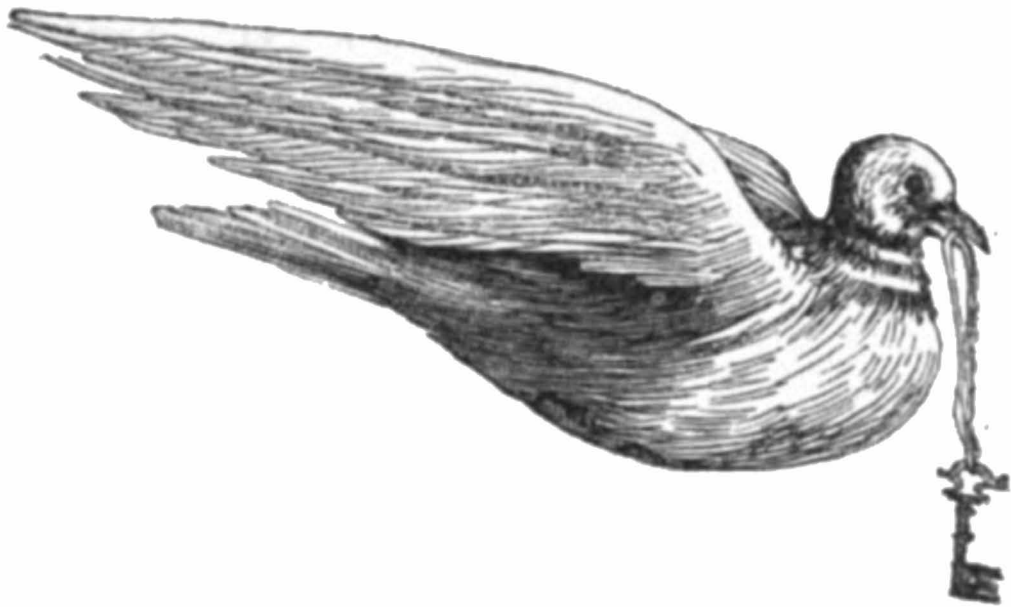


THE OLD WOMAN IN THE WOOD



ONCE upon a time a poor servant girl was traveling with the family for whom she worked through a wood, and just as they got to the middle of it they found themselves in the power of a murdering band of robbers, who all at once sprang out of the brushwood and murdered all they found. But the girl jumped out of the cart in terror, and hid behind a tree. As soon as the robbers had disappeared with their booty she came from her hiding place, and saw her great misfortune. She began to cry bitterly, and said to herself: "What shall I do now, a poor girl like me? I cannot find my way out of the wood; nobody lives here, and I must perish with hunger."

She looked about for a road, but could not find one; and when evening came she sat down under a tree, and determined to stay where she was, whatever might happen.

She had not sat there a long while before a little white pigeon came flying toward her, carrying in his beak a small golden key. The bird put the key into the girl's hand, and said, "Do you see that great tree? Within it is a cupboard, which is opened with this key, and there you will find food enough so that you need not suffer from hunger any longer."

The girl went to the tree, and unlocking it, found milk in a little dish, and white bread fit to break into it; and of these she made a good meal. When she had finished she said

GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES

to herself, "At home now the chickens are gone to roost and I am so tired I should like to go to bed myself." In a moment the pigeon flew up, bringing another gold key in his bill, and said, "Do you see that tree? Open it, and you will find a bed." She opened the little door in the tree, and there stood a little white bed; so she went to sleep. In the morning the pigeon came for the third time, bringing another key, with which he told the girl to open a certain tree, and there she would find plenty of clothes. When she did so she found dresses of all kinds, ornamented with gold and precious stones, as beautiful as any princess could desire. And here she dwelt for a time, while the pigeon every day brought her what she needed; and it was a very quiet and peaceful life.

One day, however, the pigeon came and asked the girl whether she would do an act of kindness for him.

"With all my heart," was her reply.

"I wish you, then," said the pigeon, "to come with me to a little cottage, and to go into it, and there on the hearth you will see an old woman, who will say 'Good day!' But for my sake give her no answer, let her do what she will. But go past her right hand, and you will see a door which you must open. Enter the room, where upon a table will lie a great number of rings of all descriptions, and among them several with glittering stones; but leave them alone, and seek out a plain ring which will be there, and bring it to me as quickly as possible."

The girl thereupon went to the cottage, and stepped in. There sat an old woman who stared when she saw her, but said, "Good day, my child!" The girl made no answer, but

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went toward the door. "Whither are you going?" cried the old woman. "This is my house, and nobody shall enter it unless I wish!" and she tried to detain the girl by catching hold of her dress. But the girl silently loosened herself, and went into the room, and saw upon the table the heap of rings, which glittered and shone before her eyes. She threw them aside and searched for the plain ring, but could not find it; and while she searched she saw the old woman slip in and take up a bird cage, with which she made off. So the maid pursued her, and took the bird cage away from her, for as she looked at it she saw the ring in the bill of the bird which was in it. She took the ring and ran home, joyfully expecting the white pigeon would come to take the ring, but he did not.

So she leaned back against her tree and waited for the bird. Presently it seemed as if the tree were weak and yielding, and its branches began to droop. All at once the boughs bent round, and became two arms; and as the girl turned, the tree became a handsome man who embraced and kissed her, saying, "You have saved me out of the power of the old woman, who is an evil witch. She changed me into a tree a long while ago, but every day I became a white pigeon for two hours. So long as she possessed the ring I could not regain my human form."

Thereupon his servants and horses also were freed from the enchantment, for they likewise had been changed into trees; and once more they accompanied their master to his kingdom (for he was a King's son), and there he married the serving maid, and they lived happily ever afterward.



THE WHITE DOVE WITH THE GOLDEN KEY