

A BEDTIME FULL OF STORIES



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**Frances Lincoln
Children's Books**

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EUROPE

A STORY FROM POLAND

THE THREE GIFTS



Old King Vaclav was sitting on his throne with a worried frown. “What troubles you, my dear?” asked the Queen. “Your kingdom is peaceful, your people are happy, and our three sons have grown into fine young men.”

The King sighed. “It’s time for me to decide which of our sons will reign when I am gone,” he told her. “But they were born together on the same day, so how can I choose between them?”

The Queen remembered the joyful day when the three princes, Victor, Vincent, and Vladislav, were born. Now, they had grown into kind, clever, brave young men, and their parents loved them equally. “You must choose the son who will serve our people best,” she advised her husband.

“Wise words, my dear,” said the King and he sent for the three princes.

“The time has come for me to choose an heir,” he told them. “Go out and search the kingdom for a gift that will be of service to our people. The

one whose gift is the greatest shall be King when I am gone.”

The three princes promised to do as their father asked. The following day they set off together, excited about their quest.

After riding all morning they came to a place where the road split three ways.

“Here we must part,” said Victor. He wished his brothers luck and each of them went on alone.

The road Victor chose brought him to a land of fields and meadows. He traveled through a lush green valley, where he found an orchard of apple trees, laden with golden fruit gleaming in the sunlight. As Victor gazed at the fruit, the wind whispered softly in his ear.

“Find the magic apple and search no more.”

Filled with wonder, the young prince stepped into the orchard. A bent old woman was gathering fallen apples from the ground. She stopped to rub her aching back.

“Let me help you,” said Victor. “I can climb the trees and pick as many apples as you want.”

The old woman was grateful for his help. Before long, Victor had picked enough golden fruit to fill her baskets. To thank him, she produced a strange apple from her pocket—white as snow with cheeks that glowed like a pale sun on a frosty morning.

“The magic apple!” murmured Victor.

The old woman nodded. “Take it in return for your kindness,” she said. “A person has only to smell it and they will be cured of any sickness.”

Victor was delighted. “This will serve our people better than the wisest doctor,” he thought to himself and he set off home at once.

Meanwhile, Vincent had chosen a road which brought him to a land of lakes and waterways. He followed a wide river down to the sea. Anchored off the shore was a magnificent ship with sparkling silver sails. As Vincent gazed across the water, the wind whispered in his ear.

“Find the magic mirror and search no more.”

Filled with wonder, Vincent asked a fisherman to row him to the ship.

To his surprise, the Captain was expecting him. “How did you know I was coming?” asked Vincent.

The Captain handed him a silver mirror. “I saw you here,” he explained.

“The magic mirror!” murmured Vincent.

“Yes,” said the Captain. “It will show you whatever you wish to see.”

“This mirror would serve our people well,” thought Vincent. “It could show me if anyone was in trouble.” He asked the Captain if he would sell it.

“The mirror is not for sale,” said the Captain. “But if you can read the message written around the frame then it is yours.”

The message was written in the language of the mermaids, however, as Vincent studied it, the meaning revealed itself.

“Should I by chance belong to thee,
Keep me safe and never lose me.”

“Well read!” cried the Captain. “The mirror is yours. May it serve you well.”

Vincent rowed back to shore, eager to return home with his precious gift.

Meanwhile, the road Vladislav had chosen led to a land of hills and forests. The path became steep and brought him to the top of a ridge. From there he saw a city, white as marble, with tall towers shining in the sunlight. As Vladislav gazed at it, the wind whispered in his ear.

“Find the magic carpet and search no more.”

Filled with wonder, Vladislav took a path down to the city. When he entered the gates he found himself in a bustling market overflowing with silks and jewels, perfumes and spices. The prince spied a carpet, embroidered with silver and gold.

“The magic carpet!” he murmured.

A merchant standing beside it smiled. “Yes,” he said. “This carpet can fly through the sky, swifter than time itself!”

“Here’s something that could serve our people well,” thought Vladislav. “If anyone needed help I could reach them at the speed of lightning.” He asked the merchant to sell him the carpet.



“It’s not for sale,” the merchant told him. “It’s waiting for the one who can command it to fly. Would you like to try?”

Vladislav sat on the carpet. “Take me to the clouds and back again!” he cried. Instantly the carpet rose and soared into the sky, carrying the prince high over the city, up to the clouds, and back to the market again.

“The carpet is yours!” said the merchant. “May it serve you well.”

Vladislav thanked him and made good use of the carpet straight away to fetch his brothers and carry them all home.

The King and Queen marveled to hear how the three princes had discovered their magical gifts. However, the King found it impossible to decide which gift was the greatest.

“I’m no closer to choosing an heir,” he told the Queen with a sigh.

“Each gift will be of great service to our people,” the Queen said thoughtfully, “but they would be much more useful together. Vincent’s mirror would show him when anyone was ill, Vladislav could fly to their aid, and Vincent could cure them with his magic apple. Why not share your kingdom between them?”

The King smiled at his wife’s wise words. He sent for the three princes.

“Each of you shall be a King after me,” he told his sons. “Victor shall be King of the fields and meadows, Vincent shall be King of the rivers and lakes, and Vladislav shall be King of the hills and forests. Sharing your gifts will be the greatest service to our people.”

And so it was that when the old King died his three sons ruled together and they served their people well for many years.



EUROPE

A STORY FROM ENGLAND

THE PEDLAR OF SWAFFHAM



Many years ago, in the village of Swaffham, there lived a pedlar who went from door to door selling cooking pans and wooden spoons.

One night, the pedlar had a strange dream. A voice told him that if he stood on London Bridge he would hear news of great value.

At first, the pedlar took no notice of his dream but it kept returning, night after night. At last, he decided he would have no peace until he went to London Bridge.

The pedlar set off to London with his dog. After walking for three days they arrived in the city. The old bridge bustled with busy stores and crowds of people passing to and fro. The pedlar stood outside a butcher's store and waited to hear some news of great value.

Hour after hour, the pedlar watched the passersby, but nobody stopped to give him any news. He waited a second day, but still nothing happened. By the end of the third day he'd had enough. "I've been a fool!" he said to his dog.

However, just as they were about to set off home, the butcher stepped out of his store. "I've been watching you, stranger," said the butcher. "You don't sell anything, you don't buy anything, you don't speak to anyone—what are you doing just standing there?"

The pedlar explained about his dream.

The butcher burst out laughing. "You shouldn't pay attention to dreams," he said. "Last night I dreamt that if I went to some place called Swaffham and asked for the pedlar's house and dug beneath his apple tree I'd find a chest of treasure. Well, I've got no intention of going on a foolish errand like that!"

The pedlar's face broke into a huge grin. Without another word he hurried home to Swaffham where he dug up enough gold beneath his apple tree to live happily ever after.

EUROPE

A STORY FROM DENMARK

THE EMPEROR'S NEW CLOTHES



Many years ago there lived an Emperor whose greatest love was beautiful clothes.

One day, two weavers came to the palace and claimed they could make cloth of the most exquisite colors and patterns ever seen. “Our cloth is so fine it can only be seen by those who are clever,” they told the Emperor. “To people who are stupid it’s completely invisible!”

The Emperor was captivated. He gave the weavers a large bag of money to buy silk thread so they could begin weaving the special cloth straight away.

The weavers set up their looms in the palace. However, all was not as it seemed for the two men were clever cheats. They kept the Emperor's money and pretended to weave with no thread on their looms at all.

After several days, the Emperor was eager to know how his cloth looked. He sent his minister to inspect the weavers' progress. But when the minister entered the workroom he saw nothing on the looms.

"Come closer," said one of the weavers, pretending to hold a length of cloth in his hands. "Will the Emperor like this delicate pattern and these bright colors?"

The minister had heard that only clever people could see the cloth. He peered closely at thin air. "I must be stupid!" he thought. "If the Emperor hears that I can't see the cloth he'll think I'm not fit to do my job." Not wanting to give himself away, the minister nodded approvingly.

"I shall inform the Emperor that his cloth is enchanting!" he told the weavers and so he did.

Then the weavers asked for more money and worked on.

Meanwhile, rumors about the amazing cloth spread around the city. After several days the impatient Emperor sent his chamberlain for more news.

Like the minister, the chamberlain couldn't see any cloth, but not wanting to appear stupid, he praised the weavers for their fine patterns and colors.

"The cloth is dazzling!" he reported to the Emperor.

When the Emperor heard this he could wait no longer. He went to the workshop with his courtiers to see it for himself.

As the clever cheats pretended to display their work, the Emperor was dumbstruck. "I can't see it!" he thought with alarm. "Am I stupid? People will think I'm not fit to be Emperor!"

However, his courtiers were all smiling, for none of them wished to appear stupid, so the Emperor nodded with approval. "Ravishing!" he said. "Have it made into a suit of clothes, I shall wear it for the procession tomorrow."

Next morning, the Emperor arrived to be dressed. He stood in his underclothes while the weavers pretended to put on the new garments. "What a perfect fit!" they cried. "Look in the mirror, your majesty."

The Emperor turned around in front of the mirror, as if he was admiring himself from all sides. "Splendid, fabulous, exquisite!" he cried and he gave them each a purse of gold.

Then the Emperor, followed by all his ministers and courtiers, began a procession through the streets of the city, walking proud as a peacock among his people.

To his delight, the crowd cheered loudly for nobody wanted to appear stupid. Everyone agreed that the Emperor had never looked more magnificent.

But suddenly, a boy sitting on his father's shoulders cried out, "He's got no clothes on!"

A whisper went round the crowd. "The boy's right," people sniggered. "The Emperor's only wearing his underclothes!"

The Emperor heard their words and shivered with horror. He realized that the boy had no fear of looking stupid and so he had told the truth.

All the foolish Emperor could do was swallow his pride, hold his head up high, and walk on.

Meanwhile, the two clever cheats hurried away with pockets full of gold.



EUROPE

A STORY FROM GERMANY

THE ELVES AND THE SHOEMAKER



Hans the shoemaker was kind and generous. He gave shoes to the poor and shared whatever he had with others. But Hans earned so little and gave away so much that, eventually, he had nothing left except enough leather to make one pair of shoes.

That night, Hans laid out the piece of leather on his workbench, ready to be cut and stitched in the morning.

Next day, to his astonishment, in place of the leather was a beautiful pair of shoes.

While Hans was puzzling over who could have sewn such fine stitches, a rich woman passed by his window and noticed the shoes. She gave Hans

more money than he'd ever been paid for a pair of shoes.

Hans was delighted and bought enough leather for two more pairs of shoes.

Next day, the same thing happened again. Two pairs of exquisite shoes appeared on the workbench and the rich lady's friends bought them at a good price.

This continued for several weeks. Soon Hans and his wife were no longer poor. Curious to know who'd been helping them, they hid in the workshop one evening.

At midnight, two little elves crept into the workshop. Hans and his wife watched silently. The elves cut, hammered, and stitched until the shoes were finished. Then they smiled with satisfaction and slipped away.

"How can we thank them?" said Hans.

"Make them some shoes," suggested his wife, "and I shall sew them some clothes."

The following evening, they laid their gifts on the workbench and hid to wait for their visitors.

When the elves appeared, they were delighted with the shoes and clothes, which fitted them perfectly. However, elves won't return if they are given thanks.

After that night, the elves never came back, but things always went well for kind Hans and his wife.

EUROPE

A STORY FROM ENGLAND

THE SWORD IN THE STONE



One winter's night, in Tintagel castle, a baby boy was born. The boy's father, King Uther Pendragon, had waited many years for a son to rule England after him. To protect the child he kept the birth a secret and asked his friend Merlin, a wise magician, to take the boy somewhere he would be safe.

Merlin named the boy Arthur and took him to the castle of a trusted knight called Sir Hector. He asked Sir Hector to take care of the boy, although he told him nothing of his royal birth.

The good knight agreed to bring up Arthur with his own son, Kay. Arthur grew up happily with Kay, learning to ride and fight with

swords in games of combat, unaware that Merlin was using his magic to watch over him.

As the years passed, King Uther grew old and weak. In his final hours Merlin came to his bedside.

“Your son is safe and well, Sire,” Merlin whispered to the King. “When the time is right I promise he shall wear the crown.”

Comforted by his good friend’s words, the King died peacefully.

At once, the powerful lords of the land began arguing over who should sit on Uther’s throne. Merlin instructed them to gather before the great church in London on Christmas day. “Uther’s heir would be revealed to you there.”

When the lords came to the churchyard they found a huge stone with a sword plunged deep into it. On the stone was written “Whoever draws this sword from the stone is the rightful King of England.”

One by one, the lords tried to pull the sword from the stone but even the strongest among them failed. It seems the rightful King has yet to arrive, and so they decided to wait.

To entertain the lords while they waited a tournament was arranged. Knights came from far and wide to take part.



Sir Hector brought Kay, who was now a knight himself, and Arthur came with them, excited to see the great city of London.

However, on the morning Kay was to take part in the tournament he discovered that he had left his sword at the inn where they were staying.

“Don’t worry,” said Arthur, “I’ll fetch it for you!”

Arthur rushed off towards the inn. On the way, he came to the