

ANDERSEN'S FAIRY TALES

HANS CHRISTIAN ANDERSEN



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Translated by
Pat Shaw Iversen

With a New Afterword by Joanne Greenberg

ILLUSTRATED BY
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SIGNET CLASSIC

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Hans Christian Andersen (1805–75) grew up solitary, dreamy, and enamored of literature and the theater. At fourteen, armed with little more than sheer determination, he went to Copenhagen, where he succeeded in winning the patronage of a prominent citizen and acquired some formal schooling. In 1829, his poems, plays, and travel sketches began to appear. In 1835, he published his first collection of tales, to be followed over the years by further creations in a genre he made singularly his own. His life was marked by extensive travels, enormous popularity, the friendship of many leading personalities of the era, and the highest honors of his native land.

Joanne Greenberg was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1932. She graduated from American University, and presently teaches at the Colorado School of Mines. The author of many award-winning novels, including *I Never Promised You a Rose Garden* and *In This Sign*, she lives near Denver, Colorado.

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The Tinderbox



A SOLDIER came marching along the highway: One, two! One, two! He had his knapsack on his back and a sword at his side, for he had been to war and now he was on his way home. Then he met an old witch on the highway. She was hideous, and her lower lip hung right down to her chest.

She said, "Good evening, soldier! My, what a pretty sword and a big knapsack you have! You're a real soldier! Now you shall have as much money as you'd like to have!"

"Thanks, old witch!" said the soldier.

"Do you see that big tree?" said the witch, and pointed to a tree beside them. "It's quite hollow inside. You're to climb up to the top. Then you'll see a hole you can slide through, and you'll come down way inside the tree! I'll tie a rope around your waist so I can pull you up again when you call me."

"What'll I do down in the tree, then?" asked the soldier.

"Fetch money!" said the witch. "Now I'll tell you: when you're down at the bottom of the tree, you'll find yourself in a great hall. It's quite light, for over a hundred lamps are burning there. Then you'll see three doors. You can open them: the keys are in them. If you go into the first chamber, you'll see a big chest in the middle of the floor. On top of it sits a dog with a pair of eyes as big as teacups.

But you needn't pay any attention to that. I'll give you my blue-checked apron, which you can spread out on the floor. Then go over quickly and get the dog, put him on my apron, open the chest, and take as many shillings as you like! They're all of copper. But if you'd rather have silver, then go into the next room. There sits a dog with a pair of eyes as big as mill wheels! But you needn't pay any attention to that. Put him on my apron and take the money. On the other hand, if you'd rather have gold, you can also have that, and as much as you can carry, if you just go into the third chamber. But the dog sitting on the money chest here has a pair of eyes each one as big as the Round Tower! That's a real dog, I'll have you know! But you needn't pay any attention to that. Just put him on my apron, so he won't do you any harm, and take as much gold as you like from the chest."

"There's nothing wrong with that!" said the soldier. "But what'll I get for you, old witch? For I daresay you want something too!"

"No," said the witch, "not a single shilling will I have! You can just bring me an old tinderbox, which my grand-mother forgot the last time she was down there."

"Well, put the rope around my waist," said the soldier.

"Here it is," said the witch, "and here's my blue-checked apron."

Then the soldier climbed up into the tree, let himself drop down through the hole, and stood now, as the old witch had said, down in the great hall where the many hundreds of lamps were burning.

Now he unlocked the first door. Ugh! There sat the dog with eyes as big as teacups, and it glowered at him.

"You're a pretty fellow!" said the soldier; he put the dog on the witch's apron and then took as many copper shillings as he could get in his pocket. Then he closed the chest, put the dog on it again, and went into the second chamber. Yeow! There sat the dog with eyes as big as mill wheels.

"You shouldn't look at me so hard," said the soldier; "it might strain your eyes!" Then he put the dog on the witch's apron, but when he saw all the silver coins in the chest, he got rid of all the copper money he had and filled his pocket and his knapsack with silver only. Now he went into the third chamber! My, how hideous it was! The dog in there really did have two eyes each as big as the Round Tower, and they rolled around in his head like wheels!

"Good evening," said the soldier, and touched his cap, for he had never seen a dog like that before. But after he had looked at it for a while, he thought, "Now that's enough," and lifted it down to the floor and opened the chest. Well, heaven be praised! What a lot of gold there was! He could buy all of Copenhagen with it, and the sugar pigs of the cake wives, and all the tin soldiers and whips and rocking horses in the world! Yes, that was really a lot of money! Now the soldier threw away all the silver shillings in his pocket and knapsack and took gold instead. Yes, he filled all his pockets and his knapsack, and his cap and boots were so full that he could hardly walk! Now he had money! He put the dog on the chest, shut the door, and then shouted up through the tree: "Pull me up now, old witch."

"Do you have the tinderbox with you?" asked the witch. "That's right," said the soldier. "I'd clean forgotten it." And then he went and got it. The witch pulled him up, and now he was standing on the highway again with his pockets, boots, knapsack, and cap full of money.

"What do you want that tinderbox for?" asked the soldier. "That's none of your business!" said the witch. "Why, you've got the money now. Just give me the tinderbox!"

"Fiddlesticks!" said the soldier. "Tell me at once what you want it for, or I'll draw my sword and chop off your head!"

"No!" said the witch.

Then the soldier chopped off her head. There she lay! But he tied all his money in her apron, carried it like a pack on his back, put the tinderbox in his pocket, and went straight to the town.

It was a lovely town, and he put up at the finest inn and demanded the very best rooms and all the food he liked, for he was rich, now that he had so much money.

The servant who was to polish his boots thought, of course, that they were queer old boots for such a rich gentleman to have, for he hadn't bought any new ones yet. The next day he got boots to walk in and pretty clothes. Now the soldier had become a fine gentleman, and they told him about all the things to do in their town, and about their king, and what a lovely princess his daughter was.

"Where can she be seen?" asked the soldier.

"She can't be seen at all," they said. "She lives in a big copper castle with many walls and towers around it. No one but the king is allowed to go in and out, for it has been prophesied that she will be married to a common soldier, and the king can't stand that one bit!"

"I'd like to see her, all right," thought the soldier, but this he wasn't allowed to do at all.

Now he lived merrily and well, went to the theater, drove in the royal park, and gave lots of money away to the poor; and that was well done! He remembered very well from the old days how bad it was to be penniless! Now he was rich and had fine clothes and many friends, who all said what a nice fellow he was, a real cavalier; and the soldier certainly didn't mind hearing that. But as he spent money every day and didn't get any back at all, it happened that at last he had no more than two shillings left and had to move from the nice rooms where he had lived to a tiny little room way up under the roof, and he had to brush his boots himself and mend them with a

needle; and none of his friends came to see him, for there were so many stairs to climb.

One evening it was quite dark and he couldn't buy even a candle, but then he remembered there was a little stub in the tinderbox he had taken out of the hollow tree where the witch had helped him. He took out the tinderbox and the candle stub, but just as he struck a light and the sparks flew from the flint, the door flew open and the dog with eyes as big as teacups, which he had seen down under the tree, stood before him and said, "What does my master command?"

"What's that?" said the soldier. "Why, this is a funny tinderbox if I can get whatever I like! Get me some money," he said to the dog. And whoops! It was gone! Whoops! It was back again, holding a bag full of coins in its mouth.

Now the soldier understood what a marvelous tinderbox it was. If he struck it once, the dog that sat on the chest full of copper money came; if he struck it twice, the one with the silver money came; and if he struck it three times, the one with the gold came. Now the soldier moved back down to the lovely rooms again, put on the fine clothing, and then all his friends knew him again right away, and they were so fond of him.

Then one day he thought: "Now, it's really quite odd that no one is allowed to see the princess. Everyone says she's supposed to be so lovely. But what's the good of it when she always has to sit inside that big copper castle with all the towers? Can't I even get to see her at all? Now, where's my tinderbox?" And then he struck a light, and whoops! There stood the dog with eyes as big as teacups.

"I know it's the middle of the night," said the soldier, "but I'd so like to see the princess, just for a tiny moment."

The dog was out of the door at once, and before the soldier had given it a thought, it was back again with the