

Selected Fables

By Aesop

The Archer and the Lion

An Archer went up into the hills to get some sport with his bow, and all the animals fled at the sight of him with the exception of the Lion, who stayed behind and challenged him to fight. But he shot an arrow at the Lion and hit him, and said, "There, you see what my messenger can do: just you wait a moment and I'll tackle you myself." The Lion, however, when he felt the sting of the arrow, ran away as fast as his legs could carry him. A Fox, who had seen it all happen, said to the Lion, "Come, don't be a coward: why don't you stay and fight?" But the Lion replied, "You won't get me to stay, not you: why, when he sends a messenger like that before him, he must himself be a terrible fellow to deal with."

The Wolf and the Goat

A Wolf caught sight of a Goat browsing above him on the scanty herbage that grew on the top of a steep rock; and being unable to get at her, tried to induce her to come lower down. "You are risking your life up there, madam, indeed you are," he called out: "pray take my advice and come down here, where you will find plenty of better food." The Goat turned a knowing eye upon him. "It's little you care whether I get good grass or bad," said she: "what you want is to eat me."

The Peacock and the Crane

A Peacock taunted a Crane with the dullness of her plumage. "Look at my brilliant colors," said she, "and see how much finer they are than your poor feathers." "I am not denying," replied the Crane, "that yours are far gayer than mine; but when it comes to flying I can soar into the clouds, whereas you are confined to the earth like any dunghill cock."

The Moon and Her Mother

The Moon once begged her Mother to make her a gown. "How can I?" replied she; "there's no fitting your figure. At one time you're a New Moon, and at another you're a Full Moon; and between whiles you're neither one nor the other."

The Hares and the Frogs

The Hares once gathered together and lamented the unhappiness of their lot, exposed as they were to dangers on all sides and lacking the strength and the courage to hold their own. Men, dogs, birds and beasts of prey were all their enemies, and killed and devoured them daily: and sooner than endure such persecution any longer, they one and all determined to end their miserable lives. Thus resolved and desperate, they rushed in a body towards a neighboring pool, intending to drown themselves. On the bank were sitting a number of Frogs, who, when they heard the noise of the Hares as they ran, with one accord leaped into the water and hid

themselves in the depths. Then one of the older Hares who was wiser than the rest cried out to his companions, "Stop, my friends, take heart; don't let us destroy ourselves after all: see, here are creatures who are afraid of us, and who must, therefore, be still more timid than ourselves."

The Brothers Grimm

The brothers Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859) Grimm are most famous for having collected folk tales in a volume titled *Children's and Household Tales*, though they made other literary and scholarly contributions worthy of recognition. Jakob Karl wrote a work on philology that showed the relationship of Indo-European languages. Both brothers Grimm also collaborated on a fourteen-volume dictionary of the German language.

Mother Holle

By Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

From *Children's and Household Tales*

There was once a widow who had two daughters—one of whom was pretty and industrious, while the other was ugly and idle. But she was much fonder of the ugly and idle one, because she was her own daughter; and the other, who was a step-daughter, was obliged to do all the work, and be the Cinderella of the house. Every day the poor girl had to sit by a well, in the highway, and spin and spin till her fingers bled.

Now it happened that one day the shuttle was marked with her blood, so she dipped it in the well, to wash the mark off; but it dropped out of her hand and fell to the bottom. She began to weep, and ran to her step-mother and told of the mishap. But she scolded her sharply, and was so merciless as to say, "Since you have let the shuttle fall in, you must fetch it out again."

So the girl went back to the well, and did not know what to do; and in the sorrow of her heart she jumped into the well to get the shuttle. She lost her senses; and when she awoke and came to herself again, she was in a lovely meadow where the sun was shining and many thousands of flowers were growing. Along this meadow she went, and at last came to a baker's oven full of bread, and the bread cried out, "Oh, take me out! take me out! or I shall burn; I have been baked a long time!" So she went up to it, and took out all the loaves one after another with the bread-shovel. After that she went on till she came to a tree covered with apples, which called out to her, "Oh, shake me! shake me! we apples are all ripe!" So she shook the tree till the apples fell like rain, and went on shaking till they were all down, and when she had gathered them into a heap, she went on her way.

At last she came to a little house, out of which an old woman peeped. But she had such large teeth that the girl was frightened, and was about to run away.

But the old woman called out to her, "What are you afraid of, dear child? Stay with me; if you will do all the work in the house properly, you shall be the better for it. Only you must take care to make my bed well, and to shake it thoroughly till the feathers fly—for then there is snow on the earth. I am Mother Holle."

As the old woman spoke so kindly to her, the girl took courage and agreed to enter her service. She attended to everything to the satisfaction of her mistress, and always shook her bed so vigorously that the feathers flew about like snow-flakes. So she had a pleasant life with her, never an angry word, and boiled or roast meat every day.

She stayed some time with Mother Holle, and then she became sad. At first she did not know what was the matter with her, but found at length that it was homesickness. Although she was many times better off here than at home, still she had a longing to be there. At last she said to the old woman, "I have a longing for home; and however well off I am down here, I cannot stay any longer. I must go up again to my own people." Mother Holle said, "I am pleased that you long for your home again, and as you have served me so truly, I myself will

take you up again.” Thereupon she took her by the hand, and led her to a large door. The door was opened, and just as the maiden was standing beneath the doorway, a heavy shower of golden rain fell, and all the gold remained sticking to her, so that she was completely covered with it.

“You shall have that because you are so industrious,” said Mother Holle; and at the same time she gave her back the shuttle which she had let fall into the well. Thereupon the door closed, and the maiden found herself up above upon the earth, not far from her mother’s house.

And as she went into the yard, the cock cried, “Cock-a-doodle-doo! Your golden girl’s come back to you!”

So she went in to her mother, and as she arrived thus covered with gold, she was well received, both by her and her sister.

The girl told all that had happened to her; and as soon as the mother heard how she had come by so much wealth, she was very anxious to obtain the same good luck for the ugly and lazy daughter. She had to seat herself by the well and spin; and in order that her shuttle might be stained with blood, she stuck her hand into a thorn-bush and pricked her finger. Then she threw her shuttle into the well, and jumped in after it.

She came, like the other, to the beautiful meadow and walked along the very same path. When she got to the oven the bread again cried, “Oh, take me out! take me out! or I shall burn; I have been baked a long time!” But the lazy thing answered, “As if I had any wish to make myself dirty!” and on she went. Soon she came to the apple-tree, which cried, “Oh, shake me! shake me! we apples are all ripe!” But she answered, “I like that! one of you might fall on my head,” and so went on.

When she came to Mother Holle’s house she was not afraid, for she had already heard of her big teeth, and she hired herself to her immediately.

The first day she forced herself to work diligently, and obeyed Mother Holle when she told her to do anything, for she was thinking of all the gold that she would give her. But on the second day she began to be lazy, and on the third day still more so, and then she would not get up in the morning at all. Neither did she make Mother Holle’s bed as she ought, and did not shake it so as to make the feathers fly up. Mother Holle was soon tired of this, and gave her notice to leave. The lazy girl was willing enough to go, and thought that now the golden rain would come. Mother Holle led her, too, to the great door, but while she was standing beneath it, instead of the gold a big kettleful of pitch was emptied over her. “That is the reward of your service,” said Mother Holle, and shut the door.

So the lazy girl went home, but she was quite covered with pitch, and the cock by the well-side, as soon as he saw her, cried: “Cock-a-doodle-doo! Your pitchy girl’s come back to you.” But the pitch stuck fast to her, and could not be got off as long as she lived.

Thomas Bulfinch (1796—1867)

Thomas Bulfinch compiled various classical myths into a book and by so doing no doubt helped popularize the legends and fables of ancient cultures. Born in Massachusetts, the author attended Harvard and wrote a series of books that are still read today, including *Age of Fable* (1855), *The Age of Chivalry* (1858), and *The Age of Charlemagne* (1863). The following story is about Psyche and Cupid. Note that like most of his contemporaries, Bulfinch uses Roman names for the Greek gods and goddesses. Thus, Aphrodite is named Venus, Eros is named Cupid, Hera is named Juno, and so on. Like so many of the myths, the myth of Psyche and Cupid may be considered allegorical. Bulfinch offers this interpretation: “The Greek name for a butterfly is Psyche, and the same word means the soul. There is no illustration of the immortality of the soul so striking and beautiful as the butterfly, bursting on brilliant wings from the tomb in which it has lain, after a dull, groveling, caterpillar existence, to flutter in the blaze of day and feed on the most fragrant and delicate productions of the spring. Psyche, then, is the human soul, which is purified by sufferings and misfortunes, and is thus prepared for the enjoyment of true and pure happiness.”

Classical Myths

By Thomas Bulfinch

Cupid and Psyche

A certain king and queen had three daughters. The charms of the two elder were more than common, but the beauty of the youngest was so wonderful that words cannot express its due praise. The fame of her beauty was so great that strangers from neighboring countries came in crowds to enjoy the sight, and looked on her with amazement, paying her that homage which is due only to Venus herself. In fact Venus found her altars deserted, while men turned their devotion to this young virgin. As she passed along, the people sang her praises, and strewed her way with chaplets and flowers.

This homage due only to the immortal powers offended Venus. Shaking her ambrosial locks with indignation, she exclaimed, "Am I then to be eclipsed in my honors by a mortal girl? In vain then did that royal shepherd,¹ whose judgment was approved by Jove himself, give me the palm of beauty over my illustrious rivals, Pallas and Juno. But she shall not so quietly usurp my honors. I will make her repent of her unlawful beauty."

She then called her winged son Cupid, mischievous enough in his own nature, and provoked him yet more by her complaints. She pointed out Psyche to him and said, "My dear son, punish that contumacious beauty. Give your mother a revenge as sweet as her injuries are great. Pour into that haughty girl's heart a passion for some low, mean, unworthy being, so that she may reap a mortification as great as her present joy and triumph."

Cupid prepared to obey the commands of his mother. There are two fountains in Venus's garden, one of sweet waters, the other of bitter. Cupid filled two amber vases, one from each fountain, and suspending them from the top of his quiver, hastened to the chamber of Psyche, whom he found asleep. He shed a few drops from the bitter fountain over her lips, though the sight of her almost moved him to pity, then touched her side with the point of his arrow. At the touch she awoke, and opened eyes on Cupid (himself invisible), which so startled him that in his confusion he wounded himself with his own arrow. Heedless of his wound, his whole thought now was to repair the mischief he had done, and he poured the balmy drops of joy over all her silken ringlets.

Frowned on by Venus, Psyche no longer benefited from all her charms. True, everyone looked on her beauty and everyone praised it. But no king, royal youth, or plebeian asked her hand in marriage. Her two elder sisters of moderate charms had now long been married to two royal princes. But Psyche, in her lonely room, deplored her solitude, sick of that beauty which, while it earned her a lot of flattery, had failed to awaken love.

¹ The **royal shepherd** was given the task of judging which of the three goddesses—Aphrodite (Venus), Hera (Juno), or Athena (Pallas)—was deserving of the golden apple which was addressed to the most beautiful. He chose Aphrodite, and as a consequence the Trojan War began, since the goddess gave him a beautiful Greek queen named Helen as a reward for his choice.

Afraid that they had unwittingly incurred the anger of the gods, her parents consulted the oracle of Apollo, and received this answer: "The virgin is destined for the bride of no mortal lover. Her future husband awaits her on the top of the mountain. He is a monster whom neither gods nor men can resist."

This dreadful decree of the oracle filled all the people with dismay, and her parents were grief-stricken. But Psyche said, "Why, my dear parents, do you now lament me? You should rather have grieved when the people showered on me undeserved honors, and with one voice called me a Venus. I can now see that I am a victim to that name. I submit. Lead me to that rock to which my unhappy fate has destined me." Accordingly, all things being prepared, the royal maid took her place in the procession, which more resembled a funeral than a wedding ceremony, and with her parents, amid the lamentations of the people, went up the mountain, on the summit where they left her alone, and with sad hearts returned home.

While Psyche stood on the ridge of the mountain, panting with fear and with eyes full of tears, the gentle Zephyr raised her from the earth and bore her with an easy motion into a flowery dale. Her mind gradually became composed, and she laid herself down on the grassy bank to sleep. When she awoke refreshed with sleep, she looked round and beheld near by a pleasant grove of tall and stately trees. She entered it, and in the midst discovered a fountain, sending forth clear and crystal waters, and nearby, a magnificent palace whose noble front told her that it was not the work of mortal hands, but the happy retreat of some god. Drawn by admiration and wonder, she approached the building and ventured to enter. Every object she met filled her with pleasure and amazement. Golden pillars supported the vaulted roof, and the walls were enriched with carvings and paintings representing beasts of the chase and rural scenes, adapted to delight the eye of the beholder. Proceeding onward, she saw that besides the apartments of state there were others filled with all manner of treasures, and beautiful and precious productions of nature and art.

While her eyes were thus occupied, a voice addressed her, though she saw no one: "Sovereign lady, all that you see is yours. We whose voices you hear are your servants and shall obey all your commands with our utmost care and diligence. Retire, then, to your chamber and rest on your down bed, and when you see fit, repair to the bath. Supper awaits you in the adjoining alcove when it pleases you to take your seat there."

Psyche listened to the admonitions of her vocal attendants, and after some rest and the refreshment of the bath, sat down in the alcove, where a table immediately presented itself, without any visible aid from waiters or servants, and covered with the greatest delicacies of food and the most nectareous wines. Her ears too were feasted with music from invisible performers. One sang, another played on the lute, and all closed in the wonderful harmony of a full chorus.

She had not yet seen her destined husband. He came only in the hours of darkness and fled before the dawn of morning, but his accents were full of love, and inspired a like passion in her. She often begged him to stay and let her behold him, but he would not consent. On the contrary, he ordered her not to try to see him. It was his pleasure, for the best of reasons, to

keep concealed. “Why should you wish to behold me?” he said. “Have you any doubt of my love? Have you any wish ungratified? If you saw me, perhaps you would fear me, perhaps adore me, but all I ask of you is to love me. I would rather you would love me as an equal than adore me as a god.”

This reasoning somewhat quieted Psyche for a time, and while the novelty lasted she felt quite happy. But at length the thought of her parents, left in ignorance of her fate, and of her sisters, precluded from sharing with her the delights of her situation, preyed on her mind and made her begin to feel her palace as but a splendid prison. When her husband came one night, she told him her distress, and at last drew from him an unwilling consent that her sisters should be brought to see her.

So, calling Zephyr, she told him her husband’s commands, and he, promptly obedient, soon brought them across the mountain down to their sister’s valley. They embraced her and she returned their caresses.

“Come,” said Psyche, “come with me into my house and refresh yourselves with whatever your sister has to offer.” Then taking their hands she led them into her golden palace, and committed them to the care of her numerous train of attendant voices, to refresh them in her baths and at her table, and to show them all her treasures. The view of these celestial delights made them jealous. Their young sister was living in a splendor so much exceeding their own.

They asked her numberless questions, among others what sort of a person her husband was. Psyche replied that he was a beautiful youth, who generally spent the daytime in hunting on the mountains. Not satisfied with this reply, the sisters soon made her confess that she had never seen him. Then they began to fill her heart with dark suspicions.

“Call to mind,” they said, “the Pythian oracle that said that you were destined to marry a dreadful monster. The inhabitants of this valley say that your husband is a terrible and monstrous serpent, who nourishes you for a while with dainties that he may by and by devour you. Take our advice. Get a lamp and a sharp knife and hide them so that your husband won’t discover them. And when he is sound asleep, slip out of bed, bring out your lamp, and see for yourself whether what they say is true or not. If it is, don’t hesitate to cut off the monster’s head and free yourself.”

Psyche resisted these persuasions as well as she could, but they did not fail to have their effect on her mind, and when her sisters were gone, their words and her own curiosity were too strong for her to resist. So she prepared her lamp and a sharp knife, and hid them out of sight of her husband. When he had fallen into his first sleep, she silently rose and uncovering her lamp beheld not a hideous monster, but the most beautiful and charming of the gods, with his golden ringlets wandering over his snowy neck and crimson cheek, with two dewy wings on his shoulders, whiter than snow, and with shining feathers like the tender blossoms of spring. As she leaned the lamp over to have a nearer view of his face a drop of burning oil fell on the shoulder of the god, startled with which he opened his eyes and fixed them full on her. Then, without saying one word, he spread his white wings and flew out of the window. In vain Psyche tried to follow him, and fell from the window to the ground. Beholding her as she

lay in the dust, Cupid stopped his flight for an instant and said, "O foolish Psyche, is this the way you repay my love? After having disobeyed my mother's commands and made you my wife, will you think me a monster and cut off my head? But go. Return to your sisters, whose advice you seem to prefer to mine. I punish you no more than to leave you forever. Love cannot live with suspicion." Having said this, he fled away, leaving poor Psyche face down on the ground, filling the place with her sad weeping.

When she had recovered some degree of composure, she looked around her, but the palace and gardens had vanished, and she found herself in the open field not far from the city where her sisters dwelt. She went there and told them the whole story of her misfortunes. They pretended to grieve, but inwardly rejoiced. "For now," they said, "he will perhaps choose one of us." With this idea, without saying a word of her intentions, each of them rose early the next morning and went up the mountains, and having reached the top, called on Zephyr to receive her and bear her to his lord, then leaping up, and not being sustained by Zephyr, fell down the precipice and was dashed to pieces.

Meanwhile Psyche wandered day and night, without food or rest, in search of her husband. Casting her eyes on a lofty mountain having on its brow a magnificent temple, she sighed and said to herself, "Perhaps my love, my lord, lives there," and directed her steps thither.

She had no sooner entered than she saw heaps of corn, some in loose ears and some in sheaves, with mingled ears of barley. Scattered about, lay sickles and rakes, and all the instruments of harvest, without order, as if thrown carelessly out of the weary reapers' hands in the sultry hours of the day.

The pious Psyche put order to the confusion by separating and sorting everything to its proper place and kind, believing that she should not neglect any of the gods, but try by her piety to engage them all in her behalf. It was the holy Ceres' temple. Finding her so religiously employed, the goddess said, "O Psyche, you are truly worthy of our pity. I cannot protect you from the frowns of Venus, but I can teach you how best to allay her displeasure. Go, then, and voluntarily surrender yourself to your lady and sovereign, and try by modesty and submission to win her forgiveness, and perhaps her favor will restore you the husband you have lost."

Psyche obeyed the commands of Ceres and went to the temple of Venus, trying to be strong and thinking about what she should say and about how she could best appease the angry goddess, feeling that the issue was doubtful and perhaps fatal.

Venus received her with an angry countenance. "Most undutiful and faithless of servants," said she, "do you at last remember that you really have a mistress? Or have you rather come to see your sick husband, still recovering from the wound you, his loving wife, gave him? You are so ill-favored and disagreeable that the only way you can earn your lover must be by hard labor. I will test your housewifery." Then she ordered Psyche to be led to the storehouse of her temple, where there was laid up a great quantity of wheat, barley, millet, vetches, beans, and lentils prepared for food for her pigeons, and said, "Take and separate all these grains, putting

all of the same kind in a parcel by themselves, and see that you get it done before evening.” Then Venus departed and left her to her task.

But Psyche, in a perfect consternation at the enormous work, sat stupid and silent, without moving a finger to the inextricable heap.

While she sat despairing, Cupid stirred up the little ant, a native of the fields, to take compassion on her. The leader of the ant hill, followed by whole hosts of his six-legged subjects, approached the heap, and with the utmost diligence, taking grain by grain, they separated the pile, sorting each kind to its parcel. When it was all done, they vanished out of sight in a moment.

At the approach of twilight, Venus returned from the banquet of the gods, breathing odors and crowned with roses. Seeing the task done, she exclaimed, “This is no work of yours, wicked one, but his, whom to your own and his misfortune you have enticed.” Having said this, she threw her a piece of black bread for her supper and went away.

Next morning Venus ordered Psyche to be called and said to her, “Look there at the grove over which stretches along the margin of the water. There you will find sheep feeding without a shepherd, with golden-shining fleeces on their backs. Go, fetch me a sample of that precious wool gathered from every one of their fleeces.”

Psyche obediently went to the riverside, ready to do her best what she was asked. But the river god inspired the reeds with harmonious murmurs, which seemed to say, “O maiden, severely tried, do not tempt the dangerous flood, nor venture among the formidable rams on the other side. As long as they are under the influence of the rising sun, they burn with a cruel rage to destroy mortals with their sharp horns or rude teeth. But when the noontide sun has driven the cattle to the shade, and the serene spirit of the flood has lulled them to rest, you may then safely cross, and you will find the woolly gold sticking to the bushes and the trunks of the trees.”

Thus the compassionate river god gave Psyche instructions how to do her task. She did what she was told, and soon returned to Venus with her arms full of the golden fleece. But she did not win the approval of her implacable mistress, who said, “I know very well it is by none of your own doings that you have succeeded in this task, and I am not satisfied yet that you have any capacity to make yourself useful. But I have another task for you. Here, take this box and go your way to the infernal shades, and give this box to Proserpine and say, ‘My mistress Venus begs you to send her a little of your beauty, for in tending her sick son she has lost some of her own.’ Do not be too long on your errand. I must paint myself with it to appear at the circle of the gods and goddesses this evening.”

As she had to go with her own feet directly down to Erebus, Psyche now believed that her destruction was near. Therefore, to make no delay of her fate, she went to the top of a high tower to throw herself down, in order to descend the shortest way to the shades below. But a voice from the tower said to her, “Poor unlucky girl, why do you want to put an end to your days in so dreadful a manner? And what cowardice makes you sink under this last danger—you, who have been so miraculously supported in all your former dangers?” Then the voice

told her how by a certain cave she might reach the realms of Pluto, and how to avoid all the dangers of the road, to pass by Cerberus, the three-headed dog, and prevail on Charon, the ferryman, to take her across the black river and bring her back again. But the voice added, "When Proserpine has given you the box filled with her beauty, make sure that, above all things, you do not open or look into it."

Encouraged by this advice, Psyche obeyed it, and travelled safely to the kingdom of Pluto. She was admitted to the palace of Proserpine. She did not accept the delicate seat or delicious banquet that was offered her, but was content with coarse bread for her food. She delivered her message from Venus and presently the box was given to her, shut and filled with the precious commodity. She then returned the way she came, and soon was glad to come out once more into the light of day.

So far, she had gotten through her dangerous task successfully, but a longing desire seized her to look into the box. She said, "Shall I, the carrier of this divine beauty, not take the least bit to put on my cheeks to appear to make myself more attractive in the eyes of my beloved husband!" She then carefully opened the box, but found nothing there of any beauty at all. Instead, she found an infernal and truly Stygian sleep, which being set free from its prison, took hold of her, and she fell down in the middle of the road, a sleepy corpse without sense or motion.

But now, recovered from his wound and no longer able to bear the absence of his beloved Psyche, Cupid slipped through the smallest crack of the window of his chamber, which happened to be left open, and flew to the spot where Psyche lay. He gathered up the sleep from her body, closed it again in the box, and waked Psyche with a light touch of one of his arrows. "Again," said he, "you have almost perished by the same curiosity. But now perform the task exactly as my mother ordered you to, and I will take care of the rest."

Then Cupid, as swift as lightning penetrated the heights of heaven. He then presented himself before Jupiter with his supplication. Jupiter lent a favoring ear, and pleaded the cause of the lovers so earnestly with Venus that he won her consent. On this he sent Mercury to bring Psyche up to the heavenly assembly, and when she arrived, handing her a cup of ambrosia, he said, "Drink this, Psyche, and be immortal; nor shall Cupid ever break away from the knot in which he is tied, but these nuptials shall be perpetual."

Thus Psyche became at last united to Cupid, and in due time they had a daughter born to them whose name was Pleasure.

Pyramus and Thisbe

Pyramus was the handsomest youth and Thisbe the fairest maiden in all Babylonia. Their parents lived in adjoining houses; their proximity brought the young people together and their acquaintance ripened into love. They would gladly have married, but their parents forbade it. One thing, however, they could not forbid—that love should glow with equal ardor in the hearts of both. They talked to each other by signs and glances, and the fire burned more intensely for being covered up. In the wall that parted the two houses there was a crack caused by some fault in the structure. No one had noticed it before, but the lovers discovered it. (What will love not discover!) The crack allowed them to communicate, and tender messages used to pass backward and forward through the gap. As they stood, Pyramus on this side, Thisbe on that, their breaths would mingle. “Cruel wall,” they said, “why do you keep two lovers apart? But we won’t be ungrateful. We owe you, we confess, the privilege of sending loving words to willing ears.” Such words they uttered on opposite sides of the wall. And when night came and they had to say farewell, they pressed their lips on the wall, she on her side, he on his, as they could come no nearer.

Next morning, when Aurora had put out the stars, and the sun had melted the frost from the grass, they met at their usual spot. Then, after lamenting their hard fate, they agreed, that next night, when all was still, they would slip away from watchful eyes, leave their houses and walk out into the fields; and to insure a meeting, go to a well-known building standing without the city’s bounds, called the Tomb of Ninus, and that the one who came first should await the other at the foot of a certain tree. It was a white mulberry tree, and stood near a cool spring. All was agreed on, and they waited impatiently for the sun to go down beneath the waters and night to rise up from them. With her head covered with a veil, Thisbe cautiously left, unobserved by the family. She made her way to the monument and sat down under the tree. As she sat alone in the dim light of the evening she noticed a lioness coming near the fountain to quench her thirst, her jaws reeking with her recent slaughter. Thisbe fled at the sight and found refuge in the hollow of a rock. As she fled, she dropped her veil. After drinking at the spring, the lioness turned to retreat to the woods, and seeing the veil on the ground, tossed and rent it with her bloody mouth.

Having been delayed, Pyramus now approached the meeting place. He saw the footsteps of the lion in the sand, and the color fled from his cheeks. He then found the veil all torn and bloody. “O unfortunate girl,” he said, “I have been the cause of your death! You are more worthy of life than I am, but have fallen the first victim. I will follow. I am at fault. I tempted you to this dangerous place, and was not here to guard you. Come out, you lions, from the rocks and tear this guilty body with your teeth.” He took up the veil, carried it with him to the appointed tree, and covered it with kisses and tears.

“My blood will also stain your texture,” he said. He then drew his sword and plunged it into his heart. The blood spurted from the wound, and tinged the white mulberries of the tree all red. It sank into the earth and reached the roots so that the red color mounted through the trunk to the fruit.

By this time Thisbe, still trembling with fear, yet wishing not to disappoint her lover, stepped cautiously out, looking anxiously for the youth, eager to tell him the danger she had escaped. When she came to the spot and saw the changed color of the mulberries, she doubted whether it was the same place. While she hesitated, she saw the form of one struggling in the agonies of death. She started back. A shudder ran through her frame as a ripple on the face of the still water when a sudden breeze sweeps over it. But as soon as she recognized her lover, she screamed and beat her breast, embracing the lifeless body, pouring tears into its wounds, and imprinting kisses on the cold lips. "O Pyramus," she cried, "what has done this? Answer me, Pyramus. It is your own Thisbe that speaks. Hear me, dearest, and lift that drooping head!" At the name of Thisbe, Pyramus opened his eyes, then closed them again. She saw her veil stained with blood and the scabbard empty of its sword. "Your own hand has slain you, and for my sake," she said. "I too can be brave for once, and my love is as strong as yours. I will follow you in death, for I have been the cause. And death which alone could part us shall not prevent me from joining you. And you, unhappy parents of us both, do not deny us our united request. As love and death have joined us, let one tomb contain us. And you, tree, retain the marks of slaughter. Let your berries still serve for memorials of our blood." So saying, she plunged the sword into her breast. Her parents ratified her wish, as did the gods. The two bodies were buried in one tomb, and the tree ever after brought forth purple berries, as it does to this day.

Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875)

Hans Christian Andersen is the most renowned Danish author in the English-speaking world. His fame comes from his fairy tales, which were published in 1835 under the title *Eventyr*, which means “adventure” in Danish. What English-speaking child has not heard or read the story of the ugly duckling that turns into a beautiful swan or of the emperor who, fooled by thieving weavers, parades in front of his subjects without clothes? Although he also wrote novels, Andersen found his niche with the fairy tale in which he was able to capture the charm of the orally transmitted folk tale and endue it with wit and charm.

The Swineherd

By Hans Christian Andersen

There was once a poor Prince, who had a kingdom. His kingdom was very small, but still quite large enough to marry upon, and he wished to marry.

It was certainly rather cool of him to say to the Emperor's daughter, "Will you have me?" But so he did; for his name was renowned far and wide, and there were a hundred princesses who would have answered, "Yes!" and "Thank you kindly." We shall see what this princess said.

Listen!

It happened that where the Prince's father lay buried, there grew a rose tree—a most beautiful rose tree—which blossomed only once in every five years, and even then bore only one flower, but that was a rose! It smelled so sweet that all cares and sorrows were forgotten by him who inhaled its fragrance.

And furthermore, the Prince had a nightingale, who could sing in such a manner that it seemed as though all sweet melodies dwelt in her little throat. So the Princess was to have the rose, and the nightingale, and they were accordingly put into large silver caskets, and sent to her.

The Emperor had them brought into a large hall, where the Princess was playing at "Visiting," with the ladies of the court, and when she saw the caskets with the presents, she clapped her hands for joy.

"Ah, if it were but a little pussy-cat!" said she, but the rose tree, with its beautiful rose came to view.

"Oh, how prettily it is made!" said all the court ladies.

"It is more than pretty," said the Emperor, "it is charming!"

But the Princess touched it, and was almost ready to cry.

"Fie, papa!" said she. "It is not made at all, it is natural!"

"Let us see what is in the other casket, before we get into a bad **humor**," said the Emperor. So the nightingale came forth and sang so delightfully that at first no one could say anything ill-humored of her.

"*Superbe! Charmant!*" exclaimed the ladies; for they all used to chatter French, each one worse than her neighbor.

"How much the bird reminds me of the musical box that belonged to our blessed Empress," said an old knight. "Oh yes! These are the same tones, the same execution."

"Yes! yes!" said the Emperor, and he wept like a child at the remembrance.

"I will still hope that it is not a real bird," said the Princess.

"Yes, it is a real bird," said those who had brought it. "Well then let the bird fly," said the Princess, and she positively refused to see the Prince.

However, he was not to be discouraged. He **daubed** his face over brown and black, pulled his cap over his ears, and knocked at the door.

"Good day to my lord, the Emperor!" said he. "Can I have employment at the palace?"

“Why, yes,” said the Emperor. “I want some one to take care of the pigs, for we have a great many of them.”

So the Prince was appointed “Imperial Swineherd.” He had a dirty little room close by the pigsty, and there he sat the whole day, and worked. By the evening he had made a pretty little kitchen-pot. Little bells were hung all round it, and when the pot was boiling, these bells tinkled in the most charming manner, and played the old melody,

*Ach! du lieber Augustin,
Alles ist weg, weg, weg!*²

But what was still more curious, whoever held his finger in the smoke of the kitchen-pot, immediately smelled all the dishes that were cooking on every hearth in the city—this, you see, was something quite different from the rose.

Now the Princess happened to walk that way, and when she heard the tune, she stood quite still, and seemed pleased; for she could play “Lieber Augustin”; it was the only piece she knew, and she played it with one finger.

“Why there is my piece,” said the Princess. “That swineherd must certainly have been well educated! Go in and ask him the price of the instrument.”

So one of the court-ladies must run in; however, she drew on wooden slippers first.

“What will you take for the kitchen-pot?” said the lady.

“I will have ten kisses from the Princess,” said the swineherd.

“Yes, indeed!” said the lady.

“I cannot sell it for less,” rejoined the swineherd.

“He is an impudent fellow!” said the Princess, and she walked on, but when she had gone a little way, the bells tinkled so prettily:

*Ach! du lieber Augustin,
Alles ist weg, weg, weg!*

“Stay,” said the Princess. “Ask him if he will have ten kisses from the ladies of my court.”

“No, thank you!” said the swineherd. “Ten kisses from the Princess, or I keep the kitchen-pot myself.”

“That must not be, either!” said the Princess. “But do you all stand before me that no one may see us.”

And the court-ladies placed themselves in front of her, and spread out their dresses—the swineherd got ten kisses, and the Princess—the kitchen-pot.

That was delightful! The pot was boiling the whole evening, and the whole of the following day. They knew perfectly well what was cooking at every fire throughout the city, from the chamberlain’s to the cobbler’s; the court-ladies danced and clapped their hands.

“We know who has soup, and who has pancakes for dinner today, who has cutlets, and who has eggs. How interesting!”

² “Ah! dear Augustine! All is gone, gone, gone!”

“Yes, but keep my secret, for I am an Emperor’s daughter.”

The swineherd—that is to say—the Prince, for no one knew that he was other than an ill-favored swineherd, let not a day pass without working at something; he at last constructed a rattle, which, when it was swung round, played all the waltzes and jig tunes, which have ever been heard since the creation of the world.

“Ah, that is superb!” said the Princess when she passed by. “I have never heard prettier compositions! Go in and ask him the price of the instrument, but mind, he shall have no more kisses!”

“He will have a hundred kisses from the Princess!” said the lady who had been to ask.

“I think he is not in his right senses!” said the Princess, and walked on, but when she had gone a little way, she stopped again. “One must encourage art,” said she, “I am the Emperor’s daughter. Tell him he shall, as on yesterday, have ten kisses from me, and may take the rest from the ladies of the court.”

“Oh—but we should not like that at all!” said they. “What are you muttering?” asked the Princess. “If I can kiss him, surely you can. Remember that you owe everything to me.” So the ladies were obliged to go to him again.

“A hundred kisses from the Princess,” said he, “or else let everyone keep his own!”

“Stand round!” said she, and all the ladies stood round her whilst the kissing was going on.

“What can be the reason for such a crowd close by the pigsty?” said the Emperor, who happened just then to step out on the balcony; he rubbed his eyes, and put on his spectacles. “They are the ladies of the court; I must go down and see what they are about!” So he pulled up his slippers at the heel, for he had trodden them down.

As soon as he had got into the court-yard, he moved very softly, and the ladies were so much engrossed with counting the kisses, that all might go on fairly, that they did not perceive the Emperor. He rose on his tiptoes.

“What is all this?” said he, when he saw what was going on, and he boxed the Princess’s ears with his slipper, just as the swineherd was taking the eighty-sixth kiss.

“March out!” said the Emperor, for he was very angry, and both Princess and swineherd were thrust out of the city.

The Princess now stood and wept, the swineherd scolded, and the rain poured down.

“Alas! Unhappy creature that I am!” said the Princess. “If I had but married the handsome young Prince! Ah! how unfortunate I am!”

And the swineherd went behind a tree, washed the black and brown color from his face, threw off his dirty clothes, and stepped forth in his princely robes; he looked so noble that the Princess could not help bowing before him.

“I am come to despise thee,” said he. “Thou would’st not have an honorable Prince! Thou could’st not prize the rose and the nightingale, but thou wast ready to kiss the swineherd for the sake of a trumpety plaything. Thou art rightly served.”

He then went back to his own little kingdom, and shut the door of his palace in her face.
Now she might well sing,

*Ach! du lieber Augustin,
Alles ist weg, weg, weg!*