

SEVEN O'CLOCK STORIES



Eighth Night: The Prettiest Fairy Story in the World



“Tell me a story—a fairy story,” said Jehosophat to his Mother.

The three happy children loved really true stories and fairy stories too. Sometimes they wanted one, sometimes the other. Sometimes the Toyman mixed his stories up so it was hard to tell which they were.

This morning it was spring. The sun was warm and Jehosophat felt very lazy.

“No,” said Mother. “I have too much work to do. But if you will help me dry the dishes I won’t tell you but I’ll show you one of the prettiest fairy stories in the world.”

“It is true too,” she added.

“Mother, how can that be,” said Marmaduke. “A fairy story that is a true story?”

“Just be patient,” she replied, “and you will see.”

So the boys took the dish towels and helped dry the dishes, without any accidents. But little Hepzebiah was too small, so she sat on the floor with her finger in her mouth and watched them.

“Come,” said Mother Green when they were through.

Out in the vegetable garden, back of the raspberries they went.

“See there,” said Mother.

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Three square little garden plots with nice brown earth were waiting for seeds.

“Father dug them for you—one for Jehosophat, one for Marmaduke, and one for Hepzebiah.”

The three happy children couldn’t help but think that was fine.

Just then along came Father.

His arms were full.

He had three little rakes, three little hoes, and three little spades.

The three happy children did not need to ask whom they were for.

“But where’s the fairy story, Mother?”

“That you will make,” she said. “The jolly old Sun, the gentle Rain, and brown Mother Earth will help you.”

Jehosophat laughed.

“Oh! I see now. But we can’t finish that fairy story all in one day.”

“No, it takes time and it takes work. But it’s a prettier story than any in books. And you can make it come true yourselves.”

Then Marmaduke piped up:

“What do we do first?”

“Well,” his Mother explained, “your Father has dug the ground for you. You must rake it first, make it smooth and even. Mind, no hard lumps now!”

So the three happy children set to work with their three shiny rakes. Father had to help Hepzebiah, of course.

Then when the earth was smooth and fine, like brown powder, they made little furrows or lines in the earth. In other parts of the little gardens they scooped out tiny holes with their hoes.

Out of his pockets Father took some square envelopes. On them were printed pretty flowers and ripe vegetables.

“There,” said Mother, “are the pictures of the end of the fairy story. But you’ll never know the end unless you try hard.”

Father tore open the envelopes and sowed the seeds in Hepzebiah’s garden, some in the little holes, some in the furrows. Then he let the two boys sow their own gardens.

After the envelopes were all empty and the seeds all scattered they covered them over with the fine brown soil.

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“The little seeds must sleep for a while,” said their Mother, “like babies in a big brown bed.”

So every day the three children watched. And the Sun shone and sometimes the gentle Rain came. They did not feel sad when she was weeping, for Mother told them she was a fairy too, not so jolly as the Sun but gentle and kind. Jolly Sun, gentle Rain, and Mother Earth—they were all fairies whom God had sent to help make the story come true.

Sometimes it was hard to finish breakfast, they were so anxious to see what had happened in the little gardens during the night. Sometimes they even forgot to ask Mother to “please excuse” them and they had to be called back to the table, for that was very impolite.

At last one wonderful morning, as they stood around the flower beds, Jehosophat said:

“There’s Chapter Two!”

“What’s that?” asked Marmaduke who didn’t quite understand.

“Oh, just another step in the fairy tale.”

“Where?”

He pointed to one of the gardens.

From the brown earth a little green head poked out.

Little Hepzebiah danced for it was in her garden, and toddled off to tell Mother.

Next day there were five more little heads, some in each of the gardens. They were light in colour and seemed weak but somehow the jolly old Sun and brown Mother Earth took care of them as parents take care of babies. And sometimes the gentle Rain came to water them with her tears. So they grew strong and soon the gardens were covered with an army of sturdy little green spears.

“It looks like a brown pincushion with green needles and pins,” said Jehosophat.

And the weeks passed and still the three good fairies worked hard over them to help them live and grow up to be real vegetables and flowers. They worked away very quietly, these three good fairies, as all good people work, without any noise, without any fuss.

One day Farmer Green came back from a visit to the town.

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With him he brought three green watering-pots.

“You must do some more work, yourselves,” he told them as he handed each one of the shiny green cans. “You must water them when the Rain fairy is tired, pull up the bad weeds that steal the food Mother Earth keeps for the flowers, and you must keep the soil loose around the roots, so that the drops can sink way down deep. The more work you do the better you will like your flowers when they do come. And the taller and prettier they will be.”

So the little green stalks grew tall and strong. Then the little buds came.

And one by one the buds opened into flowers. And the flowers had on their petals all the colours of the rainbow in the sky.

And the children took turns filling the vase on the supper table. They were very proud of their flowers when their father leaned over and smelled them.

“My, how sweet they smell!” he would say every time. “I don’t think I ever saw such flowers.”

And when their vegetables came to the table—round plump red radishes, crisp curling lettuce leaves, juicy tomatoes, and rows of peas in the pod, like the little toes of the neighbour’s baby, Father Green would say:

“I never did eat such vegetables!”

Then he would smile over at Mother.

And Marmaduke, after his turn one night, whispered to his mother—

“It was a pretty fairy story, Mother. And we made it come true ourselves.”

“Yes, with the help of God and His fairies—the jolly Sun, the gentle Rain, and brown Mother Earth. But the best part of it all is that your own hands helped.”

But the Little-Clock-with-the-Wise-Face-on-the-Mantle thought that the children understood now. So he stopped this advice with his silver tongue.

And Mother, too, agreed that it was late. So she kissed them good-night and tucked them under the coverlids as they had covered the tiny seeds in their brown beds.