

The Gingerbread Boy and Other First Tales

By Melody Warnick

The Gingerbread Boy

Once there was a little old woman and a little old man, who lived together in a dusty little cottage, with no boys or girls of their own. Occasionally, this made them feel a bit sad. But one warm autumn afternoon, the little old woman had an idea she thought would cheer her up.

"I'll *make* my own boy!" she said happily. "A gingerbread boy!"

She pulled down her mixing bowl, her flour and sugar, and stirred up a cookie dough rich with molasses and cinnamon. She rolled it on her kitchen table and cut out the shape of a plump little boy. As she worked, she talked to herself, for there was no one else to talk to. "Now I'll just tuck in two raisins for eyes, a few currants for his mouth, and with some cinnamon candies I'll dress him up with buttons. Oh, doesn't he look handsome? Now to pop him in the oven..."

Within a few minutes the house was full of the wonderful, spicy smell of warm gingerbread. When the old woman just couldn't wait any longer, she pulled open the oven door for a peek, to see if the gingerbread boy was done baking. Imagine her surprise when the gingerbread boy hopped straight out of the oven, past the old woman, and without so much as hello or goodbye, dashed out the front door. Indignantly, the old woman called out after him. "Come right back here this instant, gingerbread boy! I can tell just by looking at you that you're only half-baked!"

But the gingerbread boy just shook his head, laughed mischievously and cried, "Run, run, fast as you can! You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man!"

"Well," harumphed the old woman, "we'll just see about that." She hitched up her skirts, hiked up her socks, and dashed down the lane after him. But though she chased him with all her might, she couldn't catch up with the gingerbread boy. He was just too fast.

Soon the gingerbread boy darted by the old woman's husband, who was hoeing and harvesting turnips in the vegetable garden.

"Henry!" cried the old woman breathlessly. "Catch that gingerbread boy!"

"I will, Ruby, I will," said her husband. "Come back here, you!"

The gingerbread boy was in no mood to stop. "I outran the woman, and I can run away from you, too!" he taunted.

The old man tossed down his turnips, turned up his pant legs, and ran after the gingerbread boy with all his strength. But he just couldn't gain on the the

gingerbread boy, who stuck out his tongue and laughed. "Run, run, fast as you can! You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man!"

By now the gingerbread boy was heading past a neighboring farm, scooting so fast down the dirt road that he kicked up a dust cloud behind him. The dust caught the eye of a pig who had his nose deep in a trough full of table scraps. When he saw the gingerbread man running down the road, the pig gave an oink of glee. "I don't want to eat plain old slop. I want to eat a tasty gingerbread boy! Wait for me, dinner, wait for me!"

"I outran the woman and the old man too, and I can run away from you!" cried the gingerbread boy as he ran on.

The pig pulled his oinker out of the slop bucket, picked his way through the mud, and jogged after the gingerbread boy as quickly as his little hooves would carry him. But even though his curly tail waggled wildly with the effort, he wasn't any closer to catching that cookie. The gingerbread boy pointed his finger and giggled wickedly. "Run, run, fast as you can! You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man!"

Down the road the gingerbread boy continued to sail. His candy buttons shined in the sunlight, and his currant mouth smiled with the merriment of making trouble. Soon he passed through the grass near a little pond, where a mother goose was trying to herd her goslings into the water for an afternoon swim. The gingerbread boy created such a breeze when he went by that the goslings started honking and flapped back to the nest. That pleased the mother goose not one bit. She squawked, "Stop, gingerbread boy! Come back here at once!"

"I outran the woman and the old man too, I outran the pig and I can outrun you!" cried the gingerbread boy as he ran on.

The goose fluffed up her feathers, hissed with her honker, and began waddling through the grass behind him. But though she flapped her wings and even flew a few feet, she just couldn't seem to get near that gingerbread boy. For his part, he honked right back at her and laughed. "Run, run, fast as you can! You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man!"

As the gingerbread boy scurried onward, he ran straight past the nose of a hound dog sleeping under a red maple tree. His spicy, gingery scent woke the hound dog right up and set him to howling. "Gingerbread booooy! Oh, gingerbread booooy! I'm on your trail. I'm a-gonna catch you, and I'm a-gonna eat you."

The gingerbread boy wasn't even nervous, not one bit. He cried, "I outran the woman and the old man too, the pig and the goose, and I can outrun you!"

The hound dog had chased many a fox in his day, and he wasn't one to take a challenge lightly. He wiped off his paws, wiggled his haunches, and set out at full hunting speed after the gingerbread boy. He came close enough to snap at the gingerbread boy's bottom, but always the cookie hopped out of the way just in time.

After a while the dog lost some steam, and soon the gingerbread boy was far in the distance, waving and laughing and saying, "Run, run, fast as you can! You can't catch me, I'm the gingerbread man!"

By now the naughty little gingerbread boy was being chased by an old woman, an old man, a pig, a goose, and a dog. Still, he giggled, pleased with himself. He was the fastest runner in the world! He could outrace anyone who tried to catch him!

Just as he congratulated himself for being so quick, the gingerbread boy came to a wide, fast-flowing river. He stopped at the water's edge. He knew that if he jumped into the water, his gingery cookie body would crumble and melt away. If he waited, though, surely his chasers would catch up and they would eat him. As the gingerbread man tried to decide what to do, from a nearby stand of trees he heard a quiet voice. "Gingerbread boy, dear gingerbread boy, what seems to be the trouble?"

It was a fox, his long, red tail waving behind him. The fox had seen the gingerbread boy and knew just how delicious he would be; he wanted to gobble him up all for himself. But he knew he'd have to be sly about it. Luckily, being sly was what the fox did best.

"Hear that?" said the fox suddenly. "That dog barking, that goose honking, that pig squealing, that old man yelling, that old woman hollering? Sounds like trouble to me. I was just planing to cross this river myself. You're welcome to hop on my tail, if you'd like."

The gingerbread boy thought for a moment, but seeing no other options, he said, "I will, I will."

With the gingerbread man sitting on the tip of his long tail, the fox paddled slowly into the river. After a few moments, the fox spoke. "My dear gingerbread boy, the river is flowing fast today. I'm afraid you'll get soaked sitting back there on my tail. Climb up to my back so you'll be safer."

The gingerbread boy did as the fox told him. After another short while of paddling, the fox spoke again. "My dear gingerbread boy, the water is getting deeper. Climb onto my head where you'll be nice and dry."

The gingerbread did. A short while later, the fox spoke urgently. "My dear gingerbread boy, the waves are getting rough now, and I'm afraid you'll be washed away. Climb onto the very tip of my nose! That will be the safest place of all for you."

The gingerbread boy quickly climbed onto the tip of the fox's nose—and SNAP! The fox threw back his head, clapped his jaws tight around the gingerbread boy, and gobbled him up.

That was the end of the naughty gingerbread boy.

The Little Red Hen

There once was a Little Red Hen, who lived in a sunny barnyard with her flock of downy chicks. All day long she walked about the barnyard, picketty-pecketty, picketty-pecketty, scratching and searching for worms. The Little Red Hen loved worms. They were fat and delicious—the perfect food to help her chicks grow big and strong. As soon as she found one she cried out, “Chuck-chuck-chuck!” to her little chickies. When they were gathered around her, she would pass out tiny little pieces of her tidbit to each chick, who would gulp it down eagerly. Then she’d start hunting all over again, picketty-pecketty, picketty-pecketty.

As you can imagine, the Little Red Hen was very busy all day. But not everyone in the barnyard was as busy as she. There was an old orange cat who spent her day napping in the warm spot by the barn door. There was a dog who spent his day sleeping in a shady nook in the hayloft. Then there was the pig who lived in the pen, who simply lolled about in the mud all day long. He didn’t care what happened to anyone as long as he had slop to eat and a cool place to wallow.

One day as the Little Red Hen pecked and hunted in the barnyard, she found a seed. It was long and slender like a worm, but different somehow. Perhaps, thought the Little Red Hen, this was some delicious new kind of bug that she had never seen before! She said to herself, “I’ll just nibble the corner and take a tiny taste to see. Well, no, it doesn’t taste nearly as delicious as a plump, juicy worm. Whatever could it be?”

She looked around the barnyard for someone to ask. “Who can tell me what this is?” called out the Little Red Hen.

The Cat, who was napping in the sunlight, did not bother to open her eyes. “Not I,” said the Cat.

The Dog, who was lazing in the hayloft, buried his nose under his paws. “Not I,” said the Dog.

The Pig, who was digging into his trough, chewed on a corn cob. "Not I," said the pig.

They were no help at all. But even without them, the Little Red Hen eventually discovered that what she had found was a wheat seed. She also learned that if she planted it, it would grow and ripen and could be made into flour. And the best part of all was, flour could be made into bread.

"Oh my!" gasped the Little Red Hen. "Fresh, homemade bread! Well, wouldn't that be a howdy-do? I ought to plant it then, shouldn't I? But how can I take time out of my hunting-and-scratching schedule when I have all these chicks to feed? Perhaps someone else in the barnyard might be able to pitch in. Excuse me, excuse me! Will anyone here plant this wheat seed?"

"Not I," said the Cat.

"Not I," said the Dog.

"Not I," said the Pig.

"Well, then," said the Little Red Hen, "I'll plant it myself." And she did, right in the corner of the barnyard.

All through the long summer days the Little Red Hen stayed busy scratching for worms and feeding her chicks, while the Cat grew fat, the Dog grew fat, and the Pig grew fattest of all. Meanwhile, the wheat was growing tall and slender and golden.

One day the Little Red Hen happened to notice how tall the wheat and how ripe the grain was looking. It really needed to be cut, she thought. But as usual, it was a very busy day for her. Her chicks were older now, but still there was all that pecking and scratching for worms to do, picketty-pecketty, picketty-pecketty, all through the barnyard. So she called out in a loud voice, "Who here will cut the wheat today?"

“Not I,” said the Cat.

“Not I,” said the Dog.

“Not I,” said the Pig.

“Well, then,” said the Little Red Hen, “I’ll cut it myself.”

So she did. With the nicely cut wheat lying on the ground ready to be gathered and threshed, the Little Red Hen's chicks started peep-peep-peeping, demanding attention and more worms! Poor Little Red Hen! She hardly knew what to do. She needed to take care of the wheat, but she needed to care for her children as well. So again, in a very hopeful voice, she called out, “Who will thresh the Wheat?”

But the Cat, with a meow, said, “Not I.”

And the Dog, with a bark, said, “Not I,”

And the Pig, with a snort, said, “Not I.”

“Well, then,” said the Little Red Hen, “I’ll thresh it myself.” And she did.

Of course, she had to feed her babies first, but when she had gotten them all to sleep for their afternoon nap, she went out and threshed the wheat. Then she called out: “Who will carry the wheat to the mill to be ground?”

Turning their backs with irritation, the cat said, “Not I.”

The Dog said, “Not I.”

The Pig said, “Not I.”

So the good Little Red Hen smiled and said, “Well, then, I’ll take it myself.” With the sack of wheat slung over her shoulder, she trudged off to the mill, where

she ordered the wheat ground into beautiful white flour. Then she carried it slowly back all the way to the barnyard in her own picketty-pecketty fashion. She even managed, in spite of her load, to catch a nice juicy worm, which she divided among her chicks when she returned.

By now it was almost evening, and the Little Red Hen was bone-tired. But before she could rest, she wanted to turn that fine white flour into a fresh, piping-hot loaf of bread. Surely someone would help her with the baking! Loudly she cried out, "Who will help me bake the bread?"

"Not I," said the Cat.

"Not I," said the Dog.

"Not I," said the Pig.

"Well, then," said the Little Red Hen, "I'll bake it myself."

And she did. Putting on a clean apron, the Little Red Hen mixed up the dough, put it in a loaf pan, and let it rise till it looked nice and plump. Then she put it into the oven to bake. All while she worked, the Cat lazily licked her tail. The Dog scratched at a few fleas. And from the pen, the Pig's snores were loud enough to shake the slop bucket.

Suddenly, a delicious smell filled the air. It was the wonderful smell of fresh bread baking, and all over the barnyard animals perked up their noses.

Even the cat, who pricked her whiskers and smiled.

Even the dog, whose mouth began watering for a treat.

Especially the pig, who stuck his round, pink nose through the slats of his pen and oinked in anticipation.

When it was done, the Red Hen walked in her picketty-pecketty way toward the oven and pulled out the golden loaf. All the animals sighed in pleasure to see

how beautiful it looked. But the Little Red Hen was the happiest of all. After all, it was her hard work that had turned a single seed into this bread!

For she alone had planted the seed.

She alone had harvested the wheat.

She alone had threshed the grain.

She alone had taken it to the mill.

She alone had mixed the dough and baked the bread.

After all that, at last, her loaf of bread smelled wonderful!

Then, probably because she was in the habit, the Little Red Hen called out, "Who will eat the bread?"

"I will!" meowed the Cat.

"I will!" barked the Dog.

"I will!" oinked the Pig.

The Little Red Hen thought a moment. Then she shook her head. "No, I will eat it. And my chicks will help me."

And they did.

The Bremen Town Musicians

There once was a donkey who had worked hard his whole life carrying sacks of grain to the mill for his master. Slowly but surely he had become an old donkey. His thick gray coat was sprinkled with white fur. His back was bent and sore. And his once-strong legs wobbled when he walked.

One afternoon, as he rested in the barnyard, he overheard his master and mistress talking together.

“That donkey’s no good for anything anymore,” complained the master. “Rest, rest, rest, that’s all he ever does.”

“He’s too old to work,” his wife agreed. “And that means he’s not worth the price of his feed. It’s time to buy a fresh young donkey with a strong back who can carry sacks of grain without stopping every five minutes.”

“I hate to get rid of this old one,” sighed the master, “but I suppose it’s time.”

“Get rid of me?!” screeched the donkey. In that moment, he decided to escape. As soon as the master and mistress were busy with other things, the donkey jogged out of the barnyard and down the road that led to the town of Bremen. He had it in his mind that he would join the Bremen Town Band, who every afternoon played beautiful music in the square by the mill. The donkey figured that if he could learn to play the flute or some other instrument, they’d invite him to join up. After all, who wouldn’t want to hear a donkey play the flute? Or a violin? Or a harmonica?

The donkey was thinking about which instrument he preferred when he came across an old jowley-cheeked hound dog sitting on the side of the road, panting as if he’d just run a race.

“What’s the matter?” asked the donkey. “Where are you running off to?”

“Running *from* is more like it,” said the dog. “I’ve been a hunting dog all my life; I’ve always sniffed out foxes and rabbits for my master. But now he says I’ve lost

my sense of smell, and if I can't hunt then he'll have to (gulp) dispose of me. When I heard that, I ran for it, naturally."

"Good thinking, my friend," said the donkey. "I have similar troubles."

"Now of course," said the dog, "I have nowhere to sleep, no food to eat, and no way to earn a living."

"Why don't you join me?" asked the donkey. "I'm going to Bremen to become a town musician—they have the most wonderful town band. You don't play the drums, do you?"

"Well..."

"No matter, you can learn. Come along, come along."

With no place else to go, the dog agreed, and together the two slowly made their way down the road that led to Bremen town. They hadn't gotten far, however, when they came across an old tabby cat sitting on a fence, his whiskers drooping like he'd been caught in a thunderstorm.

"What's the matter?" asked the donkey. "Why the sad face?"

"You'd have a sad face too if your mistress wanted to send you away," moaned the cat. "She says I should be chasing mice, but I'm too old for that now, and my teeth aren't as sharp as they used to be. I'd be happy to sit behind the stove and purr. But does she like that? No. Chase the mice or face a sorry end, that's what my mistress says."

"That *is* terrible," sighed the donkey.

"We know what it's like," added the dog.

The cat licked halfheartedly at his whiskers. "But you seem cheerful enough," he said. "Where are you headed?"

“To Bremen,” said the donkey, “to join the town band. I imagine you’re excellent at evening serenades. Come along, why don’t you?”

The cat agreed, and soon the three were back on the road again, tromping past barns and under the canopy of trees. They had just passed a sign that said “Bremen: 5 miles” when they saw, perched on the roof of a barn, a rooster crowing and cock-a-doodling like his heart would break.

“What’s wrong, Rooster?” called out the donkey. “It’s not even sunrise. Why all the fuss?”

“All my life I’ve watched over the hens and the chicks in the barnyard,” complained the rooster. “I’ve woken my master up morning after morning. I’ve warned them when foxes strayed too near the henhouse. And how do they thank me? By trying to wring my neck and cook me in the soup for Sunday supper!”

“That does sound awful,” said the donkey.

“We’ve experienced similar misfortunes,” sympathized the cat.

“But our luck is changing, for we’re all going to Bremen to join up with the town band,” said the dog.

“Clearly you’re a high-quality crooner,” said the donkey. “Join us, and we’ll all go together. They’ll never be able to resist a talented quartet like ourselves.”

“Oh, thank you, I’d be happy to,” cried the rooster, flapping down from his roost. “Off we go!”

Onward the four walked, talking happily—until the sun set, and the night grew dark and cold. They realized that they were still far from Bremen town, with nowhere to sleep and no food between them, and their hearts sank.

“Oh, my empty stomach!” howled the dog.

“Oh, my tired paws” yowled the cat.

“Oh, my parched beak,” crowed the rooster.

“I know, I know, my hooves hurt too,” brayed the donkey. “Rooster, fly up to the treetops and see what you can see.”

Rooster flapped to the tip-top of the tallest tree and peered into the darkness. “I see a light!” he said. “It looks like it’s coming from a cottage nearby.”

“Perhaps it’s a kind family who’ll offer us a place to stay,” said the dog.

“Or a farmer with plenty of food to share,” said the cat.

“Let’s go see,” suggested the donkey.

Soon they came to a clearing in the woods where there sat a little cottage, smoke chugging from its chimney, light beaming from all the windows. The donkey, who was the tallest, put his nose to the window and peered inside.

“What do you see?” the rooster asked.

“A blazing fire. Men sitting around a table, laughing. And oh, the table—it’s covered with food! Cheese and bread, fruit and meat, pies, cakes, drink.”

“Oh, what I wouldn’t give for a piece of bacon,” said the dog.

“Or a dollop of cream,” said the cat.

“Or an ear of corn,” said the rooster.

“And there’s gold everywhere!” added the donkey. “Mounds of it, piled on the floor and in the corners of the rooms. Either they’re very rich men or they’re robbers.”

As a matter of fact, the men were robbers. They animals had stumbled onto their secret hideout, where they were counting the money they had stolen and celebrating their success. The donkey, the dog, the cat, and the rooster, hungry and

eager to get some of that food for themselves, began to talk about what they could do to drive the robbers away. At last they hit on the plan. Here is what they did:

The donkey placed his hooves on the windowsill. The dog jumped on the donkey's back. The cat climbed onto the dog. And as they stood there balancing like acrobats, the rooster flapped up and grabbed a spot on the cat's head. All at once, the four animals began to make their finest town band music. The donkey hee-hawed, the hound dog howled, the tabby cat yowled, and the rooster cock-a-doodle-dooed. They were so loud—and to tell the truth, so awful-sounding— that the robbers jumped up and flew out the front door, convinced that monsters were attacking.

Once the men were gone, in raced the donkey, the dog, the cat and the rooster to gulp down the food from the table. The donkey ate the bread, the dog gobbled the meat, the cat lapped the cream, and the rooster picked at the fruit. When they were too tired and full to eat anymore, they each found a place to sleep. The donkey settled in a warm patch of hay in the barnyard. The dog bedded down behind the back door. The cat curled up on a rug in front of the fireplace. The rooster made his roost on a beam over the door. Exhausted from their long journey, everyone soon fell fast asleep.

But not the robbers. The gang of mean-faced men were hiding in the trees around the little cottage, watching and waiting to see what would happen.

“Do you really think monsters are in there?” asked one robber.

“Not a chance,” said another. “But our gold is. We shouldn't have let ourselves be scared away.”

“Well, I'm going in,” said a third robber. Bravely he crept across the grass and let himself in the front door.

Everything was quiet. Because the fire had burned down, it was pitch dark, too. The robber felt around for a candle, then peered into the darkness for something to light it with. All he could see were the the two glowing eyes of the cat,

staring at him from near the fire. The robber thought they were two glowing coals, so he poked his candle right into the cat's eye!

How that cat howled! He sprang into the robber's face, spitting and hissing and scratching, which scared the robber so much that he turned to run out the back door and tripped over the hound dog, who sank his sharp teeth deep into the robber's leg. The robber finally stumbled outside, only to run straight into the donkey, who gave him a good, solid kick with his hind foot. All that noise woke the rooster, who flew outside screaming and shrieking "Cock-a-doodle-doo! Cock-a-doodle-doo!" till his tailfeathers flew off.

The robber never ran so fast in his life. He raced back to where his henchmen were hiding and cried, "There's a terrible witch in the house who spat at me and scratched me with her sharp nails! Then, when I tried to escape, a man hiding behind the door stabbed me in the leg. In the yard a monster jumped on me and beat me. Then another monster started screaming from the rooftop! Run for your lives! Run for your lives!"

By the time the robber finished his story, he and his gang were hot-footing it through the forest, never to return to their gold in the little cottage in the woods.

The animals, for their part, never made it all the way to Bremen town. But that was a good thing. They liked their new house so much that they decided to stay, and spent the rest of their lives there happily making music together.

The Frog Prince

Long ago there lived a king whose youngest daughter was so beautiful that even the sun, who had seen everything, stopped in the sky just to look at her. Unfortunately, that made the days long and hot, and forced everyone in the king's palace, including the princess, to do what they could to cool off. One day, the King saw his daughter skipping out the back door.

"Daughter, where are you going?" he asked.

"To the forest, Father," replied the Princess. "I'm so hot, and there's a well by that old linden tree where it's lovely and cool."

"Won't you be bored, sitting by yourself in the forest?" wondered the King.

"Oh, no, Father," she said, "I'm taking my golden ball with me."

The Princess loved to play with her golden ball. That afternoon, in the shade of the linden tree next to the well, she tossed it high into the air, then watched as the ball shone and twinkled in the sun before falling back down into her waiting hands. For hours the Princess played her game. Up and down, up and down went the golden ball, until the fateful moment when the princess's fingers slipped a bit. That time, the ball went up up up, and fell down down down straight into the well. The Princess gasped as the ball hit the water with a great splash. Though she peered into the well, it was so deep and dark she couldn't even see the bottom, let alone her golden ball.

Heartbroken, the Princess put her head in her hands and began to cry miserably—which is why she didn't notice when a giant green frog with bulging eyes and a wide mouth appeared on the rim of the well. "What ever is the matter, Princess?" it croaked.

So sad was the Princess at the loss of her ball that she thought nothing of telling her troubles to a talking frog. "I lost my golden ball. It fell down the well, and it's so deep and dark down there that I'll never be able to get it back. It's gone forever."

“You’re in luck,” said the frog. “I can help you.”

“You can?”

“Anything to stop those tears of yours,” said the frog. “But if I do this favor for you, what will you give me in return?”

The princess quickly exclaimed, “Anything! Anything at all! Pearls, jewels, the golden crown on my head!”

The frog shook his head. “I’m a frog, dear Princess. What would I do with pearls and jewels and a golden crown?”

“Well, then, what would you like? Anything you wish.”

The frog paused, then slowly said, “I want you to love me.”

“Love you?” exclaimed the princess.

“Be my friend,” said the frog. “My companion. Let me eat from your plate. Let me drink from your cup. Let me sleep on your satin pillow.”

The princess thought the request was the strangest thing she had ever heard—and probably the most disgusting, too. Share her plate and her cup with a frog? Let him sleep on her pillow? Yuck! But thinking only of her golden ball, she nodded in agreement. “Yes, fine, anything you say. Just please bring back my ball!”

Immediately, the frog let out a ribbit and dove straight to the bottom of the well. Before long he found the golden ball shimmering in the dark water, then with great strength and cleverness, he dragged it back up again and tossed it onto the grass near the well.

“My ball, my ball!” cried the princess joyfully. Without even a word of thanks, and forgetting entirely about the promise she had just made to her frog helper, the princess grabbed up the golden ball and ran straight back to the palace.

The frog watched in dismay as her figure disappeared in the distance. "Princess, wait, wait!" he called. "My webbed feet can't run as fast as yours! Take me with you! What about your promise?!"

But there was no reply.

The next night at dinner, as the Princess sat across from the King, she heard a flip-flap, flip-flap coming up the marble stairs. Soon there was a knock knock knock at the door. Then a voice called for her. "Princess, oh princess!"

The Princess paled. "Oh no," she whispered. "Can it be? The frog!"

"Who is it, Daughter?" asked her father, the king.

"Hmm? Oh, no one. I mean, I don't think it could be anyone. Certainly not a person. No, no, not a person. That means it's nothing. Why don't we eat, Father? Loudly?"

From the passageway outside the door they heard the voice again. This time it sang:

Open the door, sweet maid, sweet maid,

Don't you remember the promise you made?

Extremely curious now, the king stood up from the table. "I think I'll go see for myself." The princess listened as he opened the heavy door. After a moment, he called, "Daughter, there's a frog here. He says he wants to see you."

"Oh. Him," muttered the princess.

"What is this about?" asked the king.

“Father, yesterday when I was playing in the woods I accidentally dropped my golden ball down the well. This frog promised to fetch it for me if I let him eat from my plate and drink from my cup and sleep on my pillow.”

“And he kept his part of the bargain?”

“He did fetch the ball, Father,” admitted the princess. “But really, who does he think I am? His frog maiden? How can he possibly expect me to sleep a single wink with a frog on my pillow?”

“Daughter, did you make a promise to this frog?”

“Well... yes.”

The king looked serious. “A princess always keeps her promises. It’s settled then. The frog will join us for dinner.”

From the corridor, the frog came hopping, eager to join the princess at the table.

“Thank you, King, most kindly,” he croaked. “I’m quite hungry from my long journey from the well.” The frog flip-flap flip-flapped to where the princess sat. “Will you lift me up, Princess?” he asked.

The princess was about to refuse. Touch a frog? Never! But one stern glance from her father told her she couldn’t say no.

“Very well,” said the princess. Reluctantly, she picked up the frog and set him on the tabletop. Immediately the frog began flicking out his sticky red tongue and dragging bits of food back into his wide mouth. The princess shuddered.

The frog, however, seemed happy. “It’s not fly soup,” he joked, “but still, it’s quite tasty. Now Princess, may I have a sip of your juice?”

“You want to drink from my cup now?” said the princess weakly.

“Yes—please!”

“But Father!”

The king said loudly, "Daughter, a promise is a promise."

"Fine, then," said the princess. "Drink from my cup."

"Thank you," answered the frog, climbing up to the edge of her goblet for a sip.

As the dinner came to a close, the Princess rose from the table, tucked her golden ball under her arm, and quickly started for her bedroom. He wouldn't dare follow me here, she thought. But as she fled up the stairs, the frog cried out, "Princess, wait for me! Please—my fat little webbed feet won't carry me as quickly as your slim, beautiful ones."

The Princess hesitated, but before her father could reprimand her she heard the Frog call out:

Take me with you, sweet maid, sweet maid,

Don't you remember the promise you made?

This time, the frog's plea pricked her heart a bit, and she turned around.

"Very well, then. Climb into my hands and I'll carry you up."

"Thank you, Princess," said the frog sincerely.

"You're welcome," said the princess.

In her bedroom, the princess gently set the frog on her dressing table. He hopped about among her perfumes, but when the princess set to brushing her golden hair, the frog grew still. After a while he croaked, "You're as beautiful as this summer's day, Princess."

"Thank you, Frog."

In spite of herself, the Princess was beginning to like him. Still, when it came time to go to bed, she didn't at all like the thought of having the frog asleep on her very own

satin pillow. Maybe he'll forget, she thought. But when she climbed under the covers, the frog said:

Let me rest with you, sweet maid, sweet maid,

Don't you remember the promise you made?

"Very well, then, Frog. Sleep where you like."

With a great push of his long, green legs, the frog hopped onto her bed and settled himself into the princess's plump pink pillow. Though the Princess made sure her cheek wasn't touching the frog's clammy amphibian skin, both she and the frog soon fell fast asleep.

The next morning, the princess opened her eyes expecting to find the frog still sleeping on her pillow. But to her surprise, the frog was gone. In his place sat a handsome prince, wearing a dark blue coat and a golden crown. His green eyes shone, and though the princess had never seen him before, she thought that something about him looked familiar. At last he spoke. "You broke the spell, Princess."

The princess stared at him. "What spell?"

The prince explained. "Five years ago a witch turned me into a frog. The only way the spell could be broken, she said, was if a princess took me in. And not only that, the princess had to let me eat from her plate, drink from her cup, and sleep on her pillow. Impossible, I thought! What princess would do that for a frog? For those five years I spent living in the well, I thought it would never happen. Until you came along—and you kept your promise."

Never had a princess been more glad to have kept her word. Within a few months, the prince and the princess fell in love and were married. And of course they lived happily ever after. The End

The Three Billy Goats Gruff

On a tall mountain in a far-away country, there lived three billy goat brothers whose last name was Gruff. There was Little Billy Goat Gruff, Middle Billy Goat Gruff, and the oldest of all, Big Billy Goat Gruff. The three goats spent their days happily grazing in the lush green meadows of their mountain home, until one day, something terrible happened: The grass disappeared. They had eaten it all up.

The Little Billy Goat Gruff cried, "What shall we do?"

The Middle Billy Goat Gruff wailed, "We shall starve!"

But the Big Billy Goat Gruff, who was, after all, the oldest and the wisest of them, reassured them. "There is plenty of grass to eat in the other mountain meadow. All we need to do is cross the bridge over the stream."

"Cross the bridge!" howled the two younger billy goats Gruff. "Oh no!"

For all three billy goats knew that under the bridge that led from one mountain to the next lived an evil, ugly, awful troll, with eyes as big as plates and a nose as long as a paintbrush. If anyone dared to cross his bridge, he'd gobble them up for breakfast and still have room for a slice of toast.

"How will we ever get past that troll?" asked Middle Billy Goat Gruff.

"Leave that to me," said Big Billy Goat Gruff.

So Little Billy Goat Gruff set out first. When he came to the bridge he took a deep breath, mustered up his courage, and put his best hoof forward. No sooner had he begun trip-trapping across than he heard a terrible roar. "Who's that tripping over my bridge?" shouted the Troll.

"It's...it's only I, Little Billy Goat Gruff. I'm heading to the mountain to eat the green grass and get nice and fat.

"The only one who'll be getting nice and fat today is me," said the Troll, "for I'm going to eat you up for my breakfast!

"Oh no," exclaimed Little Billy Goat Gruff, "you wouldn't want to do that. You see, I'm just the very littlest billy goat—I wouldn't hardly make a mouthful. But my older brother, he's much bigger and fatter than I am. Why don't you wait for him to come along?"

The Troll thought about this. Finally he said, "Well, I do like a goat with some meat on his bones. Fine, then, off with you!"

The Little Billy Goat Gruff scampered the rest of the way across the bridge and ran for the hills where the tall green grass grew.

Not long after, Middle Billy Goat Gruff trudged down the mountainside. When he came to the bridge, he took a deep breath and slowly began to cross. No sooner had he begun trip-trapping on the bridge than he heard a terrible roar.

“Who’s that tripping over my bridge?”

“It’s only I, Middle Billy Goat Gruff. I’m heading to the mountain to eat the green grass and get nice and fat.”

“A nice, fat goat,” said the Troll. “Just what I wanted. Here I come to gobble you up!”

“Oh, you wouldn’t want to eat a scrawny little goat like me,” said Middle Billy Goat Gruff, “not when my eldest brother is coming soon. He’s much bigger and plumper than I am. Believe me, he’d make a much more satisfying meal.”

The Troll thought about this. Finally he said, “Well, he does sound tasty. Skedaddle then! I’ll hold out for something better.”

The troll waited impatiently under the bridge for his breakfast to come along. Lucky for him, it wasn’t too long before Big Billy Goat Gruff came down the mountain to the bridge and boldly began tramping across, TRIP-TRAP, TRIP-TRAP. He was so heavy that the bridge creaked and groaned under his weight. By now, the troll’s stomach was growling, and he was in a foul mood at having had to wait so long for his breakfast. When he heard the hooves clattering above his head, he let out a roar that shook the birds from their nests and made the fish flop onto the river bank.

“WHO’S THAT TRIPPING OVER MY BRIDGE?”

“It is I, Big Billy Goat Gruff.”

“Then you’re the one I’m after!” cried the Troll. “Here I come to gobble you up.”

With that the evil troll swung himself to the top of the bridge, where he glared at Big Billy Goat Gruff with his round saucer eyes and sniffed him with his paintbrush-long nose. Ah, thought the Troll, this big, fat billy goat was worth the wait.

But that was the last thought he had, for in that instant Big Billy Goat Gruff lowered his gray head, aimed his razor-sharp horns, and butted the Troll right off the bridge. He landed KERPLOP in the water and was carried quickly downstream. And he was never heard of again.

Big Billy Goat Gruff, who knew all along that he was strong enough to overthrow an evil, ugly old troll, danced the rest of the way across the bridge and joined his younger brothers in the lush green grass of the other mountainside. There they ate and ate and ate till they slept, then woke up and ate some more. They may be eating on the mountainside still.

Snip, snap, snout.

Our story’s told out.