

*THE WHITE WOLF*

ONCE upon a time there was a king who had three daughters; they were all beautiful, but the youngest was the fairest of the three. Now it happened that one day their father had to set out for a tour in a distant part of his kingdom. Before he left, his youngest daughter made him promise to bring her back a wreath of wild flowers. When the king was ready to return to his palace, he bethought himself that he would like to take home presents to each of his three daughters; so he went into a jeweller's shop and bought a beautiful necklace for the eldest princess; then he went to a rich merchant's and bought a dress embroidered in gold and silver thread for the second princess, but in none of the flower shops nor in the market could he find the wreath of wild flowers that his youngest daughter had set her heart on. So he had to set out on his homeward way without it. Now his journey led him through a thick forest. While he was still about four miles distant from his palace, he noticed a white wolf squatting on the roadside, and, behold! on the head of the wolf, there was a wreath of wild flowers.

Then the king called to the coachman, and ordered him to get down from his seat and fetch him the wreath from the wolf's head. But the wolf heard the order and said: 'My lord and king, I will let you have the wreath, but I must have something in return.'

'What do you want?' answered the king. 'I will gladly give you rich treasure in exchange for it.'

‘I do not want rich treasure,’ replied the wolf. ‘Only promise to give me the first thing that meets you on your way to your castle. In three days I shall come and fetch it.’

And the king thought to himself: ‘I am still a good long way from home, I am sure to meet a wild animal or a bird on the road, it will be quite safe to promise.’ So he consented, and carried the wreath away with him. But all along the road he met no living creature till he turned into the palace gates, where his youngest daughter was waiting to welcome him home.

That evening the king was very sad, remembering his promise; and when he told the queen what had happened, she too shed bitter tears. And the youngest princess asked them why they both looked so sad, and why they wept. Then her father told her what a price he would have to pay for the wreath of wild flowers he had brought home to her, for in three days a white wolf would come and claim her and carry her away, and they would never see her again. But the queen thought and thought, and at last she hit upon a plan.

There was in the palace a servant maid the same age and the same height as the princess, and the queen dressed her up in a beautiful dress belonging to her daughter, and determined to give her to the white wolf, who would never know the difference.

On the third day the wolf strode into the palace yard and up the great stairs, to the room where the king and queen were seated.

‘I have come to claim your promise,’ he said. ‘Give me your youngest daughter.’

Then they led the servant maid up to him, and he said to her: ‘You must mount on my back, and I will take you to my castle.’ And with these words he swung her on to his back and left the palace.

When they reached the place where he had met the king and given him the wreath of wild flowers, he

stopped, and told her to dismount that they might rest a little.

So they sat down by the roadside.

‘I wonder,’ said the wolf, ‘what your father would do if this forest belonged to him?’

And the girl answered: ‘My father is a poor man, so he would cut down the trees, and saw them into planks, and he would sell the planks, and we should never be poor again; but would always have enough to eat.’

Then the wolf knew that he had not got the real princess, and he swung the servant-maid on to his back and carried her to the castle. And he strode angrily into the king’s chamber, and spoke.

‘Give me the real princess at once. If you deceive me again I will cause such a storm to burst over your palace that the walls will fall in, and you will all be buried in the ruins.’

Then the king and the queen wept, but they saw there was no escape. So they sent for their youngest daughter, and the king said to her: ‘Dearest child, you must go with the white wolf, for I promised you to him, and I must keep my word.’

So the princess got ready to leave her home; but first she went to her room to fetch her wreath of wild flowers, which she took with her. Then the white wolf swung her on his back and bore her away. But when they came to the place where he had rested with the servant-maid, he told her to dismount that they might rest for a little at the roadside. Then he turned to her and said: ‘I wonder what your father would do if this forest belonged to him?’

And the princess answered: ‘My father would cut down the trees and turn it into a beautiful park and gardens, and he and his courtiers would come and wander among the glades in the summer time.’

‘This is the real princess,’ said the wolf to himself.

But aloud he said: 'Mount once more on my back, and I will bear you to my castle.'

And when she was seated on his back he set out through the woods, and he ran, and ran, and ran, till



at last he stopped in front of a stately courtyard, with massive gates.

'This is a beautiful castle,' said the princess, as the gates swung back and she stepped inside. 'If only I were not so far away from my father and my mother!'



But the wolf answered: 'At the end of a year we will pay a visit to your father and mother.'

And at these words the white furry skin slipped from his back, and the princess saw that he was not a wolf at all, but a beautiful youth, tall and stately; and he gave her his hand, and led her up the castle stairs.

One day, at the end of half a year, he came into her room and said: 'My dear one, you must get ready for a wedding. Your eldest sister is going to be married, and I will take you to your father's palace. When the wedding is over, I shall come and fetch you home. I will whistle outside the gate, and when you hear me, pay no heed to what your father or mother say, leave your dancing and feasting, and come to me at once; for if I have to leave without you, you will never find your way back alone through the forests.'

When the princess was ready to start, she found that he had put on his white fur skin, and was changed back into the wolf; and he swung her on to his back, and set out with her to her father's palace, where he left her, while he himself returned home alone. But, in the evening, he went back to fetch her, and, standing outside the palace gate, he gave a long, loud whistle. In the midst of her dancing the princess heard the sound, and at once she went to him, and he swung her on his back and bore her away to his castle.

Again, at the end of half a year, the prince came into her room, as the white wolf, and said: 'Dear heart, you must prepare for the wedding of your second sister. I will take you to your father's palace to-day, and we will remain there together till to-morrow morning.'

So they went together to the wedding. In the evening, when the two were alone together, he dropped his fur skin, and, ceasing to be a wolf, became a prince again. Now they did not know that the princess's mother was hidden in the room. When she saw the white skin lying on the floor, she crept out of the room, and sent a servant

to fetch the skin and to burn it in the kitchen fire. The moment the flames touched the skin there was a fearful clap of thunder heard, and the prince disappeared out of the palace gate in a whirlwind, and returned to his palace alone.

But the princess was heart-broken, and spent the night weeping bitterly. Next morning she set out to find her way back to the castle, but she wandered through the woods and forests, and she could find no path or track to guide her. For fourteen days she roamed in the forest, sleeping under the trees, and living upon wild berries and roots, and at last she reached a little house. She opened the door and went in, and found the wind seated in the room all by himself, and she spoke to the wind and said : ' Wind, have you seen the white wolf ? '

And the wind answered : ' All day and all night I have been blowing round the world, and I have only just come home ; but I have not seen him. '

But he gave her a pair of shoes, in which, he told her, she would be able to walk a hundred miles with every step. Then she walked through the air till she reached a star, and she said : ' Tell me, star, have you seen the white wolf ? '

And the star answered : ' I have been shining all night, and I have not seen him. '

But the star gave her a pair of shoes, and told her that if she put them on she would be able to walk two hundred miles at a stride. So she drew them on, and she walked to the moon, and she said : ' Dear moon, have you not seen the white wolf ? '

But the moon answered, ' All night long I have been sailing through the heavens, and I have only just come home ; but I did not see him. '

But he gave her a pair of shoes, in which she would be able to cover four hundred miles with every stride. So she went to the sun, and said : ' Dear sun, have you seen the white wolf ? ' .

And the sun answered, 'Yes, I have seen him, and he has chosen another bride, for he thought you had left him, and would never return, and he is preparing for the wedding. But I will help you. Here are a pair of shoes. If you put these on you will be able to walk on glass or ice, and to climb the steepest places. And here is a spinning-wheel, with which you will be able to spin moss into silk. When you leave me you will reach a glass mountain. Put on the shoes that I have given you and with them you will be able to climb it quite easily. At the summit you will find the palace of the white wolf.'

Then the princess set out, and before long she reached the glass mountain, and at the summit she found the white wolf's palace, as the sun had said.

But no one recognised her, as she had disguised herself as an old woman, and had wound a shawl round her head. Great preparations were going on in the palace for the wedding, which was to take place next day. Then the princess, still disguised as an old woman, took out her spinning-wheel, and began to spin moss into silk. And as she spun the new bride passed by, and seeing the moss turn into silk, she said to the old woman: 'Little mother, I wish you would give me that spinning-wheel.'

And the princess answered, 'I will give it to you if you will allow me to sleep to-night on the mat outside the prince's door.'

And the bride replied, 'Yes, you may sleep on the mat outside the door.'

So the princess gave her the spinning-wheel. And that night, winding the shawl all round her, so that no one could recognise her, she lay down on the mat outside the white wolf's door. And when everyone in the palace was asleep she began to tell the whole of her story. She told how she had been one of three sisters, and that she had been the youngest and the fairest of the three, and that her father had betrothed her to a white wolf. And she told how she had gone first to



The Bride wishes to buy  
the Spinning-wheel.

the wedding of one sister, and then with her husband to the wedding of the other sister, and how her mother had ordered the servant to throw the white fur skin into the kitchen fire. And then she told of her wanderings through the forest; and of how she had sought the white wolf weeping; and how the wind and star and moon and sun had befriended her, and had helped her to reach his palace. And when the white wolf heard all the story, he knew that it was his first wife, who had sought him, and had found him, after such great dangers and difficulties.

But he said nothing, for he waited till the next day, when many guests—kings and princes from far countries—were coming to his wedding. Then, when all the guests were assembled in the banqueting hall, he spoke to them and said: ‘Hearken to me, ye kings and princes, for I have something to tell you. I had lost the key of my treasure casket, so I ordered a new one to be made; but I have since found the old one. Now, which of these keys is the better?’

Then all the kings and royal guests answered: ‘Certainly the old key is better than the new one.’

‘Then,’ said the wolf, ‘if that is so, my former bride is better than my new one.’

And he sent for the new bride, and he gave her in marriage to one of the princes who was present, and then he turned to his guests, and said: ‘And here is my former bride’—and the beautiful princess was led into the room and seated beside him on his throne. ‘I thought she had forgotten me, and that she would never return. But she has sought me everywhere, and now we are together once more we shall never part again.’