

*Feminist*  
**FAIRY TALES**  
*Barbara G.*  
**WALKER**

*Author of*  
**Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets**



**FEMINIST FAIRY TALES**


**BARBARA G. WALKER**

*Illustrations by Laurie Harden*

**HarperSanFrancisco**  
*An Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers*

FEMINIST FAIRY TALES. Copyright © 1996 by Barbara G. Walker. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States of America. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information address HarperCollins Publishers, 10 East 53rd Street, New York, NY 10022.

HarperCollins Web Site: <http://www.harpercollins.com>

HarperCollins®, ®, and HarperSanFrancisco™ are trademarks of HarperCollins Publishers Inc.

FIRST HARPERCOLLINS PAPERBACK EDITION PUBLISHED IN 1997.

Illustrations by Laurie Harden  
Book design by Jaime Robles

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data  
Walker, Barbara G.

Feminist fairy tales / Barbara G. Walker.

ISBN 0-06-251319-2 (cloth)

ISBN 0-06-251320-6 (pbk.)

1. Women—Social life and customs—Fiction. 2. Man-woman relationships—Fiction. 3. Fairy tales—Adaptations. 4. Feminism—Fiction. I. Title.

PS3573.A42516F46 1996

813'.54—dc20 95-39219

00 01 ♦ HAD 10 9 8 7 6

## FEMINIST FAIRY TALES

*By Barbara G. Walker:*

**BOOKS**

- The Woman's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets**
- The Secrets of the Tarot: Origins, History, and Symbolism**
- The Crone: Woman of Age, Wisdom, and Power**
- The I Ching of the Goddess**
- The Skeptical Feminist: Discovering the Virgin, Mother, and Crone**
- The Woman's Dictionary of Symbols and Sacred Objects**
- The Book of Sacred Stones: Fact and Fallacy in the Crystal World**
- Women's Rituals: A Sourcebook**
- Amazon: A Novel**

**GRAPHICS**

- The Barbara Walker Tarot Deck**

*To Ishtar Hildachild Darkmoon*



## INTRODUCTION

Traditional fairy tales are drawn from many sources, including ancient mythology, pagan religion, political allegory, morality plays, and orientalia. Most such tales have filtered through centuries of patriarchal culture and show little respect for women, except as young and beautiful “princesses.” Only to be decorative is the customary female function in these old stories. Girls without beauty are automatically also without virtue, happiness, luck, or love.

For instance, in the old German tale of Puddocky (or Paddock, the toad-familiar of Shakespeare’s three witches), a prince seeks the world’s most beautiful girl to marry; wagonloads of less attractive candidates are casually thrown into the river and drowned, just to get rid of them.

The message that such stories convey to girls is plain: Your looks are your only asset. Whatever else you might be or do doesn’t count. Female ugliness is a crime deserving the death penalty.

The following collection of tales turns such misogynous messages around. Some of them are obvious twists on well-known stories, like “Ugly and the Beast,” “Snow Night,” “Gorga and the Dragon,” “The Littlest Mermaid,” “The Frog Princess,” “Ala Dean and the Wonderful Lamp,” “Little White Riding Hood,” “Three Little Pinks,” “Jill and the Beanroot,” and “The Empress’s New Clothes.”

"How the Gods Met Their End" is a version of the Teutonic *Götterdämmerung*. "How the Sexes Were Separated" is a retelling of the Greek myth about Zeus's jealous attack on the hermaphrodites of the Golden Age. "How Winter Came to the World" is another Greek myth, the familiar tale of Persephone or Kore (Corey) and her mother Demeter (Dea Mater), retold without the implied domination of Father Zeus and with a better appreciation of Mother Nature's cycles. Similarly, "The White God" features some of the best-known African goddesses in an appreciation of Nature. Three of them are chosen to remind the reader that the ancient Great Goddess frequently appeared as a trinity of Virgin, Mother, and Crone, representing the three stages of woman's life as well as the seasons of seed time, growth, and harvest; the tripartite world of heaven, earth, and underworld; the phenomena of birth, sex, and death; the spinning, weaving, and cutting functions of the Fates; and many other three-way cycles and divisions. Modern feminist spirituality has made this ancient trinitarian concept familiar to many of today's women.

Some stories in this collection are simply original fantasies couched in the language and form of traditional fairy tales. They are intended to be playful, sometimes funny, sometimes thought-provoking. A feminist message of some kind can be found embodied in each.

**B.G.W.**



**FEMINIST FAIRY TALES**

## CONTENTS

- ix* Introduction  
*1* The She-Wolf  
*7* Princess Questa  
*19* Snow Night  
*27* Gorga and the Dragon  
*35* The Frog Princess  
*47* Ugly and the Beast  
*55* Thomas Rhymer  
*63* Jill and the Beanroot  
*71* Barbidol  
*79* Sir Vivor and the Holy Cauldron  
*91* Ala Dean and the Wonderful Lamp  
*101* The Descent of Shaloma  
*111* The Weaver  
*121* The Sea Witch  
*129* Prince Gimme and the Fairy of the Forest  
*141* The Oracle  
*149* Lily and Rose  
*157* The Gargoyle  
*165* Little White Riding Hood  
*171* How the Sexes Were Separated

- 177 The Littlest Mermaid  
189 Cinder-Helle  
197 How Winter Came to the World  
209 The Empress's New Clothes  
217 The Three Little Pinks  
225 Fairy Gold  
233 How the Gods Met Their End  
239 The White God



THE HE-WOLF

*Wolf worship can be traced at least as far back as the days of Europe's pagan clans, some of which revered the wolf as a sacred totem, as shown by the survival of "Wolf" as a family name. Wolf-clan members ritually transformed themselves into animal spirits by wearing wolf skins and performing wolf-mimicking dances. In Greek myth the heavenly father, Zeus Lycaeus, takes wolf form.*

*Having been diabolized by Christian authorities, wolf worship gave rise to medieval superstitions about lycanthropy (werewolfism). This in turn gave rise to fairy tales that made wolves the villains. This darker, wilder canine image probably owed less to the observed behavior of real wolves than to buried childhood fears of domestic dogs who looked formidable and might bite.*

*As a dog lover from my earliest years, I could never see anything especially scary about fairy-tale wolves, however big and bad they might be called. Why vilify an interesting and attractive animal? Members of the old wolf clans must have liked the basic premise of lycanthropy, which suggested that, through a magical transformation, humans might be able to experience the keen senses of smell and hearing, the agility, strength, and swiftness of the wolf. A certain envy of such animal characteristics has been found in nearly all human societies.*



*She squatted down and tenderly bandaged the wolf's leg.*



nce upon a time there was a poor widower who lived with his daughter, Lupa, in a wretched hut on a stony little farm. The land produced hardly enough food for them, and their only reliable source of nourishment was their one cow, who gave milk, butter, and cheese. The widower's only pleasure in life was watching his daughter grow up. She was both clever and kind, the apple of her father's eye.

One day disaster struck. The cow took sick and died. There was no more milk, butter, or cheese to be had. The widower had no money to buy another cow or even a chicken or two for eggs. He and Lupa cut up the dead cow and preserved her meat, which nourished them for a while. After the meat was gone, they had almost nothing left but the seeds put by for a new crop.

The widower's late wife had been an accomplished needlewoman and had left some beautiful tapestries behind when she died. Lupa's father took them from storage. "I had hoped to keep these in memory of your mother," he told Lupa sadly. "Now I have no choice but to offer them for sale. Tomorrow I must start the spring planting. While I do that, you must take this embroidery to market and get the best price you can."

Early the next morning Lupa set out with the tapestries rolled up under her arm. She had to travel many miles to town. Along the way, a fierce thunderstorm came up. Finding no shelter, she trudged on through the rain and became thoroughly soaked.

After the sky cleared, Lupa opened the soggy roll of tapestries to wring them out. To her horror, she found that all the colors had run together—her mother had not been able to afford colorfast dyes. The pictures were ruined.

Feeling hopeless and frustrated, Lupa sat down beside the road and cried. Not only did she now have nothing to sell, but she had even lost her mother's handiwork, which would grieve her father very much.

After a while she dried her tears and decided to go on to the market anyway, hoping to sell the canvas itself, or perhaps just beg for a few coins or a bit of bread to take home.

As she was passing through a thick forest, she heard a dismal howling not far away. It seemed the very expression of her own sorrow. Too depressed to feel frightened, she followed the sound and came upon a large, gray, yellow-eyed she-wolf caught in a trap by her right foreleg, howling with pain and distress.

"Oh, poor wolf," said kindhearted Lupa. "Can I help you?" To her amazed delight, the wolf replied.

"Get me out of this trap," begged the wolf. "I have babies at home in my den. They will die if they lose me."

Lupa picked up a stout stick and opened the jaws of the trap to release the wolf's leg. Then she squatted down and tenderly bandaged the lacerated limb with a strip torn from her petticoat. The wolf stood patiently for these ministrations.

"My cubs and I thank you," she said. "How can I repay your kindness?"

"Alas, my situation is so unhappy that no one can help me," said Lupa. She told the wolf all her troubles, beginning with the cow's death and ending with the spoiled tapestries.

"Never mind going to the market," said the wolf. "Go home and don't worry. All will be well."

With that, the wolf limped away on her bandaged leg and disappeared into the underbrush.

Lupa was puzzled, but she reflected that the word of a she-wolf magical enough to talk was probably a word to be trusted. She buried the tapestries, not wanting her father to see them spoiled. Then she went home empty-handed. She told her father a white lie, saying that she had sold the tapestries and had been robbed on her way back home.

Her father had worked all day and was hungry, but they had nothing to eat except a few roots and seeds. They went to bed with rumbling stomachs and slept badly. Both Lupa and her father were sporadically awakened by the howling of wolves nearby in the forest.

In the morning Lupa felt too tired to get up, but she hurried out of bed when she heard her father shouting.

"Look, look!" he was crying. "Here on the doorstep!" There lay a whole haunch of venison, freshly butchered, ragged at the edges as if it had been chewed from the carcass instead of cut. Father and daughter immedi-

ately roasted some slices for their breakfast and had their first good meal in a long time.

The next day they were startled to find a company of the king's guardsmen on the same doorstep. The captain of the guards pounded on their door with his sword hilt and roared, "Open up in the king's name, poachers!"

Lupa's father hastily opened the door. "I am no poacher, but a poor peasant," he said. "You have the wrong man."

"You have been poaching the king's deer in the royal woodland," bawled the captain. "Don't deny it. We followed a blood trail right to your door."

The guardsmen pushed their way into the hut and found the venison hanging by the hearth. The captain took one look and said, "You're both under arrest."

In vain Lupa and her father protested that the meat had been delivered to them by agents unknown, and they had no idea where it had come from. No one listened to them. They were seized, bound, and marched away to the king's castle to stand trial.

After a miserable night in the dungeons, father and daughter were dragged to the audience chamber where the king and queen sat surrounded by their courtiers. Even the twin infant princes were present, in their cradles next to the queen's throne. An imposing official in a gold-trimmed black velvet robe announced the accusations against various evildoers and presented the evidence.

When it was his turn to respond to the charges against him, Lupa's father knelt before the king and pleaded innocent. He explained that a person or persons unknown had somehow left a haunch of venison on his doorstep during the night. The king seemed bored by this story. The defendant himself realized how feeble it sounded and lapsed into shamefaced silence. The queen, however, looked interested.

She gazed intently at Lupa and her father. Lupa noticed that she had unusual yellowish eyes.

"You will pass no sentence on these two," the queen said firmly. "I will make them my servants."

"But, my dear," said the king, "the penalty for poaching is execution."

"I say these two will not be executed," said the queen, in a tone that brooked no opposition. "Guard, take them away to my quarters."



Lupa and her father waited under guard in the queen's drawing room until the queen appeared in person. She ordered their bonds removed and then dismissed the guardsmen. Lupa and her father fell at her feet and thanked her for her mercy.

"I am not merciful, only conscientious," the queen said. "I repay my debts. My former mode of recompense got you into trouble, and now it's up to me to repair the damage."

"I don't understand, Your Majesty," Lupa said timidly.

"Does this look familiar?" the queen asked. She rolled up her right sleeve. On her forearm was a bandage, slightly bloodstained. Lupa looked closely and recognized the strip torn from her own petticoat.

"Your Majesty is the she-wolf?" Lupa whispered in amazement.

"We will not speak of this again," said the queen. "You, Lupa, will become my handmaid. Your father will be a royal gardener. He will be well paid and well fed, as will you also. Your life of privation is over."

Lupa and her father wept tears of joy and kissed the queen's hands. They never returned to their poor hut but took up residence in the castle at once. Lupa served her royal mistress faithfully and well for many years. Her father tended the castle gardens with care and eventually rose to the rank of head groundskeeper.

Lupa dug up the tapestries her mother had made, rinsed out their cheap dyes, and gave them to the most expert of the royal needlewomen to be copied. The resulting work became known far and wide as the celebrated Lupine Tapestries. Years afterward they were still prized gems in the national museum.

People said that sometimes, on moonless nights, Lupa and her father both underwent a strange transformation and ran through the forest with the wild wolves, in a pack that was always led by a large gray female with yellow eyes and a scarred right foreleg.