



Tonight's Bedtime Story

Fairy Tales for Sleepy Children

presents

The Juniper Tree

From "The Fairy Book" by Miss Mulock



One or two thousand years ago, there was a rich man, who had a beautiful and pious wife; they loved one another dearly, but they had no children. They wished and prayed for some night and day, but still they had none. In front of their house was a yard, where stood a Juniper-tree, and under it the wife stood once in winter, and peeled an apple, and as she peeled the apple she cut her finger, and the blood fell on the snow.

“Oh,” said she, sighing deeply and looking sorrowfully at the blood, “if I only had a child as red as blood, and as white as snow!”

While she spoke, she became quite happy; it seemed to her as if her wish would surely come to pass. Then she went into the house; and a month passed, and the snow melted; and two months, and the ground was green; and three months, and the flowers came up out of the earth; and four months, and all the trees in the wood burst forth, and the green twigs all grew thickly together; the little birds sang so that the whole wood rang, and the blossoms fell from the trees. The fifth month passed, and she stood under the Juniper-tree, and it smelt so beautiful, and her heart leaped with joy. She fell upon her knees, but could not speak. When the sixth month was gone, the fruit was large and ripe, and she was very quiet; the seventh month, she took the juniper berries, ate them eagerly, and was sick and sorrowful; and the eighth month went by, and she called to her husband, and cried and said, “If I die, bury me under the Juniper-tree.”

After this she was quite comforted and happy, till the next month was passed, and then she had a child as white as snow and as red as blood. When she beheld it, she was so glad, that she died.

Her husband buried her under the Juniper-tree, and began to mourn very much; but after a little time, he became calmer, and when he had wept a little more, he left off weeping entirely, and soon afterwards he took another wife.

The second wife brought him a daughter, but the child of the first wife was a little son, and was as red as blood, and as white as snow. When the wife looked at her daughter, she loved her; but when she looked at the little boy, she hated him, and it seemed as if he were always in her way, and she was always thinking how she could get all the property for her daughter. The Evil One possessed her so, that she was quite angry with the little boy, and pushed him about from one corner to another, and cuffed him here and pinched him there, until the poor child was always in fear. When he came home from school, he could not find a quiet place to creep into.

Once, when the woman went up to her room, her little daughter came up too, and said “Mother, give me an apple.”

“Yes, my child,” said the woman, and gave her a beautiful apple out of the chest; and the chest had a great heavy lid, with a great sharp iron lock.

“Mother,” said the little daughter, “shall not brother have one too?”

That vexed the woman, but she said, “Yes, when he comes from school.”

And when she saw from the window that he was coming, it was just as if the Evil One came into her, and she snatched away the apple from her daughter, and said, “You shall not have one before your brother.”

Then she threw the apple into the chest, and shut the lid close down. When the little boy came in at the door, the Evil One made her say kindly, “My son, will you have an apple?”

Yet she looked so angry all the time, that the little boy said, “Mother, how dreadful you look! Yes, give me an apple.”

Then she felt that she must speak to him. “Come with me,” said she, and opened the lid; “pick out an apple for yourself.”

And as the little boy stooped over, the Evil One prompted her, and smash! she banged the lid down, so that his head flew off and fell among the red apples. Then she was seized with terror, and thought, “Can I get rid of the blame of this?” So she went up to her room to her chest of drawers, and took out of the top drawer a white cloth, and placed the head on the neck again, and tied the handkerchief round it, so that one could see nothing, and set him before the door on a chair, and gave him the apple in his hand.

Soon after, little Margery came to her mother, who stood by the kitchen fire, and had a pot of hot water before her, which she kept stirring round.

“Mother,” said little Margery, “brother sits before the door, and looks quite white, and has an apple in his hand; I asked him to give me the apple, but he did not answer me, and I was frightened.”

“Go to him again,” said her mother, “and if he will not answer you, give him a box on the ear.”

Then Margery went, and said, “Brother, give me the apple.”

But he was silent, so she gave him a box on the ear, and the head fell down.

She was frightened, and began to cry and sob, and ran to her mother, and said, “Oh, mother, I have knocked my brother’s head off!” and cried and cried, and would not be comforted.

“Margery,” said her mother, “what have you done!—but now be quiet, and no one will notice; it cannot be helped now—we will cook him in vinegar.”

Then the mother took the little boy, and chopped him in pieces, put him into the pot, and cooked him in vinegar. But Margery stood by, and cried and cried, and all her tears fell into the pot, so that the cookery did not want any salt.

When the father came home, and sat down to dinner, he said, “Where is my son?”

The mother brought a great big dish of black soup, and Margery cried and cried without ceasing. Then the father said again, "Where is my son?"

"Oh," said the mother, "he is gone into the country, to see his uncle, where he is going to stay awhile."

"What does he want there? And he has not even said good-bye to me!"

"Oh, he wished very much to go, and asked if he might remain away six weeks; he is well taken care of there, you know."

"Well," said the father, "I am sorry; for he ought to have bade me good-bye."

After that he began to eat, and said, "Margery, what are you crying for? Brother will be sure to come back. Oh, wife," continued he, "how delicious this food tastes; give me some more." And the more he ate, the more he wanted; and he said, "Give me more, you shall not have any of it; I feel as if it were all mine." And he ate and ate, throwing the bones under the table, till he had finished it all.

But Margery went to her drawers, and took out of the bottom drawer her best silk handkerchief, and fetched out all the bones from under the table; she tied them up in the silk handkerchief, and took them out of doors, and shed bitter tears over them. Then she laid them under the Juniper-tree in the green grass; and when she had put them there, she felt all at once quite happy, and did not cry any more.

Soon the Juniper began to move, and the twigs kept dividing and then closing, just as if the tree were clapping its hands for joy. After that there went up from it a sort of mist, and right in the centre of the mist burnt a fire, and out of the fire flew a beautiful bird, who, singing deliciously, rose up high in the air. When he was out of sight, the Juniper-tree was just as it had been before, only the handkerchief with the bones was gone. But Margery felt quite pleased and happy, just as if her brother were still alive. And she went back merrily into the house to dinner.

The bird flew away, sat himself on a goldsmith's house, and began to sing—

“My mother, she killed me;

My father, he ate me;

My sister, little Margery,

Gathered up all my bones,

Tied them in a silk handkerchief,

And laid them under the Juniper-tree:

Kywitt! Kywitt! what a beautiful bird am I!”

The goldsmith sat in his workshop, making a gold chain, but he heard the bird, which sat on his roof, and sang, and he thought it very beautiful. He stood up, and as he went over the door-step he lost one slipper. But he went right into the middle of the street, with one slipper and one sock on; he had on his leather apron; in one hand he carried the gold chain, and in the other the pincers, while the sun shone brightly up the street. There he stood, and looked at the bird.

“Bird,” said he, “how beautiful you can sing! Sing me that song again.”

“No,” said the bird, “I do not sing twice for nothing. Give me that gold chain, and I will sing it again.”

“There,” said the goldsmith; “you shall have the gold chain—now sing me that song once more.”

Then the bird came and took the gold chain in his right claw, and went and sat before the goldsmith, and sang—

“My mother, she killed me;

My father, he ate me;

My sister, little Margery,

Gathered up all my bones,

Tied them in a silk handkerchief,

And laid them under the Juniper-tree:

Kywitt! Kywitt! what a beautiful bird am I!”

Afterwards he flew away to a shoemaker’s, and set himself on his roof, and sang—

“My mother, she killed me;

My father, he ate me;

My sister, little Margery,

Gathered up all my bones,

Tied them in a silk handkerchief,

And laid them under the Juniper-tree:

Kywitt! Kywitt! what a beautiful bird am I!”

When the shoemaker heard it, he ran out of his door in his shirt-sleeves, looked towards his roof, and had to hold his hand over his eyes, so that the sun should not dazzle him.

“Bird,” said he, “how beautifully you can sing!” And he called in at his door, “Wife, just come out; there is a bird here which can sing so beautifully.” Then he called his daughter and his workpeople, both boys and girls; they all came into the street, looked at the bird, and saw how handsome he was; for he had bright red and green feathers, and his neck shone like real gold, and his eyes twinkled in his head like stars.

“Bird,” said the shoemaker, “now sing me that song again.”

“No,” replied the bird, “I do not sing twice for nothing; you must give me something.”

“Wife,” said the man, “go to the garret: on the highest shelf there stands a pair of red shoes—bring them here.”

The wife went and fetched the shoes.

“There,” said the man, “now sing me that song again.”

Then the bird came and took the shoes in his left claw and flew back on the roof, and sang—

“My mother, she killed me;

My father, he ate me;

My sister, little Margery,

Gathered up all my bones,

Tied them in a silk handkerchief,

And laid them under the Juniper-tree:

Kywitt! Kywitt! what a beautiful bird am I!”

And when he had finished, he flew away, with the chain in his right claw and the shoes in his left. He flew far away to a mill, and the mill went “Clipper, clapper, clipper, clapper, clipper, clapper.” And in the mill there sat twenty millers, who chopped a stone, and chopped, “Hick, hack, hick, hack, hick, hack;” and the mill went, “Clipper, clapper, clipper, clapper, clipper, clapper.”

The bird flew up, and sat in a lime-tree that grew before the mill, and sang—

“My mother, she killed me;”

then one man stopped;

“My father, he ate me;”

then two more stopped and listened;

“My sister, little Margery,”

then four more stopped;

“Gathered up all my bones,
Tied them in a silk handkerchief,”

now only eight more were chopping,

“Laid them under”

now only five,

“the Juniper-tree.”

now only one.

“Kywitt! Kywitt! what a beautiful bird am I!”

Then the last man stopped too, and heard the last word.

“Bird,” said he, “how beautifully you sing! Please to sing me that song once more.”

“No,” answered the bird, “I do not sing twice for nothing; give me the millstone, and I will sing it again.”

“Yes,” said he, “if it belonged to me only, you should have it.”

“Yes,” cried all the others, “if he sings it again, he shall have it.”

Then the bird came down, and all the twenty millers took poles, and lifted the stone up. The bird stuck his neck through the hole in the millstone, and put it on like a collar, and flew back to the tree, and sang—

“My mother, she killed me;

My father, he ate me;

My sister, little Margery,
Gathered up all my bones,
Tied them in a silk handkerchief,
And laid them under the Juniper-tree:

Kywitt! Kywitt! what a beautiful bird am I!”

And when he had done singing, he opened his wings, and though he had in his right claw the chain, in his left the shoes, and round his neck the millstone, he flew far away to his father’s house.

In the room sat the father, the mother, and little Margery at dinner; and the father said, “Oh, how happy I am! altogether joyful.”

“For me,” said the mother, “I feel quite frightened, as if a dreadful storm was coming.”

But Margery sat, and cried and cried.

Then there came the bird flying, and as he perched himself on the roof, “Oh,” said the father, “I feel so happy, and the sun shines out of doors so beautifully! It is just as if I were going to see an old friend.

“No,” said the wife; “I am so frightened, my teeth chatter, and it feels as if there was a fire in my veins;” and she tore open her dress. But Margery sat in a corner, and cried, holding her apron before her eyes, till the apron was quite wet through.

The bird perched upon the Juniper-tree, and sang—

“My mother, she killed me;”

Then the mother stopped up her ears, and shut her eyes tight, and did not want to see or hear; but there was a roaring in her ears like the loudest thunder, and her eyes burned and flashed like lightning—

“My father, he ate me;”

“Oh, wife,” said the man, “look at that beautiful bird!—he sings so splendidly. And the sun shines so warm, and there is a smell like real cinnamon!”

“My sister, little Margery,”

Then Margery laid her head on her knee, and sobbed out loud; but the man said, “I shall go out—I must look at the bird quite close.”

“Oh, do not go,” said the wife; “it seems to me as if the whole house shook, and was in flames.”

But the man went out and watched the bird, which still went on singing—

“Gathered up all my bones,

Tied them in a silk handkerchief,

And laid them under the Juniper-tree:

Kywitt! Kywitt! what a beautiful bird am I!”

After that, the bird let the gold chain fall, and it fell right on to the man’s neck, fitting exactly round it. He went in and said, “See what a beautiful bird that is—it has given me such a splendid gold chain!”

But the wife was frightened, and fell flat down on the floor, and her cap dropped off her head.

Then the bird sang again—

“My mother, she killed me;”

“Oh, that I were a thousand feet under the earth, so that I might not hear!”

“My father, he ate me;”

Then she fell down, as if she was dead.

“My sister, little Margery;”

“Oh!” said Margery, “I will go out too, and see if the bird will give me anything.”

“Gathered up all my bones,

Tied them in a silk handkerchief;”

And the shoes were thrown down.

“And laid them under the Juniper-tree:

Kywitt! Kywitt! what a beautiful bird am I!”

Then Margery was very joyful; she put on the new red shoes, and danced and jumped about. “Oh,” said she, “I was so unhappy when I came out, and now I am so happy! That is a wonderful bird; he has given me a pair of red shoes.”

“For me,” cried the wife, and jumped up, and her hair stood on end like flames of fire, “I feel as if the world were come to an end; I will go out—perhaps I shall feel easier.”

But as she went out of the door—smash!—the bird threw the millstone on her head, and she was crushed to pieces.

The father and Margery heard it, and rushed out to see what had happened: there was a great flame and smoke rising up from the place, and when that was gone, there stood the little brother all alive again—as if he had never died. He took his father and Margery by the hand, and they were all three quite happy, and went into the house to dinner.

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