

BRIAR-ROSE

Long ago there lived a king and a queen and never a day passed but they said: 'Oh, if only we had a child!' and yet they never had one. Then it happened one day when the queen was taking her bath that a frog crawled ashore out of the water and said to her: 'Your wish is to be granted; before a year is over you will give birth to a daughter.' It happened as the frog had said, and the queen gave birth to a little girl of such beauty that the king was beside himself with joy and ordered a great feast. He invited to it not only his relatives and friends and acquaintances but also the wise-women of the land, in the hope that they would show the child affection and favour. There were thirteen of them in his kingdom, but because he had only twelve golden plates for them to eat from, one of them had to stay at home. The feast was celebrated with great magnificence, and when it was over the wise-women bestowed their magic gifts on the child: one gave her virtue, another beauty, a third wealth, and so on, till she had everything in the world you could wish for. Just as the eleventh of them had spoken her spell, the thirteenth suddenly entered. She meant to avenge herself for not having been invited, and without greeting or looking at anyone she cried out in a loud voice: 'In her fifteenth year the princess shall prick herself on a spindle and fall dead.' And without speaking another word she turned her back and left the hall. Everyone was horrified, but then the twelfth wise-woman, who still had not uttered her wish, stepped forward: she could not cancel the evil spell but only lessen its effect, so she said: 'But it shall not be death the princess falls into, only a deep sleep lasting a hundred years.'

The king, who dearly wished to protect his beloved child from this misfortune, gave orders that every spindle in his kingdom was to be burnt. But the blessings of the wise-women on the girl were all fulfilled, for she was so beautiful, well behaved, kind and intelligent that no one could look at her without loving her. It happened that on the very day she was to reach the age of fifteen the king and queen were not at home and the girl stayed behind in the palace all by herself, so she explored everything, looked at the rooms and bedrooms just as she pleased, and finally came to an old tower. She climbed to the top of the narrow spiral stair and came to a little door. In the lock was an old rusty key; when she turned it the door sprang open and there, in a little room, sat an old woman with a spindle, busily spinning her flax. 'Good morning, old lady,' said the princess, 'what's that you're doing?' 'I'm spinning,' said the old woman, nodding her head. 'And what's this funny little thing jumping about?' asked the girl. And she took the spindle in her hand and wanted to learn how to spin too. But she had scarcely touched it when the spell was fulfilled and she pricked herself in the finger.

The moment she felt the prick she fell down on the bed that was standing there, and lay in a deep sleep. And this sleep spread over the entire palace: the king and queen, who had just got back and entered the hall, began to fall asleep, and so did their whole court with them. And the horses in the stable fell asleep, and the dogs in the courtyard, the pigeons on the roof, the flies on the wall, in fact even the fire blazing in the hearth stood still and fell asleep, and the roast stopped crackling, and the cook, who was in the act of pulling the kitchen boy's hair for

something he had done wrong, let him go and fell asleep. And the wind died down, and on the trees in front of the palace not a single leaf stirred.

But round the palace a thorn thicket began to grow, which grew taller every year and in the end surrounded the entire castle and grew up above the top of it so that you couldn't see any castle any more, not even the flag on the roof. But the legend of the lovely sleeping Briar-Rose (for so the princess came to be called) was told in the land, so that from time to time princes would come and try to force their way through the thicket into the castle. But none of them succeeded, because the thorn bushes gripped each other as if they had hands, and the young men got trapped among them and couldn't free themselves and died a piteous death. After many many years another prince came to that country and heard an old man tell the story of the thorn thicket, and of how it was said that a palace stood behind it in which a most beautiful princess called Briar-Rose had been sleeping for the last hundred years, and the king and the queen and the whole court lay asleep there with her, and of how he had also heard from his grandfather that many princes had already come and tried to force their way through the thorns but had got trapped in them and perished miserably. Then the young man said: 'I'm not afraid, I'll go out and find this beautiful Briar-Rose.' The kind old man tried his best to dissuade him, but the prince didn't listen.

Now it happened that the hundred years had just passed, and the day had come on which Briar-Rose was to wake up. When the prince approached the thorn thicket, the thorns had all turned into enormous beautiful flowers, which parted of their own accord and let him through unharmed, and behind him they closed up again and made a hedge. In the palace courtyard he saw all the horses and the brindled hunting-hounds lying asleep, and on the roof the pigeons were roosting with their heads tucked under their wings. And when he went indoors, the flies were asleep on the wall, the cook in the kitchen still had his hand outstretched as if to grab the kitchen boy, and the kitchen maid was sitting with a black chicken in her lap, about to pluck it. Then he went further and saw the whole court lying asleep in the hall, and up there beside the throne lay the king and the queen. Then he went still further, and everything was so silent that he could hear his own breathing; and in the end he came to the tower and opened the door of the little room where Briar-Rose was sleeping. There she lay, and she was so beautiful he couldn't take his eyes off her, and he stooped down and kissed her. As his lips touched hers, Briar-Rose opened her eyes, woke up and smiled at him. Then they went downstairs together, and the king woke up and so did the queen and the whole court, and they looked at each other in astonishment. And the horses in the yard got to their feet and shook themselves, the hounds jumped up and wagged their tails, the pigeons on the roof took their heads from under their wings, looked about them and flew off over the fields, the flies began crawling up the walls again, the fire in the kitchen revived and blazed up and cooked the dinner, the roast began to crackle again, and the cook gave the boy such a box on the ear that he howled, and the maid finished plucking the chicken. And after that the wedding of the prince with Briar-Rose was celebrated with great magnificence, and they lived happily till the end of their days.