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Title: Grimm's Fairy Tales: Roland and May-Bird

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Roland and May-Bird

There was once a poor man who went every day to cut wood in the forest. One day as he went along he heard a cry like a little child's; so he followed the sound till at last he looked up a high tree, and on one of the branches sat a very little girl. Its mother had fallen asleep, and a vulture had taken it out of her lap and flown away with it and left it on the tree. Then the wood-cutter climbed up, took the little child down, and said to himself, "I will take this poor child home and bring it up with my own son Roland." So he brought it to his cottage, and both grew up together; and he called the little girl May-bird, because he had found her on a tree in May; and May-bird and Roland were so very fond of each other that they were never happy but when they were together.

But the wood-cutter became very poor, and had nothing in the world he could call his own, and indeed he had scarcely bread enough for his wife and the two children to eat. At last the time came when even that was all gone, and he knew not where to seek for help in his need. Then at night, as he lay on his bed and turned himself here and there, restless and full of care, his wife said to him, "Husband listen to me, and take the two children out early to-morrow morning; give each of them a piece of bread, and then lead them into the midst of the wood where it is thickest, make a fire for them, and go away and leave them alone to shift for themselves, for we can no longer keep them here." "No, wife," said the husband, "I cannot find it in my heart to leave the children to the wild beasts of the forest, who would soon tear them to pieces." "Well, if you will not do as I say," answered the wife, "we must all starve together:" and she let him have no peace until he came into her plan.

Meantime the poor children too were lying awake restless and weak from hunger, so that they heard all that their mother said to her husband. "Now," thought May-bird to herself, "it is all up with us:" and she began to weep. But Roland crept to her bedside, and said, "Do not be afraid, May-bird, I will find out some help for us." Then he got up, put on his jacket, and opened the door and went out.

The moon shone bright upon the little court before the cottage, and the white pebbles glittered like daisies on the green meadows. So he stooped down, and put as many as he could into his pocket, and then went back to the house. "Now, May-bird," said he, "rest in peace;" and he went to bed and fell fast asleep.

Early in the morning, before the sun had risen, the woodman's wife came and woke them. "Get up, children," said she, "we are going into the wood; there is a piece of bread for each of you, but take care of it and keep some for the afternoon." May-bird took the bread and carried it in her apron, because Roland had his pocket full of stones, and they made their way into the wood.

After they had walked on for a time, Roland stood still and looked towards home, and after a while turned again, and so on several times. Then his father said, "Roland, why do you keep turning and lagging about so? move your legs on a little faster." "Ah! father," answered Roland, "I am stopping to look at my white cat that sits on the roof, and wants to say good-bye to me." "You little fool!" said his mother, "that is not your cat; 'tis the morning sun shining on the chimney top." Now Roland had not been looking at the cat, but had all the while been staying behind to drop from his pocket one white pebble after another along the road.

When they came into the midst of the wood, the woodman said, "Run about, children, and pick up some wood, and I will make a fire to keep us all warm." So they piled up a little heap of brush-wood, and set it a-fire; and as the flame burnt bright, the mother said, "Now set yourselves by the fire and go to sleep, while we go and cut wood in the forest; be sure you wait till we come again and fetch you." Roland and May-bird sat by the fire-side till the afternoon, and then each of them ate their piece of bread. They fancied the woodman was still in the wood, because they thought they heard the blows of his axe; but it was a bough which he had cunningly hung upon a tree, so that the wind blew it backwards and forwards, and it sounded like the axe as it hit the other boughs. Thus they waited till evening; but the woodman and his wife kept away, and no one came to fetch them.

When it was quite dark May-bird began to cry; but Roland said, "Wait awhile till the moon rises." And when the moon rose, he took her by the hand, and there lay the pebbles along the ground, glittering like new pieces of money, and

marked the way out. Towards morning they came again to the woodman's house, and he was glad in his heart when he saw the children again; for he had grieved at leaving them alone. His wife also seemed to be glad; but in her heart she was angry at it.

Not long after there was again no bread in the house, and May-bird and Roland heard the wife say to her husband, "The children found their way back once, and I took it in good part; but there is only half a loaf of bread left for them in the house; to-morrow you must take them deeper into the wood, that they may not find their way out, or we shall all be starved." It grieved the husband in his heart to do as his wife wished, and he thought it would be better to share their last morsel with the children; but as he had done as she said once, he did not dare to say no. When the children had heard all their plan, Roland got up and wanted to pick up pebbles as before; but when he came to the door he found his mother had locked it. Still he comforted May-bird, and said, "Sleep in peace, dear May-bird; God is very kind and will help us." Early in the morning a piece of bread was given to each of them, but still smaller than the one they had before. Upon the road Roland crumbled his in his pocket, and often stood still, and threw a crumb upon the ground. "Why do you lag so behind, Roland?" said the woodman; "go your ways on before." "I am looking at my little dove that is sitting upon the roof and wants to say good-bye to me." "You silly boy!" said the wife, "that is not your little dove, it is the morning sun that shines on the chimney top." But Roland went on crumbling his bread, and throwing it on the ground. And thus they went on still further into the wood, where they had never been before in all their life. There they were again told to sit down by a large fire, and sleep; and the woodman and his wife said they would come in the evening and fetch them away. In the afternoon Roland shared May-bird's bread, because he had strewed all his upon the road; but the day passed away, and evening passed away too, and no one came to the poor children. Still Roland comforted May-bird, and said, "Wait till the moon rises; then I shall see the crumbs of bread which I have strewed, and they will show us the way home."

The moon rose; but when Roland looked for the crumbs, they were gone; for thousands of little birds in the wood had found them and picked them up. Roland, however, set out to try and find his way home; but they soon lost themselves in the wilderness, and went on through the night and all the next day, till at last they lay down and fell asleep for weariness: and another day they went on as before, but still did not reach the end of the wood, and were as hungry as could be, for they had nothing to eat.

In the afternoon of the third day they came to a strange little hut, made of bread, with a roof of cake, and windows of sparkling sugar. "Now we will sit down and eat till we have had enough," said Roland; "I will eat off the roof for my share; do you eat the windows, May-bird, they will be nice and sweet for you." Whilst May-bird, however, was picking at the sugar, a sweet pretty voice called from within:

"Tip, tap! who goes there?"

But the children answered:

"The wind, the wind,
That blows through the air;"

and went on eating; and May-bird broke out a round pane of the window for herself, and Roland tore off a large piece of cake from the roof, when the door opened, and a little old fairy came gliding out. At this May-bird and Roland were so frightened, that they let fall what they had in their hands. But the old lady shook her head, and said, "Dear children, where have you been wandering about? come in with me; you shall have something good." So she took them both by the hand, and led them into her little hut, and brought out plenty to eat—milk and pancakes, with sugar, apples, and nuts; and then two beautiful little beds were got ready, and May-bird and Roland laid themselves down, and thought they were in heaven: but the fairy was a spiteful one, and had made her pretty sweetmeat house to entrap little children. Early in the morning, before they were awake, she went to their little beds, and when she saw the two sleeping and looking so sweetly, she had no pity on them, but was glad they were in her power. Then she took up Roland, and put him in a little coop by himself; and when he awoke, he found himself behind a grating, shut up as little chickens are: but she shook May-bird, and called out, "Get up, you lazy little thing, and fetch some water; and go into the kitchen and cook something good to eat: your brother is shut up yonder; I shall first fatten him, and when he is fat, I think I shall eat him."

When the fairy was gone, the little girl watched her time and got up and ran to Roland, and told him what she had heard, and said, "We must run away quickly, for the old woman is a bad fairy, and will kill us." But Roland said, "You must first steal away her fairy wand, that we may save ourselves, if she should follow." Then the little maiden ran back, and fetched the magic wand, and away they went together; so when the old fairy came back, she could see no one at home, and sprang in a great rage to the window, and looked out into the wide world (which she could do far and near), and a long way off she spied May-bird running away with her dear Roland; "You are already a great way off," said she; "but you will still fall into my hands." Then she put on her boots, which walked several miles at a step, and scarcely made two steps with them, before she overtook the children: but May-bird saw that the fairy was coming after them, and by the help of the wand turned her dear Roland into a lake, and herself into a swan which swam about in the middle of it. So the fairy set herself down on the shore, and took a great deal of trouble to decoy the swan, and threw crumbs of bread to it; but it would not come near her, and she was forced to go home in the evening, without taking her revenge. And May-bird changed herself and her dear Roland back into their own forms once more and they went journeying on the whole night until the dawn of day; and then the maiden turned herself into a beautiful rose, which grew in the midst of a quickset hedge, and Roland sat by the side and played upon his flute.



""The door opened and a little old fairy came gliding out."

The fairy soon came striding along. "Good piper," said she, "may I pluck the beautiful rose for myself?" "Oh yes," answered he; "and I will play to you meantime." So when she had crept into the hedge in a great hurry to gather the flower (for she well knew what it was), he began to play upon his flute; and, whether she liked it or not, such was the wonderful power of the music that she was forced to dance a merry jig, on and on without any rest. And as he did not cease playing a moment, the thorns at length tore the clothes from off her body, and pricked her sorely, and there she stuck quite fast.

Then May-bird was free once more; but she was very tired, and Roland said, "Now I will hasten home for help, and by and by we will be married." And May-bird said, "I will stay here in the meantime and wait for you; and, that no one may know me, I will turn myself into a stone and lie in the corner of yonder field." Then Roland went away, and May-bird was to wait for him. But Roland met with another maiden, who pleased him so much that he stopped where she

lived, and forgot his former friend; and when May-bird had staid in the field a long time, and found he did not come back, she became quite sorrowful, and turned herself into a little daisy, and thought to herself, "Some one will come and tread me under foot, and so my sorrows will end." But it so happened that as a shepherd was keeping watch in the field he found the flower, and thinking it very pretty, took it home, placed it in a box in his room, and said, "I have never found so pretty a flower before." From that time everything throve wonderfully at the shepherd's house: when he got up in the morning, all the household work was ready done; the room was swept and cleaned; the fire made, and the water fetched: and in the afternoon, when he came home, the table-cloth was laid and a good dinner ready set for him. He could not make out how all this happened; for he saw no one in his house; and although it pleased him well enough, he was at length troubled to think how it could be, and went to a cunning woman who lived hard by, and asked her what he should do. She said, "There must be witchcraft in it; look out to-morrow morning early, and see if anything stirs about in the room; if it does, throw a white cloth at once over it, and then the witchcraft will be stopped." The shepherd did as she said, and the next morning saw the box open and the daisy come out: then he sprang up quickly and threw a white cloth over it: in an instant the spell was broken, and May-bird stood before him; for it was she who had taken care of his house for him; and as she was so beautiful he asked her if she would marry him. She said "No," because she wished to be faithful to her dear Roland; but she agreed to stay and keep house for him.

Time passed on, and Roland was to be married to the maiden that he had found; and according to an old custom in that land, all the maidens were to come and sing songs in praise of the bride and bridegroom. But May-bird was so grieved when she heard that her dearest Roland had forgotten her, and was to be married to another, that her heart seemed as if it would burst within her, and she would not go for a long time. At length she was forced to go with the rest; but she kept hiding herself behind the others until she was left the last. Then she could not any longer help coming forward; and the moment she began to sing, Roland sprang up, and cried out, "That is the true bride; I will have no other but her"; for he knew her by the sound of her voice; and all that he had forgotten came back into his mind, and his heart was opened towards her. So faithful May-bird was married to her dear Roland, and there was an end of her sorrows; and from that time forward she lived happily till she died.

[The end of *Grimm's Fairy Tales: Roland and May-Bird* by the Brothers Grimm]