

Tree of Health

A Danish Fairytale retold by JB Rowley

Source: *Favourite Fairy Tales Told in Denmark* retold by Virginia Haviland

Long, long ago there were three brothers who had an apple orchard left to them by their father. Before he died their father told them that one of the trees in the orchard bore the fruit of health. He did not tell them which tree it was but he told them the apples of that tree could cure any illness.

After his death the brothers divided the apple orchard among themselves but this was not done in a fair way. The two elder brothers cheated the youngest brother. They gave him only one tree, the one in the centre of the orchard.

It was at that time that the king's daughter, the beautiful princess, became ill. The king promised half his kingdom to anyone who could restore his daughter's health.

The eldest brother decided to take apples from his part of the orchard. Surely one of them would be the fruit of health. He picked an apple from each tree. He placed them in a basket and covered them with a cloth to protect them from the sun and the birds and set off to the palace.

Along the way he met an old woman who asked him what was in his basket. She looked so skinny and scrawny he was afraid she would want him to share his apples if he told her what was in the basket.

"It's none of your business, old lady, but I have frogs and toads in the basket," he said.

"Frogs and toads, eh," cackled the old woman. "You're a cheeky one aren't you? Frogs and toads. Well, off you go, Laddie."

The eldest brother hurried past her and on to the palace. At the gate the guard asked him what he had in his basket.

"Apples of health," replied the boy. "To cure the princess."

The guard lifted up the cover and looked into the basket. But there were no apples in that basket. It was full of...frogs and toads.

"Off with you," yelled the guard. "Bringing frogs and toads to the princess indeed!"

The eldest brother ran home as fast as he could. By the time he reached home the basket was full of apples again. The second eldest brother did not believe his story.

"How could apples turn to frogs and toads? I will take my apples to the princess."

The second brother picked an apple from each tree in his part of the orchard. He

placed them in a basket and covered them with a cloth to protect them from the sun and the birds and set off to the palace. Along the way he met an old woman who asked him what was in his basket. Like his brother he did not want to share his apples with her.

“It’s none of your business but if you must know I have snakes and worms in my basket.”

“Snakes and worms, eh,” cackled the old woman. “You’re a cheeky one aren’t you? Snakes and worms indeed. Off you go then.”

The eldest brother hurried past her and on to the palace. At the gate the guard asked him what he has in his basket.

“Apples of health,” replied the boy. “To cure the princess.”

The guard lifted up the cloth and looked into the basket. But there were no apples in that basket. It was full of... snakes and worms.

The second brother ran home as fast as he could. When he arrived and told his brothers what had happened the younger brother thought about the princess. Perhaps, he thought, my tree has the apples of health. I should take them to the princess and try to help her.

The youngest brother picked several apples from his one tree in the orchard. He placed them in a basket and covered them with a cloth to protect them from the sun and the birds and set off to the palace. Along the way he met an old woman who asked him what was in his basket. He felt sorry for the old woman, she looked so thin he was sure she must be hungry.

“I have apples of health in my basket,” he replied.

“Apples of health, eh,” cackled the old woman.

“Would you like one?” he asked.

He took one of the juicy red apples from the basket and handed it to the old woman. The old woman took the apple.

“Apples of health, eh,” she cackled again. “You’re a good laddie, aren’t you? Off you go then.”

The boy continued on his journey until he arrived at the palace. At the gate the guard asked him what he had in his basket.

“Apples of health,” replied the boy. “To cure the princess.”

The guard lifted up the cloth and looked into the basket. It was full of... juicy red apples.

“Please do help yourself to an apple, sir,” said the boy.

The guard took one of the apples and bit into it. He immediately felt very strong and healthy. He began marching up and down and eating the apple.

“Come,” he said. “I will take you to meet the king.”

He took the youngest brother to the king and told him about the boy’s apples. The king took the boy to see the princess.

The poor princess was so ill she could hardly lift her head from the pillow. She took an apple from the boy and began to eat it. She felt a little better and sat up in her bed and reached for another apple. After the princess had eaten the second apple she jumped out of bed and stood up. After the third apple she began to skip and laugh.

The king was very happy and kept his promise. He gave half his kingdom to the youngest brother. Not only that, but the youngest brother and the princess were married.

And what do you think their favourite food was?