King Grisly-Beard

A great king of a land far away in the East had a daughter who was very beautiful, but so proud and haughty and conceited, that none of the princes who came to ask for her hand in marriage was good enough for her. All she ever did was make fun of them.

Once upon a time the king held a great feast and invited all her suitors. They all sat in a row, ranged according to their rank -- kings and princes and dukes and earls and counts and barons and knights. When the princess came in, as she passed by them, she had something spiteful to say to each one.

The first was too fat: 'He's as round as a tub,' she said.

The next was too tall: 'What a maypole!' she said.

The next was too short: 'What a dumpling!' she said.

The fourth was too pale, and she called him 'Wallface.'

The fifth was too red, so she called him 'Coxcomb.'

The sixth was not straight enough; so she said he was like a green stick that had been laid to dry over a baker's oven. She had some joke to crack about every one. But she laughed most of all at a good king who was there.

'Look at him,' she said; 'his beard is like an old mop; he shall be called Grisly-beard.' So the king got the nickname of Grisly-beard.

But the old king was very angry when he saw how his daughter behaved and how badly she treated all his guests. He vowed that, willing or unwilling, she would marry the first man that came to the door.

Two days later a travelling fiddler came by the castle. He began to play under the window and begged for money and when the king heard him, he said, 'Let him come in.'

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So, they brought the dirty-looking fellow in and, when he had sung before the king and the princess, he begged for a gift.

The king said, 'You have sung so well that I will give you my daughter to take as your wife.'

The princess begged and prayed; but the king said, 'I have sworn to give you to the first man who came to the door, and I will keep my word.'

Words and tears were to no avail; the parson was sent for, and she was married to the fiddler.

When this was over, the king said, 'Now get ready to leave -- you must not stay here -- you must travel with your husband.'

So the fiddler left the castle, and took the princess with him.

Soon they came to a great wood.

'Pray,' she said, 'whose is this wood?'

'It belongs to King Grisly-beard,' he answered; 'hadst thou taken him, all would have been thine.'

'Ah! unlucky wretch that I am!' she sighed; 'would that I had married King Grisly-beard!'

Next they came to some fine meadows.

'Whose are these beautiful green meadows?' she said.

'They belong to King Grisly-beard, hadst thou taken him, they would all have been thine.'

'Ah! unlucky wretch that I am!' she said; 'would that I had married King Grisly-beard!'

Then they came to a great city. 'Whose is this noble city?' she said.

'It belongs to King Grisly-beard; hadst thou taken him, it would all have been thine.'

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'Ah! wretch that I am!' she sighed; 'why did I not marry King Grisly-beard?'

'That is no business of mine,' said the fiddler, 'why should you wish for another husband? Am I not good enough for you?'

At last they came to a small cottage. 'What a paltry place!' she said; 'to whom does that little dirty hole belong?'

The fiddler said, 'That is your and my house, where we are to live.'

'Where are your servants?' she cried.

'What do we want with servants?' he said; 'you must do for yourself whatever is to be done. Now make the fire, and put on water and cook my supper, for I am very tired.'

But the princess knew nothing of making fires and cooking, and the fiddler was forced to help her.

When they had eaten a very scanty meal they went to bed; but the fiddler called her up very early in the morning to clean the house.

They lived like that for two days and when they had eaten up all there was in the cottage, the man said, 'Wife, we can't go on thus, spending money and earning nothing. You must learn to weave baskets.'

Then the fiddler went out and cut willows, and brought them home, and she began to weave; but it made her fingers very sore.

'I see this work won't do,' he said, 'try and spin; perhaps you will do that better.'

So she sat down and tried to spin; but the threads cut her tender fingers until the blood ran.

'See now,' said the fiddler, 'you are good for nothing; you can do no work. What a bargain I have got! However, I'll try and set up a trade in pots and pans, and you shall stand in the market and sell them.'

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'Alas!' she sighed, 'if any of my father's court should pass by and see me standing in the market, how they will laugh at me!'

But her husband did not care about that, and said she would have to work if she did not want to die of

hunger.

At first the trade went well because many people, seeing such a beautiful woman, went to buy her wares and paid their money without even thinking of taking away the goods. They lived on this as long as it lasted and then her husband bought a fresh lot of pots and pans, and she sat herself down with it in the corner of the market.

However, soon a drunken soldier soon came by and rode his horse against her stall and broke all her goods into a thousand pieces.

She began to cry, and did not know what to do. 'Ah! what will become of me?' she said; 'what will my husband say?' So she ran home and told him everything.

'Who would have thought you would have been so silly,' he said, 'as to put an earthenware stall in the corner of the market, where everybody passes? But let us have no more crying; I see you are not fit for this sort of work, so I have been to the king's palace, and asked if they did not want a kitchen-maid; and they say they will take you, and there you will have plenty to eat.'

So the princess became a kitchen-maid and helped the cook to do all the dirtiest work. She was allowed to carry home some of the meat that was left over, and they lived on that.

She had not been there long before she heard that the king's eldest son was passing by, on his way to get married. She went to one of the windows and looked out. Everything was ready and all the pomp and brightness of the court was there. Seeing it, she grieved bitterly for the pride and folly that had brought her so low. The servants gave her some of the rich meats and she put them into her basket to take home.

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All of a sudden, as she was leaving, in came the king's son in his golden clothes. When he saw such a beautiful woman at the door, he took her by the hand and said she should be his partner in the dance. She trembled with fear because she saw that it was King Grisly-beard, who was making fun of her. However, he kept hold of her, and led her into the hall. As she entered, the cover of the basket came off, and the meats in it fell out. Everybody laughed and jeered at her and she was so ashamed that she wished she were a thousand feet deep in the earth. She sprang over to the door so that she could run away but on the steps King Grisly-beard overtook her, brought her back and said:

'Fear me not! I am the fiddler who has lived with you in the hut. I brought you there because I truly loved you. I am also the soldier that overset your stall. I have done all this only to cure you of your silly pride, and to show you the folly of your ill-treatment of me. Now it is all over: you have learnt wisdom, and it is time to hold our marriage feast.'

Then the chamberlains came and brought her the most beautiful robes. Her father and his whole court were already there, and they welcomed her home. Joy was in every face and every heart. The feast was grand; they danced and sang; everyone was merry; and I only wish that you and I had been there.

The Fire Cat—by Esther Averill

Pickles

Once upon the time there was a yellow cat with black spots in his fur.

His name was Pickles. Pickles was a young cat. His paws were big. And he wishes to do big things with them. But where could Pickles find anything big to do? Pickles lived in a barrel. The barrel was all that he had for a home. Pickles' barrel was in an old yard where there was nothing big to do. So what did Pickles do? He ran after little cats. He ran after every little cat that came into the hard. And he chased the little cat out of the yard. This was a bad, bad thing. But it was all that Pickles could find to do. Next to Pickles' yard was a house. In the house lived many cats who called out to Pickles, "You are bad. You cannot be our friend."

But Pickles did have a friend in the house. His friend was Mrs. Goodkind. Everyday Mrs. Goodkind came into the yard and gave Pickles something to eat.

One day Mrs. Goodkind said, "Pickles, you are not a bad cat. You are not a good cat. You are bad and good. You are a mixed-up cat. What you need is a good home. Then you will be good." Mrs. Goodkind picked up the mixed-up cat. She took him into her home to live. In Mrs. Goodkind's home there was a pretty chair for Pickles to sit on. There were toys for him to play with.

But Pickles did not want to sit on a pretty chair. He did not want to play with toys. So he ran back to his barrel in the yard. And he began to chase the little cats again. Mrs. Goodkind said to Pickles, "Things cannot go on like this. Something will happen" The next few day Pickles chased a little cat up an old tree. He climbed up after her. Pickles sat up in the tree near the little cat. He would not let her come down.

After a time, the wind began to blow. It blew and blew and blew. And the rain came down hard. It came down harder and harder. At last Pickles let the little cat climb down and go home. Pickles wanted to climb down, too. He wanted to get back into his barrel. But he could not climb down. Sometimes this happens to a cat. And it happened to Pickles.

Mrs. Goodkind ran to the tree. "Pickles!" she called. "Please try to climb down." But Pickles could not climb down. Mrs. Goodkind ran into her house. Pickles could see her by the window. She was talking on the telephone. Then she called out to Pickles, the firemen are coming!"

A fire truck came up the street and stopped at Pickles' yard. Three firemen jumped down from the truck. Mrs. Goodkind came out of her house.

She ran to the firemen, and pointed to Pickles. The firemen put a ladder against the tree. One of the firemen began to climb up the ladder. The fireman climbed to the top of the ladder. "Come, cat," he said to Pickles. "Let me help you." The fireman picked up Pickles and tucked him into his coat. Then he took Pickles down the ladder—down to Mrs. Goodkind.

"Mrs. Goodkind," said the fireman, "is this your cat?"

"No, Joe," said Mrs. Goodkind. "Pickles has no home, and he does not want to live with me."

"Why?" asked Joe.

Mrs. Goodkind answered, "My home is too little for Pickles. Pickles is a cat who wishes to do big things. And someday he will do them. Look at his big paws." Pickles put out a paw for Joe to see.

"My goodness, Pickles," said Joe, "what big paws you have!"

Pickles looked at Joe and said the one word he could say: "MEOW!" And Joe could see that Pickles wanted something very much. Joe gave Pickles a pat.

"Pickles," he said, "I will take you to our firehouse. Maybe our Chief will let you stay."

The Fire Cat

Joe took Pickles to the Chief, who was sitting at his desk.

"Oh!" said the Chief. "I know this young cat." He is the one who chases little cats."

"How do you know?" asked Joe.

The Chief answered, "A Fire Chief knows many things." Just then the telephone began to ring. "Hello," said the Chief. "Oh, hello, Mrs. Goodkind. Yes, Pickles is here. He came with Joe. What did you say? You think Pickles would like to live in our firehouse? Well, we shall see. Thank you, Mrs. Goodkind. Good-bye." The Chief looked at Pickles and said, "Mrs. Goodkind says you are not a bad cat. And Joe likes you. I will let you live here IF you will learn to be a good firehouse cat." Pickles walked quietly up the stairs after Joe.

Joe and Pickles went into a room where the firemen lived. The men were pleased to have a cat. They wanted to play with Pickles. But suddenly the fire bell rang. All the firemen ran to a big pole and down they went. The pole was the fast way to get to their trucks. Pickles could hear the trucks start up and rush off to the fire.

Pickles said to himself, "I must learn to do what the firemen do. I must learn to slide down the pole." He jumped and put his paws around the pole. Down he fell with a BUMP. "Bumps or no bumps, I must try again," said Pickles. Up the stairs he ran. Down the pole he came—and bumped. He tried again—and bumped. But by the time the firemen came back from the fire, Pickles could slide down the pole.

"What a wonderful cat you are!" said the firemen. The Chief did not say anything.

Pickles said to himself, "I must keep on learning everything I can." So he learned to jump up on one of the big trucks. And he learned to sit up straight on the seat while the truck raced to a fire.

"What a wonderful cat you are!" said the firemen. The Chief did not say anything.

Pickles said to himself, "Now I must learn to help the firemen with their work." At the next fire, he jumped down from the truck. He ran to a big hose, put his paws around it, and tried to help a fireman shoot the water at the flames.

"What a wonderful cat you are!" said the firemen. The Chief did not say anything.

The next day the Chief called all the firemen to his desk. Then he called for Pickles. Pickles did not know what was going to happen. He said to himself, "Maybe the Chief does not like the way I work. Maybe he wants to send me back to my old yard." But Pickles went to the Chief. At the Chief's desk stood all the firemen—and Mrs. Goodkind!

The Chief said to Pickles, I have asked Mrs. Goodkind to come because she was your first friend. Pickles, jump up on my desk. I have something to say to you." Pickles jumped up on the desk and looked at the Chief. Out of the desk the Chief took—a little fire hat!

"Pickles," said the Chief, "I have watched you at your work. You have worked hard. The time has come for you to know that you are now our Fire Cat." And with these words, the Chief put the little hat on Pickles' head.

The Old Tree

Pickles made friends with all the firemen. But he did not make friends with any cats. When cats came to the firehouse to look at the trucks, Pickles chased them away.

The Chief called Pickles to him and said, "A Fire Cat must be kind to everyone. You must be good to other cats." Little by little, Pickles learned to be good to the cats he met. He made friends with them, too. Then all the cats loved to come to the firehouse.

On rainy days, most cats stayed at home, and Pickles sat upstairs with the firemen. One rainy day, as he sat there, he thought to himself, "How bad I was when I chased the other cats. Once I chased a little cat up a tree. Oh, me! Oh, my! Why did I do that?"

Suddenly, Pickles heard the Chief call out, "Cat in a tree!" Fireman Joe and two other men slid down the pole. Pickles slid down after them. He heard the Chief say, "The tree is in the old yard next to Mrs. Goodkind's house."

"Oh," thought Pickles, "That's the yard where I lived. And that's THE TREE." Pickles jumped up on the truck with the three firemen. Away they rode to the yard. And there, in the wind and the rain, stood Mrs. Goodkind, pointing for a very little cat. The firemen put a ladder against the tree. The ladder scared the little cat, and she ran to a high branch, where a fireman could not go.

Joe said to Mrs. Goodkind, "I don't know what to do." But Pickles knew. He began to climb the ladder. Pickles climbed up and up and up. It was hard work. But at last he came to the top of the ladder. Then he climbed the tree until he came to the little cat. "Come, cat," he said to her. "Let me help you." He picked her up and took her gently down to Mrs. Goodkind.

Mrs. Goodkind thanked Pickles. Then she said to him, "I always knew that someday you would do big things. Today you have down something very big."

Pickles waved a paw at her as if to say, “Mrs. Goodkind, this is only a beginning.” And he rode home to the firehouse—a proud and happy cat.

Rapunzel—the Brothers Grimm

There were once a man and a woman who had long, in vain, wished for a child. At length it appeared that God was about to grant their desire.

These people had a little window at the back of their house from which a splendid garden could be seen, which was full of the most beautiful flowers and herbs. It was, however, surrounded by a high wall, and no one dared to go into it because it belonged to an enchantress, who had great power and was dreaded by all the world.

One day the woman was standing by this window and looking down into the garden, when she saw a bed which was planted with the most beautiful rampion, and it looked so fresh and green that she longed for it. She quite pined away, and began to look pale and miserable.

Her husband was alarmed, and asked: 'What ails you, dear wife?'

'Ah,' she replied, 'if I can't eat some of the rampion, which is in the garden behind our house, I shall die.'

The man, who loved her, thought: 'Sooner than let your wife die, bring her some of the rampion yourself, let it cost what it will.'

At twilight, he clambered down over the wall into the garden of the enchantress, hastily clutched a handful of rampion, and took it to his wife. She at once made herself a salad of it, and ate it greedily. It tasted so good to her - so very good, that the next day she longed for it three times as much as before.

If he was to have any rest, her husband knew he must once more descend into the garden. Therefore, in the gloom of evening, he let himself down again; but when he had clambered down the wall he was terribly afraid, for he saw the enchantress standing before him.

'How can you dare,' said she with angry look, 'descend into my garden and steal my rampion like a thief? You shall suffer for it!'

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'Ah,' answered he, 'let mercy take the place of justice, I only made up my mind to do it out of necessity. My wife saw your rampion from the window, and felt such a longing for it that she would have died if she had not got some to eat.'

The enchantress allowed her anger to be softened, and said to him: 'If the case be as you say, I will allow you to take away with you as much rampion as you will, only I make one condition, you must give me the child which your wife will bring into the world; it shall be well treated, and I will care for it like a mother.'

The man in his terror consented to everything.

When the woman was brought to bed, the enchantress appeared at once, gave the child the name of

Rapunzel, and took it away with her.

Rapunzel grew into the most beautiful child under the sun. When she was twelve years old, the enchantress shut her into a tower in the middle of a forest. The tower had neither stairs nor door, but near the top was a little window. When the enchantress wanted to go in, she placed herself beneath it and cried:

'Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair to me.'

Rapunzel had magnificent long hair, fine as spun gold, and when she heard the voice of the enchantress, she unfastened her braided tresses, wound them round one of the hooks of the window above, and then the hair fell twenty ells down, and the enchantress climbed up by it.

After a year or two, it came to pass that the king's son rode through the forest and passed by the tower. Then he heard a song, which was so charming that he stood still and listened. It was Rapunzel, who in her solitude passed her time in letting her sweet voice resound. The king's son wanted to climb up to her, and looked for the door of the tower, but none was to be found. He rode home, but the singing had so deeply touched his heart, that every day he went out into the forest and listened to it.

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Once when he was thus standing behind a tree, he saw that an enchantress came there, and he heard how she cried:

'Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair to me.'

Then Rapunzel let down the braids of her hair, and the enchantress climbed up to her.

'If that is the ladder by which one mounts, I too will try my fortune,' said he, and the next day when it began to grow dark, he went to the tower and cried:

'Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair to me.'

Immediately the hair fell down and the king's son climbed up.

At first Rapunzel was terribly frightened when a man, such as her eyes had never yet beheld, came to her; but the king's son began to talk to her quite like a friend, and told her that his heart had been so stirred that it had let him have no rest, and he had been forced to see her. Then Rapunzel lost her fear, and when he asked her if she would take him for her husband, and she saw that he was young and handsome, she thought: 'He will love me more than old Dame Gothel does'; and she said yes, and laid her hand in his.

She said: 'I will willingly go away with you, but I do not know how to get down. Bring with you a skein of silk every time that you come, and I will weave a ladder with it, and when that is ready I will descend, and you will take me on your horse.'

They agreed that until that time he should come to her every evening, for the old woman came by day. The enchantress remarked nothing of this, until once Rapunzel said to her: 'Tell me, Dame Gothel, how it happens that you are so much heavier for me to draw up than the young king's son - he is with me in a moment.'

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'Ah! you wicked child,' cried the enchantress. 'What do I hear you say! I thought I had separated you

from all the world, and yet you have deceived me!'

In her anger she clutched Rapunzel's beautiful tresses, wrapped them twice round her left hand, seized a pair of scissors with the right, and snip, snap, they were cut off, and the lovely braids lay on the ground. And she was so pitiless that she took poor Rapunzel into a desert where she had to live in great grief and misery.

On the same day that she cast out Rapunzel, however, the enchantress fastened the braids of hair, which she had cut off, to the hook of the window, and when the king's son came and cried:

'Rapunzel, Rapunzel,
Let down your hair to me.'

she let the hair down. The king's son ascended, but instead of finding his dearest Rapunzel, he found the enchantress, who gazed at him with wicked and venomous looks.

'Aha!' she cried mockingly, 'you would fetch your dearest, but the beautiful bird sits no longer singing in the nest; the cat has got it, and will scratch out your eyes as well. Rapunzel is lost to you; you will never see her again.'

The king's son was beside himself with pain, and in his despair he leapt down from the tower. He escaped with his life, but the thorns into which he fell pierced his eyes.

He wandered quite blind about the forest, ate nothing but roots and berries, and did naught but lament and weep over the loss of his dearest wife. Thus he roamed about in misery for some years, and at length came to the desert where Rapunzel, with the twins to which she had given birth, a boy and a girl, lived in wretchedness. He heard a voice, and it seemed so familiar to him that he went towards it, and when he approached, Rapunzel knew him and fell on his neck and wept. Two of her tears wetted his eyes and they grew clear again, and he could see with them as before. He led her to his kingdom where he was joyfully received, and they lived for a long time afterwards, happy and contented.