

SNOWWHITE

Once upon a time, in the middle of winter when the snowflakes were falling from the sky like feathers, a queen sat sewing at a window with a frame of black ebony. And as she sewed and looked up at the falling snow, she pricked her finger with her needle, and into the snow there fell three drops of blood. The red looked so beautiful against the white that she thought to herself: If only I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood and as black as the wood of this window frame! Soon after this she gave birth to a little daughter who was as white as snow, as red as blood and had hair as black as ebony, and for this reason was called 'little Snowwhite'. And when the child was born the queen died.

A year later the king took another wife. She was a beautiful woman, but proud and haughty, and could not bear that anyone else's beauty should excel her own. She possessed a magic mirror, and when she stood in front of it and looked at herself she would say:

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest of us all?'

The mirror would answer:

'My lady queen is the fairest of all.'

And this satisfied her, for she knew that the mirror spoke the truth.

But Snowwhite was growing up and becoming more and more beautiful, and by the age of seven she was as lovely as the bright day and more beautiful even than the queen. One day when the queen asked her mirror:

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest of us all?'

it answered:

'My lady queen is fair to see,
But Snowwhite is fairer far than she.'

At this the queen took fright and turned yellow and green with envy. From now on, whenever she saw Snowwhite, her heart turned over inside her, she hated the girl so. And envy and pride took root like weeds in her heart and grew higher and higher, giving her no peace by day or night. So she sent for a huntsman and said: 'Take that child out into the forest, I'm sick of the sight of her. You are to kill her and bring me her lungs and liver as proof.' The huntsman obeyed and took Snowwhite with him, but when he had drawn his hunting-knife and was about to thrust it into her innocent heart she began to cry and said: 'Oh, dear huntsman, let me live; I will run away into the wild forest and never come home again.' And because she was so beautiful the huntsman took pity on her and said: 'Run away then, you poor child.' The wild beasts will soon have eaten you, he thought, and yet it was as if a stone had been rolled from his heart because he did not have to kill her. And when a young boar happened to come bounding up he slaughtered it, cut out its lungs and liver and took them to the queen as the proof she wanted. The cook was ordered to stew them in salt, and the wicked woman devoured them, thinking she had eaten the liver and lungs of Snowwhite.

And now the poor child was utterly alone in the huge forest, and so terrified that she gazed at every leaf on the trees, trying to think what to do to save herself. Then she began to run, and she ran over the sharp stones and through the thorns, and the wild animals bounded past her but did not harm her. She ran on as far as her feet would carry her, until it was nearly evening: then she saw a little cottage and went into it to rest. Inside the cottage everything was tiny, but more dainty and neat than you can imagine. There stood a little table with a white tablecloth and seven little plates, every plate with its little spoon, and seven little knives and forks and cups as well. In a row along the wall stood seven little beds all made up with sheets as white as snow. Because she was so hungry and thirsty, Snowwhite ate a little of the vegetables and bread from each plate and drank a sip of wine from each of the cups; for she didn't want to take the whole of anyone's supper. Then, because she was so tired, she lay down on one of the little beds – but none of them fitted her: one was too long, the next too short, till finally the seventh was the right size. So in it she stayed, and said her prayers and went to sleep.

When it had got quite dark, the owners of the little house came home: they were the seven dwarfs who worked in the hills, hacking and digging out precious metal. They lit their seven lamps, and as soon as there was light in the cottage they saw that someone had been there, because not everything was exactly as they had left it. The first said: 'Who's been sitting on my chair?' The second said: 'Who's been eating from my plate?' The third said: 'Who's taken some of my bread?' The fourth said: 'Who's eaten some of my vegetables?' The fifth said: 'Who's been poking with my fork?' The sixth said: 'Who's been cutting with my knife?' The seventh said: 'Who's been drinking out of my cup?' Then the first of them looked round and saw that there was a little hollow on his bed, and he said: 'Who's stepped on my bed?' The others came running up and exclaimed: 'Someone's been in mine too.' But when the seventh looked at his bed he saw Snowwhite lying there asleep. And he called the others, who came running up and cried out in amazement; they fetched their seven little lamps and shone them on Snowwhite. 'Oh goodness me! Oh goodness me!' they cried. 'What a lovely girl!' And they were so delighted that they didn't wake her, but let her go on sleeping in the little bed. But the seventh dwarf slept with his companions, one hour with each of them, and so the night passed.

When it was morning Snowwhite woke up, and when she saw the seven dwarfs she was scared. But they spoke to her kindly and asked her what her name was. 'I'm called Snowwhite,' she replied. 'How did you get into our house?' asked the dwarfs. So she told them how her stepmother had tried to have her killed, but that the huntsman had spared her life, and then she had wandered all day till finally she found their cottage. The dwarfs said: 'If you will keep house for us, and do the cooking and the beds and the washing and the sewing and the knitting, and keep everything neat and tidy, you can stay with us and you shan't want for anything.' 'Yes,' said Snowwhite, 'I'd like that very much.' So she stayed with them, and looked after their cottage. In the morning they went into the hills and dug for ore and gold, in the evening they came back and their supper had to be ready. The young girl was by herself all day, and the kind dwarfs warned her and said: 'Beware of your stepmother, she will soon find out that you are here; don't on any account let anyone in.'

But after the queen, as she supposed, had eaten Snowwhite's liver and lungs, her first thought was she was again the most beautiful of all women, and she stood before her mirror and said:

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest of us all?'

And the mirror answered:

'My lady queen is fair to see:
But Snowwhite lives beyond the hills,
With the seven dwarfs she dwells,
And fairer far than the queen is she.'

Then the queen took fright, for she knew that the mirror never told a lie, and she realized that the huntsman had deceived her and that Snowwhite was still alive. So she began plotting and planning again how to kill her; for so long as she was not the fairest of all, her envy never left her in peace. And having finally thought of a plan, she painted her face and disguised herself as an old pedlar-woman, and no one could have recognized her. In this disguise she went over the seven hills to the house of the seven dwarfs, knocked at the door and called out: 'Fine wares for sale, for sale!' Snowwhite peeped out of the window and called to her: 'Good day, old lady, what have you got to sell?' 'Fine wares, lovely things,' she answered, 'laces of all colours' – and she fetched out one that was made of many-coloured silk. I can let in this honest woman, thought Snowwhite, and she unbolted the door and bought the pretty lace. 'My child,' said the old woman, 'how untidy you look! Come, I'll lace you up properly.' Snowwhite suspected nothing, stood in front of the old woman and let herself be laced with the new lace; but the old woman laced her up very fast and pulled the lace so tight that Snowwhite's breath was stopped and she fell down as if dead. 'Now you're no longer the fairest of us all,' said the queen and hurried out.

Not long after, when evening fell, the seven dwarfs came home: but what a fright they got when they saw their dear little Snowwhite lying on the ground, not moving or stirring, as if she were dead! They lifted her up, and seeing that she was laced too tightly they cut the laces – then she began to breathe a little, and gradually she came back to life. When the dwarfs heard what had happened they said: 'That old pedlar-woman was the godless queen and no one else – be on your guard and let no one in here when we're not with you.'

But when the evil woman got home, she went to her mirror and asked:

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest of us all?'

And the mirror answered as before:

'My lady queen is fair to see:
But Snowwhite lives beyond the hills,
With the seven dwarfs she dwells,
And fairer far than the queen is she.'

When the queen heard that, she was so startled that all the blood rushed to her heart, for she saw very well that Snowwhite had come to life again. 'But now,' she said, 'I'll think out something that will deal with you once and for all.' And by the witchcraft she knew she made a poisoned comb. Then she disguised herself and took the form of another old woman. And

again she went over the seven hills to the house of the seven dwarfs, knocked at the door and called out: 'Fine wares for sale, for sale!' Snowwhite peeped out and said: 'Go away, I'm not allowed to let anyone in.' 'Surely they'll allow you to take a look,' said the old woman, and pulled out the poisoned comb and held it up. The young girl liked it so much that she let herself be fooled and opened the door. When they had agreed on a price the old woman said: 'Now I'll comb your hair properly for you.' Poor Snowwhite suspected nothing and let the old woman have her way; but she had hardly stuck the comb into her hair when its poison worked and the young girl fell senseless to the ground. 'That's done for you now, my beauty queen,' said the wicked woman, and off she went. But fortunately it was nearly evening and the seven little dwarfs were coming home. When they saw Snowwhite lying on the floor as good as dead, they suspected her stepmother at once, and searched and found the poisoned comb, and as soon as they had pulled it out of her hair Snowwhite revived and told them what had happened. Then they warned her again to be on her guard and not to open the door to anyone.

Back home the queen stood before her mirror and said:

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest of us all?'

And it answered as before:

'My lady queen is fair to see:
But Snowwhite lives beyond the hills,
With the seven dwarfs she dwells,
And fairer far than the queen is she.'

When she heard the mirror say this, she trembled and shook with fury. 'Snowwhite shall die,' she cried, 'even if it costs me my own life.' With that she went to a completely secret remote room which no one else ever entered, and there she made an apple filled with deadly poison. Outwardly it looked like a beautiful white-and-red-cheeked apple which made everyone who saw it want to take a bite out of it, but anyone who did so was doomed. When the apple was ready, she painted her face and disguised herself as a peasant woman, and then she went over the seven hills to the house of the seven dwarfs. When she knocked, Snowwhite put her head out of the window and said: 'I can't let anyone in, the seven dwarfs have told me I mustn't.' 'That's all right,' answered the peasant woman, 'I'll have no difficulty selling my apples. Here, I'll make you a present of one.' 'No,' said Snowwhite, 'I'm not allowed to take anything.' 'Are you afraid it's poisoned?' said the old woman. 'Look here, I'll cut the apple in two: you eat the red cheek and I'll eat the white one.' But the apple was so cunningly made that only the red cheek was poisoned. Snowwhite was longing to eat this lovely apple, and when she saw the peasant woman doing so she could resist no longer, put her hand out and took the poisoned half. But no sooner did she have a bite in her mouth than she fell to the floor dead. Then the queen gazed at her gloatingly and laughed a dreadful laugh and said: 'White as snow, red as blood, black as ebony! This time the dwarfs won't wake you.' And when she got home and asked the mirror:

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest of us all?'

it at last answered:

'My lady queen is the fairest of all.'

And then her envious heart was at rest, if an envious heart ever can be.

When the dwarfs came home in the evening, they found Snowwhite lying on the ground, and not a breath stirring from her mouth, and she was dead. They lifted her up, looked all over her for something poisonous, unlaced her, combed her hair, washed her with water and wine, but it was all no good: the sweet girl was dead and dead she stayed. They laid her on a bier, and all seven sat by it and mourned her and wept for her for three days. Then they were going to bury her, but she still looked as fresh as a living person and still had her lovely red cheeks. They said: 'This is something we can't bury in the black earth,' and they had a transparent glass coffin made so that she could be seen from all sides; they laid her in it, and on it in letters of gold they wrote her name, and that she was a princess. Then they put the coffin out on the hill, and one of them always sat by it keeping watch. And the animals came too and mourned Snowwhite, first an owl, then a raven, and then a little dove.

So Snowwhite lay in her coffin for a long, long time; she didn't go bad, but just looked as if she were asleep, for she was still as white as snow, as red as blood and her hair was as black as ebony. Then it happened that a prince strayed into the forest and arrived at the dwarfs' house to spend the night there. He saw the coffin on the hill with the lovely Snowwhite inside, and read what was written on it in letters of gold. And he said to the dwarfs: 'Let me have that coffin, I'll pay you whatever you ask for it,' but the dwarfs answered: 'We wouldn't sell it for all the gold in the world.' So he said: 'Then give it to me, for I can't live without seeing Snowwhite, and I will honour her and treasure her as my dearest possession.' When he said that, the kind little dwarfs took pity on him and gave him the coffin. So the prince told his servants to carry it away on their shoulders. And it happened that they stumbled against a shrub and gave the coffin such a jolt that the lump of poisoned apple which Snowwhite had bitten off was jerked out of her throat. And presently she opened her eyes, pushed up the lid of the coffin and sat up and was alive again. 'Oh goodness, where am I?' she exclaimed. The prince's heart leapt with joy and he said: 'You are with me.' And he told her what had happened and said: 'I love you more than anything in the world: come with me to my father's palace, and you shall be my wife.' And Snowwhite liked him and went with him, and their wedding was prepared with great splendour and magnificence.

But Snowwhite's godless stepmother was asked to the feast too. So when she had put on beautiful clothes, she stood before the mirror and said:

'Mirror, mirror on the wall,
Who is the fairest of us all?'

And the mirror answered:

'My lady queen is fair to see:
But the young queen is fairer far than she.'

At this the evil woman shrieked out a curse and was beside herself with fear. At first she decided not to go to the wedding at all, but the thing preyed on her mind and she just had to go to see the young queen. And when she entered she recognized Snowwhite and stood rooted to the spot with fright and terror. But already a pair of iron slippers had been heated over glowing coals and they were brought in with tongs and placed before her. Then she had to put her feet into the red-hot shoes and dance till she dropped dead.