

Snow White and Rose Red

The Brothers Grimm

A poor widow once lived in a little cottage with a garden in front of it, in which grew two rose trees, one bearing white roses and the other red. She had two children, who were just like the two rose trees; one was called Snow White and the other Rose Red, and they were the sweetest and best children in the world: always hardworking and cheerful. But Snow White was quieter and more gentle than Rose Red. Rose Red loved to run about the fields and meadows, and to pick flowers and catch butterflies. Snow White stayed at home helping her mother or reading aloud to her when there was no work to do.

The two children loved each other so dearly that they always walked about hand in hand, and when Snow White said, "We will never desert each other," Rose Red answered, "No, not as long as we live," and the mother added, "Whatever one gets she shall share with the other." They often roamed about in the woods gathering berries and no beast threatened to hurt them. In fact, animals loved and trusted the two girls. The little hare would eat a cabbage leaf from their hands, the deer grazed beside them, the stag would bound past them merrily, and the birds remained on the branches and sang to them with all their might.

No evil ever befell them; if they stayed late in the wood and night overtook them, they lay down together on the moss and slept until morning, and their mother knew they were quite safe, and never felt anxious about them. Once, when they had slept all night in the wood and had been wakened by the morning sun, they saw a beautiful child in a shining white robe sitting close to their resting place. The figure got up and looked at them kindly, but said nothing, and then vanished into the wood. When they looked around them they realized they had slept quite close to a deep crater in the ground. If they had gone a few steps further in the darkness, they would have fallen into it. When they told their mother of their adventure, she said what they had seen must have been the angel that guards good children.

Snow White and Rose Red kept their mother's cottage so beautifully clean and neat that it was a pleasure to go into it.

Every morning in summer, Rose Red placed a rose from each tree next to her mother's bed. In winter, Snow White lit the fire and put on the kettle. In the evening when the snowflakes fell their mother said, "Snow White, go and close the shutters," and they drew round the fire. Their mother read aloud from a big book while the two girls listened and sat and spun. Beside them on the ground lay a little lamb, and behind them perched a little white dove with its head tucked under its wings.

One evening as they sat cozily together, someone knocked at the door. The mother said, "Rose Red, open the door quickly; it must be some traveler seeking shelter." Rose Red hastened to unlock the door and saw a bear outside who poked his thick black head through the door. Rose Red screamed aloud and sprang back in terror, the lamb began to bleat, the dove flapped its wings, and Snow White ran and hid behind her mother's bed.

The bear began to speak, saying, “Don’t be afraid. I won’t hurt you. I am half frozen, and only wish to warm myself a little.”

“My poor bear,” said the mother, “lie down by the fire, only take care you don’t burn your fur.” Then she called out, “Snow White and Rose Red, come out; the bear will do you no harm—he is a good, honest creature.”

So they came out of their hiding places, and gradually the lamb and dove drew near too, and they all forgot their fear. The bear asked the children to beat the snow a little out of his fur, and they fetched a brush and scrubbed him until he was dry. Then the beast stretched himself in front of the fire and growled quite happily and comfortably. The children soon grew quite at ease with him, teasing and playing with him quite roughly. They tugged his fur, put their small feet on his back, and rolled him about, and if he growled they only laughed. The bear submitted to everything with the best possible good nature, only when they went too far he cried,

“Oh! children, spare my life!
Snow White and Rose Red,
Do not beat your lover dead.”

When it was time to retire for the night, and the others went to bed, the mother said to the bear, “You can lie there on the hearth, in heaven’s name; it will be shelter for you from the cold and wet.”

As soon as day dawned the children led him out, and he trotted over the snow into the wood. From this time on the bear came every evening at the same hour, and lay down by the hearth and let the children play what pranks they liked with him. They got so used to him that the door was never shut until their friend had made his appearance.

When spring came, and all outside was green, the bear said one morning to Snow White, “Now I must go away, and not return again the whole summer.”

“Where are you going to, dear bear?” Snow White asked.

“I must go to the wood and protect my treasure from the wicked dwarfs. In winter, when the earth is frozen hard, they are forced to remain underground, for they can’t work their way through; but now, when the sun has thawed and warmed the ground, they break through and come up above to spy the land and steal what they can. Anything that falls into their hands and into their caves is not easily found again.”

Snow White was quite sad that their friend was leaving, and when she unbarred the door for him, the bear stepping out, caught a piece of his fur in the door-knocker, and Snow White thought she saw glittering gold beneath it, but she couldn’t be certain of it. The bear ran hastily away, and soon disappeared behind the trees.

A short time after this, the mother sent the children into the wood to collect twigs to start the fire. As they wandered, they came upon a big tree which lay felled on the ground, and on the trunk among the long grass they noticed something jumping up and down, but what it was they couldn’t be certain. When they approached nearer they saw a dwarf with a wizened face and a

beard a yard long. The end of the beard was jammed into a cleft of the tree, and the little man sprang about like a dog on a chain and didn't seem to know what to do. He glared at the girls with his fiery red eyes, and screamed out, "What are you standing there for? Can't you come and help me?"

"What were you doing, little man?" asked Rose Red.

"You stupid, inquisitive goose! I wanted to split the tree to get little chips of wood for our kitchen fire. My beautiful white beard has gotten caught in a cleft, so here I am stuck fast, and I can't get away, and you silly, smooth-faced girls just stand and laugh! Ugh!"

The children did all in their power, but they couldn't get the beard out—it was wedged in far too firmly. "I will run and fetch somebody," said Rose Red.

"Crazy blockheads!" Snapped the dwarf. "Does nothing better occur to you than that?"

"Don't be so impatient," said Snow White, and taking her scissors out of her pocket she cut off the end of his beard. As soon as the dwarf felt himself free, he seized a bag full of gold which was hidden among the roots of the tree, lifted it up, and muttered aloud, "Curse these rude wretches, cutting off a piece of my splendid beard!" With these words he swung the bag over his back, and disappeared without looking at the children again.

Shortly after this Snow White and Rose Red were out again, walking along the bank of a stream. They saw their old friend the dwarf springing toward the water as if he were going to jump in. They ran forward, and Rose Red asked, "Where are you going to? You're surely not going to jump into the water?"

"I'm not such a fool," screamed the dwarf. "Don't you see that cursed fish is trying to drag me in?"

The little man had been sitting on the bank, fishing, when unfortunately the wind had entangled his beard in the line. Immediately afterward a big fish bit, and the feeble little creature had no strength to pull it out. The fish dragged the dwarf toward him. He clung on with all his might to every reed and blade of grass.

The girls came up just in the nick of time, held him firm, and did all they could to free his beard from the line; but in vain, beard and line were in a hopeless muddle. All they could do was to take out the scissors again to cut the beard.

The little man was far from grateful to the girls for rescuing him. He yelled to them, "Do you call that manners, to disfigure a fellow's face? It wasn't enough that you shortened my beard before, but you must now cut off the best bit of it."

Then he fetched a sack of pearls that lay among the rushes, and without saying another word he dragged it away and disappeared behind a stone.

Soon after this the mother sent the two girls to the town to buy needles, thread, laces, and ribbons. Their road led over a heath where huge boulders of rock lay scattered here and there.

While trudging along they saw a big bird hovering in the air, circling slowly above them, but always swooping lower, until at last it settled on a rock not far from them.

Immediately afterward they heard a sharp, piercing cry. They ran forward, and saw with horror that the eagle had pounced on their old friend, the dwarf, and was about to carry him off. The tender-hearted children seized hold of the little man, and struggled so long with the bird that at last he let go his prey. When the dwarf had recovered from the first shock he screamed in his screeching voice, "Couldn't you have treated me more carefully? You have torn my thin little coat all to shreds!"

Then he took a bag of precious stones and vanished under the rocks into his cave. The girls were used to his ingratitude, and went on their way. Again passing the heath on their way home, they found the dwarf pouring out his precious stones in an open space, for he had thought no one would pass by at so late an hour. The evening sun shone on the glittering stones, and they gleamed so beautifully that the children stood still and gazed on them.

"What are you standing there for?" screamed the dwarf, and his ashen-grey face became scarlet with rage. He was about to go off with these angry words when a sudden growl was heard, and a black bear trotted out of the wood. The dwarf jumped up in great fright, but he hadn't time to escape down his hole, for the bear was already close to him. Then he cried in terror, "Dear Mr. Bear, spare me! I'll give you all my treasure. Look at those beautiful precious stones lying there. Spare my life! What pleasure would you get from a poor feeble little fellow like me? You won't feel me between your teeth. There, lay hold of these two wicked girls, they will be a tender morsel for you; eat them up, for heaven's sake." But the bear, paying no attention to his words, gave the evil little creature one blow with his paw, and he never moved again.

The girls had run away, but the bear called after them, "Snow White and Rose Red, don't be afraid. Wait, and I'll come with you." Then they recognized his voice and stood still, and when the bear was quite close to them his skin suddenly fell off, and a beautiful man stood beside them, all dressed in gold. "I am a king's son," he said, "and have been doomed by that unholy little dwarf, who had stolen my treasure, to roam about the woods as a wild bear until his death should set me free. Now he has got his well-merited punishment."

In due course, when the girls were old enough, Snow White married the prince who had been a bear, and Rose Red married his brother, and they divided the great treasure the dwarf had stolen between them. The old mother lived for many years peacefully with her children; and she carried the two rose trees with her, and they stood in front of her window, and every year they bore the finest red and white roses.

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