Hans Christian Andersen

Fairytales

Illustrated by Svend Otto S.

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BØRNENES H. C. ANDERSEN

Printed 2000 in Denmark
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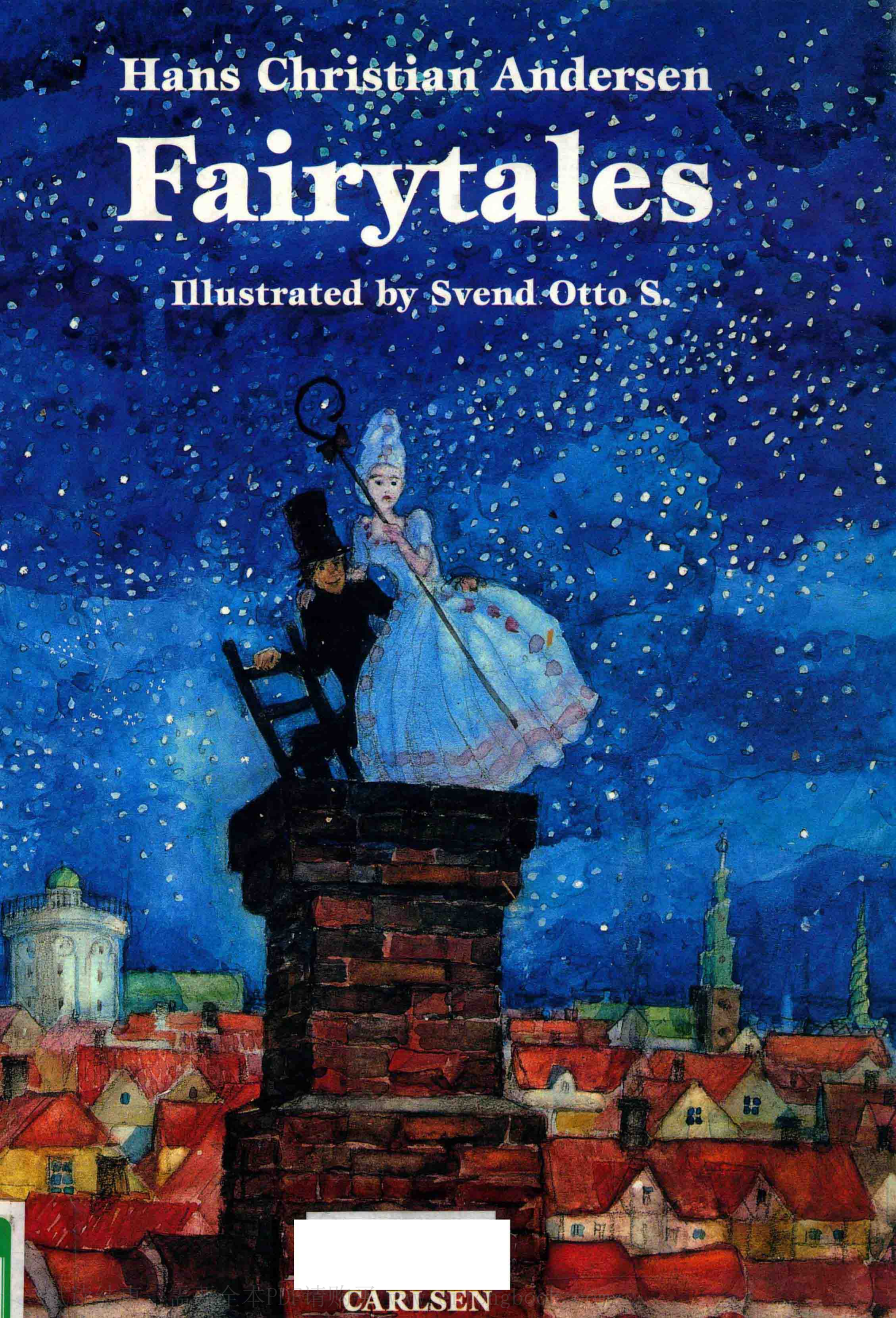

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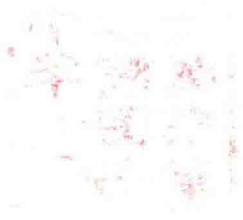

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THE FIRST PART

Which tells of a looking-glass and its splinters

If you're ready, we'll begin. When we come to the end of this story we shall know more than we know now.

It all began with the work of a wicked troll. He was one of the worst of all; he was the Devil himself. One day he was in a very good mood, because he had made a mirror which had the power, when anything good and beautiful was reflected in it, to make it shrink to almost nothing, while anything that was worthless and ill-looking stood out and became worse still. It made the loveliest landscapes look like boiled spinach and the best people turn ugly or stand on their heads, with no middles; their faces were so distorted that they were unrecognizable and the smallest freckle was sure to spread over

their noses and mouths. The Devil thought that was extremely funny. The best and purest thought reflected in that mirror became a grin, and how the Devil laughed at his cunning invention! All the pupils at troll-school, for he ran a troll-school, told each other that a miracle had happened; for the first time, they said, you could see what the world and the people in it really looked like. They ran all over the place with the mirror, until at last there was not a country or a person who had not been distorted in it. Then they decided to fly up to heaven itself, to make fun of the angels and the Lord. The higher they flew with the mirror, the more it grinned, until they could scarcely hold it; higher and higher they flew, closer to God and the angels; then the mirror shuddered with such terrible laughter that it fell from their hands and plunged to the earth, where it broke into pieces, hundreds of millions, billions and even more! Now it did even worse damage than before, because some of the pieces were no bigger than a grain of sand and they flew all over the world and wherever they blew into people's eyes, they stuck, so that people saw everything wrongly, or could see only the bad; for each little speck of mirror had the same power as the whole mirror. A splinter of glass even flew into some people's hearts and that was the worst fate of all, for their hearts turned into lumps of ice. Some of the glass fragments were big enough to use as window-panes, but it was not good to look at your friends through those panes; others were made into spectacles and things went awry when people put them on in order to see clearly and be just. The Evil One laughed till his stomach was bursting, which tickled him delightfully. But outside, little splinters of glass were still flying about in the air. We shall hear more about those!

THE SECOND PART

About a little boy and a little girl

In the big town, where there are so many houses and people that there is not enough room for everyone to have a little garden, and where most people have to be content with flowers in pots, lived two poor children who had a garden which was a little larger than a flower-pot. They were not brother and sister, but they were as fond of each other as if they had been. Their parents lived next door to each other in two attic rooms, just where the roof of one house touched its neighbour's and the gutter ran along the eaves. A little window stuck out from each house; you had only to step over the gutter to get from one window to the next.

Their parents each had a big wooden box outside, in which they grew herbs which they used, and a little rose-tree; there was one in each window-box and they grew and flourished. The parents had the idea of setting the window-boxes straight across the gutter, so that they reached from one window almost to the next and looked for all the world like two flower-beds. The pea-tendrils hung down from the window-boxes and the rose-trees put out long branches that twined their way round the windows and leaned in towards each other like a triumphal arch of leaves and flowers. Because the window-boxes were very high and the children knew that they must not climb up them, they were allowed to come out in

summer and sit on their little stools under the rose-trees, where they could have splendid games.

In winter there were no such pleasures. The windows were frozen solid, but the children would heat copper coins on the stove and hold them against the frozen pane to make a lovely peephole, round as round; behind each a gentle eye looked out, one from each window: they belonged to the little boy and the little girl. His name was Kay and hers was Gerda. In summer they could be together with one leap, but in winter they had first to go down all the stairs in one house and up all the stairs in the next; the snow swirled outside.

"It's the white bees swarming," said the old grandmother.

"Do they have a queen too?" asked the little boy, because he knew that real bees have one.

"They certainly have," said Grandmother. "She is in there where the swarm is thickest, the biggest of them all, and she never stays still on earth, she always flies back into the black clouds. Many a winter's night she flies through the city streets, looking in at the windows, and they freeze in wonderful shapes, like flowers."

"Yes, I've seen that!" said the two children, and so they knew that it was true.

"Can the Snow Queen get in here?" asked the little girl.

"Let her come!" said the boy. "I'll put her on the hot stove and she'll melt."

But Grandmother stroked his hair and told them different stories.

That night, when Kay was at home and half-undressed, he climbed on to the chair by the window and looked out through the little hole; a few snowflakes were falling outside, and one of them, the biggest of all, came to rest on the edge of one of the window-boxes; the snowflake grew and grew until at last it was a real, live woman, dressed in the finest white gauze seemingly woven from a million star-shaped flakes. She was both beautiful and elegant, but icy, made of dazzling, brilliant ice. And yet she was alive; her eyes stared like two bright stars, but there was no peace or quiet in them. She nodded towards the window and beckoned. The little boy was frightened and jumped off the chair, and, for a moment, a great bird seemed to be flying past the window.

The next day there was a white frost – and then a thaw – and then came spring. The sun shone, the leaves peeped out, the swallows built their nests, the windows opened and the two children were able to sit in their little garden again, high up on the eaves, at the very top of the many-storeyed house.

The roses bloomed that year as they had never bloomed before; the little girl had learned a hymn which sang of roses and those roses made her think of her own, so she sang it for the little boy and he sang with her:

"In the valley roses grow,
There the Christ-child we shall know!"

And the children held hands, kissed the roses, looked at God's bright sunshine and spoke to it, as if the Christ-child were there. What lovely summer days they were, how lovely it was to be out by the fresh rose-trees which seemed never to stop flowering!

One day Kay and Gerda were looking at the animals and birds in their picture-books when suddenly – the clock on the great church tower was just striking five – Kay cried: "Ah! Something pierced my heart! And now there is something in my eye!"

The little girl took his face in her hands; he blinked, but no, there was nothing to be seen.

"I think it's gone!" he said, but it had not gone. It was one of those grains of glass which had sprung from the mirror, the magic mirror, remember, the dreadful glass that turned anything great and good that was reflected in it into something small and ugly, while the evil and the bad became more distinct and the least fault could be seen at once. Poor Kay – a splinter had also entered his heart, which would soon become a lump of ice. It no longer hurt him but it was there.

"Why are you crying?" he asked. "It makes you look ugly! There's nothing wrong with me! Ugh!" he cried suddenly, "this rose has been gnawed by a worm, and look, that one is all crooked – in fact they are really horrid roses, just like the window-boxes they're growing in!" And he kicked the box hard and pulled off the two roses.

"Kay, what are you doing?" cried the little girl, and, when he saw her fright, he pulled off another rose and ran inside through his own window, away from little Gerda.

When she brought the picture-book out later on he said it was for babies, and when Grandmother told stories he was always saying *but* – in fact, whenever he had the chance, he made fun of her, putting on glasses and imitating her; he did it so well that he made people laugh. Soon he could walk and talk just like *all* the people in the street. Everything that was different or not too good about them, Kay could imitate and people said: "That boy's got brains, that's for sure!" But it was the glass that had fallen into his eye, the glass that was stuck in his heart that made him tease even little Gerda, who loved him with all her heart.

His games were quite different from before, they were so clever: one winter's day, when the snowflakes were falling, he brought a big magnifying glass, held out his coat-tails and let the snowflakes fall on them.

"Now look through the glass, Gerda!" he said, and every snowflake grew much larger and looked like a wonderful flower or a ten-pointed star; they were a beautiful sight.

"Look, aren't they curious?" said Kay. "Much more interesting than real flowers! And there is not a single flaw in them, they're quite perfect, until they melt."

A day or so later Kay arrived, wearing big gloves and with his sledge on his back. "I'm taking my sledge to the big square," he shouted in Gerda's ear. "The others are playing there!" And he was off.

Down on the square the boldest boys would tie their sledges to the farmers' carts and slide along behind them for a while, having a fine time. In the midst of their play a big sledge drove past, all painted white, its driver wrapped in a fleecy white fur and wearing a white fur cap. As the sledge drove round the square a second time, Kay quickly tied his own little sledge to it and slid along behind. Faster and faster they went, right into the next street, while the driver turned and gave Kay a friendly nod, as if they knew each other. Every time Kay tried to untie his little sledge the driver nodded again, so Kay stayed where he was until they were driving straight out through the city gate. Then it began to snow so hard that the little boy could not see his hand before his face as they rushed along; he quickly released the rope to free himself from the big sledge, but it was no use; his own little one hung on and they were travelling like the wind. He shouted at the top of his voice, but no one heard him and the snow fell and the sledge flew along, sometimes leaping as though they were crossing ditches and fences. In his terror he tried to repeat the Lord's Prayer, but could only remember his multiplication tables.

The snowflakes grew larger and larger, until they looked like big, white hens; suddenly they lurched sideways, the big sledge stopped and the driver rose, furs and hat covered with snow; it was a lady, very tall and straight and shining white: the Snow Queen.

"We have come a long way," she said, "are you cold? Come inside my bearskin coat!" Taking him into the sledge beside her, she wrapped her furs around him. He seemed to be sinking into a snowdrift.

"Are you still cold?" she asked, kissing him on the forehead. Ah! Her kiss was colder than ice, it pierced him to the very heart, which was already half made of ice; he felt as if he were going to die – but only for a moment, then he felt better; he no longer noticed the cold.

"My sledge! Don't forget my sledge!" was his first thought, but it was tied on to one of the white hens, which flew behind them with the sledge on its back. When the Snow Queen