

“The 12 Windows”

A Fairy Tale collected by Wilhelm and Jacob Grimm
in the early 1800s in Germany

Once there was a Princess who, high in her castle, had a tower room with 12 windows. The windows faced out in all directions. When she looked out of these windows, she could inspect her entire kingdom. When she looked out of the first window, her sight was more keen than that of any other human being; from the second she could see still better, from the third more distinctly still, and so it went on, until the twelfth window, from which she could see everything above and beneath the earth, and nothing could be kept secret from her.

This Princess proclaimed that only a man who could hide himself from her could be her husband. Any man who tried this and was discovered by her, was to have his head cut off and stuck on a post. 97 posts with the heads of 97 men whom the Princess had found were standing before the castle, as our story begins.

One day, three brothers appeared before the Princess, and told her that they wanted to try their luck.

The eldest brother thought he might be safe if he hid in the earth. So he dug a deep hole, climbed down, and covered himself with dirt. But alas, the Princess saw him through the second window. His head was cut off and placed on the 98th post.

The second brother went as far as he could walk in a day, and climbed a tall mountain and hid in a cave there. But the princess spotted him through the fourth window. His head was placed on the 99th post.

Then the youngest brother came to the Princess, and asked her to give him a day to think about how he might hide. He also asked for three chances, in case he was found the first two times. This young man seemed very handsome to the Princess, and he spoke very politely to her -- so she agreed to his requests.

The next day the young man meditated for a long time about how he might hide, but he could not decide on anything. He realised he was hungry, so he picked up his bow and arrows, and walked to the forest to hunt.

Soon the young man saw a raven. He aimed, and was about to release an arrow, when the raven cried, "Don't shoot! I can help you!" The young man lowered his bow. The raven flew off.

The young man walked onwards, and came to a lake. There he saw a large fish who had come up to the surface of the water. The young man aimed at the fish, but the fish cried, "Don't shoot! I can help you!" The young man allowed the fish to dive and escape.

Once more the young man walked onwards. Soon he came upon a fox who was limping. The fox cried, "Please draw the thorn out of my foot." The young man did as the fox requested. Then the fox said, "Thank goodness! I can walk comfortably again. Now please let me go -- I promise I can help you!" The young man said nothing, and the fox disappeared into the bushes. Evening was approaching now, so the young man returned to his sleeping place in town.

The next day, the young man was to hide himself, but no matter how much he puzzled over it, he could not decide what to do. He again went into the forest.

He met the raven and said to him, "I let you live, so now please tell me where I can hide myself so that the Princess will not find me." The raven thought it over for some time. At length he croaked, "I have it." He fetched an egg out of a nearby nest, cut it in half with his beak, and instructed the young man to climb inside one of the halves. Then the raven made the egg whole again, and seated himself on it.

When the Princess went to the first window, she could not see the young man. She also could not see him from the second window, or the third. She began to feel uneasy. But from the fourth window, she saw him inside the egg. She ordered the egg to be brought and broken open, and the young man came out. She said, "You have two more chances".

The next day the young man went to the lake, and called to the fish: "I allowed you to live, now please tell me where to hide myself, so that the Princess may not find me." The fish surfaced, greeted the young man, and thought for a while. At last the fish cried, "I have it! I will put you in my stomach." So the fish swallowed the young man, and went down to the bottom of the lake.

The Princess looked through her windows -- fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth. She was getting very nervous! Finally, from the ninth window she saw him. She ordered the fish to be caught and cut open, and the young man came out. She said to him, "You only have one chance left."

The next day, the young man walked to the place where he had met the fox. And sure enough, he saw the fox there again. The young man said to the fox, "You are known as the cleverest of animals. I helped you, so now please advise me where I can hide myself so that the Princess will not find me."

"Hmmm," replied the fox, looking very thoughtful. At length he cried, "I have it!" This fox had the ability to jump up, do a flip in mid-air, and land in a different form. So the fox jumped, flipped, and landed as an animal-trainer. He told the young man to likewise jump and flip, and the young man landed as a flea!

The animal-trainer and the flea went into the town. The animal-trainer set up his show in a busy market street. Many people gathered to see his amazing dancing, jumping, singing flea! It even walked on a miniature tightrope! At last the Princess was informed of this great novelty, and she also came to see the show. She enjoyed the performance very much, and when it was over she turned to go. At that moment, the animal-trainer said to the flea: "Here's your chance! Run after her, climb up her back, and hide under the braid of hair on her head!" The flea did as instructed.

The princess returned to her tower room with the 12 windows. The time had arrived for her final search for the young man. She looked through the first window. She did not see him. She looked through the second, the third, the fourth, and so on. Finally, she looked through the 12th window, and she could see everything -- except the young man. She said to herself, "I can not find him. He has done it! He has done it!"

With that, the flea moved out from under the princess' braid. The flea leapt, did a flip in mid-air, and landed as himself -- a handsome young man.

The princess was amazed to see him. She joyfully hugged him, and said, "Hurray! I have finally found a man who is smart enough to be my husband!"