year." The king agreed and Omar spent the year studying with the wisest and cleverest teachers in the kingdom. And though he got to know a number of girls, he did not fall in love. When twelve months had passed, the young prince was again summoned to his father. "Well, son," said the king anxiously, "when am I to announce your engagement?" "Alas, father, I still haven't met the right girl," was Omar's reply. The king lost his temper. "Omar! You must stop wasting time. You're a grown man now and I want to see your heirs. Think of the future and make up your mind without delay." "I'm sorry, father, I can't do that just yet. I'm not in love and so I can't get married." The king, who could not bear to be crossed in such an important matter, went into a rage. He shouted for the guards and ordered them to shut the prince in an old castle in the forest. In the meanwhile, lovely sweetnatured Princess Sheherazade was a maiden whose home was in China. When she became sixteen years old, her father insisted she marry one of the princes that flocked to court her. But Sheherazade was waiting to meet a true love. And since nothing the king, her father, did served to change her mind, he locked the princess up in one of the palaces. "I'd rather be a prisoner," said the princess, than have a husband I didn't love." Meantime, Omar spent lonely sad days in the castle where he was held prisoner. However, two invisible genies, Abhu and Dhabi were amusing themselves, unknown to the prince, by secretly watching his movements. One day Abhu said to his friend: "Omar is the most handsome person in the whole world." "Not so!" exclaimed Dhabi. "The most beautiful person in the world is Sheherazade, the King of China's daughter." The genies started to

argue, then decided to ask Lilibeth, the daughter of the genie king to judge the matter. Lilibeth's advice was this: "Go to China, cast a sleeping spell over the princess and bring her to Omar's castle. When you see them together, then you'll soon see which is the most beautiful." That very night Abhu and Dhabi flew all the way to China. The two genies sent the princess to sleep and carried her to Omar's castle. "They're so lovely, they seem made for each other," remarked the genies, gazing at the two young people together. "If only they could get to know each other . . . " And in the hope that they might, the genies hid behind a curtain and waited . . . Not long afterwards, Sheherazade opened her eyes and, when she saw Omar at her side, her heart began to thump. This was the man she would like to marry. So she took off one of her rings and slipped it on to his finger as a token of love. Then she went back to sleep. On wakening a little later, Omar set eyes on Sheherazade and was overwhelmed by her beauty. "If this girl is as kind as she's beautiful, she would make a wonderful wife," said Omar to himself as he gazed at her in amazement. Then he took off a ruby ring and slipped it onto the princess's finger. Drowsy again, he fell asleep. Abhu and Dhabi crept out from behind the curtain, wide-eyed. "They've fallen in love," said Dhabi. "What are we to do now?" "Take Sheherazde home again. But if they have really fallen in love, they'll move heaven and earth to meet again." And so, when Omar awoke, Sheherazade had vanished. Confused and upset, the prince asked his guards and servants if they had seen her. When the king heard the story, he told Omar: "My lad, you are losing your head over a girl you dreamed about!" "No, she wasn't a dream," the prince insisted. "This is the ring she left me!" Omar was lovesick. The king called doctors and wise men, but there was nothing they could do, for Omar was losing his will to live. And far away, Sheherazade was pining in sorrow. The king was certain his daughter must have dreamt it all. How otherwise could she have met the mysterious young man? The only person who believed the princess was Marzuan, a childhood friend, and he offered to search for the missing youth. Sheherazade handed him Omar's ruby ring. Marzuan set out that same day but, though he traveled far and wide, no one could give him a clue as to the young man's identity. In the meantime, Abhu and Dhabi secretly followed in his tracks. One day, a merchant told Marzuan that, on the island of Kaledan, there was a lovesick prince. Feeling that this might be the very person he was seeking, Marzuan took a passage on a ship bound for Kaledan. After days of sailing, a terrible storm broke, driving the ship onto a reef, where it sank. Clinging to a floating spar, Marzuan held on till the storm died away, then headed for the shore. The beach was deserted, but in the distance he could see the turrets of a castle. Then, as he was getting his strength back, he saw a horseman approach. "Where am I?" Marzuan asked the stranger. "On the island of Kaledan," replied the horseman. "Who are you?" Marzuan jumped to his feet. "I'm a doctor, and famous in my own land. I hear that a prince here is seriously ill, and I'd like to try and cure him." "Yes," replied the horseman, "Prince Omar is indeed seriously ill, but it seems his illness is fatal." Disturbed by his words, Marzuan sold: "Take me to him straight away." When admitted to Omar's presence, without saying a word~ Marzuan showed him the ruby ring. Omar uttered a shriek and leapt to his feet. The onlookers stared in surprise. "This is the ring I gave to the girl I want to marry!" the prince exclaimed joyfully. "That young lady is Sheherazade. She lives in far off China and is dying to see you again," Marzuan told him instantly. Omar was delighted. In finding the girl of his dreams, he would be truly happy. He presented Marzuan with a jeweled sword and a splendid horse, as fast as the wind, as a token of thanks. Then he told him to take him as quickly as could be to the beautiful princess. Overcoming all the difficulties that it had to face during the long journey, the cheerful procession led by Omar and Marzuan, many days later, reached distant China. When they reached Sheherazade's city, Omar announced his arrival by sending a messenger with a letter for the princess and a diamond ring. At long last, the couple had met again. They exchanged their first, affectionate words and found they really were meant for each other. Sure of their feelings and anxious to start a new life together, Omar and Sheherazade quickly asked the king's permission to get married as soon as possible. The invisible genies, Abhu and Dhabi too, were at the wedding, a few days later. "Sheherazade really is lovely!" Dhabi exclaimed. "Yes, but Omar..." said Abhu. "Are you looking for an argument again?" demanded Dhabi. Just then, Lilibeth, the genie king's daughter appeared. "We still haven't decided which is the better-looking," said Abhu and Dhabi. "Well, I'd say they are the best-looking couple in the world," said Lilibeth. "And I'm certain their children will be even more handsome." And so the argument finally ended to everybody's satisfaction, and the two genies hugged each other contentedly.

## THE PARROT SHAH

Once upon a time . . . hundreds of years ago, there lived a brave young Shah. His counselor was a very old wise Minister called Saleb. Like all his subjects, the Shah worshipped the God of Reason. Every day, he went to the temple he had built close to the palace. In response to the prayers, the God gave the Shah good advice on the difficult art of government. Indeed, the kingdom had never been so well ruled and had become very prosperous. One day, at the end of his first visit, the Shah was amazed to hear the God's deep voice say: "You no longer need my advice. You are wise enough. You can keep on praying to me, but this is the last time you will speak to me. But before I leave you to Fate, I will grant you a wish. Anything you ask will be given to you." On his knees before the statue, the Shah thought for a long time before replying. Then he said: "Oh, God who rules over us all, thank you for all you have done for me and my people. Give me the power to transfer my soul into the body of another man or animal, whenever I want. And let my own body remain intact till I enter it again." "It shall be so," said the God. "Now listen carefully..." Back at the palace, the Shah quickly called the Chief Minister. "Would you believe it, Saleb! In his infinite goodness, the God has given me his trust and a great power . . " and he told his counselor all about it. The old man, however, had great doubts about the wisdom of this, but he hid his feelings. "This strange incredible thing could change my master's whole life and destiny," the old man told himself. "I must do my best to make sure he doesn't alter his ways and makes no dangerous changes. What he needs is a wife and family to keep him from making risky decisions. It only takes strange deeds to ruin good government. Far beyond the mountains bordering on the Shah's kingdom lay a great fertile plain, the realm of an old king, who had an only daughter named Gala. Gala was young and beautiful and so sweet and gentle that her father hated the thought of letting her get married. The Court, however, was eager to see her a bride. The king was very possessive and wanted to keep Gala all to himself, and with the help of a wizard, he had thought up a plan to discourage her suitors. A magic tree was planted in the garden, a huge pomegranate that had three fruits. At sunset, the branches bent over to touch the ground and the fruit split open. Inside each laid a soft feather bed. Gala, the princess, slept in the middle one, with her servants on each side. The fruit closed over the maidens and the branches swung back to the sky, carrying the princess high above all danger. Seven walls were built round the garden, each studded with thousands of spikes which nobody could ever cross. The king sent out a proclamation: "Any man wishing to marry my daughter must be noble, rich and handsome. But he must also succeed in

picking the fruit in which the princess sleeps. Yet, if he falters in trying to cross the seven circles of spikes, he will be left to die." As it so happens, the Shah's Chief Minister decided that the princess would make a good wife for his master. As time went by, many fine brave warriors perished on the spikes guarding the enchanted garden. Saleb, however, was sure that the special divine powers of the Shah would help him to overcome any obstacle. So he wanted to persuade the Shah to try and win the princess's hand. Every day, Saleb described the trials men had to go through to reach the king's daughter, and to begin with, the Shah was amused by such stories. Then he became curious and began to ask questions himself. The clever Minister told his master of the princess's beauty and all about her brave suitors. In the end, the Shah began to fall in love with the girl he had never seen, just by hearing so much about her. In no time at all, he began to pore over ways of reaching the fruit. And the Chief Minister was delighted to hear of the Shah's plans. Next day, the Shah ordered a large, brightly feathered parrot with a strong beak to be brought to him. He had decided to use his own magic powers, and he said to Saleb: "My soul is going to enter this parrot, but my lifeless body will return. Watch over it day and night till I come back." After a long prayer to the God of Reason, the Shah did everything he had been told and fell into a deep sleep. His breathing grew fainter and fainter till it died away and he lay still on the bed. Watching worriedly, Saleb saw that the parrot, which had been sitting quietly on its perch, was now flapping its wings wildly. The parrot quickly reached the mountain. The air was cold and he flapped heavily upwards but the highest peak was soon left behind. Far below lay the turrets of the palace and the glinting of thousands of spikes. Somehow, the parrot struggled across ten rows of sharp steel and landed safely beside the magic tree. The sun was setting when Gala and her two servants stepped into the fruit for the night. As the pomegranates closed, the calls of the three maidens rang in the ears of the Parrot Shah, and in the second before they shut, he caught a fleeting glimpse of the beautiful princess. Her gleaming dark eyes seemed to smile at him. Then the branches rose into the air and the fruit shrank back to their normal size. As they pointed upwards, the parrot sprang into the air and, with a blow of his strong beak, ripped the pomegranate containing the princess from its branch. Clutching the fruit in his claws, he flew off into the night. The twinkling stars lit the Parrot Shah's path home. This time it was hard to cross the mountain, but the parrot felt neither cold nor fatigue, for he could still picture Gala's lovely face. As he gripped the magic pomegranate, the parrot knew that it was hindering his flight, and his wings grew weary and slow. In panic, he felt he was going to drop the fruit, but the thought of Gala's eyes filled him with new strength. Suddenly he saw the valley. He was over the mountain. Now, he had to find the energy to go on and re-enter his own body. And then admire Gala, the bride of his dreams. Saleb had been watching at the window, left open day and night, and guarding his master's lifeless body. Full of remorse at having coaxed the Shah into undertaking such a dangerous mission, the poor Minister had never stopped praying. Suddenly, he leapt to his feet: "Thank Heavens!" he cried. "At last! At last! . . " The stars were fading and the sun coming up, tinting the clouds with pink, when the parrot appeared. Gently laying its precious burden on the bed, the bird went back to its perch... and the Shah's body came slowly to life. Saleb threw himself in front of his master. "Sire!" he gasped. "I've been so afraid. I thought I'd never see you again." The magic worked as the sun rose over the horizon and its first rays shone through the window. The pomegranate began to grow and grow as it did each morning, then it gently opened and out stepped Gala, smiling. "Where am I? How did I get here?" she gasped in surprise. The Shah clasped her hand and kissed it fleetingly. "You're in your future husband's palace!" The Chief Minister clapped his hands in delight. The wedding took place the very next day and the couple ruled happily ever after. From that day, all the parrots in the Shah's kingdom were treated with great respect. A parrot was even included in the royal coat-of-arms and fluttered from the army's banners, while to all the people it was a sacred symbol.

# THE PEASANT, THE SNAKE AND THE FOX

Once upon a time, a peasant on his way home heard a feeble voice calling "Help! Help!" He looked round, took a careful step or two then realised that the sound was coming from beneath a large boulder. He asked in amazement: "Who's that calling?" And a voice replied, "It's me. The rock rolled down over my hole and I'm shut in. I can't get out, I'm going to die. Please help me. Move the boulder." The peasant then asked: "But who are you?" "I'm a poor snake," came the reply. "A snake? But if I let you out you will bite me." "No, no, I promise I won't. Get me out, please!" The peasant allowed himself to be persuaded and he shifted the boulder . . . and out of a hole in the ground slid a snake which darted towards the peasant and tried to bite him. The man jumped back and cried, "Why did you do that?" The snake replied, "Because every good deed is rewarded by an evil one, didn't you know that?" "No, I didn't. I don't think that's so," said the peasant. "Very well," said the snake. "Let's go and ask someone. If we come across someone who thinks as you do, well, that's it, but if people say I'm right, then I shall bite you. Agreed?" "Agreed," said the peasant, and off they went. A little later, they met an old mangy lame horse, thin and covered in scratches, with an uncombed mane and dirty tail. The peasant spoke to him. "Listen, friend. If someone does a good deed, what does he get as his reward?" Without a moment's hesitation, the horse replied. "A bad deed. Look at me! I served my master faithfully for years and now that I'm old, he has left me to die of starvation!" At these words, the snake turned to the peasant and hissed, "Did you hear that? I shall bite you now!" But the man exclaimed: "Wait! One question isn't enough! We have to ask someone else." "Bother!" exclaimed the snake. "Very well, let's look for someone else, but wait and see, I'm right and I'll get my bite!" So, leaving the horse behind, the pair went on their way. They met a sheep which, at the peasant's question, said: "A good deed is always repaid with a bad deed. Look at me, I always follow my master and never complain. I obey him all the time and what does he do? He shears my fleece in winter, so I feel the cold, and makes me keep it in summer, so I melt with the heat!" "Get ready," said the snake, "I'm about to bite!" But the peasant said, "Please! We've had the first round, and the second one as well, now let's play the deciding round. If I'm wrong at the third question, then I'll let you bite me." On they went, and in the wood, the peasant caught sight of a fox. Suddenly he had an idea. With an excuse, he left the snake on the road and ran into the wood to speak to the fox. "Listen, fox, do you too think that a good deed is always rewarded by a bad one?" "Of course!" replied the fox. Then the man went on. "Well, listen, I'm going to ask you the same question in front of a snake. If you say that one good deed is rewarded by another good deed, I'll give you a present of a piglet, a lamb or a goose. How's that?" "Good," said the fox. The peasant went back to the snake. "I saw a fox over there," he said. "As you know, foxes are wise. Let's go and hear what he thinks about it." A little later they asked the fox the same question and the fox replied as had been agreed. "A good deed is always rewarded with another good deed, but," he went on, "why ask me that question?" "Because this snake, that I helped to escape from his hole blocked by a boulder, wants to bite me," replied the peasant. The fox looked at the

snake and said, "Hmm! I think a snake can manage to slither under a boulder." "But it was a big boulder," the snake protested, "and, it was blocking the entrance to my den." "I don't believe you!" "Oh, don't you? Well come and see then," said the snake, setting off for his den with the fox and the peasant. Pointing to the boulder, he said, "See? That boulder fell just there," and he pointed to the entrance. But the fox shook his head. "A big snake like you couldn't get into such a little hole," he said. Annoyed, the snake retorted, "Don't you think so?" and slid swiftly into the hole. Then the fox shouted, "Quick, peasant man! Shut him in!" and the peasant rolled the boulder back across the mouth of the den, imprisoning the snake (and I think he's in there yet!). "Ah, fox," said the peasant happily, "now that was a good deed! You got rid of that wicked snake for me! Thanks a million!" "Oh, it was nothing," replied the fox, "but don't forget that piglet, the lamb and the goose you promised me." "No, I won't. Come to the farm this evening and you shall have them," said the man. That same evening, the fox went to the farm, but the peasant appeared with two snarling dogs and a gun, shouting, "Get out of here, you horrible beast, if you don't want to get into trouble!" The fox trotted away, sad and disappointed, muttering, "and they say I'm cunning! The cunning one is that peasant. Oh, well, that poor snake was probably right, good deeds are repaid with bad deeds," and off he went, his tail between his legs, into the wood.

## THE PIED PIPER OF HAMELIN

Once upon a time . . . on the banks of a great river in the north of Germany lay a town called Hamelin. The citizens of Hamelin were honest folk who lived contentedly in their grey stone houses. The years went by, and the town grew very rich. Then one day, an extraordinary thing happened to disturb the peace. Hamelin had always had rats, and a lot too. But they had never been a danger, for the cats had always solved the rat problem in the usual way - by killing them. All at once, however, the rats began to multiply. In the end, a black sea of rats swarmed over the whole town. First, they attacked the barns and storehouses, then, for lack of anything better, they gnawed the wood, cloth or anything at all. The one thing they didn't eat was metal. The terrified citizens flocked to plead with the town councilors to free them from the plague of rats. But the council had, for a long time, been sitting in the Mayor's room, trying to think of a plan. "What we need is an army of cats!" But all the cats were dead. "We'll put down poisoned food then . . ." But most of the food was already gone and even poison did not stop the rats. "It just can't be done without help!" said the Mayor sadly. Just then, while the citizens milled around outside, there was a loud knock at the door. "Who can that be?" the city fathers wondered uneasily, mindful of the angry crowds. They gingerly opened the door. And to their surprise, there stood a tall thin man dressed in brightly coloured clothes, with a long feather in his hat, and waving a gold pipe at them. "I've freed other towns of beetles and bats," the stranger announced, "and for a thousand florins, I'll rid you of your rats!" "A thousand florins!" exclaimed the Mayor. "We'll give you fifty thousand if you succeed!" At once the stranger hurried away, saying: "It's late now, but at dawn tomorrow, there won't be a rat left in Hamelin!" The sun was still below the horizon, when the sound of a pipe wafted through the streets of Hamelin. The pied piper slowly made his way through the houses and behind him flocked the rats. Out they scampered from doors, windows and gutters, rats of every size, all after the piper. And as he played, the stranger marched down to the river and straight into the water, up to his middle. Behind him swarmed the rats and every one was drowned and swept away by the current. By the time the sun was high in the sky, there was not a single rat in the town. There was even greater delight at the town hall, until the piper tried to claim his payment. "Fifty thousand florins?" exclaimed the councillors, "Never..." " A thousand florins at least!" cried the pied piper angrily. But the Mayor broke in. "The rats are all dead now and they can never come back. So be grateful for fifty florins, or you'll not get even that ..." His eyes flashing with rage, the pied piper pointed a threatening finger at the Mayor. "You'll bitterly regret ever breaking your promise," he said, and vanished. A shiver of fear ran through the councillors, but the Mayor shrugged and said excitedly: "We've saved fifty thousand florins!" That night, freed from the nightmare of the rats, the citizens of Hamelin slept more soundly than ever. And when the strange sound of piping wafted through the streets at dawn, only the children heard it. Drawn as by magic, they hurried out of their homes. Again, the pied piper paced through the town, this time, it was children of all sizes that flocked at his heels to the sound of his strange piping. The long procession soon left the town and made its way through the wood and across the forest till it reached the foot of a huge mountain. When the piper came to the dark rock, he played his pipe even louder still and a great door creaked open. Beyond lay a cave. In trooped the children behind the pied piper, and when the last child had gone into the darkness, the door reeked shut. A great landslide came down the mountain blocking the entrance to the cave forever. Only one little lame boy escaped this fate. It was he who told the anxious citizens, searching for their children, what had happened. And no matter what people did, the mountain never gave up its victims. Many years were to pass before the merry voices of other children would ring through the streets of Hamelin but the memory of the harsh lesson lingered in everyone's heart and was passed down from father to son through the centuries.

## **PINOCCHIO**

Once upon a time... a carpenter, picked up a strange lump of wood one day while mending a table. When he began to chip it, the wood started to moan. This frightened the carpenter and he decided to get rid of it at once, so he gave it to a friend called Geppetto, who wanted to make a puppet. Geppetto, a cobbler, took his lump of wood home, thinking about the name he would give his puppet. "I'll call him Pinocchio," he told himself. "It's a lucky name." Back in his humble basement home and workshop, Geppetto started to carve the wood. Suddenly a voice squealed: "Ooh! That hurt!" Geppeto was astonished to find that the wood was alive. Excitedly he carved a head, hair and eyes, which immediately stared right at the cobbler. But the second Geppetto carved out the nose, it grew longer and longer, and no matter how often the cobbler cut it down to size, it just stayed a long nose. The newly cut mouth began to chuckle and when Geppetto angrily complained, the puppet stuck out his tongue at him. That was nothing, however! When the cobbler shaped the hands, they snatched the good man's wig, and the newly carved legs gave him a hearty kick. His eyes brimming with tears, Geppetto scolded the puppet. "You naughty boy! I haven't even finished making you, yet you've no respect for your father!" Then he picked up the puppet and, a step at a time, taught him to walk. But the minute Pinocchio stood upright, he started to run about the room, with Geppetto after him, then he opened the door and dashed into the street. Now, Pinocchio ran faster than Geppetto and though the poor cobbler shouted "Stop him! Stop him!" none of the onlookers, watching in amusement, moved a finger. Luckily, a policeman heard the cobbler's shouts and strode quickly down the street. Grabbing the runaway, he handed him over to his father. "I'll box your ears," gasped Geppetto, still out of breath. Then he realised that was impossible, for in his haste to carve the

puppet, he had forgotten to make his ears. Pinocchio had got a fright at being in the clutches of the police, so he apologised and Geppetto forgave his son. Indeed, the minute they reached home, the cobbler made Pinocchio a suit out of flowered paper, a pair of bark shoes and a soft bread hat. The puppet hugged his father. "I'd like to go to school," he said, "to become clever and help you when you're old!" Geppetto was touched by this kind thought. "I'm very grateful," he replied, "but we haven't enough money even to buy you the first reading book!" Pinocchio looked downcast, then Geppetto suddenly rose to his feet, put on his old tweed coat and went out of the house. Not long after he returned carrying a first reader, but minus his coat. It was snowing outside. "Where's your coat, father?" "I sold it." "Why did you sell it?" "It kept me too warm!" Pinocchio threw his arms round Geppetto's neck and kissed the kindly old man. It had stopped snowing and Pinocchio set out for school with his first reading book under his arm. He was full of good intentions. "Today I want to learn to read. Tomorrow I'll learn to write and the day after to count. Then I'll earn some money and buy Geppetto a fine new coat. He deserves it, for . . . " The sudden sound of a brass band broke into the puppet's daydream and he soon forgot all about school. He ended up in a crowded square where people were clustering round a brightly coloured booth. "What's that?" he asked a boy. "Can't you read? It's the Great Puppet Show!" "How much do you pay to go inside?" "Four pence.' "Who'll give me four pence for this brand new book?" Pinocchio cried. A nearby junk seller bought the reading book and Pinocchio hurried into the booth. Poor Geppetto. His sacrifice had been quite in vain. Hardly had Pinocchio got inside, when he was seen by one of the puppets on the stage who cried out: "There's Pinocchio! There's Pinocchio!" "Come, along. Come up here with us. Hurrah for brother Pinocchio!" cried the puppets. Pinocchio went onstage with his new friends, while the spectators below began to mutter about uproar. Then out strode Giovanni, the puppet-master, a frightful looking man with fierce bloodshot eyes. "What's going on here? Stop that noise! Get in line, or you'll hear about it later!" That evening, Giovanni sat down to his meal, but when he found that more wood was needed to finish cooking his nice chunk of meat, he remembered the intruder who had upset his show. "Come here, Pinocchio! You'll make good firewood!" The poor puppet started to weep and plead. "Save me, father! I don't want to die ... I don't want to die!" When Giovanni heard Pinocchio's cries, he was surprised. "Are your parents still alive?" he asked. "My father is, but I've never known my mother," said the puppet in a low voice. The big man's heart melted. "It would be beastly for your father if I did throw you into the fire . . . but I must finish roasting the mutton. I'll just have to burn another puppet. Men! Bring me Harlequin, trussed!" When Pinocchio saw that another puppet was going to be burned in his place, he wept harder than ever. "Please don't, sir! Oh, sir, please don't! Don't burn Harlequin!" "That's enough!" boomed Giovanni in a rage. "I want my meat well cooked!" "In that case," cried Pinocchio defiantly, rising to his feet, "burn me! It's not right that Harlequin should be burnt instead of me!" Giovanni was taken aback. "Well, well!" he said. "I've never met a puppet hero before!" Then he went on in a milder tone. "You really are a good lad. I might indeed . . . " Hope flooded Pinocchio's heart as the puppet-master stared at him, then at last the man said: "All  $right! \ l'Il\ eat\ half-raw\ mutton\ tonight,\ but\ next\ time,\ somebody\ will\ find\ himself\ in\ a\ pickle."\ All\ the\ puppets\ were\ delighted\ at\ being\ puppets\ puppet$ saved. Giovanni asked Pinocchio to tell him the whole tale, and feeling sorry for kindhearted Geppetto, he gave the puppet five gold pieces. "Take these to your father," he said. "Tell him to buy himself a new coat, and give him my regards." Pinocchio cheerfully left the puppet booth after thanking Giovanni for being so generous. He was hurrying homewards when he met a half-blind cat and a lame fox. He couldn't help but tell them all about his good fortune, and when the pair set eyes on the gold coins, they hatched a plot, saying to Pinocchio: "If you would really like to please your father, you ought to take him a lot more coins. Now, we know of a magic meadow where you can sow these five coins. The next day, you will find they have become ten times as many!" "How can that happen?" asked Pinocchio in amazement. "I'll tell you how!" exclaimed the fox. "In the land of Owls lies a meadow known as Miracle Meadow. If you plant one gold coin in a little hole, next day you will find a whole tree dripping with gold coins!" Pinocchio drank in every word his two "friends" uttered and off they all went to the Red Shrimp Inn to drink to their meeting and future wealth. After food and a short rest, they made plans to leave at midnight for Miracle Meadow. However, when Pinocchio was wakened by the innkeeper at the time arranged, he found that the fox and the cat had already left. All the puppet could do then was pay for the dinner, using one of his gold coins, and set off alone along the path through the woods to the magic meadow. Suddenly... "Your money or your life!" snarled two hooded bandits. Now, Pinocchio had hidden the coins under his tongue, so he could not say a word, and nothing the bandits could do would make Pinocchio tell where the coins were hidden. Still mute, even when the wicked pair tied a noose round the poor puppet's neck and pulled it tighter and tighter, Pinocchio's last thought was "Father, help me!" Of course, the hooded bandits were the fox and the cat. "You'll hang there," they said, "till you decide to talk. We'll be back soon to see if you have changed your mind!" And away they went. However, a fairy who lived nearby had overheard everything . . . From the castle window, the Turquoise Fairy saw a kicking puppet dangling from an oak tree in the wood. Taking pity on him, she clapped her hands three times and suddenly a hawk and a dog appeared. "Quickly!" said the fairy to the hawk. "Fly to that oak tree and with your beak snip away the rope round the poor lad's neck!" To the dog she said: "Fetch the carriage and gently bring him to me!" In no time at all, Pinocchio, looking quite dead, was lying in a cosy bed in the castle, while the fairy called three famous doctors, crow, owl and cricket. A very bitter medicine, prescribed by these three doctors quickly cured the puppet, then as she caressed him, the fairy said: "Tell me what happened!" Pinocchio told her his story, leaving out the bit about selling his first reading book, but when the fairy asked him where the gold coins were, the puppet replied that he had lost them. In fact, they were hidden in one of his pockets. All at once, Pinocchio's nose began to stretch, while the fairy laughed. "You've just told a lie! I know you have, because your nose is growing longer!" Blushing with shame, Pinocchio had no idea what to do with such an ungainly nose and he began to weep. However, again feeling sorry for him, the fairy clapped her hands and a flock of woodpeckers appeared to peck his nose back to its proper length. "Now, don't tell any more lies," the fairy warned him," or your nose will grow again! Go home and take these coins to your father." Pinocchio gratefully hugged the fairy and ran off homewards. But near the oak tree in the forest, he bumped into the cat and the fox. Breaking his promise, he foolishly let himself be talked into burying the coins in the magic meadow. Full of hope, he returned next day, but the coins had gone. Pinocchio sadly trudged home without the coins Giovanni had given him for his father. After scolding the puppet for his long absence, Geppetto forgave him and off he went to school. Pinocchio seemed to have calmed down a bit. But someone else was about to cross his path and lead him astray. This time, it was Carlo, the lazy bones of the class. "Why don't you come to Toyland with me?" he said. "Nobody ever studies there and you can play all day long!" "Does such a place really exist?" asked Pinocchio in amazement. "The wagon comes by this evening to take me there," said Carlo. "Would you like to come?" Forgetting all his promises to his father and the fairy, Pinocchio was again heading for trouble. Midnight struck, and the wagon arrived to pick up the two friends, along with some other lads who could hardly wait to reach a place where schoolbooks and

teachers had never been heard of. Twelve pairs of donkeys pulled the wagon, and they were all shod with white leather boots. The boys clambered into the wagon. Pinocchio, the most excited of them all, jumped on to a donkey. Toyland, here we come! Now Toyland was just as Carlo had described it: the boys all had great fun and there were no lessons. You weren't even allowed to whisper the word "school", and Pinocchio could hardly believe he was able to play all the time. "This is the life!" he said each time he met Carlo. "I was right, wasn't I?" exclaimed his friend, pleased with himself. "Oh, yes Carlo! Thanks to you I'm enjoying myself. And just think: teacher told me to keep well away from you." One day, however, Pinocchio awoke to a nasty surprise. When he raised a hand to his head, he found he had sprouted a long pair of hairy ears, in place of the sketchy ears that Geppetto had never got round to finishing. And that wasn't all! The next day, they had grown longer than ever. Pinocchio shamefully pulled on a large cotton cap and went off to search for Carlo. He too was wearing a hat, pulled right down to his nose. With the same thought in their heads, the boys stared at each other, then snatching off their hats, they began to laugh at the funny sight of long hairy ears. But as they screamed with laughter, Carlo suddenly went pale and began to stagger. "Pinocchio, help! Help!" But Pinocchio himself was stumbling about and he burst into tears. For their faces were growing into the shape of a donkey's head and they felt themselves go down on all fours. Pinocchio and Carlo were turning into a pair of donkeys. And when they tried to groan with fear, they brayed loudly instead. When the Toyland wagon driver heard the braying of his new donkeys, he rubbed his hands in glee. "There are two fine new donkeys to take to market. I'll get at least four gold pieces for them!" For such was the awful fate that awaited naughty little boys that played truant from school to spend all their time playing games. Carlo was sold to a farmer, and a circus man bought Pinocchio to teach him to do tricks like his other performing animals. It was a hard life for a donkey! Nothing to eat but hay, and when that was gone, nothing but straw. And the beatings! Pinocchio was beaten every day till he had mastered the difficult circus tricks. One day, as he was jumping through the hoop, he stumbled and went lame. The circus man called the stable boy. "A lame donkey is no use to me," he said. "Take it to market and get rid of it at any price!" But nobody wanted to buy a useless donkey. Then along came a little man who said: "I'll take it for the skin. It will make a good drum for the village band!" And so, for a few pennies, Pinocchio changed hands and he brayed sorrowfully when he heard what his awful fate was to be. The puppet's new owner led him to the edge of the sea, tied a large stone to his neck, and a long rope round Pinocchio's legs and pushed him into the water. Clutching the end of the rope, the man sat down to wait for Pinocchio to drown. Then he would flay off the donkey's skin. Pinocchio struggled for breath at the bottom of the sea, and in a flash, remembered all the bother he had given Geppetto, his broken promises too, and he called on the fairy. The fairy heard Pinocchio's call and when she saw he was about to drown, she sent a shoal of big fish. They ate away all the donkey flesh, leaving the wooden Pinocchio. Just then, as the fish stopped nibbling, Pinocchio felt himself hauled out of the water. And the man gaped in astonishment at the living puppet, twisting and turning like an eel, which appeared in place of the dead donkey. When he recovered his wits, he babbled, almost in tears: "Where's the donkey I threw into the sea?" "I'm that donkey",  $giggled\ Pinocchio.\ "You!"\ gasped\ the\ man.\ "Don't\ try\ pulling\ my\ leg.\ If\ I\ get\ angry\ \dots "\ However,\ Pinocchio\ told\ the\ man\ the\ whole$ story . . . "and that's how you come to have a live puppet on the end of the rope instead of a dead donkey!" "I don't give a whit for your story," shouted the man in a rage. "All I know is that I paid twenty coins for you and I want my money back! Since there's no donkey, I'll take you to market and sell you as firewood!" By then free of the rope, Pinocchio made a face at the man and dived into the sea. Thankful to be a wooden puppet again, Pinocchio swam happily out to sea and was soon just a dot on the horizon. But his adventures were far from over. Out of the water behind him loomed a terrible giant shark! A horrified Pinocchio saw its wide open jaws and tried to swim away as fast as he could, but the monster only glided closer. Then the puppet tried to escape by going in the other direction, but in vain. He could never escape the shark, for as the water rushed into its cavern-like mouth, he was sucked in with it. And in an instant Pinocchio had been swallowed along with shoals of fish unlucky enough to be in the fierce creature's path. Down he went, tossed in the torrent of water as it poured down the shark's throat, till he felt dizzy. When Pinocchio came to his senses, he was in darkness. Over his head, he could hear the loud heave of the shark's gills. On his hands and knees, the puppet crept down what felt like a sloping path, crying as he went: "Help! Help! Won't anybody save me?" Suddenly, he noticed a pale light and, as he crept towards it, he saw it was a flame in the distance. On he went, till: "Father! It can't be you! . . . " "Pinocchio! Son! It really is you . . . "Weeping for joy, they hugged each other and, between sobs, told their adventures. Geppetto stroked the puppet's head and told him how he came to be in the shark's stomach. "I was looking for you everywhere. When I couldn't find you on dry land, I made a boat to search for you on the sea. But the boat capsized in a storm, then the shark gulped me down. Luckily, it also swallowed bits of ships wrecked in the tempest, so I've managed to survive by getting what I could from these!" "Well, we're still alive!" remarked Pinocchio, when they had finished recounting their adventures. "We must get out of here!" Taking Geppetto's hand, the pair started to climb up the shark's stomach, using a candle to light their way. When they got as far as its jaws, they took fright, but as so happened, this shark slept with its mouth open, for it suffered from asthma. As luck would have it, the shark had been basking in shallow waters since the day before, and Pinocchio soon reached the beach. Dawn was just breaking, and Geppetto, soaked to the skin, was half dead with cold and fright. "Lean on me, father." said Pinocchio. "I don't know where we are, but we'll soon find our way home!" Beside the sands stood an old hut made of branches, and there they took shelter. Geppetto was running a temperature, but Pinocchio went out, saying, "I'm going to get you some milk." The bleating of goats led the puppet in the right direction, and he soon came upon a farmer. Of course, he had no money to pay for the milk. "My donkey's dead," said the farmer. "If you work the treadmill from dawn to noon, then you can have some milk." And so, for days on end, Pinocchio rose early each morning to earn Geppetto's food. At long last, Pinocchio and Geppetto reached home. The puppet worked late into the night weaving reed baskets to make money for his father and himself. One day, he heard that the fairy after a wave of bad luck, was ill in hospital. So instead of buying himself a new suit of clothes, Pinocchio sent the fairy the money to pay for her treatment. One night, in a wonderful dream, the fairy appeared to reward Pinocchio for his kindness. When the puppet looked in the mirror next morning, he found he had turned into somebody else. For there in the mirror, was a handsome young lad with blue eyes and brown hair. Geppetto hugged him happily. "Where's the old wooden Pinocchio?" the young lad asked in astonishment. "There!" exclaimed Geppetto, pointing at him. "When bad boys become good, their looks change along with their lives!"

### THE POPLAR AND THE STREAM

Once upon a time . . . a woodcutter called I van lived in a huge forest in the north of Russia. A sturdy young man, with his bare hands he built himself a stout log cabin and when it was finished, he thought he would look for a wife. His dream was of a beautiful maiden, tall, slender and fair, with blue eyes and a creamy skin. On Sundays he roamed to distant villages looking for the girl of his dreams. But the only girls he ever saw were dull and not pretty enough. As it so happened, the path he took to work passed close to a pretty little house with green shutters. Often, the corner of a curtain would be raised and a sweet-faced girl would watch the woodcutter as he went by. For he had unwittingly lit the flames of love in a maiden's heart. This young girl c called Natasha; she was very shy, but her love for the woodcutter was so great that, one day, she plucked up enough courage to stop him on the path. "I picked this basket of strawberries myself," she said. "Please eat them and think of me!" "Well, she's not exactly ugly," said I van to himself as he stared woodenly at Natasha, who was blushing to the roots of her hair. "I don't like strawberries," he replied bluntly. "But thanks all the same!" Tears sprang to Natasha's eyes as she watched him stride away. A few days later, the girl again stopped I van and held out a woolen jacket saying: "The air will be chilly tonight when you go home. This will keep you warm. I made it myself." But I van coldly replied: "What makes you think that a man like me is afraid of the cold?" And this time, at I van's refusal, two tears rolled down Natasha's rosy cheeks and she fled sobbing into the house. However, Natasha again watched for the woodcutter. This time, she held out a bottle and said: "You can't refuse a liqueur that I distilled from all the fruits of the forest! I t will ..." But I van broke in saying: "I don't like liqueurs," and I marched straight on. However, he realized he had been very rude, so he turned round, but Natasha had gone. As he walked, he said to himself: "She has gentle eyes . . . and she must be very kind-hearted! Perhaps I should take at least one of her gifts, but ... "The picture of his dream girl slipped into his mind. "I'm so unhappy!" he sighed. At that very moment, on a golden cloud appeared a beautiful lady. "Will you sing a song for me? I'm Rosalka, one of the woodland fairies!" I van stood thunderstruck. "I'd sing for you for the rest of my life!" he exclaimed "If only I could . . . " and he stretched out his hand to touch the fairy, but she floated out of reach amongst the branches. "Sing then! Sing! Only the sound of your voice will ever send me to sleep!" So I van happily sang all the old lullables and love songs, while the drowsy fairy urged him on: "Sing! Sing!" Cold and weary, his voice getting hoarser the woodcutter sang till evening, as he tried to help the fairy to fall asleep. But when night fell, Rosalka was still demanding: "If you love me, sing on! Sing!" As the woodcutter sang on, in a feeble voice, he kept thinking: "I wish I had a jacket to keep me warm!" Suddenly he remembered Natasha. "What a fool I am!" he told himself. "I should have chosen her as my bride, not this woman who asks and gives nothing in return!" I van felt that only the gentle-faced Natasha could fill his empty heart. He fled into the darkness, but he heard a cruel voice call: "... you'll never see her again! All her tears for her great love have turned her into a stream! You'll never see her again!" It was dawn when I van knocked at Natasha's door. No one answered. And the woodcutter saw, with fear, that close by flowed a tiny sparkling stream he had never noticed before. Weeping sorrowfully, he plunged his face into the water. "Oh, Natasha, how could I have been so blind! And I love you now!" Lifting his gaze to the sky, he silently said a prayer: "Let me stay beside her forever! " || I van was magically turned into a young poplar tree and the stream bathed its roots. Natasha had, at last, her beloved I van by her side forever.

## THE 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 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 of 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 exhibited in the castle museum.

#### PUSS IN BOOTS

Once upon a time . . . a miller died leaving the mill to his eldest son, his donkey to his second son and . . . a cat to his youngest son. "Now that's some difference!" you might say; but there you are, that's how the miller was! The eldest son kept the mill, the second son took the donkey and set off in search of his fortune . . . while the third sat down on a stone and sighed, "A cat! What am I going to do with that?" But the cat heard his words and said, "Don't worry, Master. What do you think? That I'm worth less than a half-ruined mill or a mangy donkey? Give me a cloak, a hat with a feather in it, a bag and a pair of boots, and you will see what I can do." The young man, by no means surprised, for it was quite common for cats to talk in those days, gave the cat what he asked for, and as he strode away, confident and cheerful. the cat said. "Don't look so glum, Master. See you soon!" Swift of foot as he was, the cat caught a fat wild rabbit, popped it into his bag, knocked at the castle gate, went before the King and, removing his hat, with a sweeping bow, he said: "Sire, the famous Marquis of Carabas sends you this fine plump rabbit as a gift." "Oh," said the King, "thanks so much." "Till tomorrow," replied the cat as he went out. And the next day, back he came with some partridges tucked away in his bag. "Another gift from the brave Marquis of Carabas," he announced. The Queen remarked, "This Marquis of Carabas is indeed a very courteous gentleman." In the days that followed, Puss in Boots regularly visited the castle, carrying rabbits, hares, partridges

and skylarks, presenting them all to the King in the name of the Marguis of Carabas. Folk at the palace began to talk about this noble gentleman. "He must be a great hunter," someone remarked. "He must be very loyal to the King," said someone else. And yet another, "But who is he? I've never heard of him." At this someone who wanted to show people how much he knew, replied, "Oh, yes, I've heard his name before. In fact, I knew his father." The Queen was very interested in this generous man who sent these gifts. "Is your master young and handsome?" she asked the cat. "Oh yes. And very rich, too," answered Puss in Boots. "In fact, he would be very honoured if you and the King called to see him in his castle." When the cat returned home and told his master that the King and Queen were going to visit him, he was horrified. "Whatever shall we do?" he cried. "As soon as they see me they will know how poor I am." "Leave everything to me," replied Puss in Boots. "I have a plan." For several days, the crafty cat kept on taking gifts to the King and Queen, and one day he discovered that they were taking the Princess on a carriage ride that very afternoon. The cat hurried home in great excitement. "Master, come along," he cried. "It is time to carry out my plan. You must go for a swim in the river." "But I can't swim," replied the young man. "That's all right," replied Puss in Boots. "Just trust me." So they went to the river and when the King's carriage appeared the cat pushed his master into the water. "Help!" cried the cat. "The Marquis of Carabas is drowning." The King heard his cries and sent his escorts to the rescue. They arrived just in time to save the poor man, who really was drowning. The King, the Queen and the Princess fussed around and ordered new clothes to be brought for the Marquis of Carabas. "Wouldn't you like to marry such a handsome man?" the Queen asked her daughter. "Oh, yes," replied the Princess. However, the cat overheard one of the ministers remark that they must find out how rich he was. "He is very rich indeed," said Puss in Boots. "He owns the castle and all this land. Come and see for yourself. I will meet you at the castle." And with these words, the cat rushed off in the direction of the castle, shouting at the peasants working in the fields, "If anyone asks you who your master is, answer: the Marquis of Carabas. Otherwise you will all be sorry." And so, when the King's carriage swept past, the peasants told the King that their master was the Marquis of Carabas. In the meantime, Puss in Boots had arrived at the castle, the home of a huge, cruel ogre. Before knocking at the gate, the cat said to himself, "I must be very careful, or I'll never get out of here alive." When the door opened, Puss in Boots removed his feather hat, exclaiming, "My Lord Ogre, my respects!" "What do you want, cat?" asked the ogre rudely. "Sire, I've heard you possess great powers. That, for instance, you can change into a lion or an elephant." "That's perfectly true, said the ogre, "and so what?" "Well," said the cat, "I was talking to certain friends of mine who said that you can't turn into a tiny little creature, like a mouse." "Oh, so that's what they say, is it?" exclaimed the ogre. The cat nodded, "Well, Sire, that's my opinion too, because folk that can do big things never can manage little ones." "Oh, yes? Well, just watch this!" retorted the ogre, turning into a mouse. In a flash, the cat leapt on the mouse and ate it whole. Then he dashed to the castle gate, just in time, for the King's carriage was drawing up. With a bow, Puss in Boots said, "Sire, welcome to the castle of the Marquis of Carabas!" The King and Queen, the Princess and the miller's son who, dressed in his princely clothes, really did look like a marquis, got out of the carriage and the King spoke: "My dear Marquis, you're a fine, handsome, young man, you have a great deal of land and a magnificent castle. Tell me, are you married?" "No," the young man answered, "but I would like to find a wife." He looked at the Princess as he spoke. She in turn smiled at him. To cut a long story short, the miller's son, now Marquis of Carabas, married the Princess and lived happily with her in the castle. And from time to time, the cat would wink and whisper, "You see, Master, I am worth a lot more than any mangy donkey or half-ruined mill, aren't I?"

## THE RED DRAGON

Once there was a time, thousands of years ago, when animals were not the same as they are now. Except for a few like the lion, the tiger and the butterflies, they all looked alike. All were more or less the same height, everyone had four legs and it wasn't easy to tell which was which, even though the elephant did weigh more than the hyena, and the hippo more than the gazelle. One day, while all the animals were relaxing in a field, along came a red dragon, out of breath, crying, "We're in danger, folks! The world is about to come to an end!" "How do you know?" everyone asked. The dragon replied, "I read it in the stars. We must escape!" "But where can we go?" they asked him. "To another world," he replied. "I'll take you there. I can fly and I'll take you to a planet that is safer than this one." Frightened, as they were, all the animals climbed on to the dragon's back. With a bored look, the lion said, "I'm not scared of anything, so I'll just stay here on Earth." The others, however, were fighting to get on the dragon's back. "Don't push, you behind!" shouted the crocodile. "Hey, move that paw!" It was just like people today pushing and shoving to get onto an overcrowded train. At last the dragon cried, "Ready! Off we go," and started to run for takeoff. The first and the second runs weren't fast enough, but at the third try he finally got off the ground, flapping his wings and waving his tail. "Not so fast!" shouted somebody, and another voice yelled: "Faster, or we will end up in the trees!" The dragon replied, "Oh, bother! I'm doing the best I can. Why don't you lot keep still, for once." The fact was that because they were frightened, they did everything but keep still, and so, after a while, the poor red dragon, now very tired, simply could not flap his wings any longer . . . and crashed on a lovely green meadow. All the animals shrieked with terror. Nobody lost his life . . but the snake lost his legs and slithered away through the grass. The rhino bumped his head and grew a horn. All the elephant's teeth fell out, except for two which became very long. The giraffe sprained his neck and it grew to a great length. The hippo rolled about so much he became nearly round, ended up in a pond and didn't come out, he was too ashamed to be seen . . . Well, in that fall, all the animals took on a different appearance and became what they are today. And when the lion saw them, what he said was: "Oh, how funny you look!"

#### THE RUBY PRINCE

Once upon a time . . . a beggar in faraway Persia had a stroke of luck. After a sudden flood, the fast-flowing river near the capital city shrank back to its old bed, leaving mud and slime behind it on the banks. In the dirt, the beggar caught sight of a sparkling red stone. He picked it up and hurried off to visit one of his friends who worked in the royal kitchens. "How many dinners would you give me for this shining stone?" he asked the man hopefully. "But this is a ruby!" exclaimed the cook. "You must take it to the Shah at once!" So next day, the beggar took the stone to the Shah, who asked him: "Where did you find this?" "Lying in the mud on the bank of the river, Sire! he said. "Hmm!" mused the Shah. "Now why did the great river leave such a treasure to you? I'll give you a bag of gold for the stone. Will that do?" The beggar could scarcely believe his ears. "Sire, this is the most wonderful day of my life," he stammered. "My humblest thanks!" Before the Shah locked the big stone in his treasure box, he called Fatima, his daughter and

happily threw her arms round her father's neck. "It's marvellous! Thank you so much. I know it will bring me good luck!" Some months later, on Fatima's birthday, the Shah went to fetch the ruby as promised. But when he lifted the lid of the box, he leapt in surprise, for out stepped a handsome young man, who smilingly said, "The ruby you want no longer exists! I've taken its place. I'm the Ruby Prince. Please don't ask me how this miracle took place. It's a secret I can never tell!" When the Shah got over his shock, he went into a towering rage. "I lose a precious gem, find a prince, and I'm not allowed to ask the reason why?" he roared. "I'm sorry, Sire," replied the prince, "but nothing and nobody will make me tell how I got here." Furious at these words, the Shah instantly decided to punish the young man for his impertinence. "Since you've taken the place of my ruby," he thundered, "you are now my servant, I presume." "Of course, Sire," replied the young man confidently. "Good!" exclaimed the Shah. "Then take my gold sword. I'll reward you with the hand of my daughter Fatima if you succeed in killing the dragon of Death Valley that's stopping the caravans from passing through the forest." As it happens, many a brave young man had lost his life trying to kill the terrible dragon, and the Shah was guite sure that the Ruby Prince would share their fate. Armed with the Shah's sword, the Ruby Prince set off for Death Valley. When he reached the edge of the thick dark forest, he loudly called for the dragon to show itself. But the only reply was the echo of his own voice. He leant against a tree trunk and was about to drop off to sleep when the sound of snapping branches brought him to his feet. A frightful hissing grew louder and louder and the earth trembled. The terrible dragon was on its way. Before him the huge horrible beast reared with open jaws. Unlike all the other brave warriors who had gone before him, the prince stoutly stood his ground; he took a step forward and struck first one heavy blow at the dragon's throat, then another, till at last the monster lay dead at his feet. When he returned to the palace carrying the dragon s head, the Ruby Prince was hailed as a hero. And so Fatima and the Ruby Prince were married and lived happily together. However, as time passed, Fatima became more and more curious about her husband's past. "I know nothing about you," she complained. "At least tell me who you really are and where you once lived!" But every time the Ruby Prince heard such remarks, he went white and said, "I can't tell you. You mustn't ask, or you'll run the risk of losing me for ever!" But Fatima was tormented by the desire to know. One day, as they sat by the river that flowed through the Shah's gardens, Fatima pleaded with him to reveal his secret. White-faced, the young man replied, "I can't!" But Fatima only pleaded more: "Oh, please! Please tell me!" "You know I can't . . . " The Ruby Prince hesitated, gazing at his dearly loved wife and gently stroking her hair. Then he made his decision. "I don't want to see you suffer like this. If you really must know, then I'll tell you that I'm ... " At the very second he was about to reveal his secret, a huge wave swept him into the river and dragged him under the water. The horrified Princess rushed vainly along the bank, crying loudly for her husband. But he had vanished. Fatima called the guards and even the Shah himself ran up to comfort her. But the Princess became very depressed, for she knew that her foolish questioning had been the cause of the tragedy. One day, her favourite handmaiden hurried up to her. "Your Highness!" she exclaimed. "I saw the most amazing thing last night. A host of tiny lights appeared on the river, then a thousand little genies draped the river bank with flowers. Such a handsome young man then began to dance in honour of an old man who seemed to be a king. And beside the king stood a young man with a ruby on his forehead. I thought he was . . . " Fatima's heart leapt: could the young man with the ruby be her husband? That night, the Princess and her handmaiden went into the garden and hid behind a tree close to the water's edge. On the stroke of midnight, tiny lights began to twinkle on the river, then a stately old man with a white beard, dressed in a golden robe and holding a scepter, rose from the water. In the young man beside the throne, Fatima recognized her husband. Covering her face with her veil, she left her hiding place and gracefully began to dance. Wild applause greeted her at the end. Then from the throne came a voice. "For such a divine dance, ask us whatever you wish for and it will be granted!" Fatima tore the veil from her face and cried, "Give me back my husband!" The old king rose to his feet. "The King of the Waters of Persia gave his word. Take back your husband, the Ruby Prince. But do not forget how you lost him and be wiser in future!" Then the waters opened once more and closed over the King and his Court, leaving Fatima and the Ruby Prince on the bank, reunited and happy at last.

said: "This is the biggest ruby I've ever seen. I shall give it to you for your 18th birthday!" Fatima admired the gem in her hand and

#### SALEM AND THE NAIL

Once upon a time . . . the shop belonging to an astute merchant called Salem, and all the carpets in it, were burnt in a fire. Salem was left with nothing but his house, and since he was a trader he decided to sell it. With the money he would be able to buy a new shop and more carpets. Salem did not ask a high price for his house. However, he had a most unusual request to make of would-be buyers: "I'll sell you the house, except for that nail in the wall. That remains mine!" And as they all went off, shaking their heads, they wondered what he meant by this strange Abraham, however, more miserly than all the others, thought the price was fair, and he even haggled it down further. A bargain was struck and the new owner took over the whole house, except for the nail. A week later, Salem knocked at the door. "I've come to hang something on my nail," he said. Abraham let him in and Salem hung up a large empty bag, said goodbye and left. A few days later, he appeared again, and this time hung an old cloak on the nail. From then on, Salem's visits became regular; he was forever coming and going, taking things off the nail or hanging something else up. One evening, in front of the stunned eyes of Abraham and his family, Salem arrived dragging a dead donkey. With a struggle, he hoisted it up and roped it to the nail. The occupants of the house complained about the smell and the sight of the dead beast, but Salem calmly said: "It's my nail and I can hang anything I like on it!" Abraham, naturally, could no longer live in the house under such conditions. But Salem refused to remove the donkey. "If you don't like it," he said, "you can get out of my house, but I'll not pay you back a penny!" Abraham did his best to persuade Salem to take the donkey down, for it smelt to high heaven. He even consulted a judge, but the terms of the bargain were clear. The house belonged to Abraham, but Salem kept the nail. In the end, Abraham was forced to leave, and Salem got his house back without paying a penny for it!

# SASHA, MANSOR AND THE STORKS

Once upon a time . . . in Persia there lived a handsome young man called Sasha, who was the Ruler and greatly loved by all. Sasha had only one enemy, Kashenor, a cruel wicked wizard whose desire was to put his own son Mizrah on Sasha's throne. Sasha loved to collect ancient precious objects, and he always granted an audience to any passing merchants. One day, Kashenor, disguised as a merchant, was taken by Mansor, the Chief Minister, before Sasha. The Ruler bought everything the merchant offered him, but he also asked what was inside a small drawer in an antique box. "I really don't know myself," replied Kashenor, pulling out of the drawer

an old roll of paper written in a long-forgotten language, together with a tobacco jar full of black powder. "I'll give it to you as a present," he told the Ruler. Sasha wanted to know what the writing meant, so he gave the paper to his wise men, and a few days later, they told him what it said: "The man that reads these words will acquire the power to turn himself into an animal, any animal he likes, and to know its language. All he must do is to sniff the black powder and say the word MUTABOR. To turn back to a man again, he must bow three times to the east and repeat the word!" But the roll of paper also contained a warning. It told the reader he must never laugh when in his animal shape, for he would then forget the magic word forever. "Did you hear that, Mansor!" exclaimed the Ruler. "We can turn into animals! Shall we do it?" "Sire, I'll do whatever you want me to," replied the Chief Minister with a low bow. "Good! Then we'll try it tomorrow." At dawn next day, the Ruler and his Minister left the palace, and when they were well out of sight, Sasha took the tobacco jar from his pocket. "What animal shall we choose?" he asked the Minister. Now Mansor had no idea, till he noticed a stork glide past. "Storks!" he cried. "Let's become storks!" Sasha sniffed the powder and together the two said the word MUTABOR. Suddenly, their legs shoveled into long thin limbs and their clothes became snowy white feathers, covering their whole bodies. All trace of the Ruler and his Chief Minister simply vanished. The two storks gaped at each other in astonishment. They flapped their wings and discovered they knew how to fly. At first, they were awkward, but soon became quite good at it. "Doesn't the ground look so different from the air? Let's go and find other storks," suggested Sasha cheerfully, so they headed towards a river estuary. What a lot of bird things they learned on the way. Sasha and Mansor found it so silly to see a stork prancing stiffly around in his funny dance that they forgot all about the warning and began to laugh. They were later to regret bitterly that laughter . . . Full of their new knowledge, the two storks decided, as the afternoon wore on, to return to the palace. Slowly and majestically they flew over the city. Something had happened in their absence, for they could see that the streets were thronged with spectators and a long procession was entering the portals of the palace. Sasha was furious to see a stranger sitting in his golden carriage, escorted by his own servants and guards. Wicked Kashenor's trick had worked, for the wizard's son was on his way to seize the Ruler's throne. "Hurry!" urged Sasha. "We must dash back to the palace. Who is that imposter?" "It's the son of Kashenor, that wizard you once banned from the palace," replied Mansor in horror. "He swore he'd get even. Remember?" But even as he spoke, the Chief Minister shook with fear, for what he himself could not remember was the magic word. The two storks landed on the ground, ready to become humans again, but Sasha could only stammer . . . "I don't remember . . . I don't remember . . . . "They looked at each other sadly: "We'll never be human beings again!" Followed by the Ruler, the Chief Minister rose into the air. "We'll go to Mecca and pray on the Prophet's tomb. Perhaps he'll help us remember the magic word." But Mecca was a long way away and the sun was setting. Tired and hungry, the two storks landed amongst the ruins of an old temple. As they looked around them, seeking food and water, a sudden long-drawn out screech made them jump in fright. Who on earth was living in such a lonely place? Sasha plucked up courage. "Let's go and find out!" he said, and off they went through the crumbled buildings. From a dark corner a pair of big yellow eyes glowed and the mournful cry of some strange creature echoed louder than before. It was a huge owl. "Thank goodness," it said, "I've been waiting for years. The spell is sure now to be broken..." Sasha and Mansor stared at each other in amazement on hearing the owl talk. "Who are you?" they asked it. "I'm Naja, the King of India's daughter. Many years ago, an evil wizard called Kashenor wanted me to marry his son Mizrah, so that he could seize my father's kingdom. One day, disquised as a slave, Kashenor gave me a cool drink in the garden. That turned me into an owl. Kashenor said I'd remain a horrible bird till the day someone came, wanting to marry me. That's why I've been sentenced to making my home in these ruins." "So you're one of Kashenor's victims too!" exclaimed the Ruler, and he went on to tell the owl his own story. "What shall we do now?" they asked themselves. "There's hope yet," replied the owl. "For now and again, Kashenor meets the other wizards in one of the ruined halls. While they're banqueting, they boast of what they've done. If Kashenor should brag of what he did to you, then he might repeat the magic word you've forgotten!" "Goodness, yes!" agreed the storks. "Let's go to the hall." But the owl sat where she was. "Before we go," she said, "one of you must promise to marry me. Otherwise I'll remain a bird forever!" "Very well! I promise I'll marry you, but only if I manage to hear the magic word and break the spell," said the Ruler. So the owl led the storks along a narrow passage beneath the temple, to a hall. "This is their meeting place. We can spy on them from this hole." The three birds took turns at keeping watch. Then one evening, the murmur of voices announced the arrival of the wizards. As they ate and toasted each other's health, Kashenor rose to his feet. "Guess how I succeeded in placing my son on the Ruler's throne?" he said, and when the wicked wizard said the word MUTABOR, the two storks thrilled with delight. "Mutabor! Mutabor!" they repeated. "That's the magic word!" Outside in the open air, the storks bowed three times to the east and said the magic word. Instantly they became men again, and the owl magically turned into a beautiful young lady. The three hugged each other with joy. "I will keep my promise," he assured her, "and when I am on my throne, I shall marry you." The Ruler's next task was to depose Mizrah. Stealing the wizards' camels, they rode all night, and dawn found them at the city gates. "The Ruler is alive!" cried the first people to see them. As they rode through the streets, the citizens pressed round, cheering wildly. "Sasha has come back! Mizrah has lied to us!" The wizard's nasty plan had failed. With a handful of followers, Mizrah had succeeded in seizing the throne, certain that Sasha would never be seen again. But when he heard the news, the wizard's son tried to escape. However, he was captured and thrown into prison. Kashenor too was put in chains, and the citizens themselves pronounced the sentence, when they learned what he and his son had done. "Death! Put them to death!" shouted the Ruler's subjects. And so the wizard was executed. Mizrah, instead, was forced to sniff the black powder that had caused all the trouble and speak the magic word MUTABOR. He instantly turned into a stork and was sent to live in a cage at the top of the highest turret. And in the end, this whole affair, brought much happiness to the palace, for Naja turned out to be the perfect wife of Sasha's dreams.

# **SAYED'S ADVENTURES**

Once upon a time, in the mysterious East, lived a man called Benezar who married a woman called Zemira. They were in love with each other and agreed on all things, except one. Zemira believed in magic, omens, premonitions and fairies. Benezar only believed in what he could see before his eyes. However, that did not mar their happiness at all, and this reached its height, when, one day, in the midst of thunderstorm, Zemira gave birth to a handsome baby boy. When Benezar, who had anxiously awaited the arrival, was allowed to see the baby, he noticed a tiny whistle hanging from a thin silver thread round its neck. "What's this?" he asked. "It's a gift a fairy made to our son," replied Zemira. "It's a magic gift. Take it," she went on, removing the whistle from the child's neck,

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"give it to our son when he is twenty." "All right. But listen, what are we to call the child?" asked Benezar. "Sayed," replied Zemira. The years went by and Sayed grew healthy, strong and brave. He was eighteen years old when he decided to go on a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca. He told his father of his decision. "Yes, I'm pleased you're going," said his father. "In fact, Sayed, take this as a lucky charm," and he gave him the fairy's gift. "What is it?" Sayed asked. "It's a whistle. Your mother, alas now dead, thought highly of it. Carry it with you always." "I will father," said the young man, putting the whistle round his neck. Not long after, the travellers with a hundred camels, many merchants and a host of guards, set out on the journey. Young Sayed was splendidly equipped and armed with a sword, spear, bow and arrows. It was a long, long way to the holy city of Mecca. They travelled over plains, mountains and deserts. It was on a long stretch of desert that they were attacked by a large band of robbers. The 4y were caught unaware, some tried to flee, but Sayed shouted: "Flee? Where do you think you can flee to in the desert? Come on. Let's die fighting!" and he hurled himself against the attackers. At the height of the fighting, Sayed was attacked by a young robber, richly dressed and riding a white horse. The young man bravely faced the attacker and killed him with his sword. A soldier nearby shouted out, "What have you done? You've killed Almansor. This is the end, let's run!" Men ran in all directions. Now practically alone Sayed remembered the whistle round his neck. If it really was magic, it might be able to help him... he put it to his lips and blew hard... But nothing happened. Not so much as a whisper of sound. In the meantime, the others had fled. Sayed was taken prisoner, bound and led before Sheik Selim, a very powerful man, the leader of several of the desert tribes and, unfortunately, the father of Almansor, the very man Sayed had killed. Selim, however, was not an unjust man. When he discovered that Sayed had taken Almansor's life in a fair fight, he refused to allow a hair of his head to be harmed. Indeed, he set him free and entrusted the young man to some travellers about to leave for far off Mecca, the holy city. Sayed thus found himself once more on his travels. However, one night, friends of the dead Almansor captured him. "Your master told you not to kill me," cried the young man. "We're not going to kill you. All we going to do is tie you up and leave you here in the desert. Thirst and the sun, or the vultures or the jackals will do the rest. They, not us, will kill you!" And laughing cruelly, they rode away. Two whole days went by. Sayed was on the point of death, baked by the sun and with no water, when close by passed some travellers belonging to Kalum the merchant. They came to his aid and saved his life. As he came back to his senses with the first sips of water, Sayed spoke: "May Allah reward you, Sir, for saving my life. What is your name?" "My name is Kalum," said the man, "but it won't be Allah who will reward me. You are going to do that yourself. If I hadn't come along, you would have been dead by now. And you are going to work for me until you have repaid that debt. What is your name?" "Sayed," he answered. "Well, Sayed, get up and come with me." The young man went along with Kalum and on the way discovered that he was a rich merchant from Baghdad, so that was the city in which he went to live. At that time, Baghdad was ruled by the famous Caliph, Harun-el-Rascid, wise, valiant and loved by all. Kalum owned a big bazaar in the city and it was there that Sayed was put to work doing all the humble jobs. One day, a veiled woman came to the bazaar. Sayed was amazed when she said to him, "You're Sayed, aren't you?" "Yes," he replied in astonishment. "How did you know that?" "Tell me, have you still got the whistle round you neck?" "Of course!" exclaimed the young man. "You must be the fairy who gave it to my mother. But what is this whistle for? I've tried blowing it, but..." The woman interrupted him. "It will be of no use to you until you are twenty. Then it will save your life. Now tell me, what can I do for you?" "Help me to get home," Sayed replied. "I need lots of money for that, which I don't have." "But you're brave and strong. You can earn it," said the woman, and she explained that, every week, tournaments were held in the city, and Harun-el-Rascid, the Caliph, always watched them. The winners received rich prizes. The veiled woman had weapons, armour and horses and she lent these to Sayed. He took part in the tournaments and always beat the others, winning lots of prizes, as well as Caliph's admiration. Sayed, however, never revealed his name, but just mentioned that he was a horseman from distant Cairo. Now it so happens that the Caliph, Harun-el-Rascid, liked to wander through the city at night, disguised as a beggar or merchant, to hear what folk had to say about him. Not to spy on them, but to try and put right any mistakes he might have made. Sometimes, he was accompanied by his chief minister. Well, one night, as Sayed was going home to Kalum's bazaar, he heard shouts and the sounds of struggle. Four men had attacked to others in a dark corner. The brave young man immediately came to the rescue by killing two of the attackers and chasing the others away. When it was all over, the two victims thanked Sayed and asked him, "Brave youth, what's your name?" "My name is Sayed," came the reply. "I'm Kalum the merchant's shop assistant." "Hmm," said one of the two men, "you seem to be more of a gentleman than a shop assistant. However, take this ring as a reward for what you did for me." Then the other man spoke, "And this bag of coins. You've saved my life and you deserve it. Goodbye!" And away they went. Sayed stood there with the ring and bag in his hand. With these he could now find a ship and go home. Next day he said to Kalum, "I'm leaving. I shan't be working for you any longer." "And where are you going to?" asked Kalum. "Home!" answered Sayed. "Home? But it's a costly journey, and with the wages I pay you..." Sayed smiled, "Your pay certainly wouldn't take me far, but..." and he held out the bag, "but this money will. Farewell!" However, wicked Kalum was not to be defeated. He told the police Sayed had stolen a bag of gold. The young man was immediately arrested. The chief of police asked him, "Who gave you this money?" "A man I'd never seen before," was the honest reply. Sayed was judged a thief and sentenced to deportation to Thirsty I sland, the home of the worst kind of criminals. On the ship the young man thought to himself, "Well, I left home two years ago, proud, rich and happy. Here I am today, twenty years old, in the midst of these convicts, condemned to live and die an innocent man in prison!" During the night there was a terrible storm. Driven by the wind, the ship was flung about by the waves until it crashed onto some hidden rocks. Only one man survived the disaster. It was Sayed. At the mercy of the waters, he groped for something to hold on to, but nothing came within his grasp, until he suddenly felt his fingers touch the whistle the fairy had given him. Desperately, he blew it... and a dolphin surfaced beside him, shaking its head as though to tell him to get onto its back. Sayed clambered up and there found safety. He remembered the fairy had told him that when he was twenty years old, the whistle would save his life! The dolphin carried the young man within sight of land. "Thanks, friend!" called out Sayed as he slid down from the creature and swam ashore. What a surprise awaited him! There was a military camp, soldiers and war machines. Sayed was taken prisoner and brought before none other than Harun-el-Rascid himself. The soldiers who had seized him said, "Sire, this man must be one of the convicts that survived the shipwreck." "Is that so?" Harunel-Rascid demanded gravely. "Yes," replied Sayed, "I did survive the shipwreck. But I'm not a convict." And he explained how he had been reported to the police because of the bag of gold. 'It was given to me," he went on, "by one of two men I saved one night from being attacked by four robbers." Harun-el Rascid looked at the man sitting beside him and then said, "Did the two men give you anything else?" "Yes, they did, this ring," Sayed replied, showing the Caliph the ring which he kept round his neck with the whistle. Harun rose to his feet and exclaimed: "Young man, the two men you helped were my chief minister and myself! Go free, but first tell

me your name." "Sayed, Sire." "Sayed?" echoed the chief minister. "There's a man here in the camp called Benezar, who is searching for his son Sayed." "It's my father!" cried the young man. And it was his father. They hugged each other in delight. Since justice must be done in the world, evil Kalum was arrested and imprisoned as he deserved to be...

### THE SEVEN CROWS

Once upon a time there was, far away amid high mountains, a green valley. The valley was crossed by a clear stream and a woodsman had built his stone house on its shore. The woodsman was married and had seven sons and one daughter. He often had to travel from home to work and his wife had a hard time bringing up the children alone. The daughter did not cause her any trouble because she was kind, pretty and helpful. But the boys were the cause of her problems because they were rude, disobedient and quarrelsome. They had no respect for their mother and she was very worried for them. When the husband returned home tired after a week's hard work, the poor wife couldn't bring herself to tell him of the sons' mischievous behaviour because she didn't want to worry him further. The woman kept her sorrow to herself not realizing that by doing so her sons would only get worse and worse. As a matter of fact, when their father was not home to punish them, the boys kept on taking advantage of the situation which continued to get worse. Their sister suffered most because she loved her brothers even if they were wicked, but she loved her mother especially. Being the youngest, however, none of the brothers paid any attention to her reprimands. One day the seven boys got into the biggest trouble yet. In the woods grew a dangerous grass which causes the animals stomachs to swell. The woodsman had always told his sons to make sure that their goats never ate any. The cruel boys filled a bag with the grass and then mixed it in with the animals' food. Later on the goats and the cow fell ill, their bellies swelled and ached and they could not stand up. "We won't have any more milk! We won't be able to make any cheese!" the mother cried desperately. "How will we survive? The sons laughed maliciously and did not realize the evil they had done until the woman, at the height of her desperation, cried: "I wish you were crows rather than sons of mine!" When she spoke these words, a mysterious cloud overshadowed the sun, it was suddenly very chilly and the boys turned into seven big crows that flew away croaking. The woman was so frightened and felt such regret that she fainted. When the father came back from work the day after, he found out the truth and was very upset. Nevertheless he tried to comfort his wife, telling her she was not to blame for the terrible wish that had been fulfilled. But the house was filled with sadness and despair. A long time passed and the little girl grew older. She still remembered her brothers and rarely smiled. One day she asked her mother's permission to go and look for them. "I will find them, I feel it. I feel I have to go and that they are expecting me. Let me go, Mother, and give me your blessing." The mother could not resist her daughter's pleas and the little girl left home with a little bundle of provisions. She walked for two days through the woods, climbing towards the mountains. Pretty soon she had no more food , her clothes were torn and she was cold and tired. The third day, at dawn, she saw a strange little cottage in the mist. Something attracted her to the house even though it had a gloomy and uninviting appearance. When she was inside the house she found a little table with seven bowls on it and her heart beat very fast ... maybe she had found what she was looking for. There was a large pot full of wheat and oats on the fire. The little girl was very hungry and so she poured a bit of food in a bowl and ate it avidly. Then she went upstairs and found a little bedroom with seven little beds, each one with a different blanket. With tears in her eyes, the little girl realized she had finally found her brothers. Exhausted by the trip and the commotion, the little girl lay down on a bed and fell asleep. Later on, seven chattering crows pushed open the front door and sat around the kitchen table. "Someone has eaten some of our soup," one of the crows said after finding "But who would ever come up here?" answered another. "We're condemned to be alone on these mountains forever." "Nobody will ever come to look for us." When they finished eating, the crows pulled on their sleeping caps, went upstairs and found the little girl in one of their beds. "But this is . . . " one of the crows said, after delicately touching her braid with his beak. "That's right, this is . . . our sister," they said all together. At that moment the little girl opened her eyes and when she saw herself surrounded by the big and ugly birds, she was frightened. But out of one ugly beak spoke a kind voice: "Are you our sister?" The little girl got up and opened her arms: "I've found you! I've found you! We're together again at last!" The seven crows looked at her sadly and one said: "Don't we frighten and disgust you?" The girl hugged every one of them. "I love you very much and even if you've turned into crows you're still my brothers." When they heard this, the crows were moved and began crying. "Why don't you come back home with me?" she asked. "We would like very much to come back," they all answered together, "and we regret our evil ways. But how can we show ourselves to our parents like this?" "Mother would accept you all the same, I am sure of it. She keeps crying and thinking of you," the little girl answered. The little girl insisted and convinced her brothers to come home with her. "There's no need to walk back up and down the mountains like you did. We will fly there and carry you," they said. As they were about to leave, the youngest brother said, "Wait a minute! Let's bring Mother all the sparkling stones we found as a present." "They are really beautiful," the little girl said when she saw the bag with her brothers' treasure. "Do you like them? They might be precious, you know. When we crows see something sparkle, we cannot help ourselves and take it." "This one sparkles more than the rest, maybe it's a diamond." They finally left. The world was very different from above. At first the little girl was scared, but the seven crows held her firmly and flew safely. Then they saw the valley, the stream and the little house where they were born. The courtyard was deserted and when they landed the little girl said, "You wait here and I'll go and call Mother." She silently went into the kitchen and saw the poor woman leaning on the table and weeping. She hugged her and kissed her saying, "Mother I'm back and I  $have \ a \ big \ surprise \ for \ you." \ "You're \ here \ at \ last! \ I \ thought \ I'd \ lost \ you \ for ever." \ The \ poor \ woman \ was \ so \ happy \ and \ moved \ that \ she$ didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. In the courtyard she found the crows. "My poor sons! I missed you so much. I am so sorry to have uttered that curse. A mother should never say such things against her children." "We regret all we have done too. We very much regret our wickedness." They were all crying over the past when, suddenly, another miracle occurred. The seven brothers became boys again. The father, who had heard voices, ran out of the house. "Thank God I can see my children again," he cried as he hugged his sons and his daughter. The years passed and the crows' hats became the only memory of this moving story. The stones the crows had brought to their mother turned out to be precious after all, and the treasure allowed the family to live a better future.

# THE SEVEN OLD SAMURAI

Once upon a time, in far off Japan, a band of fierce robbers had their hiding place on top of a mountain almost always covered with grey clouds, windswept and battered by storms. The robbers lived in a large cave where they had piled their spoils. Now and again, they went down the mountain, attacked a village, murdered the poor folk they chanced upon, stole whatever they could lay hands on and burned it to the ground. Wherever the robbers passed, there was nothing but smoking ruins, weeping men and women, misery, mourning and desolation. The Emperor, worried at this, had sent his soldiers to attack the mountain, but the robbers had always managed to drive them off. The Emperor sent for one of the last remaining Samurai, old Raiko, and said to him: "Raiko, you've served me for many years. Do my bidding for one last time. Go to the mountain at the head of an army and wipe out these bloodthirsty bandits." Raiko sighed. "Your Majesty, if I were young again I'd do it alone. Today I'm too old, far too old to do that, or to command an army." "Must I then," said the Emperor, "submit to the force of these marauding robbers?" The old Samurai replied: "No, I'll go up there with six Samurai like myself." "But if they're all as old as you, how can they help you?" "Have faith in us!" said Raiko. A few days later, the seven Samurai set off on their journey, not with horses, swords, shields and armour, which they could no longer have worn anyway, but dressed as humble pilgrims. From the summit, the bandits watched them come, and their leader said, "Who cares about seven beggars. Let them climb up." The seven reached the cave and Raiko humbly said, "Let us come in, it's cold outside. There's a wind blowing and we, as you can see, are old men. We'll be no trouble to you." The leader of the gang scornfully replied: "Come in, old men, and stay in a corner." And so, the seven pilgrims huddled in a corner while the bandits ate their meal of food stolen from the villages nearby. Now and again, they threw scraps of food and leftovers to the old men, saying: "Eat this, and it is much too good for you." A few hours later, Raiko rose to his feet saying: "The wind has dropped. We can go on our way. In thanks, for your hospitality, we would like to offer you this liqueur, it is sake, rice wine. Drink our health with it." The robbers needed no second telling. In the blink of an eye, they had emptied the goatskin bottle Raika held out to them. And in the blink of an eye they all lay dead, for the sake contained a very potent poison. And so, the seven Samurai, too old to wield a sword, served the Emperor for the last time.

# THE SEVEN VOYAGES OF SINBAD THE SAILOR

Once upon a time years and years ago in Baghdad there lived a porter called Sinbad. As he was passing a palace one day, he saw a bench in the great doorway and thought he would rest on it. So he put down his load, and was about to sit down when curiosity got the better of him and, slipping through the entrance he went into the gardens. To Sinbad it was like heaven. Everywhere there were flower beds, gushing fountains and palm trees, in whose shade many gentlemen were strolling. while pages served them with cakes and drinks. Sinbad couldn't help exclaiming aloud: "Well I never! Here I am, worked to the bone, poor and always hungry while other lucky men never carry burdens, but enjoy good food and drink. And yet, we're all Allah's sons! What a world of difference between me and the people who live here." Sinbad had barely stopped speaking when one of the pages came across to him and said: "Come with me. My master wishes to speak to you." Rather alarmed, Sinbad followed the lad into a hall where the owner of the house was seated amongst his guests. "Come in," he said. "What's your name?" "Sinbad, the Porter." "My name is Sinbad too. Sinbad the Sailor. I hear you've been complaining, but I'd like you to know that I became rich only by working hard and taking dreadful risks. All this during seven amazing but adventurous voyages. I haven't had an easy life, you know. Sit down and I'll tell you my story." "My father," began Sinbad the Sailor, "was a merchant. When he died, he left me a fortune. I was young then and foolish, and I started to squander my riches until one day, I discovered my money had gone. I didn't lose heart, however, for I decided to become a merchant like my father. With the money I earned from selling my furniture and carpets I bought all the goods I could and set out. I boarded a ship at Bassora with other traders and began to trade in every port. One day, the captain dropped anchor near a beautiful island and we went ashore. We had hardly lit the fires to cook our meal when the captain suddenly shouted; 'Quick! Get away! This is no island. It's a huge fish that's been sleeping on the waves so long that trees have grown on it. The heat from the fires is wakening it. It will dive to the deep any minute now. Back to the ship! Drop everything!' Many managed to climb aboard again, but I was too far away and ended up in the sea. Luckily I found a floating empty barrel. Clinging to this and drifting with the winds and currents, I reached an island. As I came ashore, I saw a mare tethered to a stump. Then a man appeared and asked me: 'Who are you? Where have you come from?' 'I've been shipwrecked,' I said. The man went on: 'Follow me,' he said and took me to a cave, where he offered me some food. I told him of my adventure and he listened in amazement. I was dying to know why he kept his horse tethered at the shore. 'I used to be one of King Mihragian's grooms' he replied. 'When the moon is full, we tether the mares on the beach so they can meet with the sea horses. The foals that are born are so beautiful there are none like them in the whole world. This is the time of the new moon and the sea stallions arrive. When it's all over, I'll take you to the king. You're very lucky, you know, for you'd have died of hunger on this desert island if you hadn't met me.' My rescuer introduced me to his friends and they gave me a friendly welcome. Later, back in the city the grooms told the king about my adventure. 'It was Allah's will that you should be saved,' the ruler told me after listening carefully. 'It's your destiny to live a long life.' Because he felt I was under the protection of Allah himself, he showered me with gifts and favours. I was appointed harbourmaster; it was my job to keep a register of all freight in transit and so I found myself in an excellent post. Just the same, I felt homesick, and every time a ship came in, I asked the captain if he was bound for Baghdad, for I intended to ask him for a passage home. One day, however, as I took a note of the cargo on a ship that had just tied up, I asked: 'Anything else on board?' 'Yes,' replied the captain. 'There's still a certain quantity of goods aboard. The owner was lost at sea and must have drowned. I'm going to see if I can sell them and take the money back to his family in Baghdad.' 'What was the name of the man who was lost?' I enquired. 'Sinbad the Sailor.' I let out a shout. 'I am Sinbad the Sailor! I clung to a barrel that saved my life and drifted ashore on an island. There, thanks be to Allah, I met the royal grooms. And it was the king himself who made me harbourmaster. The goods you're carrying on board your ship belong to me.' 'Well, what a story! I've never heard anything like it!' exclaimed the captain. 'I sn't there an honest soul left in the world?' 'Captain!' I gasped. 'Why won't you believe what I say?' 'Because it's perfectly obvious,' he replied, 'that you heard the trader had drowned and now, by inventing a ridiculous adventure, you hope to lay hands on his property!' At that point, I described to the captain every single thing that had taken place on board his ship since the moment it had weighed anchor. He was forced to believe I was telling the truth. 'Good gracious!' everyone gasped. 'We certainly never dreamt that you were safe and sound.' I got my trading

goods back and immediately thought of something precious to give to the king. He was astounded at what had happened, but everyone assured him that every word was true. He too gave me a gift and allowed me to leave with all my belongings. I went aboard. Some days later, I was at Bassora and then back to Baghdad. I had grown far richer than before and guickly forgot all my past suffering." When Sinbad the Sailor had ended his tale, he gave Sinbad the Porter three gold coins and told him to return the next day. The following day, after providing the porter and the other quests with a delicious meal, Sinbad the Sailor again began to speak. "One day, I again had a great desire to travel. I decided to invest some of my money in trading goods and went on board ship at Bassora for my second voyage. To begin with, it was a pleasant journey. Then one day, we reached a strange desert island. Many of the passengers decided to go ashore and I sat down on the bank of a river and fell fast asleep. When I awoke there was not a soul in sight. The ship had sailed, for the captain had forgot all about me. However, I decided to climb a tree and survey the island. It was then that I discovered a great white dome. Full of hope, I marched in the direction of the dome. but as I drew near, I realised it had no doors. The sun had not yet set and the sky was a fiery pink. Suddenly, everything went dark, as though night had fallen. I looked up and saw an enormous bird with outstretch wings, shutting out the sunlight. I remembered then of hearing about a bird so huge it fed its nestlings elephants. The bird's name was Rukh. Just then I realised that the dome was really one of Rukh's eggs. Indeed, the great bird settled on top of the egg and dropped of too sleep. I unwound my turban and twisted it to make a rope. I tied the end of it round the bird's leg so that it would carry me away with it. At the first light of dawn, the bird woke, spread its immense wings and took flight. So high did it rise into the sky that the earth almost vanished from sight, but it landed on a plateau. I undid the knot. Rukh floated down into the valley below and when he returned, it was with a large snake in his beak. Nobody lived on this plateau and, on the other side of the valley lay a mountain far too high for anyone ever to climb. All I could do was clamber down into the valley. When I got there, I saw the ground was littered with diamonds and full of terrible snakes. I couldn't help shuddering. Luckily, the snakes were not moving about that day, for fear of Rukh, but darkness was about to fall. I found a cave and blocked the entrance with a rock. In the morning, I left the cave and started to roam the valley searching for a way out. Suddenly I came upon the carcass of an animal. Just then I remembered once hearing the story of a doomed valley, into which diamond hunters would throw a large dead animal. The precious gems stuck to the carcass and the hunters would then wait for a vulture or eagle to appear. The bird of prey would swoop down on the meat and carry it away in its talons to the plateau above. There, the diamond hunters, shouting and yelling, forced the bird to give up its prey. With this tale in mind, I filled my pockets with diamonds then roped myself to the dead animal. A little later, a huge eagle carried the carcass and me to the plateau. It was just about to tear into the flesh with its beak, when some men appeared, shouting loudly. The eagle flapped away and, though my clothes were bloodstained, I was alive! I told the diamond hunters about my adventure and gave some diamonds to the man who had thrown the carcass into the valley. They all told me I was under Allah's own protection. I had come out alive from the valley of the snakes; something nobody else had ever done before. Next day, I set off homewards. I bartered some of the diamonds for goods to sell and became richer than ever. When I arrived in Baghdad, my friends and relations welcomed me with delight and, again forgetting all my trials and troubles, I went back to an easy life. And that's the tale of my second voyage. I'll tell you about the third tomorrow. It's time to eat now," ended Sinbad the Sailor. Sinbad the bearer of burdens had, like all those present, listened wide-eyed to this story, and again that evening, he found himself gifted another three gold coins. Of course, next day, he hurried back to the sailor's home. He sat at his side till the rich man's friends came, then they sat down to a cheerful feast. When the meal was over, Sinbad the Sailor told the tale of his third voyage. "Rich as I was, I wanted to become even richer. So I got a passage again at Bassora, on a fine vessel, together with other merchants. One day, we ran into a fierce storm and the captain began to cry: 'The ship is out of control! The sails are in tatters! Let's hope we can find shelter in the lee of Monkey Mountain. Though the monkeys are dangerous beasts! Shortly after this, the ship ran aground on the shore of a strange island and, in next to no time, we were surrounded by a tribe of monkeys. About the height of a child, hairy and smelly, they rushed about as we stood there without moving a muscle, afraid of what they might do. All we could do was stand aside and watch them swarm up the masts and tear the rubber lifeboats with their sharp teeth. Soon after, a giant wave swept the vessel out to sea, with the horrid creatures still aboard, together with all our cargo. As we wandered over the island, we caught sight of a huge castle-like building. Though very much afraid, we ventured through the gateway. The castle looked deserted, but somebody certainly lived there for, in the middle of the courtyard stood a large bench and a bonfire of logs was ablaze. We all sank on to the bench and, overcome by fatigue, fell fast asleep. As evening came the ground began to tremble. A terrifying creature was approaching us. It was a real ogre, gigantic with fierce red eyes, long fangs like those of a wild pig, a great mouth and huge ears. The ogre grabbed me and started to prod me with his enormous hands. Luckily I was too skinny for his taste, so he picked out the plumpest of my companions, killed and made a meal of him. After this meal, he stretched out on the bench and slept while we shrank trembling in a corner, unable to sleep a wink. Next morning, the giant went off after locking the door behind him. For us it was a day of terror and the giant, when he returned, picked out another of our little band and made a meal of him too. As soon as he had fallen asleep, we came to a decision: 'We must kill him while he's asleep!' So we put two long sticks into the coals and when they were burning hot, thrust them into the giant's eyes. The ogre leapt to his feet with a scream, knocking us over as he did. Now blinded, he was quite unable to catch us. He fumbled his way to the door and stumbled out, screaming horribly as he went. We ran as fast as we could down to the sea and hastily made a raft out of pieces of driftwood. The raft was barely in the water when we saw the giant coming, with an even more horrible-looking giantess. They started to hurl great rocks at us, and we were hit more than once. Before we could escape their reach, they had managed to kill all my companions except two. Though by now the raft was scarcely afloat, it carried all three of us to another island. Not knowing where we were, we roamed all day, meeting no-one at all, and fell sound asleep when night fell. It was not a peaceful night, however. A giant snake crept up and gobbled down one of my friends. Then it curled up and went to sleep. Shaking with terror, my remaining companion and I climbed a tree. Thinking he was sure to be safe there, my friend settled down in the lowest forked branch. This was to save my life. For the snake later finding the poor man an easy victim, ate him up rather than climb to the top of the tree for me. I didn't see how I could ever get away from this place alive. However, I had an idea. Picking up the planks lying round about, I tied one under my feet, another on each side, one along my stomach, another at my back and the last as a roof over my head. This gave me a sort of armour. When, late that night, the snake did its best to devour me, it could not, no matter how hard it tried. My wooden armour withstood the crushing. The reptile squeezed and squeezed till dawn. but as the sun came up, it wearily gave up and slithered away. I untied the planks and set off in search of food. My wanderings took me to the tip of the island, high above the sea. As I sat there,

downhearted, staring at the water, I saw a ship sail past only a few hundred yards from the shore. The crew heard my cries and I was safe at last. I was hoisted aboard, fed and clothed and later I told them my amazing tale, which naturally astonished those who heard it. A fair wind swept us safely into the port of Salahita. The captain then said to me: 'You're a poor unfortunate stranger here, but I'd like to give you another chance. This ship is carrying a batch of goods belonging to one of the passengers who vanished on a desert island. Nothing has ever been heard of him again. I'm going to sell these articles and take the money back to his family. If you like, you can try selling them. I'll give you a commission on what you manage to sell.' I thanked the captain for his kindness; I was desperately in need. However, the bosun who was busy listing the cargo, asked a question: 'Captain,' he said, 'what name do I put on these goods?' 'Mark them as Sinbad the Sailor's. That's the name of the man who disappeared.' 'But I'm Sinbad the Sailor!' I exclaimed. 'And I didn't disappear at all. I fell asleep on the island and when I awoke, you had all gone. These are my goods. The diamond hunters I met on the mountain, to whom I told my tale, will vouch for all this.' The crowd of seamen and merchants that had clustered round to listen, began to murmur amongst themselves. Some believed my words, others swore I was a liar. Suddenly, however, on hearing the words 'diamond hunters', one of the merchants came up to me and, after a good stare, exclaimed: 'Do you remember when I told you all about the man roped to the carcass I threw into Diamond Valley? Well, this is him! I know his face. Everything he says is true.' At that, the captain sharply demanded: 'What marks do your goods have on them? Which are they?' I told him and he too realised that I was none other than Sinbad. That's how I got my belongings back and was able to go on trading as though nothing had happened. When I returned home, I saw that I was even richer than before. That's all I have to tell about my third voyage," Sinbad said, "but if you come back tomorrow, I'll describe the fourth one." Thus saying, he ordered that the bearer of burdens should be given three gold coins. Next morning, Sinbad the Porter hurried back to his rich friend. They enjoyed a meal and waited till all the other guests had appeared. Then Sinbad the Sailor started to tell the story of his fourth adventure. "As in the past, I began to feel the urge to travel, and I knew I had to go back to sea. I bought a great quantity of goods, said goodbye and went to Bassora to find a ship. To begin with, the voyage was all plain sailing. Till the day a hurricane ripped the sails and broke up the ship. We all ended in the sea, though most of us were able to cling to bits of wreckage and keep afloat. Then the waters grew calm again and the waves washed us ashore on an island. Our first thought was to look for food and as we did so, we came upon a building. A band of naked men rushed out, without uttering a sound and shut us up in a large pen. They brought us such strange food that I, who did not trust them, refused to eat. But, overcome by hunger, my friends gobbled it down. This was to lead to their ruin, for the more they ate, as though by magic, the hungrier they felt. In horror, I realised that the naked men were the subjects of an ogre. They caught shipwrecked sailors, fattened them up with special food and then when they were nice and plump, strangled and roasted them. While my friends, already out of their minds, were led to pasture just like farm animals, I began to starve. By the time I was nothing but skin and bone, nobody was paying the slightest attention to me and I took the opportunity to run away. For seven days and seven nights I walked without stopping. At dawn on the eighth day, in the distance I could see folk picking peppers. They took pity on me and led me to their king. I told His Majesty everything that had happened since the day I left Baghdad, and feeling sorry for me, the king presented me with a silver coin. I decided to stay in that hospitable city. It was easy to make friends with the citizens, and they soon had great respect for me. One day, I noticed that everyone the rich and the poor, always rode bareback. Surprised at this I mentioned it to the king and he asked 'What is a saddle like?' 'Have I your permission to make one?' I asked him. 'If you wish,' he replied, ordering his servants to provide me with everything I required. A skilled carpenter built the wooden shape, stuffed it with wool and covered it with leather. A blacksmith forged the stirrups. Then I strapped the saddle on a horse's back and persuaded the king to try riding it. He was so delighted that he gave me a generous reward for my work. A few days later, I had a visit from the Prime Minister. He too wanted a saddle, and in the end, so did many other important officials at Court. I set to work at making saddles for them all and quickly became wealthy. As time went by, my reputation grew, and the king sent for me one day. 'You are now highly respected and well loved by all here. But what you need is a wife. I wish you to marry the young lady I've chosen for you.' And this I did willingly, for she was rich and beautiful. I was perfectly happy with my wife and lived in peace. 'If I ever go home,' I said to myself, 'I'll take her with me.' But a man's fate is always a mystery. A little time later, I went to visit one of my neighbours. His wife had died and he was desperate. 'My good friend,' I consoled him, 'don't torment yourself like this. You've still a life to live. Maybe you'll get married again and find a wife that is even better than your first one! 'How do you expect me to remarry,' the man replied, 'when I've only one more day to live!' 'What? But you're perfectly healthy!''I know,' he said, 'but I shall be buried along with my wife today. That's our custom.' And as we were speaking, in came the man's friends and relations. The dead woman was gently laid in her coffin and carried to the foot of a hill by the sea shore. There the gravediggers lifted up a great stone, revealing a deep pit. Once the coffin had been lowered into the pit, the widower was obliged to follow it down, taking with him nothing but a jug of water and seven pieces of bread. I cried, 'That's a fate worse than death,' I hurried straight to the king. 'How can anyone be so cruel as to bury the living with the dead?' I asked him. 'It isn't cruel,' he replied. 'This custom has been followed since the dawn of time.' 'Do strangers suffer the same fate?' I asked him. 'Yes. It touches all who live in this land and have married here.' I was aghast. This meant that my life would be linked to my wife's, and if she were to die, I would be buried with her. By sheer ill luck wife did fall ill some time after and died only a few days later. Her relatives arrived, dressed her, adorning her with all her jewellery, then laid her in her coffin. They firmly gripped me and though I struggled and protested, I was lowered into the pit. The stone clanged back into place over my head. Wild with terror, I fainted. When I came to my senses I could see, with the aid of a feeble light filtering from a tiny crack, that I was in a vast cavern. All around, amongst broken coffins, lay skeletons covered with jewels. Horror gave way to madness. I started to gather up the precious stones, without thinking that I would never be able to take them out, for this place was to be my own tomb. Overcome by desperation, I screamed, wept and swore, before dropping exhausted by the wall of the cavern. The days passed. I had carefully rationed my bread and water to make it last. I soon lost all notion of time and had no idea how long I had been down this pit. Yet a small ray of hope shone within me. I had survived so many other adventures and trials that it seemed impossible that I should die now. One day, the noise of rolling stones wakened me from sleep. I leapt to my feet and rushed towards the spot the sound seemed to come from. There I saw a huge badger which, alarmed at my sudden arrival, fled along a tunnel. I followed it and after crawling for what seemed an eternity, caught sight of light: it was the hole in the rock through which the badger had entered. In the open air again, I found myself halfway up the hillside. Fresh air at last! I felt as though I had been given a new lease of life. However, I went back along the tunnel to the cavern and stripped the dead of the jewels they would never need again. On the shore I managed to catch some lobsters and other

mollusks. The days went by, and at last I saw a ship. I rushed to the top of the hill and waved a white cloth. Luckily someone saw it and a lifeboat was lowered into the water. I was soon aboard, safe and sound. The ship continued on its way. It was an uneventful voyage, and some days later, I returned to Baghdad and my family and friends. And that," said Sinbad, "is what happened to me on my fourth sea voyage." With that, the sailor fell silent and his guests remarked in tones of wonder about their host's adventures. It was late when the porter rose to his feet to leave, and again he found three gold coins slipped into his hand. At the first light of dawn next day, Sinbad the Porter went to the house of Sinbad the Sailor, who began to tell another tale. "I was as good as dead more than once during my fourth voyage, but I soon forgot the risks I had run. I began to feel the wanderlust again. This time I bought a ship, signed on a captain and loaded it with cargo. We sailed and traded from one island to another, till one day, we dropped anchor in a bay of a desert island. Far in the distance I could see a white dome. It was a huge egg. That's when I knew I had landed on Rukh's island. Though I warned the merchants not to, they broke the egg and took out the chick. Just as they were about to cook it, the sky grew very dark. Rukh's wings had blotted out the sun. We all ran back to the ship and I shouted to cast off immediately. When Rukh saw that the egg was broken, off he flew in search of his mate. In a very short time, the two great birds came back, circled above the ship for a moment or two, then flapped away. We were well out to sea when we spotted the birds, each gripping a boulder in its talons. The captain managed to swerve and avoid Rukh's rock, but the second boulder scored a direct hit on the prow, smashing it to bits. The ship sank like a stone. As luck would have it, fate floated a spar towards me and clinging to this, I was washed by the tide onto an island beach. I found myself in an immense garden of Eden, thickly planted with fruit trees and full of sparkling streams. After wandering through this garden for a while, I came upon an old man dressed in leaves, beside a spring. Thinking he must be another shipwrecked sailor, I went over to him. Without saying a word, the old man gestured that he wanted to go into the nearby forest, but was unable to walk. So I hoisted him onto my shoulders. However, when we reached the spot I thought he had pointed to, he refused to get down. What's more, as I tried to shrug him off my back, he squeezed his legs so tightly round my neck, I almost choked. I fell to the ground and the stranger began to kick me with an energy that was amazing in one so old and so small. Then I realised I was at his mercy. Indeed, by dint of kicking, he made me carry him here and there, without a moments rest. The only time I got any rest was when he fell asleep. But these breaks were very short, for the old fellow would not let me be. Dazed by his blows, I was furious at being so ill-rewarded for my kindness in helping him in the first place. As I was wandering about one day with the old man on my back, I saw some large water melons in a field. Close by was a vineyard, the vines laden with grapes. I decided I could easily make some wine. The old man said he did not mind and let me get on with the job. Several days later, the grapes had fermented and when the old fellow saw me happily tasting the wine, he snatched the gourd from my hands and drained it dry. A little later, he was flat on the ground, helplessly drunk. I kicked him then as hard as I could and ran off. A few days after this, a storm drove a ship into the bay, where she dropped anchor. I was taken aboard, given fresh clothes and a meal. When the storm had passed, the ship set sail and some weeks later we reached the monkey town. This strange town got its name from the ferocious monkeys that invaded it every evening. Towards sundown, the citizens were obliged to leave the town, take refuge on ships and other craft and stay away from the shore. Anyone remaining in the town would be killed by these fearsome creatures. Here too I had another stroke of bad luck. Having left the ship and gone to visit the town, I lingered at the market and my ship left without me. I was roaming about feeling very frightened, for it was almost evening, when a man came over to me. 'Come with me,' he said, 'or the monkeys will get you!' So I went aboard his boat and spent the night out at sea, returning with the rest of the people in the morning. And for the rest of the time I passed on the island, I spent the night on this man's boat. The owner became a friend and he said to me: 'What's your job? What skills do you have?' 'I'm a merchant,' I replied, 'but I can't trade, for I've lost all I had.' 'Take this sack then,' he said 'fill it with stones. Go with these men and do as they do! Maybe you'll manage to make some money.' So I filled the sack with stones and went with the other men to a palm grove on the outskirts of the town, the home of a tribe of monkeys. The men started to throw the stones at the beasts, and from their perches in the treetops, the monkeys threw coconuts. Whether this was in imitation of the men or in self defence, I do not know. But when we had thrown all our stones, we filled the sacks with coconuts. Back in the town, I took my coconut harvest to my friend. 'Sell as many as you need to and store the rest in my warehouse.' I could not thank him enough for his help. Every day I went to the palm grove and came back laden with coconuts. I sold some and stored the rest in the warehouse. Then one fine day, a ship sailed in. Now was my chance to go home again. I agreed a price with the captain for taking me and my load of coconuts. We set sail immediately, calling at islands and ports, and at all of them I bartered coconuts. On Cinnamon Island I bought cinnamon, on Pepper Island I got a large quantity of pepper. Then we landed on an island where the aloe trees grew. The wood of this tree is the best in the world and I bought a large number of planks. Later, we came to the Pearl Sea. I called the fishermen and promised them many coconuts is they would fish pearls for me. This they did, and they brought me lots of big pearls. 'You have a great fortune there, Sir,' the fishermen exclaimed. Never before had they found so many big pearls all at the one time. With the blessing of Allah, we had an easy trip to Bassora, where I stopped for some time before going on to Baghdad. There I found my home, family and all my friends again. I gave generously, especially to widows and orphans, as I always did. When all was said and done, I had succeeded in gaining nearly four times the amount I had lost. That helped me to quickly forget all my misadventures and I soon dropped back into a carefree, happy-go-lucky life. "Go now!" said Sinbad the Sailor, "but return tomorrow, and I'll tell you what happened during my sixth voyage." Sinbad the Porter received his usual three gold coins and went off home. Next morning, he returned, and was greeted with Sinbad the Sailor's usual kindliness. When the other guests arrived, there was a cheerful feast and all those present praised the sailor's generosity. After the meal, Sinbad began to tell tale. "Well, friends, I was so delighted to be back that my life was a round of parties and festivities. Once more I forgot all my past suffering, fears and brushes with death. One day, certain merchants who had just returned from a long cruise, came to see me, and I was seized with the longing to set out on my travels. So I bought new goods and took a passage on a large ship. It was a peaceful voyage till the day the captain announced in frightened tones: 'The wind has blown us into unknown waters. Anything can happen now, for I have no idea if there are reefs and rocks. I have no charts that show these seas. All we can do is pray to Allah!' Still greatly alarmed, he set the sails to quickly leave behind the uncharted waters. But the wind suddenly veered, so violently that the rudder split apart, leaving us at the mercy of the waves, a short distance from an island surrounded by terrifying rocks. 'There's no hope for us at all!' cried the captain. And a second later, the ship crashed onto the rocks, smashing into a thousand splinters. With one or two others, I managed to cling to a rock. We came later to a wide beach, encircled by a steep mountain. Wreckage from many a shipwreck lay scattered on the shore. Beside the beach, a river flowed for a

short distance before disappearing into an opening in the rock. We quickly discovered that things of value were to be found amongst the wrecks and we picked up rubies, pearls, emeralds and diamonds. Our great fear, however, was of dying of hunger for, though there were a few trees, not one bore any signs of fruit or even a berry to eat. And so, within a few days, everyone had died but myself, and I knew that I could not last long. I decided to dig my own grave. 'If I should feel too weak,' I told myself, 'I shall lay myself down in my coffin and wait for death. Then the wind will blow sand over me and I too will have a proper burial.' I dug the hole, then sat down to await the end, on the bank of the river, cursing my craze for travel. As I gazed at the running water, I suddenly realised that it must be flowing somewhere, perhaps even to a place where people were living. I had to make a raft. With that thought, I set to work using driftwood from the beach. Now, in order to float through the entrance to the rock the raft would have to be short and narrow, so I made it the same length as my own height and found two short sticks as oars. I loaded all the gems I had found and my remaining items of food. Then I shoved it into the water and lay down on it. The current swept me under the shadow of the rock and into darkness. The raft floated along, brushing the walls of the underground passageway, ready to capsize from one minute to the next. Then the tunnel widened and the raft glided so smoothly and so gently that I fell asleep. When I awoke, I was back in the open air, lying on the grassy river bank and surrounded by men. Their friendly looks quickly calmed my fears. 'Welcome, brother,' said one of the men as I opened my eyes. 'Where have you come from? Who are you?' I almost shouted at him: 'In the name of all-holy Allah! Give me a bite of food. Then I'll answer all your questions.' At once the kindly people brought me food and drink, and as I gobbled it hungrily, I told them my tale. 'We must take you to our king,' said the men. 'This is an extraordinary story. He'll be interested to hear it.' A few hours later, we were in the city. My new friends had brought the raft too, with its load. The king gave me a splendid welcome, listened to my tale and said how glad he was I had scraped through. Being curious to hear about life in my own land, he asked me to stay as his guest. 'I've learned a lot from you,' he told me. 'The Caliph of Baghdad seems to be a wise ruler. I wish to send him a gift as a token of friendship and respect. I'd like you to take it to him when you return to your own city.' Not long after, a group of merchants engaged a ship to sail to Bassora. This was my chance. I went to the king and told him I wanted to leave. And with great courtesy, since I was to take his gift to the Caliph of Baghdad, he paid all my travelling expenses. The moment I reached Baghdad, I called on the Caliph with the gift. He was amazed and wondered why an unknown king should be so generous. So I told him what had happened. I spent almost a whole week at the Caliph's court, for the ruler never tired of hearing me repeat my story. At long last, I was free to return home, and I carefully laid my treasure in my strong boxes. And this is the adventure of the sixth voyage," ended Sinbad the Sailor. The porter was handed his three gold coins and off he went. Back he came at sunrise next day, and again Sinbad the Sailor began to recount. "As before, I craved to travel after a while. For a long time, we had fair winds. Then one day, a storm blew up, bringing driving rain, like nothing we had ever seen before. But this was not all, for a little later, the captain began to tear his hair in desperation as he cried: 'Pray Allah if we're to be saved! This is the sea of the doomed, from which there is no return.' Then he took a fistful of earth from a box, dampened it with seawater, sniffed it and went on to say: 'Men, this is a strange part of the world we're in, with evil forces. We've no hope of escape. We are close to the land where King Solomon is buried, and the home of huge deadly snakes. Ships here are swallowed by monster fish!' Hardly had the captain said these words than there was a terrible roar, like the sound of a thousand tempests. In a flash a giant fish rose from the deep and swam towards us. We had barely set eyes on this, when a second and then another even more gigantic fish broke the surface of the sea. All three splashed round and round us, then the biggest hurled itself at our ship, its jaws gaping wide to swallow us. At that very instant, a great wave heaved the ship into the air and threw it against the rocks. Everyone on board was knocked into the sea. Gasping for breath, I managed to grab a plank. Then I found I was alone, for all the others had drowned. 'If I get out of here alive,' I cried, 'I swear to Allah that I'll never again leave Baghdad.' For two days and nights I floated in the sea, but on the third day, my feet located dry land. I was on an island, and as I explored it, I came to a river that reminded me of my previous voyage. Perhaps this river too would carry me to safety. Again I needed a raft, and set about finding suitable bits of wood. Luckily, I laid hands on some precious sandalwood, which is light and floats well. The raft was soon ready and I set off down the river. For two days, everything went smoothly, but on the third day, the current dragged me in the direction of a cave. Terror-stricken, I tried in vain to pole the raft to the bank, but the river carried me into the heart of the mountain. This time the tunnel was not very long, but a series of waterfalls boomed and echoed like thunder and I was battered and beaten by the rushing waters. At long last, after running the risk of being smashed to pieces against the rocks, the river again flowed calmly and carried me along till I came to a city. By that time I was half dead from hunger and terror. An old man with a white beard took me home and gave me shelter. Some days later, he said to me. 'Come with me, my son, to the market and sell your goods.' I could not understand what he meant. What goods? But I said nothing. Then I discovered that the sandalwood, of which the raft was made, was valuable in that country. And so, I again became rich. The old man grew so fond of me he wanted me to marry his only daughter. I had no choice but to agree. In any case, his daughter was kind and beautiful, as well as rich. Time passed and the old man died. I inherited his worldly goods and also his position as chief of the merchants. But I quickly made an amazing discovery about some of the inhabitants of the city: on the first day of each month, certain men grew wings, rose into the air and flew far out of sight. The next day, they went back to everyday life. The first day of the next month, I approached one of the winged men and jumped on his back. Off we flew, higher and higher into the sky, almost touching the vaults of heaven, and I thought I heard the angels sing. Overcome by emotion, I couldn't help calling out: 'Praise and Glory be to Allah!' I had hardly said the last word when a giant tongue of fire leapt from the sky, just missing us by inches. We dived down to the peak of a high mountain and the winged man yelled at me in rage: 'You spoiled everything, praising Allah while we were flying!' 'I never dreamt that it would do any harm,' I replied. 'I'm very sorry. Please take me back to the city.' The man agreed, on condition that I made no mention of Allah while on his back. He took me straight home where my wife, worried at my absence, was delighted to see me. When I told her what had happened, she said: 'You were naive. You mustn't go near these folk. They're brothers to the Devil and hate the name of Allah.' 'What about your father?' I asked. 'My father never had anything to do with them, and never did anything wrong. He wanted me to marry you so there would be no danger of my becoming the wife of a winged man. Why don't you sell everything and let's go together to Baghdad?' I took her advice and some months later, we came home. Here I saw friends and relatives who had given up all hope of ever setting eyes on me again, and they gave us a great homecoming. Everyone was astonished to hear my story, but all were overjoyed when I swore that I had been on my last voyage. And this was also my last adventure," concluded the host. "Please excuse me for my complaints when I didn't know you and had no idea how much you had gone through to become rich," said Sinbad the Porter. Sinbad the Sailor hugged

him and asked him to remain in his house as a guest. And from that day on, Sinbad the Sailor and Sinbad the Porter lived together as brothers.

# A SHREWD FARMER'S STORY

Once upon a time there lived a farmer who worked far from his home in the fields of a rich baron. In the past, gangs of bandits hid in the mountains rising behind the plain but the emperor had sent his soldiers to find and kill the thieves and now the area was safe and quiet. Every once in a while, however, old weapons from past battles could be found in the fields. While he was chopping a stump one day, the farmer found a bag full of gold. The farmer had only ever seen silver coins in his life, and he was so astonished to find all that gold, that when he started walking home it was already dark. On his way home, the farmer thought about the problems that this sudden wealth could cause him. First of all, everything found on the baron's territory belonged to the baron. By law, the farmer had to hand the gold over to the baron. The farmer decided that it was much more fair for him to keep the treasure because he was very poor, rather than giving it to the baron who already had a lot of money. He realized the risk he would run if anyone found out about his luck. He would never tell anyone, of course, but his wife had a reputation for talking too much and she would never keep a secret. Sooner or later he would end up in jail. He thought the problem over and over until he found a solution. Before getting home he left the bag full of gold in a bush next to some pine trees and the day after, instead of going to work, he went by the village to buy a few nice trout, some doughnuts and a rabbit. In the afternoon he went home and said to his wife: "Get your wicker basket and come with me. Yesterday it rained and the wood is full of mushrooms. We must get to them before someone else does!" The wife, who loved mushrooms, picked up her basket and followed her husband. When they got to the woods the farmer ran to his wife shouting: "Look! Look! We have found a doughnut tree!" and he showed her the branches he previously loaded with doughnuts. The wife was astonished but she was even more puzzled when, instead of mushrooms, she found trout in the grass. The farmer laughed happily. "Today is our lucky day! My grandfather said that everyone has one lucky day. We might even find a treasure!" In addition to being a gossip, the farmer's wife was also a sucker. So she believed her husband and repeated, while looking around: "This is our lucky day, this is our lucky day." The basket of the woman was full of fish by now. When she and her husband reached the banks the farmer ran ahead of her, looked into the thicket and said: "Yesterday I laid out my nets and I want to check whether I've caught any fish or shrimps." A few minutes later the wife heard the husband shout: "Run and see what I've caught! What extraordinary luck! I've fished a rabbit!" They were walking back home and the wife kept talking excitedly about the great dinner with the doughnuts, the fish and the rabbit. The husband said: "Let's go by the wood again. We could find other doughnuts!" They went to the spot where the farmer had hidden his gold coins. The farmer pretended to find something. "Look over here! There's a strange bag and... it's full of gold! This is an enchanted forest. We found the doughnuts on the trees, then we found the trout in the grass and now... gold." The poor woman was so excited that tears filled her eyes. She could not utter another word and gulped as she touched the shiny coins. At home, after dinner, neither of the two could fall asleep. The farmer and his wife kept getting up to look over the treasure they had hidden in an old boot. The day after the farmer went back to work, but first said to his wife: "Don't tell anybody about what happened yesterday." And he repeated the same recommendation every day after that. Pretty soon, however, the entire village had heard about the treasure. The farmer and his wife were called by the baron and when they went in to see him the farmer tried to stand behind his wife. His wife, at the request of the baron, spoke first of the doughnuts, then of the trout on the grass and lastly of the rabbit in the river. Meanwhile, behind her, the husband kept tapping his forehead with his finger and gesticulating to the baron. The baron began looking at the woman with pity. "And then I bet you found a treasure, too." "That's right, Sir!" the woman said. The baron turned to the farmer and, tapping his finger on his forehead sympathetically said: "I see what you mean. Unfortunately, I have the same problem with my wife . . . " The farmers were sent home and no one believed their story. And so the shrewd farmer didn't go to jail and spent his money wisely.

#### SIX ABLE MEN

Once upon a time there lived a young soldier named Martin who had enlisted in the royal army to flight a war. The war was long but victorious and when the King abandoned the enemy's territory and returned with his troops to the homeland, he left Martin to guard the only bridge on the river that separated the two nations. "Stay on watch on the bridge," the King ordered. "Don't let any enemy soldier go by." Days and then months passed, and the soldier kept his watch on the bridge. He survived by asking the passers-by for food and, after two years, thought that the authorities had probably forgotten him. He then headed towards the capital, where he would ask the King for all his back pay. His pockets were empty and his only possessions were a pipe, a bit of tobacco and his sword. A couple of days later he arrived in a valley where a stream crossed his path. A big man with hands as big as hams, large shoulders and a bull's neck was sitting by the stream. The man, who had a strangely soft and kind voice, asked him: "Would you like to cross the stream?" The soldier couldn't ask for more. The man effortlessly uprooted a huge tree and laid it across the stream. Martin offered the man some of his tobacco in return and when he found out that the man had nothing to do, Martin asked him to come along. "You'll see all the things we can do together!" They had just begun walking away when they met a hunter who was aiming his rifle at a faraway hill. "What are you aiming at?" "Do you see that cobweb on that tree on top of the hill?" the hunter asked. "I want to get the spider!" The hunter shot and when the three men got to the top of the hill they found a big hole in the middle of the cobweb and no more spider. Martin had never seen anyone shoot that well and he asked the hunter to join them. "Come with us and you'll be in luck!" The three men walked and walked until they arrived at a windmill. The wheel of the mill was turning even though there was no wind. The men were puzzled but further up the road they found a fat man sitting on a tree stump. The man was blowing through one of his nostrils in the mill's direction. The fat man explained to the three amazed fellow travellers that his strength was such that he could sneeze up a hurricane. The soldier convinced him to follow them. As they approached the city, they were approached by a man who hopped about with his legs tied together. "Who tied you up?" they asked in unison. "I did it myself," the man, who was very young and very thin, answered. "If I untied myself I would run as fast as the wind and would not enjoy the sights." And so it was that even this character, nicknamed Fastfoot by the others, joined the group. But the surprises of that extraordinary day were far from over. A little man with a round face sat under a tree. He held his hat over his left ear. "If I straighten my hat," he explained, "I will freeze everything around me." Naturally, everybody took his word for it and the stranger

was asked to join the group. The bizarre company finally arrived at the city. A public notice was hung outside the city walls. The princess announced that whoever would beat her in a race could marry her. The soldier dusted his uniform, cleaned himself up after the long trip and ran to the palace. He wanted to challenge the princess but said that one of his servants would run in his place. The princess accepted his challenge. The morning after, at the starting line, Fastfoot untied his legs and took off like a rocket. Each one of the contestants had a jug that had to be filled at a nearby stream and brought back full to the finish line. On his way back, Fastfoot stopped to pick a flower and after carefully setting the jug on the ground and realizing that the princess was still far away, he decided to lie down and rest for a while. Unfortunately, he fell asleep. Later on, when the princess caught up with him and saw that he had fallen asleep, she kicked down his jug and ran away. She was sure of her victory. From far away the sharp-sighted hunter shot and hit a spot near Fastfoot's ear. Fastfoot woke up all of a sudden and saw the princess approaching the finish line. He quickly ran back to the stream, filled the jug and reached the finish line as fast as lightning. The King was furious. He would never let his daughter marry a miserable soldier. He invited the unsuspecting Martin to the palace. Martin told him about his two years watching over the river, which made the King ever angrier. The King, however, pretended to feel guilty and invited the soldier and his friends to a banquet in a strange dining room. In fact the dining room was lined with iron walls and was built over a huge furnace. The King ordered his men to seal the dining room's door and to light the furnace. Then he proceeded to watch the slow death of the group through an unbreakable glass. The six men began eating but suddenly felt the floor grow very hot, while the room's temperature rapidly increased. But Martin did not lose his head. He straightened the hat of the round-faced little man and pretty soon they were all shivering from the cold. The King uselessly urged his men to throw more and more wood in the furnace, but the soldier and his friends had found a remedy to the King's wickedness. No one had ever come out of this torture chamber alive, but this time the King had to accept defeat, even though he was still determined not to let his daughter go. He offered the soldier a large sum of money as long as he gave up the wedding. "I will fill you a bag of gold and other riches if you forget the wedding." "That's fine with me," Martin said, "and I accept your offer but as long as I pick the bag and the man who will carry it away." The poor King was unaware of the strength of one of the six friends. When he began filling the sack, all of his gold was not enough to fill it. Martin and his friends were rich. When they left court, the King had become very poor. The monarch lost his temper and realized the soldier had fooled him. He called the army commander and ordered two battalions to chase Martin. "Bring them back dead or alive and at all costs!" Later on, the soldiers caught up with the six young men and surrounded them. "Give us back the gold and surrender," they demanded. But the fattest of the men began blowing so hard that horses and soldiers were carried away. In just a few minutes the wounded soldiers were scattered all over the plain and the battalions were no longer a threat to the six extraordinary friends who continued their journey. Then they divided the gold and jewels in equal parts and each one of them went his own separate way. Martin crossed the bridge where he had been on watch for so long without any reward and never turned back again.

## THE SLEEPING PRINCESS

Once upon a time there was a Queen who had a beautiful baby daughter. She asked all the fairies in the kingdom to the christening, but unfortunately forgot to invite one of them, who was a bit of a witch as well. She came anyway, but as she passed the baby's cradle, she said: "When you are sixteen, you will injure yourself with a spindle and die!" "Oh, no!" screamed the Queen in horror. A good fairy quickly chanted a magic spell to change the curse. When she hurt herself, the girl would fall into a very deep sleep instead of dying. The years went by, the little Princess grew and became the most beautiful girl in the whole kingdom. Her mother was always very careful to keep her away from spindles, but the Princess, on her sixteenth birthday, as she wandered through the castle, came into a room where an old servant was spinning. "What are you doing?" she asked the servant. "I'm spinning. Haven't you seen a spindle before?" "No. Let me see it!" The servant handed the girl the spindle ... and she pricked herself with it and. with a sigh, dropped to the floor. The terrified old woman hurried to tell the Queen. Beside herself with anguish, the Queen did her best to awaken her daughter but in vain. The court doctors and wizards were called, but there was nothing they could do. The girl could not be wakened from her deep sleep. The good fairy who managed to avoid the worst of the curse came too, and the Queen said to her, "When will my daughter waken?" "I don't know," the fairy admitted sadly. "In a year's time, ten years or twenty?" the Queen went on. "Maybe in a hundred years' time. Who knows?" said the fairy. "Oh! What would make her waken?" asked the Queen weeping. "Love," replied the fairy. "If a man of pure heart were to fall in love with her, that would bring her back to life!" "How can a man fall in love with a sleeping girl?" sobbed the Queen, and so heart-broken was she that, a few days later, she died. The sleeping Princess was taken to her room and laid on the bed surrounded by garlands of flowers. She was so beautiful, with a sweet face, not like those of the dead, but pink like those who are sleeping peacefully. The good fairy said to herself, "When she wakens, who is she going to see around her? Strange faces and people she doesn't know? I can never let that happen. It would be too painful for this unfortunate girl." So the fairy cast a spell; and everyone that lived in the castle - soldiers, ministers, guards, servants, ladies, pages, cooks, maids and knights - all fell into a deep sleep, wherever they were at that very moment. "Now," thought the fairy, "when the Princess wakes up, they too will awaken, and life will go on from there." And she left the castle, now wrapped in silence. Not a sound was to be heard, nothing moved except for the clocks, but when they too ran down, they stopped, and time stopped with them. Not even the faintest rustle was to be heard, only the wind whistling round the turrets, not a single voice, only the cry of birds. The years sped past. In the castle grounds, the trees grew tall. The bushes became thick and straggling, the grass invaded the courtyards and the creepers spread up the walls. In a hundred years, a dense forest grew up. Now, it so happened that a Prince arrived in these parts. He was the son of a king in a country close by. Young, handsome and melancholy, he sought in solitude everything he could not find in the company of other men: serenity, sincerity and purity. Wandering on his trusty steed he arrived, one day, at the dark forest. Being adventurous, he decided to explore it. He made his way through slowly and with a struggle, for the trees and bushes grew in a thick tangle. A few hours later, now losing heart, he was about to turn his horse and go back when he thought he could see something through the trees . . . He pushed back the branches . . . Wonder of wonders! There in front of him stood a castle with high towers. The young man stood stock still in amazement, "I wonder who this castle belongs to?" he thought. The young Prince rode on towards the castle. The drawbridge was down and, holding his horse by the reins, he crossed over it. Immediately he saw the inhabitants draped all over the steps, the halls and courtyards, and said to himself, "Good heavens! They're

dead!" But in a moment, he realised that they were sound asleep. "Wake up! Wake up!" he shouted, but nobody moved. Still thoroughly astonished, he went into the castle and again discovered more people, lying fast asleep on the floor. As though led by a hand in the complete silence, the Prince finally reached the room where the beautiful Princess lay fast asleep. For a long time he stood gazing at her face, so full of serenity, so peaceful, lovely and pure, and he felt spring to his heart that love he had always been searching for and never found. Overcome by emotion, he went close, lifted the girl's little white hand and gently kissed it . . . At that kiss, the princess quickly opened her eyes, and wakening from her long long sleep, seeing the Prince beside her, murmured: "Oh, you have come at last! I was waiting for you in my dream. I 've waited so long!" Just then, the spell was broken. The Princess rose to her feet, holding out her hand to the Prince. And the whole castle woke up too. Everybody rose to their feet and they all stared round in amazement, wondering what had happened. When they finally realised, they rushed to the Princess, more beautiful and happier then ever. A few days later, the castle that only a short time before had lain in silence, now rang with the sound of singing, music and happy laughter at the great party given in honour of the Prince and Princess, who were getting married. They lived happily ever after, as they always do in fairy tales, not quite so often, however, in real life.

# THE SNOW MAIDEN

Once upon a time there was a beautiful garden which became even more beautiful that day, after a heavy fall of snow covered the ground, the trees and bushes in a soft white mantle. A little boy and girl were playing happily in the garden, they were brother and sister. They chased each other, threw snowballs and played hide and seek under the fir trees. Then the little girl said, "Let's make a snow doll." They began to make a snow doll and decided it would be a girl. "So there will be three of us and we'll have more fun!" said the little girl. So they carefully built a doll made of snow, with a pretty oval face, long hair, large eyes and a delicate little mouth. It looked just like a real little girl. "Let's give her a kiss and maybe her lips will turn red like ours," said the sister. So they kissed the doll... and lo and behold, its lips turned red! And the snow doll's cheeks turned pink. When a sudden gust of wind blew from the north, the doll came to life. It moved, smiled at the two children and started to play with them. Some time later, the children's father returned from town. When he saw the girl in white playing with his own children, he said to himself, "It must be one of the neighbour's daughters." Then he said to the little snow doll, "Come into the house and get warm." But the snow maiden made a frightened sign as though to say "No!" The man, however led her into the house, saying, "Oh, you're so cold! The fire will soon warm you up!" But the snow maiden sighed sadly, though she didn't have the courage to speak. In she went and stood by the window, looking out at the white garden. Then she began to weep - as slowly and gently, she began to melt... until nothing was left of her except a trace of white snow on the floor...

### THE SNOW QUEEN 1

There is a legend that, once upon a time, a beautiful fairy, the Snow Queen, lived on the highest, most solitary peaks of the Alps. The mountain folk and shepherds climbed to the summits to admire her, and everyone fell head over heels in love with her. Every man would have given anything, including his life, to marry her. Indeed, their lives are just what they did give: for Fate had decided that no mortal would every marry the Snow Queen. But in spite of that, many brave souls did their best to approach her, hoping always to persuade her. Each suitor was allowed to enter the great ice palace with the crystal roof, where the Queen's throne stood. But the second he declared his love and asked for her hand, thousands of goblins appeared to grasp him and push him over the rocks, down into bottomless abysses. Without the slightest emotion, the Queen would watch the scene, her heart of ice unable to feel anything at all. The legend of the crystal palace and the beautiful heartless Queen spread as far as the most distant alpine valley, the home of a fearless chamois hunter. Fascinated by the tale, he decided to set out and try his luck. Leaving his valley, he journeyed for days on end, climbing the snow clad mountain faces, scaling icebound peaks and defying the bitterly cold wind that swept through the alpine gullies. More than once he felt all was lost, but the thought of the lovely Snow Queen gave him new strength and kept him moving onwards. At last, after many days climbing, he saw glinting in the sunshine before him, the tall transparent spires of the ice palace. Summoning all his courage, the young man entered the Throne Room. But he was so struck by the Snow Queen's beauty that he could not utter a word. Shy and timid, he did not dare speak. So he knelt in admiration before the Queen for hours on end, without opening his mouth. The Queen looked at him silently, thinking all the while that, provided he did not ask her hand in marriage, there was no need to call the goblins. Then, to her great surprise, she discovered that his behaviour touched her heart. She realised she was becoming quite fond of this hunter, much younger and more handsome than her other suitors. Time passed and the Snow Queen dared not admit, not even to herself, that she would actually like to marry the young man. In the meantime, the goblins kept watch over their mistress; first they were astonished, then they became more and more upset. For they rightly feared that their Queen might be on the point of breaking the Law and bringing down on the heads of all the Mountain People the fury of Fate. Seeing that the Queen was slow to give the order to get rid of her suitor, the goblins decided to take matters into their own hands. One night, as dusk fell, they slipped out of the cracks in the rock and clustered round the young chamois hunter. Then they hurled him into the abyss. The Snow Queen watched the whole scene from the window, but there was nothing she could do to stop them. However, her icy heart melted, and the beautiful cruel fairy suddenly became a woman. A tear dropped from her eye, the first she had ever shed. And the Snow Queen's tear fell on to a stone where it turned into a little silvery star. This was the first edelweiss ... the flower that grows only on the highest, most inaccessible peaks in the Alps, on the edge of the abyss and precipice . . .

### THE SNOW QUEEN 2

Once upon a time a magician made a magic mirror. In this mirror, a kind face became wicked, a look of hate was reflected as a look of love. One day, however, the mirror broke, and if a sliver of glass from the mirror entered someone's eye, that person's soul became evil, if another pierced a heart, that heart grew hard and cold as ice. In a big town two children, called Karl and Gerda were very close friends, and even the sweet pea that grew on Karl's window sill spread across the street to entwine with Gerda's little rose bush. One evening Karl was watching the snow drift down, when he noticed a white flake slowly turn into a beautiful ice maiden.

Karl was startled to hear the ice maiden speak his name, and he was not to know he had set eyes on the Snow Queen. Winter passed, and one spring afternoon, as Karl and Gerda pored over a book, the little boy told her: "I feel a pain in my heart! And something's pricking my eye!" "Don t worry, said Gerda comfortingly. "I can't see anything!" But, alas, splinters from the shattered mirror had pierced the little boy. Now in the grip of the evil spell, he snapped: "You're so ugly!" And ripping two roses from her bush, he ran off. From that day on, Karl turned into a very nasty boy, and nobody could understand what had happened to him to cause such a change. Only Gerda still loved him, though all she got in return were insults and spite. 79 Winter came round again, though earlier than usual, and bringing far more snow than anyone could remember. One day, just after going outdoors to play in the snow, Karl saw the beautiful maiden he had seen that night, coming towards him wrapped in a white fur coat. She stood in front of him and told him to tie his sledge to her own, drawn by a white horse. Then they sped away. Suddenly, the great sledge soared into the sky and through the clouds. Stretched out on his own little sledge, Karl didn't dare move a muscle for fear of falling into space. At last, they came to a halt on an immense white plain, dotted with lots of sparkling frozen lakes. "Come into my arms," said the Snow Queen, opening her soft fur coat. "Come and keep warm!" Karl allowed himself to be hugged by the unknown maiden and a chill ran up his spine as two icy lips touched his forehead. The Snow Queen kissed him again, and in an instant, the little boy forgot all about Gerda and his past life, as he fell into a deep sleep. In the meantime, Gerda was anxiously searching for Karl, but no one had seen him. Finally, she went down to the river. "Great river," she said, "please tell me if you've seen Karl or if you've carried him away! I'll give you these, if you do!" And she threw her shoes into the river. But the current paid no heed and just swept them back to the bank. Not far away stood an old boat, and Gerda climbed into it. As she drifted with the current, she pleaded: "Great river, silently flowing and knowing all things about men's lives, take me to Karl." At dusk, she stopped by a river bank carpeted with all kinds of flowers. After resting she went into the forest, and though she did not know how she would ever find her friend, a mysterious voice inside her told her to be brave. After wandering far and wide, she stopped, tired and hungry. A crow flapped out from a hollow tree. "If you're looking for Karl," it said, "I know where he is! I saw him with the Snow Queen on her sledge in the sky!" "And where is her kingdom?" Gerda asked the crow. "In Lapland, where all is icy cold. That reindeer over there might take you! "Gerda ran over to the big reindeer, threw her arms around its neck and, laying her cheek against its soft muzzle, said: "Please help me to find my friend!" The reindeer's kindly eyes told her that he would, and she climbed onto its back. They travelled till they came to the frozen tundra, lit by the fiery glow of the Northern Lights. "Karl! Where are you?" shouted Gerda as loudly as she could. When, at last, she found the little boy, Karl did not recognize her. Gerda threw her arms round him, and teardrops dripped onto his chest and heart. This broke the evil spell. Karl woke from his long sleep, and when he set eyes on Gerda, he too began to cry. The second cold splinter of mirror vanished. They had found each other again at last, thanks to Gerda's love, and the reindeer galloped them home. The two plants on the window sills started to blossom again and to twine, a sign of their everlasting friendship.

### SNOW WHITE AND THE SEVEN DWARFS

Once upon a time . . . in a great castle, a Prince's daughter grew up happy and contented, in spite of a jealous stepmother. She was very pretty, with blue eyes and long black hair. Her skin was delicate and fair, and so she was called Snow White. Everyone was quite sure she would become very beautiful. Though her stepmother was a wicked woman, she too was very beautiful, and the magic mirror told her this every day, whenever she asked it. "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the loveliest lady in the land?" The reply was always; "You are, your Majesty," until the dreadful day when she heard it say, "Snow White is the loveliest in the land." The stepmother was furious and, wild with jealousy, began plotting to get rid of her rival. Calling one of her trusty servants, she bribed him with a rich reward to take Snow White into the forest, far away from the Castle. Then, unseen, he was to put her to death. The greedy servant, attracted to the reward, agreed to do this deed, and he led the innocent little girl away. However, when they came to the fatal spot, the man's courage failed him and, leaving Snow White sitting beside a tree, he mumbled an excuse and ran off. Snow White was all alone in the forest. Night came, but the servant did not return. Snow White, alone in the dark forest, began to cry bitterly. She thought she could feel terrible eyes spying on her, and she heard strange sounds and rustlings that made her heart thump. At last, overcome by tiredness, she fell asleep curled under a tree. Snow White slept fitfully, wakening from time to time with a start and staring into the darkness round her. Several times, she thought she felt something, or somebody touch her as she slept. At last, dawn woke the forest to the song of the birds, and Snow White too, awoke. A whole world was stirring to life and the little girl was glad to see how silly her fears had been. However, the thick trees were like a wall round her, and as she tried to find out where she was, she came upon a path. She walked along it, hopefully. On she walked till she came to a clearing. There stood a strange cottage, with a tiny door, tiny windows and a tiny chimney pot. Everything about the cottage was much tinier than it ought to be. Snow White pushed the door open. "I wonder who lives here?" she said to herself, peeping round the kitchen. "What tiny plates! And spoons! There must be seven of them, the table's laid for seven people." Upstairs was a bedroom with seven neat little beds. Going back to the kitchen, Snow White had an idea. "I'll make them something to eat. When they come home, they'll be glad to find a meal ready." Towards dusk, seven tiny men marched homewards singing. But when they opened the door, to their surprise they found a bowl of hot steaming soup on the table, and the whole house spick and span. Upstairs was Snow White, fast asleep on one of the beds. The chief dwarf prodded her gently. "Who are you?" he asked. Snow White told them her sad story, and tears sprang to the dwarfs' eyes. Then one of them said, as he noisily blew his nose: "Stay here with us!" "Hooray! Hooray!" they cheered, dancing joyfully round the little girl. The dwarfs said to Snow White: "You can live here and tend to the house while we're down the mine. Don't worry about your stepmother leaving you in the forest. We love you and we'll take care of you!" Snow White gratefully accepted their hospitality, and next morning the dwarfs set off for work. But they warned Snow White not to open the door to strangers. Meanwhile, the servant had returned to the castle, with the heart of a roe deer. He gave it to the cruel stepmother, telling her it belonged to Snow White, so that he could claim the reward. Highly pleased, the stepmother turned again to the magic mirror. But her hopes were dashed, for the mirror replied: "The loveliest in the land is still Snow White, who lives in the seven dwarfs' cottage, down in the forest." The stepmother was beside herself with rage. "She must die! She must die!" she screamed. Disguising herself as an old peasant woman, she put a poisoned apple with the others in her basket. Then, taking the quickest way into the forest, she crossed the swamp at the edge of the trees. She reached the bank unseen, just as Snow White stood waving goodbye to the seven dwarfs on their way to the mine. Snow White was in the kitchen when she heard the sound at the door:

KNOCK! KNOCK! "Who's there?" she called suspiciously, remembering the dwarfs advice. "I'm an old peasant woman selling apples," came the reply. "I don't need any apples, thank you," she replied. "But they are beautiful apples and ever so juicy!" said the velvety voice from outside the door. "I'm not supposed to open the door to anyone," said the little girl, who was reluctant to disobey her friends. "And quite right too! Good girl! If you promised not to open up to strangers, then of course you can't buy. You are a good girl indeed!" Then the old woman went on. "And as a reward for being good, I'm going to make you a gift of one of my apples!" Without a further thought, Snow White opened the door just a tiny crack, to take the apple. "There! Now isn't that a nice apple?" Snow White bit into the fruit, and as she did, fell to the ground in a faint: the effect of the terrible poison left her lifeless instantaneously. Now chuckling evilly, the wicked stepmother hurried off. But as she ran back across the swamp, she tripped and fell into the quicksand. No one heard her cries for help, and she disappeared without a trace. Meanwhile, the dwarfs came out of the mine to find the sky had grown dark and stormy. Loud thunder echoed through the valleys and streaks of lightning ripped the sky. Worried about Snow White they ran as quickly as they could down the mountain to the cottage. There they found Snow White, lying still and lifeless, the poisoned apple by her side. They did their best to bring her around, but it was no use. They wept and wept for a long time. Then they laid her on a bed of rose petals, carried her into the forest and put her in a crystal coffin. Each day they laid a flower there. Then one evening, they discovered a strange young man admiring Snow White's lovely face through the glass. After listening to the story, the Prince (for he was a prince!) made a suggestion. "If you allow me to take her to the Castle, I'll call in famous doctors to waken her from this peculiar sleep. She's so lovely ... I'd love to kiss her. . .!" He did, and as though by magic, the Prince's kiss broke the spell. To everyone's astonishment, Snow White opened her eyes. She had amazingly come back to life! Now in love, the Prince asked Snow White to marry him, and the dwarfs reluctantly had to say good bye to Snow White. From that day on, Snow White lived happily in a great castle. But from time to time, she was drawn back to visit the little cottage down in the forest.

# THE 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 marvellous 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.

# THE THREE LITTLE PIGS

Once upon a time . . . there were three little pigs, who left their mummy and daddy to see the world. All summer long, they roamed through the woods and over the plains, playing games and having fun. None were happier than the three little pigs, and they easily made friends with everyone. Wherever they went, they were given a warm welcome, but as summer drew to a close, they realized that folk were drifting back to their usual jobs, and preparing for winter. Autumn came and it began to rain. The three little pigs started to feel they needed a real home. Sadly they knew that the fun was over now and they must set to work like the others, or they'd be left in the cold and rain, with no roof over their heads. They talked about what to do, but each decided for himself. The laziest little pig said he'd build a straw hut. "It will only take a day," he said. The others disagreed. "It's too fragile," they said disapprovingly, but he refused to listen. Not quite so lazy, the second little pig went in search of planks of seasoned wood. "Clunk! Clunk! Clunk!" It took him two days to nail them together. But the third little pig did not like the wooden house. "That's not the way to build a house!" he said. "It takes time, patience and hard work to build a house that is strong enough to stand up to wind, rain, and snow, and most of all, protect us from the wolf!" The days went by, and the wisest little pig's house took shape, brick by brick. From time to time, his brothers visited him, saying with a chuckle: "Why are you working so hard? Why don't you come and play?" But the stubborn bricklayer pig just said "no". "I shall finish my house first. It must be solid and sturdy. And then I'll come and play!" he said. "I shall not be foolish like you! For he who laughs last, laughs longest!" It was the wisest little pig that found the tracks of a big wolf in the neighbourhood. The little pigs rushed home in alarm. Along came the wolf, scowling fiercely at the laziest pig's straw hut. "Come out!" ordered the wolf, his mouth watering. I want to speak to you!" "I'd rather stay where I am!" replied the little pig in a tiny voice. "I'll make you come out!" growled the wolf angrily, and puffing out his chest, he took a very deep breath. Then he blew with all his might, right onto the house. And all the straw the silly pig had heaped against some thin poles, fell down in the great blast. Excited by his own cleverness, the wolf did not notice that the little pig had slithered out from underneath the heap of straw, and was dashing towards his brother's wooden house. When he realized that the little pig was escaping, the wolf grew wild with rage. "Come back!" he roared, trying to catch the pig as he ran into the wooden house. The other little pig greeted his brother,

shaking like a leaf. "I hope this house won't fall down! Let's lean against the door so he can't break in!" Outside, the wolf could hear the little pigs' words. Starving as he was, at the idea of a two-course meal, he rained blows on the door. "Open up! Open up! I only want to speak to you!" Inside, the two brothers wept in fear and did their best to hold the door fast against the blows. Then the furious wolf braced himself a new effort: he drew in a really enormous breath, and went ... WHOOOOO! The wooden house collapsed like a pack of cards. Luckily, the wisest little pig had been watching the scene from the window of his own brick house, and he rapidly opened the door to his fleeing brothers. And not a moment too soon, for the wolf was already hammering furiously on the door. This time, the wolf had grave doubts. This house had a much more solid air than the others. He blew once, he blew again and then for a third time. But all was in vain. For the house did not budge an inch. The three little pigs watched him and their fear began to fade. Quite exhausted by his efforts, the wolf decided to try one of his tricks. He scrambled up a nearby ladder, on to the roof to have a look at the chimney. However, the wisest little pig had seen this ploy, and he quickly said: "Quick! Light the fire!" With his long legs thrust down the chimney, the wolf was not sure if he should slide down the black hole. It wouldn't be easy to get in, but the sound of the little pigs' voices below only made him feel hungrier. "I'm dying of hunger! I'm going to try and get down." And he let himself drop. But landing was rather hot, too hot! The wolf landed in the fire, stunned by his fall. The flames licked his hairy coat and his tail became a flaring torch. "Never again! Never again will I go down a chimney" he squealed, as he tried to put out the flames in his tail. Then he ran away as fast as he could. The three happy little pigs, dancing round and round the yard, began to sing: "Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la! The wicked black wolf will never come back...!" From that terrible day on, the wisest little pig's brothers set to work with a will. In less than no time, up went the two new brick houses. The wolf did return once to roam in the neighbourhood, but when he caught sight of three chimneys, he remembered the terrible pain of a burnt tail, and he left for good. Now safe and happy, the wisest little pig called to his brothers: "No more work! Come on, let's go and play!"

### THE 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 sold 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.

# THE TIN SOLDIER

Once upon a time . . . there lived a child who had a lot of toys. The child kept his toys in his room and spent many happy hours everyday playing with them. One of his favourite games was the battle with the tin soldiers. He arranged the little toy soldiers in their respective ranks and fought imaginary battles. When the boy received the soldiers, as a present, he noticed that one of them had been made, by mistake, with just one leg. Despite the missing limb, the boy placed the little mutilated soldier in the front lines, encouraging him to be the most valorous of all the little soldiers. The child did not know that, at night, the toys became animated and talked between themselves. It often happened that, when lining up the soldiers after playing with them, the little boy would forget about the little tin soldier without a leg and left him with all the other toys. It was thus that the little metal soldier got to talk to a pretty tin ballerina. A great friendship was born between the two, and pretty soon the little soldier fell in love with the ballerina. But the nights went by quickly, and he did not find the courage to declare his love to her. When the child played with the

soldiers and positioned him in the front lines, the little soldier hoped that the ballerina would notice his courage in battle. And in the evening, when the ballerina asked the soldier if he had been afraid, he proudly answered, "No." But the loving stares and sighs of the little soldier did not go unnoticed by the jack-in-the-box. One night, the jackin-the-box said to the little soldier: "Hey you! Don't look at the ballerina like that!" The poor little soldier was confused and he blushed, but the kind ballerina cheered him up. "Don't listen to him, he is ugly and jealous. I am very happy to talk to you," she said blushing too. The two little tin figurines were both too shy to speak of their love. One day they were separated. The boy picked up the tin soldier and placed him on the window-sill. "You stay here and watch for the enemy," he said. Then the boy played inside with the other soldiers. It was summer and in the days that followed the soldier remained on the window-sill. But one afternoon there was a sudden storm and a strong wind shook the windows. The Little soldier fell head first off the windowsill. His bayonet stuck into the ground. It kept raining and storming and pretty soon the rain formed big puddles and the gutters were full. A group of boys in the nearby school waited for the storm to end and when it stopped raining hard they ran outdoors. Joking and laughing, the boys hopped over the bigger puddles while two of them cautiously walked next to the wall so that the sprinkling rain wouldn't wet them. These two boys noticed the little tin soldier stuck in the sodden earth. "Too bad he has just one leg. Otherwise, I'd take him home with me," one of the boys said. The other boy picked him up and put him in his pocket. "Let's take him anyway," he said. "We could use him for something." On the other side of the street, the gutter was overflowing and the current carried a little paper boat. "Let's put the little soldier in the boat and make him a sailor," said the boy who had picked up the tin soldier. And so the little soldier became a sailor. The whirling gutter flowed into a sewer and the little boat was carried down the drain. The water in the underground sewage was deep and muddy. Big rats gnashed their teeth as the vessel and its unusual passenger flowed by. The boat was soaked and about to sink. But the little soldier, who had faced far greater dangers in battle, was not afraid. The water of the sewer then flowed into the river and the little boat, now overturned, was swept by the high waves. The little tin soldier realized his end was near. After the paper boat was wrecked, he sank in deep waters. A thousand thoughts went through the little soldier's mind, but one in particular anguished him: "I will never see my sweet little ballerina again!" But a huge mouth swallowed the little tin soldier and, once again, his destiny took an unexpected turn. The little soldier found himself in the stomach of a large fish who had been lured by the glittering colours of his uniform. The fish, however, did not even have time to digest his meal because, shortly after having swallowed the soldier, he was caught in the net of a fisherman. Shortly after, the gasping fish ended up in a big basket and was brought to the market. Meanwhile, a cook was on her way to the market. She worked in the very same house where the little soldier used to live. "This fish will be perfect for tonight's guests," the cook said when she saw the big fish on the fish market's counter. The fish ended up in the kitchen and when the cook slit its belly to clean it she found the little tin soldier. "This looks like one of our boy's toy soldiers..." she thought, and ran to the boy to show him her discovery. "That's right, it's my soldier!" the little boy cheered, when he recognized the soldier with the missing leg. "I wonder how he got into the fish's belly? Poor soldier, he must have gone through a lot of trouble since he fell off the window-sill!" The little boy placed the soldier on the mantle, right next to his sister's ballerina. The amazing ways of destiny had once again reunited the two lovers. The little soldier and the ballerina were very happy to be close to each other. At night they talked about what had happened after their separation. But the ill disposition of fate had another surprise in store for them. One day a sudden gust of wind lifted the heavy drape of the window and hit the ballerina, who fell into the fireplace. The little soldier saw his friend fall into the fireplace and he was frightened. He knew a fire was lit because he could feel its warmth. He was desperate, conscious of not being able to do anything to save the ballerina. In fact, fire is the greatest enemy of tin figurines because it melts metals. Rocking back and forth on his one leg, the little soldier tried to move the metal base under his feet that held him in place. He kept trying to move until he fell into the fire as well. The two figurines were reunited in their misfortune. They were so close to each other now, that their metal bases began melting together. The tin of one base melted with the metal of the other, and the metal strangely moulded into the shape of a heart. As their bodies were about to begin melting as well, the little boy went by the fireplace and saw the two little figurines enveloped by the flames and moved them away from the blaze with his foot. Ever since then the soldier and the ballerina have been melted close to each other, sharing their destiny and a common base shaped like a heart.

### TIL ULENSPIGHEL

Once upon a time there lived a little boy called Til Ulenspighel. His father was a good blacksmith, his mother a kindly woman but they never imagined that they had brought into the world naughtiest rascal ever heard of! Til had such a lively personality, bright and naughty, that people couldn't help smiling when they saw him. And he got up to such mischief and all sorts of tricks that we can't help smiling to ourselves . . . But as you'll soon see, the ones who didn't see the funny side of things were his fellow citizens. The minute he learned to speak, Til pulled people's legs. If a man, for instance, had flat feet, Til would greet him by saying, "Good day, Mr. Flatfeet!" And if a lady had a red nose, he would say, "Good evening, Mrs. Rednose!" He enjoyed playing tricks and teasing everyone. Of course, the neighbours complained to his father, saying, "Mr. Ulenspighel, what a rude son you have!" And so, one day, Til's father said to him, "Listen, son, why don't people like you? Do you annoy them?" "Who, me?" said Til with an innocent air. "I never bother anyone. It's other people that shake their fists at me whenever they see me and say nasty things." "Hmm!" said his father. "I wonder if that's really so. I'm going to market with the donkey. Get up behind!" Till didn't need to be told twice and he clambered behind his father. But the second he was on the donkey's back, he hung a notice on his shoulders on which he had written: 'Whoever reads this is a donkey.' People did read it and they were offended, so they shook their fists and shouted, "Oh, you horrid boy, Til! What a little horror you are!" On hearing these shouts, Til's father, who knew nothing about the notice, muttered: "You're right, Til. People are angry with you, though goodness knows why! Don't worry," he added, "come and sit in front and we'll see if they still call you names." Til did as he was told and slung the notice over his chest. Though his father couldn't see it, he could see other people as they shook their fists, scowled, shouted and yelled insults, and he said, "Folk don't like you, Til. But pay no attention to them and go your own way!" And Til laughed up his sleeve.... Time went by and Til began to weary of long faces every time people saw him. He joked and teased folk now and again, but what harm was there in that? All he wanted to do was amuse himself and others as well. One day, a company of wandering entertainers came to the town: actors, sword swallowers and acrobats. They made a great impression on the lad, who stared at them open-mouthed. While holding a pole in their hands, they kept their balance as they walked

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the tightrope across the road. How he would love to do the same. The people who now shook their fists at him would clap their hands. No sooner thought than done, the boy picked up a pole, stretched a rope between two trees in the wood and started to practise. Of course, it wasn't easy and he fell more than once. But in the end, he felt pretty secure and decided to hold a show. He went through the streets crying, "Tomorrow, Til Ulenspighel, the acrobat, will walk the tightrope!" Filled with curiosity, everyone came to watch. Til had stretched the rope between his balcony and a tree in the nearby wood: the rope lay above the river and the young lad climbed on. The crowd that, at first had laughed and made a noise, grew quiet after a while, and were impressed: "He's clever all right," someone said. "He's a real acrobat," said someone else. "We were wrong about him!" At that moment, Til's mother, who knew nothing about her son's gymnastics, hearing the murmur of the crowd, went onto the balcony . . . and saw her son walking the rope suspended over empty space. Frightened, she shouted, "Til, come down at once!" And seeing that the boy was not doing as he was told, she picked up the scissors and cut the rope. Til fell with a splash into the river. You can imagine the people! First they started to laugh, snigger and make fun of the poor lad as he struggled soaking from the water. "Hey, acrobat! If that had been the ground instead of water, you'd have had a cracked head, wouldn't you?" they called, chuckling, and Til said to himself, "Laugh if you want to, he who laughs last laughs longest!..." Some days later, Til announced he was going to repeat the show, this time not over the river but above the main road. Everyone rushed to watch, hoping to see him fall off and hurt himself. Before he ventured on to the rope, Til called out, "To make it more difficult for me, I'm going to carry a sack on my back. Every spectator will give me his left shoe. I'll put it in the sack and hand it back at the end of the show." Everyone did this. Til walked the tightrope until he reached the middle of the road, and from the heights he said, "Now I'm going to give you back your shoes. There they are!" and opening the sack, he emptied out the shoes. You can picture the confusion that reigned then. Not only did the onlookers get hit on the head by shoes, but everyone hunted for his own shoe without managing to find it; he'd pick one up, but it belonged to somebody else, and he'd throw it down again, and start to look for another, argue, exchange insults . . . and Til, from a window on high looked down on the pandemonium and chuckling said, "Ha! He who laughs last laughs longest!"

# THE 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 grey 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 lastborn. Well, the grey 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 grey 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 paler 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 hide 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'II 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.

# THE UNLUCKY WARRIOR

Once upon a time there was a Samurai called Hido. Valiant and strong, he was afraid of no-one, yet in all the wars he had ever fought, he had always found himself on the losing side. People in his home town began to say "Hido brings bad luck." And because nobody wanted him to fight for them any more the Samurai ended up a poor man. He said to himself: "I'll go to a town where no-one knows me. Maybe I'll find work there." He gathered up his remaining belongings, his sword, bow and three arrows, and set off along the first road he came to. On and on he walked, until after many days march, he reached the banks of a lake. As he started to cross

the narrow bridge over the water, he stopped in surprise. The way was blocked by an enormous snake, fast asleep. From its mouth and nostrils, it breathed red smoke with a pungent smell of sulphur. Hido thought to himself, "That beast isn't going to stop me," and on tiptoe he stepped over the snake, without wakening it up, and went on his way. But he had barely gone twenty metres when he heard a voice behind him. "Hey, you! Samurai!" He turned round. The snake had disappeared and in its place stood a well-dressed man, who made a friendly gesture and said, "You're a brave one! You weren't scared of the snake. You see, I'm looking for a Samurai, and so, whenever I see someone coming, I turn into a snake. So far, you're the only person that has had the courage to step over it. What's your name?" "Hido," replied the Samurai, "and who are you?" The man pointed to the lake. "I'm King of that realm." "What!" exclaimed Hido. "Is your realm a lake?" The King replied smiling, "Yes. But under the water lies a great city protected by a crystal ball. My people live there happily, or at least they were happy until the Dragon arrived." "The Dragon?" asked Hido. And the King replied sadly, "Yes. Every second night he dives off the bridge into the water, enters the crystal ball and creates havoc amongst my subjects. It won't be long before he eats us all. That's why I'm looking for a Samurai!" Hido understood what he meant. "Do you want me to fight the Dragon?" he asked. "Yes!" "I think you ought to know, Sire, that people say I bring bad luck." To which the King replied: "I never believe what I hear, only what I see. Come with me." He took Hido's hand and they went down into the lake. Wonder of wonders! The waters opened up and they went down to the great crystal circle that contained the city. There, Hido sat down with the King who gave him food and drink. Then he said, "In a little while you will hear a terrible noise. It will be the Dragon. You will have to face him up there, Hido." "I'm not afraid. I have my sword, bow and three arrows." "Only three? You will need a hundred arrows!" exclaimed the King. But Hido shook his head. "They're poisoned, but even if they weren't, they would still be enough, because if the Dragon doesn't stop with three arrows in him, I wouldn't have time to fire any more." Just then there was a fearful noise and the sound of shouting. "The Dragon! The Dragon!" Hido picked up his weapons and ran onto the bridge, only just in time. For the Dragon, huge and terrible, was advancing, with a roar, and breathing fire. Hido fired his first and second arrows, both of them hit the Dragon right in the heart, but it didn't stop. Just as the Dragon was bearing down ferociously on him, Hido remembered hearing that the only poison to stop a dragon is a man's saliva. So he licked his fingers and wet the tip of his last arrow, fired and hit the Dragon . . . On it came, still roaring. "All is lost," said Hido to himself . . . . . but after taking another step or two, the Dragon stopped in its tracks, shuddered and fell to the ground. It was dead. All the citizens rushed from the lake to greet Hido and shower him with gifts, telling him: "Oh, brave Samurai, luck is with you and with our people!" So Hido knew that not only had he defeated the Dragon, he had overcome his bad luck.

### THE VAIN CROW

Once upon a time . . . a restless crow decided to go farther away than usual from home and friends. Suddenly, in a farmyard, he met a pair of peacocks. What wonderful birds they were! The crow had never seen such beautiful feathers, and he timidly asked the regal-looking birds what they were. "We're peacocks," one of them replied, spreading its tail. And as the peacock strutted about, showing the crow his magnificent feathers, he screamed, as peacocks do. Bursting with admiration, the crow said goodbye and flapped away, but as he flew home, he could not forget the two peacocks. "What fine feathers! They must be so happy, being so beautiful." And he gazed down sadly at his own ugly plumes. From that day on, he could not help thinking about the splendor of the peacocks and his own plain feathers. He even stopped looking at himself in the pond water, for every time he did so, it made him even more depressed. He got into the habit of spying on the peacocks, and the more he watched them strut royally around, the more envious he was of their beauty. One day, he noticed that one of the peacocks had dropped a feather. When the sun went down, the crow picked it up and hid it away. For days on end, he watched the peacocks and found another feather. When he had four, he could wait no longer: he stuck the peacock feathers onto his own tail, using pine resin, and started to parade up and down for his friends to admire. "Just look at my gorgeous tail!" he said proudly. "I'm not ugly like you! Out of my way, you moth eaten crows!" The crows' amazement soon changed to indignation, then they started to laugh and jeer at their vain companion. "You're nothing but a crow yourself, even with those flashy feathers!" they jeered. "And you're silly as well as ugly," replied the conceited crow haughtily, and off he went to live with the peacocks. When the peacocks set eyes on the stranger, they thought the crow was just another peacock who, for some reason, had lost most of his feathers, and they felt sorry for him. But the crow, vainer than ever, wanted to attract greater admiration and a foolish idea came into his head. He tried to scream the way the peacocks do when they fan their tails. But the harsh "Craw! Craw! Craw!" quickly betrayed the crow. The furious peacocks pecked the stolen feathers off and chased the crow away. Poor crow! For when, sad and downcast, he went back to his friends, he was given exactly the same rough treatment. Nobody would speak to him and all the crows turned their backs on him for trying to be what he was not.

# THE WEEPING PRINCESS

Once upon a time . . . a greedy emperor forced his subjects to pay heavy taxes. Not only the poor were squeezed, but the nobles in this immense empire were highly taxed too. At last, tired of being crushed by taxes, the nobles held a protest meeting. When the emperor heard about this, he took fright for he feared a rebellion. So he sent out this proclamation to put an end to their complaints: "The nobleman that can make my daughter Sarah smile again, for she's mourning the loss of her fiancé. will never pay taxes again." This caused an uproar at the protest meeting. Most of the princes decided there was no need now to complain, for each was quite sure he would succeed where others might fail. So off they went to get ready to try and make Sarah smile. But some of the nobles warned their fellows that, with his words, the emperor was not really abolishing any taxes at all. From that day on, a long procession of noble knights trooped from all over the empire to the palace to try and console the weeping princess. The crowds cheered them as they passed, but when they returned with bowed heads, the same crowds booed and whistled at their failure. The days went by and the list of defeated knights grew longer . . . Indians, Circassians, Arabs and Turks . . . from all over the provinces came bold young men, bouncing with confidence and hope. But the minute the princess set eyes on them, she just wept and wept. The emperor was delighted, for each failure meant another taxpayer. Even the common folk seemed contented to see that the rich too did not always get what they wanted. The only unhappy person among them was Sarah, who went on weeping. One day, a Mongol prince seemed to be on the point of winning a smile. He thrummed his balalaika for hours, playing first a sad tune, then a more cheerful one, till he finished by playing a merry jig. The princess sat for ages staring at him eyed and the onlookers thought she was

about to smile. Instead she burst into floods of tears, to everyone's disappointment. A Kurdish chief, famed for his humour, who had already kept the court in fits of laughter, tried to steal a smile from Sarah with his witty remarks. But the princess's dark eyes filled with tears. Noblemen came from as far away as Persia, but in vain. The only person who had not yet appeared was Omar, the chief of the tiniest farthest away province. A bright, intelligent young man, he had cleverly got the better of certain greedy ambitious relatives that tried to take away his power when he succeeded his uncle as chief. The emperor's messengers had taken a long time to reach this remote realm, and though Omar set out at once, on hearing the news, he rode for many days on his fine black horse. Then, one evening, he reached the palace. When the tired and dusty traveller explained to the stable boys why he had come, they laughed in scorn. But they had orders to obey, so they told him to enter. "It's late," they said, "and you won't see the princess till tomorrow." The emperor's other daughters, however, were soon told of the new arrival. "He's the most handsome of them all!" exclaimed one of the servants. So Marika, the emperor's youngest and prettiest daughter, with her sisters, peeked through a window at the sleeping Omar. Next morning, the emperor ordered the newcomer to be led before Sarah. The court crowded round to watch. Unlike all the other suitors, Omar did nothing at all to amuse the princess. He stared at Sarah without saying a word. And she stared back, with an empty look on her face. The two young people stared silently at each other. Then Omar went back to the emperor and said: "Sire! Give me your sceptre and I will solve the problem of Sarah." Surprised at such an odd request, the emperor followed Omar into Sarah's room. The other princesses clustered round, smiling and admiring the handsome young man. With a deep bow to Sarah, Omar straightened up and dealt her a blow on the head with the sceptre. Screams filled the air the emperor threw up his arms in rage and his daughters fled in all directions. The guards drew their swords. Then the whole room stopped in amazement. For, out of Sarah's head, which had been chopped off by the blow, rolled broken springs and pieces of metal. The princess that never smiled was a doll! A perfect doll And nobody had ever been aware of it except Omar. The only princess that couldn't stop laughing was Marika. The emperor glared at her. "Be quiet . . . " he ordered. But he too saw the funny side of it. For the crafty emperor had been making use of Sarah the doll as a way of guaranteeing himself a steady flow of taxes from all his subjects. And now, a man more cunning than himself had exposed his trick. The emperor had a sudden thought: he would rid himself of the cheeky Marika and gain an astute son-in-law able to help him hold onto his kingdom. "You should be put to death for this insolence," he said, "but I'm going to spare your life, if you marry my youngest daughter. Of course, you won't need to pay taxes!" Smiling at a happy Marika, Omar nodded silently. Down in the depths of his mind he was thinking: "One day, dear father-in-law, I'll be sitting on your Imperial throne." And he was, a few years later.

### WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK

Once upon a time . . . a farmer and his son went to market to sell a donkey. However, they loaded the beast into the wheelbarrow, so that it would not reach market tired and worn out, and pushed it along the road. When people saw such a peculiar sight, they loudly remarked: "That man is mad! Whoever saw a donkey being taken to market in a wheelbarrow!" The poor farmer became more and more confused, for the farther he went, the louder the comments became and the more people gossiped. It was the last straw when, as they passed the blacksmith's forge, the smith jeeringly asked the farmer if he wanted shoeing, since he was doing the donkey work! So the farmer stopped, heaved the animal out of the wheelbarrow and climbed onto its back, while his son walked behind. But that made matters even worse! A group of women going home from market instantly complained: "You cruel man! Fancy a great lump like you riding a donkey, while your poor little boy runs along behind! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" People heaped insult upon insult, till the unhappy farmer slid off the donkey. He simply did not know what to do next. He took off his cap and mopped his brow. "Whew!" he exclaimed. "I never imagined it could be so difficult to take a donkey to market." Then he hoisted his little boy onto the donkey and walked along behind. This time, a cluster of men began to protest. "Look at that! There's a young lad sitting pretty as you please, on top of a donkey, while his weary old father has to go on foot!" "It's a disgrace." Once again, father and son came to a halt. How on earth could they stop people from criticizing everything they did? Well, in the end, they both got on the donkey. "What heartless folk!" exclaimed the passers-by. "Two riders on one little donkey!" But by now the farmer had lost his patience. He gave the donkey a terrible kick, saying: "Giddy up! From now on, I'll do things my way, and pay no attention to what other people think!"

# THE WISE LITTLE GIRL

Once upon a time . . . in the immense Russian steppe, lay a little village where nearly all the inhabitants bred horses. It was the month of October, when a big livestock market was held yearly in the main town. Two brothers, one rich and the other one poor, set off for market. The rich man rode a stallion, and the poor brother a young mare. At dusk, they stopped beside an empty hut and tethered their horses outside, before going to sleep themselves on two heaps of straw. Great was their surprise, when, next morning they saw three horses outside, instead of two. Well, to be exact the newcomer was not really a horse. It was a foal, to which the mare had given birth during the night. Soon it had the strength to struggle to its feet, and after a drink of its mother's milk, the foal staggered its first few steps. The stallion greeted it with a cheerful whinny, and when the two brothers set eyes on it for the first time, the foal was standing beside the stallion. "It belongs to me!" exclaimed Dimitri, the rich brother, the minute he saw it. "It's my stallion's foal." I van, the poor brother, began to laugh. "Whoever heard of a stallion having a foal? It was born to my mare!" "No, that's not true! It was standing close to the stallion, so it's the stallion's foal. And therefore it's mine!" The brothers started to quarrel, then they decided to go to town and bring the matter before the judges. Still arguing, they headed for the big square where the courtroom stood. But what they didn't know was that it was a special day, the day when, once a year, the Emperor himself administered the law. He himself received all who came seeking justice. The brothers were ushered into his presence, and they told him all about the dispute. Of course, the Emperor knew perfectly well who was the owner of the foal. He was on the point of proclaiming in favour of the poor brother, when suddenly I van developed an unfortunate twitch in his eye. The Emperor was greatly annoyed by this familiarity by a humble peasant, and decided to punish I van for his disrespect. After listening to both sides of the story, he declared it was difficult, indeed impossible, to say exactly who was the foal's rightful owner. And being in the mood for a spot of fun, and since he loved posing riddles and solving them as well, to the amusement of his counsellors, he exclaimed: "I can't judge which of you should have the foal, so it will be awarded to whichever of you solves the following four riddles: what is the

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fastest thing in the world? What is the fattest? What's the softest and what is the most precious? I command you to return to the palace in a week's time with your answers!" Dimitri started to puzzle over the answers as soon as he left the courtroom. When he reached home, however, he realised he had nobody to help him. "Well, I'll just have to seek help, for if I can't solve these riddles, I'll lose the foal!" Then he remembered a woman, one of his neighbours, to whom he had once lent a silver ducat. That had been some time ago, and with the interest, the neighbour now owed him three ducats. And since she had a reputation for being guickwitted, but also very astute, he decided to ask her advice, in exchange for canceling part of her debt. But the woman was not slow to show how astute she really was, and promptly demanded that the whole debt be wiped out in exchange for the answers. "The fastest thing in the world is my husband's bay horse," she said. "Nothing can beat it! The fattest is our pig! Such a huge beast has never been seen! The softest is the quilt I made for the bed, using my own goose's feathers. It's the envy of all my friends. The most precious thing in the world is my three-month old nephew. There isn't a more handsome child. I wouldn't exchange him for all the gold on earth, and that makes him the most precious thing on earth!" Dimitri was rather doubtful about the woman's answers being correct. On the other hand, he had to take some kind of solution back to the Emperor. And he guessed, quite rightly, that if he didn't, he would be punished. In the meantime, I van, who was a widower, had gone back to the humble cottage where he lived with his small daughter. Only seven years old, the little girl was often left alone, and as a result, was thoughtful and very clever for her age. The poor man took the little girl into his confidence, for like his brother, he knew he would never be able to find the answers by himself. The child sat in silence for a moment, then firmly said: "Tell the Emperor that the fastest thing in the world is the cold north wind in winter. The fattest is the soil in our fields whose crops give life to men and animals alike, the softest thing is a child's caress and the most precious is honesty." The day came when the two brothers were to return before the Emperor. They were led into his presence. The Emperor was curious to hear what they had to say, but he roared with laughter at Dimitri's foolish answers. However, when it was I van's turn to speak, a frown spread over the Emperor's face. The poor brother's wise replies made him squirm, especially the last one, about honesty, the most precious thing of all. The Emperor knew perfectly well that he had been dishonest in his dealings with the poor brother, for he had denied him justice. But he could not bear to admit it in front of his own counsellors, so he angrily demanded: "Who gave you these answers?" I van told the Emperor that it was his small daughter. Still annoyed, the great man said: -- "You shall be rewarded for having such a wise and clever daughter. You shall be awarded the foal that your brother claimed, together with a hundred silver ducats ... But ... but ... and the Emperor winked at his counsellors: "You will come before me in seven days' time, bringing your daughter. And since she's so clever, she must appear before me neither naked nor dressed, neither on foot nor on horseback, neither bearing gifts nor empty-handed. And if she does this, you will have your reward. If not, you'll have your head chopped off for your impudence!" The onlookers began to laugh, knowing that the poor man would never to able to fulfill the Emperor's conditions. I van went home in despair, his eyes brimming with tears. But when he had told his daughter what had happened, she calmly said: "Tomorrow, go and catch a hare and a partridge. Both must be alive! You'll have the foal and the hundred silver ducats! Leave it to me!" I van \_did as his daughter said. He had no idea what the two creatures were for, but he trusted in his daughter's wisdom. On the day of the audience with the Emperor, the palace was thronged with bystanders, waiting for I van and his small daughter to arrive. At last, the little girl appeared, draped in a fishing net, riding the hare and holding the partridge in her hand. She was neither naked nor dressed, on foot or on horseback. Scowling, the Emperor told her: "I said neither bearing gifts nor empty-handed!" At these words, the little girl held out the partridge. The Emperor stretched out his hand to grasp it, but the bird fluttered into the air. The third condition had been fulfilled. In spite of himself, the Emperor could not help admiring the little girl who had so cleverly passed such a test, and in a gentler voice, he sold: "Is your father terribly poor, and does he desperately need the foal. "Oh, yes!" replied the little girl. "We live on the hares he catches in the rivers and the fish he picks from the trees!" "Aha!" cried the Emperor triumphantly. "So you're not as clever as you seem to be! Whoever heard of hares in the river and fish in the trees! To which the little girl swiftly replied: "And whoever heard of a stallion having a foal?" At that, both Emperor and Court burst into peals of laughter. I van was immediately glen his hundred silver ducats and the foal, and the Emperor proclaimed: "Only in my kingdom could such a wise little girl be born!"

### THE WITCH IN THE TOWER

Once upon a time... people in the Japanese city of Kyoto were terribly afraid; they shook with fear. A fierce witch had taken possession of the tower over the city gate which she opened and closed whenever she felt like it. She was capable of locking the gate in the face of travellers bringing food and merchandise, or throwing it wide open to savage tribes from the north. Many brave Samurai, the strongest and best fighters, had faced up to the witch, but the minute she set eyes on them, she hurled herself out of the tower, hair flying in the wind, screeching furiously and brandishing a fiery sword. Attacking them one by one, she left them lying dead in the dust. No, there was no hope for the city of Kyoto, and many people began to think of leaving it. The folk were murmuring, "All our Samurai are dead. If only Watanabi were still here, the bravest of them all! But all that remains is his sword, and there's no one able to use it." However, the sword was not all that remained of valiant Watanabi, there was also his son, a young boy. On hearing what the citizens were saying, he wondered, "My father has gone, he died fighting, but we still have his sword. I shall take it and face the witch. Win or die, I shall be a credit to my father's memory." So the boy bravely armed himself and went off to the tower. The witch saw him arrive and she grinned, but did not make a move. She wouldn't even bother using her fiery sword on that snivelling youngster, she would wither him with a glance. So she paid little heed to Watanabi's son as he quietly crept into the tower, climbed the stairs without making the slightest sound and entered the witch's room. When, however, the witch heard the door close, she turned round and laid her wild burning gaze on the boy but the splendour of Watanabi's sword blinded her. "This is Watanabi's sword!" shouted the young boy, and before the witch could defend herself, he struck a blow and ended her life. In his father's memory and in honour of his sword, the boy had freed the city of Kyoto.