

## Fairy Tales

When I was a child, nothing completely captured my imagination more than fairy tales. I spent one elementary school summer reading my way through the 398's at the Graham Library. Each week, I'd check out another anthology. I happily re-read old favorites such as "Cinderella," and "The Princess and the Pea," and delightedly discovered new-to-me tales such as "East of the Sun, West of the Moon," "The Twelve Dancing Princesses," and "Baba Yaga."

The tales I read were a little darker than the "suitable for Disney," sanitized tales that have become so familiar today. Good did not always triumph easily. The heroes and heroines suffered.

Cinderella's stepsisters cut off part of their toes and heels to make the glass slipper fit, and the Little Mermaid became foam upon the sea because the Prince married someone else. Hansel and Gretel's father left them alone in the woods to save them from the wrath of their murderous stepmother. The little sister in the story "The Six Swans" spent six years mute and made six shirts out of stinging nettles to save her brothers from their stepmother's curse.

Dark though they might have been, the fairy tales I read served to reinforce the idea that good behavior is generally rewarded, and rude or defiant behavior almost always leads to unhappiness. Snow White and Rose Red were kind, considerate girls who always did as their mother asked. In the end, they helped a prince defeat the evil dwarf who had turned him into a bear. The story ends with the sisters marrying the prince and his brother. They all lived happily ever after, of course. In the story of the Pied Piper, on the other hand, the people of Hamelin learned the hard way that promises shouldn't be broken.

I enjoyed those stories because they were exciting. The heroes were brave and handsome, the heroines smart and beautiful. They often took place in exotic lands, where magic might be found in a mirror, the spindle of a spinning wheel or a freshly-picked apple. Wishes came true, animals frequently talked, and a frog or a bear might be a bewitched prince.

I believe that nothing nurtures the imagination better than a good fairy tale. In order to fully appreciate fairy tales, the reader has to be willing to set aside disbelief and be open to the fantastic. Once we learn to dismiss the notion of the impossible, the world opens up.

Hans Christian Anderson's birthday was April 2. Anderson gave us some of our most-loved fairy tales, including "The Steadfast Tin Soldier," "The Ugly Duckling," and "Thumbelina." Each of our libraries has a variety of fairy tale books, from beautifully illustrated picture books to hefty anthologies. We've got books that tell the tales in the most familiar way and books that put a modern spin on the old stories. Stop by your library and rediscover the stories of your childhood. I encourage you to celebrate Anderson's birthday by sharing your favorite tale with someone special.

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