

The Complete Fairy Tales
of the
BROTHERS GRIMM

Translated and With an Introduction by
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Illustrations by John B. Gruelle



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As soon as he began to feel well, he began to live with joy again. Then one day somebody tapped him on the shoulder. He looked around, and Death was standing behind him and said, "Follow me, the hour has come for you to take leave of the world."

"What?" responded the man. "Are you going to break your word? Didn't you promise me that you'd send your messengers to me before you came yourself? I haven't seen any messengers."

"Be quiet!" replied Death. "Didn't I send you one messenger after another? Didn't fever come to jolt and shake you up and knock you off your feet? Didn't dizziness numb your head? Didn't gout make all your limbs twitch? Didn't you hear a roaring noise in your ears? Didn't the toothache gnaw at your cheeks? Didn't your eyesight become dim? And, aside from all this, didn't my very own brother, sleep, remind you of me? Didn't you lie there evenings as if you were already dead?"

The man did not know what to reply. So he surrendered to his fate and went away with Death.

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Master Pfriem

Master Pfriem was a small, lean, but lively man, who could never sit still for a second. His face was deathly pale and pockmarked, and its most outstanding feature was a turned-up nose. His hair was gray and shaggy and his eyes small, and they shifted quickly and constantly to the left and right. He noticed everything, found fault with everything, knew everything better, and was always right. Whenever he went walking on the street, he steered himself by swinging both arms violently, and one time he hit a maiden who was carrying water. Her pail flew high into the air, and he himself was doused by the water.

"You idiot!" he yelled at her while shaking himself. "Couldn't you see that I was coming behind you?"

He was a shoemaker by trade, and when he worked, he pulled out the thread with such force that his fist pulverized anyone who did not stand far enough away from him. Not a single apprentice remained longer than one month in his employ, for the shoemaker always found something wrong, even with the very best work. Sometimes the stitches were not even, or a shoe was too long, or a heel was higher than another, or the leather was not softened enough. "Wait," he would say to the apprentice, "I'll show you how to pound the skin so that it becomes soft." And he would fetch a strap and give him a couple of blows on his back. He called all the apprentices lazy good-for-nothings. However, he himself did not produce very much be-

The Messengers of Death

In days of old there was once a giant who was traveling on a large country road, when suddenly a stranger jumped out in front of him and cried out, "Stop! Not one step farther!"

"What?" the giant said. "You measly wretch, I can squash you between my fingers, and you want to block my way? Who do you think you are that you dare to speak so boldly to me?"

"I am Death," responded the other. "Nobody can resist me, and even you must obey my commands."

However, the giant refused and began to wrestle with Death. It was a long, violent struggle. Finally, the giant got the better of Death and hit him with his fist so that he collapsed next to a stone. The giant continued on his way, and Death lay there defeated. He was so weak that he could not pull himself up. "What will come of this," he said, "if I'm left to lie here on this spot? There will be no more deaths in the world, and there will be so many people in the world that they'll no longer have enough room to stand next to one another."

Just then a young, vigorous, and healthy man came along. He was singing a song, and his eyes roamed back and forth. When he spotted Death, who was half-unconscious, he went to him out of compassion, propped him up, gave him a drink from a bottle to refresh him, and waited until the stranger regained his strength.

"Do you happen to know," asked the stranger as he stood up, "who I am and who you have helped to his feet?"

"No," answered the young man, "I don't know you."

"I am Death," he said. "I don't spare anyone and cannot make exceptions, even with you. But, just so that you can see that I'm grateful, I'm going to promise you that I won't seize you unexpectedly. Instead I'll send my messengers to you right before I come to fetch you."

"Well," said the young man, "it's still to my advantage that I will know when you are coming, and at least I'll be safe from you during this time."

Then the young man moved on. He was merry and in good spirits and took each day as it came. But youth does not last forever. Soon sickness and sorrows came, and they tormented him during the day and would not let him sleep at night. "I won't die," he said to himself, "until Death first sends his messengers. I only wish that these terrible days of sickness were over with."