



The Magic Mirror



One day in the middle of winter, when the snowflakes fell from the sky like feathers, a queen sat at a window netting. Her netting-needle was of black ebony, and as she worked, and the snow glittered, she pricked her finger, and three drops of blood fell into the snow. The red spots looked so beautiful in the white snow that the queen thought to herself: "Oh, if I only had a little child, I should like it to be as fair as snow, as rosy as the red blood, and with hair and eyes as black as ebony."

Very soon after this the queen had a little daughter who was very fair, had rosy cheeks, and hair as black as ebony; and they gave her the name of Snow-white. But at the birth of the little child the queen died.

When Snow-white was a year old, the king took another wife. She was very handsome, but so proud and vain that she could not endure that anyone should surpass her in beauty. She possessed a wonderful mirror, and when she stood before it to look at herself she would say:

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, Am I most beautiful of all?" Then the mirror would reply: "Young queen, thou art so wondrous fair, None can with thee at all compare." Then she would go away quite contented, for she knew the magic mirror could speak only the truth. Years went by, and as Snow-white grew up, she became day after day more beautiful, till she reached the age of seven years, and then people began to talk about her, and say that she would be more lovely even than the queen herself. So the proud woman went to her magic looking-glass, and asked:

"Mirror, mirror on the wall, Am I most beautiful of all?" But the mirror answered: "Queen, thou art lovely still to see, But Snow-white will be A thousand times more beautiful than thee." Then the queen was terrified, and turned green and yellow with jealousy. If she had caught sight of Snow-white at that moment, she would have been ready to tear her heart out of her body, she hated the maiden so fiercely.

And this jealousy and envy grew every day stronger and stronger in her heart, like a disease, till she had no rest day or night.

At last she sent for a hunter, who lived near a forest, and said to him, "Hunter, I want to get rid of that child. Take her out into the wood, and if you bring me some proofs that she is dead, I will reward you handsomely. Never let her appear before my eyes again."

So the hunter enticed the child into the wood; but when he took out his hunting-knife to thrust into Snow-white's innocent heart, she fell on her knees and wept, and said, "Ah, dear hunter, leave me my life; I will run away into the wild wood, and never, never come home any more."

She looked so innocent and beautiful as she knelt, that the hunter's heart was moved with compassion: "Run away, then, thou poor child," he cried; "I cannot harm thee."

Snow-white thanked him so sweetly, and was out of sight in a few moments.

"She will be devoured by wild beasts," he said to himself. But the thought that he had not killed her was as if a stone-weight had been lifted from his heart.

To satisfy the queen, he took part of the inside of a young fawn, which the wicked woman thought was poor little Snow-white, and was overjoyed to think she was dead.

But the poor little motherless child, when she found herself alone in the wood, and saw nothing but trees and leaves, was dreadfully frightened, and knew not what to do. At last she began to run over the sharp stones and through the thorns, and though the wild beasts sprang out before her, they did her no harm. She ran on as long as she could till her little feet became quite sore; and towards evening she saw, to her great joy, a pretty little house. So she went up to it, and found the door open and no one at home.

It was a tiny little house, but everything in it was so clean and neat and elegant that it is beyond description. In the middle of the room stood a small table, covered with a snow-white table-cloth, ready for supper. On it were arranged seven little plates, seven little spoons, seven little knives and forks, and seven mugs. By the wall stood seven little beds, near each other, covered with white quilts.

Poor Snow-white, who was hungry and thirsty, ate a few vegetables and a little bread from each plate, and drank a little drop of wine from each cup, for she did not like to take all she wanted from one alone. After this, feeling very tired, she thought she would lie down and rest on one of the beds, but she found it difficult to choose one to suit her. One was too long, another too short; so she tried them all till she came to the seventh, and that was so comfortable that she laid herself down, and was soon fast asleep.

When it was quite dark the masters of the house came home. They were seven little dwarfs, who dug and searched in the mountains for minerals. First they lighted seven little lamps, and as soon as the room was full of light they saw that some one had been there, for everything did not stand in the order in which they had left it.

Then said the first, "Who has been sitting in my little chair?" The second exclaimed, "Who has been eating from my little plate?" The third cried, "Some one has taken part of my bread." "Who has been eating my vegetables?" said the fourth. Then said the fifth, "Some one has used my fork." The sixth cried, "And who has been cutting with my knife?" "And some one has been drinking out of my cup," said the seventh.



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Then the eldest looked at his bed, and, seeing that it looked tumbled, cried out that some one had been upon it. The others came running forward, and found all their beds in the same condition. But when the seventh approached his bed, and saw Snow-white lying there fast asleep, he called the others, who came quickly, and holding their lights over their heads, cried out in wonder as they beheld the sleeping child. "Oh, what a beautiful little child!" they said to each other, and were so delighted that they would not awaken her, but left her to sleep as long as she liked in the little bed, while its owner slept with one of his companions, and so the night passed away.

In the morning, when Snow-white awoke, and saw all the dwarfs, she was terribly frightened. But they spoke kindly to her, till she lost all fear, and they asked her name. "I am called Snow-white," she replied. "But how came you to our house?" asked one. Then she related to them all that had happened; how her stepmother had sent her into the wood with the hunter, who had spared her life, and that, after wandering about for a whole day, she had found their house. The dwarfs talked a little while together, and then one said, "Do you think you could be our little housekeeper, to make the beds, cook the dinner, and wash and sew and knit for us, and keep everything neat and clean and orderly? If you can, then you shall stay here with us, and nobody shall hurt you." "Oh yes, I will try," said Snow-white. So they let her stay, and she was a clever little thing. She managed very well, and kept the house quite clean and in order. And while they were gone to the mountains to find gold, she got their supper ready, and they were very happy together.

But every morning when they left her, the kind little dwarfs warned Snow-white to be careful. While the maiden was alone they knew she was in danger, and told her not to show herself, for her stepmother would soon find out where she was, and said, "Whatever you do, let nobody into the house while we are gone."

After the wicked queen had proved, as she thought, that Snow-white was dead, she felt quite satisfied there was no one in the world now likely to become so beautiful as herself, so she stepped up to her mirror and asked: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, Who is most beautiful of all?" To her vexation the mirror replied: "Fair queen, at home there is none like thee, But over the mountains is Snow-white free, With seven little dwarfs, who are strange to see; A thousand times fairer than thou is she."

The queen was furious when she heard this, for she knew the mirror was truthful, and that the hunter must have deceived her, and that Snow-white still lived. So she sat and pondered over these facts, thinking what would be best to do, for as long as she was not the most beautiful woman in the land, her jealousy gave her no peace. After a time, she decided what to do. First, she painted her face, and whitened her hair; then she dressed herself in old woman's clothes, and was so disguised that no one could have recognised her.

Watching an opportunity, she left the castle, and took her way to the wood near the mountains, where the seven little dwarfs lived. When she reached the door, she knocked, and cried, "Beautiful goods to sell; beautiful goods to sell!"

Snow-white, when she heard it, peeped through the window, and said, "Good-day, old lady. What have you in your basket for me to buy?"

"Everything that is pretty," she replied; "laces, and pearls, and earrings, and bracelets of every colour;" and she held up her basket, which was lined with glittering silk.

"I can let in this respectable old woman," thought Snow-white; "she will not harm me." So she unbolted the door, and told her to come in. Oh, how delighted Snow-white was with the pretty things; she bought several trinkets, and a beautiful silk lace for her stays, but she did not see the evil eye of the old woman who was watching her. Presently she said, "Child, come here; I will show you how to lace your stays properly." Snow-white had no suspicion, so she placed herself before the old woman that she might lace her stays. But no sooner was the lace in the holes than she began to lace so fast and pull so tight that Snow-white could not breathe, and presently fell down at her feet as if dead.

"Now you are beautiful indeed," said the woman, and, fancying she heard footsteps, she rushed away as quickly as she could.

Not long after, the seven dwarfs came home, and they were terribly frightened to see dear little Snow-white lying on the ground without motion, as if she were dead. They lifted her up, and saw in a moment that her stays had been laced too tight. Quickly they cut the stay-lace in two, till Snow-white began to breathe a little, and after a time was restored to life. But when the dwarfs heard what had happened, they said: "That old market-woman was no other than your wicked stepmother. Snow-white, you must never again let anyone in while we are not with you."

The wicked queen when she returned home, after, as she thought, killing Snow-white, went to her looking-glass and asked:

"Mirror, mirror on the wall,

Am I most beautiful of all?"

Then answered the mirror:

"Queen, thou art not the fairest now;
Snow-white over the mountain's brow
A thousand times fairer is than thou."



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When she heard this she was so terrified that the blood rushed to her heart, for she knew that after all she had done Snow-white was still alive. "I must think of something else," she said to herself, "to get rid of that odious child." Now this wicked queen had some knowledge of witchcraft, and she knew how to poison a comb, so that whoever used it would fall dead. This the wicked stepmother soon got ready, and dressing herself again like an old woman, but quite different from the last, she started off to travel over the mountains to the dwarfs' cottage.

When Snow-white heard the old cry, "Goods to sell, fine goods to sell," she looked out of the window and said: "Go away, go away; I must not let you in." "Look at this, then," said the woman; "you shall have it for your own if you like," and she held up before the child's eyes the bright tortoise-shell comb which she had poisoned. Poor Snow-white could not refuse such a present, so she opened the door and let the woman in, quite forgetting the advice of the dwarfs. After she had bought a few things, the old woman said, "Let me try this comb in your hair; it is so fine it will make it beautifully smooth and glossy." So Snow-white, thinking no wrong, stood before the woman to have her hair dressed; but no sooner had the comb touched the roots of her hair than the poison took effect, and the maiden fell to the ground lifeless. "You paragon of beauty," said the wicked woman, "all has just happened as I expected," and then she went away quickly.

Fortunately evening soon arrived, and the seven dwarfs returned home. When they saw Snow-white lying dead on the ground, they knew at once that the stepmother had been there again; but on seeing the poisoned comb in her hair they pulled it out quickly, and Snow-white very soon came to herself, and related all that had passed.

Again they warned her not to let anyone enter the house during their absence, and on no account to open the door; but Snow-white was not clever enough to resist her clever wicked stepmother, and she forgot to obey. The wicked queen felt sure now that she had really killed Snow-white; so as soon as she returned home she went to her looking-glass, and inquired: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, Who is most beautiful of all?" But the mirror replied: "Queen, thou art the fairest here, But not when Snow-white is near; Over the mountains still is she, Fairer a thousand times than thee." As the looking-glass thus replied, the queen trembled and quaked with rage. "Snow-white shall die," cried she, "if it costs me my own life!"

Then she went into a lonely forbidden chamber where no one was allowed to come, and poisoned a beautiful apple. Outwardly it looked ripe and tempting, of a pale green with rosy cheeks, so that it made everyone's mouth water to look at it, but whoever ate even a small piece must die. As soon as this apple was ready, the wicked queen painted her face, disguised her hair, dressed herself as a farmer's wife, and went again over the mountains to the dwarfs' cottage.

When she knocked at the door, Snow-white stretched her head out of the window, and said, "I dare not let you in; the seven dwarfs have forbidden me."

"But I am all right," said the farmer's wife. "Stay, I will show you my apples. Are they not beautiful? let me make you a present of one."

"No, thank you," cried Snow-white; "I dare not take it."

"What!" cried the woman, "are you afraid it is poisoned? Look here now, I will cut the apple in halves; you shall have the rosy-cheek side, and I will eat the other."

The apple was so cleverly made that the red side alone was poisonous. Snow-white longed so much for the beautiful fruit as she saw the farmer's wife eat one half that she could not any longer resist, but stretched out her hand from the window and took the poisoned half. But no sooner had she taken one mouthful than she fell on the ground dead.

Then the wicked queen glanced in at the window with a horrible look in her eye, and laughed aloud as she exclaimed:

"White as snow, red as blood, and black as ebony; this time the dwarfs will not be able to awake thee."

And as soon as she arrived at home, and asked her mirror who was the most beautiful in the land, it replied:

"Fair queen, there is none in all the land
So beautiful as thou."

Then had her envious heart rest, at least such rest as a heart full of envy and malice ever can have.

The little dwarfs, when they came home in the evening, found poor Snow-white on the ground; but though they lifted her up, there were no signs of breath from her mouth, and they found she was really dead. Yet they tried in every way to restore her; they tried to extract the poison from her lips, they combed her hair, and washed it with wine and water, but all to no purpose: the dear child gave no signs of life, and at last they knew she was dead. Then they laid her on a bier, and the seven dwarfs seated themselves round her, and wept and mourned for three days. They would have buried her then, but there was no change in her appearance; her face was as fresh, and her cheeks and lips had their usual colour. Then said one, "We cannot lay this beautiful child in the dark, cold earth."



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So they agreed to have a coffin made entirely of glass, transparent all over, that they might watch for any signs of decay, and they wrote in letters of gold her name on the lid, and that she was the daughter of a king. The coffin was placed on the side of the mountain, and each of them watched it by turns, so that it was never left alone. And the birds of the air came near and mourned for Snow-white; first the owl, then the raven, and at last the dove. Snow-white lay for a long, long time in the glass coffin, but showed not the least signs of decay. It seemed as if she slept; for her skin was snow white, her cheeks rosy red, and her hair black as ebony.

It happened one day that the son of a king, while riding in the forest, came by chance upon the dwarfs' house and asked for a night's lodging. As he left the next morning he saw the coffin on the mountain-side, with beautiful Snow-white lying in it, and read what was written upon the lid in letters of gold.

Then he said to the dwarfs, "Let me have this coffin, and I will give you for it whatever you ask."

But the elder dwarf answered, "We would not give it thee for all the gold in the world."

But the prince answered, "Let me have it as a gift, then. I know not why, but my heart is drawn towards this beautiful child, and I feel I cannot live without her. If you will let me have her, she shall be treated with the greatest honour and respect as one dearly beloved."

As he thus spoke the good little dwarfs were full of sympathy for him, and gave him the coffin. Then the prince called his servants, and the coffin was placed on their shoulders, and they carried it away, followed by the king's son, who watched it carefully. Now it happened that one of them made a false step and stumbled. This shook the coffin, and caused the poisoned piece of apple which Snow-white had bitten to roll out of her mouth. A little while after she suddenly opened her eyes, lifted up the coffin-lid, raised herself and was again alive.

"Oh! where am I?" she cried.

Full of joy, the king's son approached her, and said, "Dear Snow-white, you are safe; you are with me."

Then he related to her all that had happened, and what the little dwarfs had told him about her, and said at last, "I love you better than all in the world besides, dear little Snow-white, and you must come with me to my father's castle and be my wife."

Then was Snow-white taken out of the coffin and placed in a carriage to travel with the prince, and the king was so pleased with his son's choice that the marriage was soon after celebrated with great pomp and magnificence.

Now it happened that the stepmother of Snow-white was invited, among other guests, to the wedding-feast. Before she left her house she stood in all her rich dress before the magic mirror to admire her own appearance, but she could not help saying;

"Mirror, mirror on the wall,

Am I most beautiful of all?"

Then to her surprise the mirror replied:

"Fair queen, thou art the fairest here,
But at the palace, now,
The bride will prove a thousand times
More beautiful than thou."

Then the wicked woman uttered a curse, and was so dreadfully alarmed that she knew not what to do. At first she declared she would not go to this wedding at all, but she felt it impossible to rest until she had seen the bride, so she determined to go. But what was her astonishment and vexation when she recognised in the young bride Snow-white herself, now grown a charming young woman, and richly dressed in royal robes! Her rage and terror were so great that she stood still and could not move for some minutes. At last she went into the ballroom, but the slippers she wore were to her as iron bands full of coals of fire, in which she was obliged to dance. And so in the red, glowing shoes she continued to dance till she fell dead on the floor, a sad example of envy and jealousy.