

The Bird of Truth, the Dancing Water, and the Singing Apple

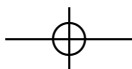
Told by Gwilherm Garandel

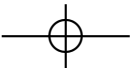
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Breton Tale 1

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Once upon a time, there was a baker who had three most beautiful daughters. Their father baked bread for the folk of the town where they lived, and the daughters spun thread on their spinning wheels and made handsome sums of money, because thread was expensive in those days, not like now. One day, the three of them were spinning in the yard behind their father's oven, singing, and talking about one thing or another. So it was that they began to talk about their loves.

"Tell us who is your love, the one you would like to have for husband?" the elder daughter asked her younger sister.

"The king's baker," she answered; "And you?"

"Me, the king's cook is the one I love."

"And you, Littlest One?" they both asked their youngest sister.

"Me," Little One said, "It's no king's baker or cook that I want to have, but the king's son himself."

When they heard such a thing, the two other sisters began to laugh and make fun of their little sister.

"Don't laugh like that," she told them, "Because this might well happen. I will even tell you more: if the prince happened to take me for his spouse, I would give him three children, two sons and a daughter. The older son, when he will come unto the earth, his grand-father's crown will be engraved on his forehead. The second one will have two swords crossed on his chest, and the daughter will have a star on her forehead."

"You must have lost all your good sense, speaking like that!" her two elder sisters told Little One.

"We shall see later," she told them.

When he was passing by the courtyard, the valet of the king's son had heard the three girls talking, and he hid behind a bush to listen. As soon as he returned to the palace, he told everything he had heard to the prince. The prince ordered to bring the baker's older daughter, first, to come and talk with him in his room.

The girl went and was afraid: "For what reason does he ask for me?" she wondered. When she was in front of the prince:

"Would you take my cook as your spouse?" he asked her.

"Yes, with all my heart," she said.

"Well! You will have him. Go now, and tell your younger sister to come to see me."



The baker's second daughter came and the prince spoke to her as he did to her sister. Now the two girls were happy. Now it was the turn of Little One and he asked her:

"Did you truly say that you loved the king's son?"

"Yes," she said, "I said it, and I don't deny it."

"Did you also truly say that if you had the king's son as spouse, you would give him two sons and a daughter. His grand-father's crown would be marked on the elder son's forehead, when he would come to the world, two swords in a cross on the second son's chest, and a star on the daughter's forehead?"

"Yes," she said, "This is also true."

"And all of this will happen as you said?"

"Yes, all of this will happen as I said."

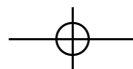
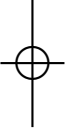
"Well then, you will be my wife! Our marriage and that of your two sisters with those they love will be celebrated at the same time."

And so the three weddings were done together, as the prince said, and there were splendid feasts and all kinds of games for two full weeks.

Once the feasts and celebrations were over, the baker and the cook went to live in town, each with his wife, and Little One stayed in the palace with the prince. But now her two older sisters were jealous of her and had ill feelings towards her. They went to see her nevertheless and even pretended to love her. When the time came and she was about to give birth, she asked them to find her a midwife who would take care of her. They found a midwife and paid her money to replace the child that their sister would bear with a little dog, and to tell the prince that she would have born a dog. Meanwhile, they would put the child in a basket and set it on the water, to go in God's grace.

So it was done. The prince's wife bore a most beautiful son, with his grand-father's crown marked on his forehead. The baker's wife and the cook's wife grabbed him immediately and placed him in a basket to go in God's grace on a river which ran below the palace's garden. A parrot was in the room, and when he saw them leaving with the child, it began to shout: "I'll tell! I'll tell!" But they paid no mind to it.

When the father and mother asked to see their child, the treacherous midwife showed them a little dog. At this sight, their sorrow



was great. But the prince said:

“God’s will it is! One must accept whatever he does!”

Meanwhile, the chief gardener of the palace saw the basket going with the current and grabbed it. He was greatly surprised to find in it a most beautiful child. He said:

“We have no child, my wife and I, even though we married long ago, and this one is sent to us by God!”

He ran home with it and told everything to his wife. She was overjoyed by the little child whom God had sent them. A nurse was sought, and the child was nursed and brought up as if he had been born to them. He was their whole joy.

About one year after these events, the queen gave birth to a most beautiful second son, with two swords in a cross on his chest. The old king had died by now, and his son had become king in his place. So Little One was also queen. The jealousy of her two sisters increased because of this. The midwife, well paid by them, again put a puppy to replace the child, who was placed, like his older brother, in a basket on the river, and picked up also by the palace’s gardener.

When the king asked to see his child, he was shown again a puppy, and he was in great sorrow:

“What,” he says, “My wife will only give birth to dogs!... What is this?...”

“Alas, sire,” the treacherous midwife said, “It’s God’s will, and nothing can be done about it...”

“You are right,” he said, and he kissed his wife, who was as chagrined as he was.

About one year later, to make short, the queen gave birth to the most beautiful little girl, with a star on her forehead. The same thing was done to her as had been done to her brothers. She was put in a basket on the river, and the queen was told this time that she had given birth to a bitch. The baby girl was also picked up by the old gardener, who was surprised to see how beautiful she was, and ran to take her home. But when his wife saw him coming, she said:

“A little child again! Enough children! Where do you go to get so many children?...”



“Oh, wife, it’s a little girl this time. Please look and see how beautiful she is!...”

“A little girl?... Show me...”

And when she saw the little child so pretty in the basket, with her star on her forehead, she exclaimed:

“Oh, most beautiful angel,” and she gave her two kisses.

But the king became very angry this time when a bitch was shown again to him instead of a child, and he shouted:

“What is this?... She will only give birth to dogs!... I will be known as father of dogs!... She must be an wicked wife!...”

He was repeatedly told: “Sire, it’s God’s will,” but he listened to no one. Meanwhile, the midwife and the queen’s two sisters were saying:

“Three times is too much after all!...”

“She will be punished as she deserves!” the king said, and he went out of the room in a fury.

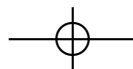
The next day, he gathered all his counsellors, so that each of them would tell the punishment he would find suitable to decree for the queen. They thought of terrible punishments for her that would have killed her surely. But the last counsellor said:

“Put her in the lowest room of the big tower over the courtyard, with just enough dog-bread and water to survive, and make a hole in the wall for her head, so that anyone going by the courtyard will spit in her eyes. So her pain and punishment will be longer.”

The one who spoke like this did not want to see her die, because he did not believe she was guilty.

“Yes, so it will be done,” the king said.

So the poor queen was placed in the tower, and a hole was made in the wall to lean her head, for whenever anyone would call her to spit in her face. Palace servants, men and women, even the lords and ladies, would find it pleasant to pass often near the foot of the tower, to spit in the face of the poor queen. The gate-keeper would command whomever came: “Spit in the queen’s face, by order of the king.” Daily, she was thrown a piece of moldy barley bread through the hole, and given a pot of dirty water. But at night, when the whole palace would be asleep, the lord who had prevented her killing by suggesting to put her there, brought her white bread, meat, and wine.



But let's leave the mother a bit and see what's happening to her children. They were well taken care of by the old gardener and his wife, who loved them like their own children. They were well fed and schooled. They grew daily in knowledge, wisdom and beauty, the daughter above all, and everyone was surprised to see that the old gardener had children who were so beautiful, so well learned, and so wise. The children were now about fifteen, sixteen and seventeen years old, when one day their two aunts came, their mother's two sisters, to visit the gardener. They were greatly surprised to see the children:

"How beautiful the children are!" they said; "But we had heard that you hadn't had any child?" As the old gardener wasn't at home, his wife told them everything. So, they discovered that these children were their sister's. They didn't say anything about it, but they ran to the midwife, who was also a witch, and they told her:

"The queen's children are still alive, and in town!"

"Really? Where are they, then?"

"In the house of the gardener, who brought them up. You must do away with them, and without wasting time."

"Do not worry, it will not take long."

The two young men went almost daily to hunt in the wood. Their sister would remain at home with the gardener's wife, to help her clean the house and prepare food. One day, she was alone in the kitchen when she heard a cry: "Iou hou hou! I'm about to die of cold!"

Joy—Joy was the girl's name, because the gardener and his wife named the three of them—looked around to see where the voice was coming from. She saw an old lady at the door, with long black teeth, whose whole body trembled so much that even her teeth shook.

"Jesus! Old mother," she told her, "Come inside to get warm."

She came into the house, sat on a stool in front of the fire, and stretched her hands above the fire. While warming up, she began talking:

"Little daughter, you are lucky to live here! and how pretty and wise you are! I've never seen, even though I'm old and much traveled, no, I've never seen a young woman as pretty and wise as



you. If only you could have the dancing water, the singing apple and the bird of truth, you wouldn't have your equal on earth."

Joy was surprised to hear about the dancing water, the singing apple and the bird of truth.

"Well, where does one find these things, grandma?" she asked.

"Oh, you have two brothers, little daughter, two most beautiful men, like you, who will find them for you, when you wish."

The old woman disappears after this, leaving the young woman dreaming of the dancing water, the singing apple and the bird of truth. Her mind was so preoccupied with them that when her brothers arrived home, the dinner was not ready.

"What happened to you, sister?" they asked her.

"Nothing," she said.

"Yes, something is new, and you must reveal it to us."

"Well, here is what it is. Today, an old lady came here who was so cold that her teeth chattered, and while she was warming herself near the fire, she spoke to me about a dancing water, a singing apple and a bird of truth. Since then I cannot stop dreaming about them."

"And you want, of course, to get these marvelous things? But why didn't you ask the old witch, because it must be a witch, how and where to get the dancing water, the singing apple and the bird of truth?"

"I asked her, brother, and she said: 'You have two brothers who are most beautiful and who will find them for you, when they want'."

"Well, to-morrow morning, sister," her older brother told her then, "I will take the road to get you the dancing water, the singing apple and the bird of truth, and I will not return until I've found them."

There were three laurel trees in the garden which had been planted by the old gardener when he had found the three children, one for each of them. The next morning, before going on the road, the older brother said to his sister and brother:

"Go to the garden every morning, as soon as you get out of bed, and you will each pluck a leaf from my tree. Do not worry about me until blood comes out of the stem of the leaf. Nothing yet will have happened to me. But if the blood comes out, then I'll be dead."



He took leave from his sister and brother and set off on the road, with the grace of God, without knowing which way to go. He walked and walked until he happened in a large heath where he found a hermit in his cabin made of clay, grass and small branches.

“Good day to you, father hermit,” he told him.

“Good day to you, son of the king of France,” said the hermit.

“I’m not a son of the king of France, father hermit.”

“Oh yes, you are a son of the king of France, and moreover, I know where you wish to go. You, my poor child, are going to get for your sister the dancing water, the singing apple and the bird of truth.”

“True, father, and if you can help me, perhaps everything will turn out to the good.”

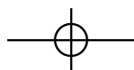
“Stay and spend the night with me, and I’ll teach you. And yet, to tell the truth, you are not the one who will take with him the dancing water, the singing apple and the bird of truth.”

“And why so, father? But it doesn’t matter, I’ll go anyway.”

He spent the night with the hermit. Like him, he only had roots and fountain water for their dinner, and the cold earth for bed, with a stone under their head.

Next morning, they were up at daybreak, and after doing their prayer and eating a little something, the old hermit took the young man to the foot of a high mountain and spoke to him as follows:

“You will have to climb to the top of this mountain, where are the dancing water, the singing apple and the bird of truth. This is the way to follow to climb the mountain. You see how steep and difficult it is. You see those statues? There are so many kings, princes, dukes, barons, lords and people of all stations in life who have wanted like you to get the dancing water, the singing apple and the bird of truth, and they were not able to climb to the top of the mountain. When you are about to climb, it will begin to rain, and after that there will be hail, snow, great wind and thunder. As you climb, the rain, hail, snow, wind and thunder will worsen. A terrible storm. But keep going. You will often fall. But get up and stand again, without losing heart. As you climb, you will also hear the stone statues shouting at you: ‘Where do you go, son of the king? Have you lost your senses? Turn back, quickly, or you’ll lose your life....’ But don’t listen to them and keep going no matter



what. Don't even look behind you, or you will be turned into a stone statue like them. And now, may God be with you!..."

Then, the hermit returned to his hermitage. The young man began to go up the mountain. It soon began to rain. The higher he went, the worse the rain. Later came hail, snow, howling wind, thunder and lightning... A terrible storm, so terrible that he thought the end of the world had come. He would fall, get up, and go forward again. And the statues shouted at him:

"Where is it you are going, son of the king? Where are you going, poor fellow?... Have you lost your mind? Don't you see that you are going to die if you keep going forward? Turn back, turn back quickly, before it's too late!"

So, he turned back, and as soon as he did he was turned into a statue of stone, right behind the others.

Meanwhile, his sister and brother went every morning to pick a leaf of laurel each, and since no blood came out with the leaf, they would say:

"Everything is well; nothing bad has happened yet to our older brother!"

How unfortunate! One day, when a drop of blood came out of the leaf's stem, they said:

"Oh, our poor brother has died!" And they were very sad.

The younger brother then said to his sister:

"Little sister, now I have to go look for our older brother and, if I can, I'll bring you the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth."

He said goodbye to his sister, after advising her to go every morning to pick a leaf on the laurel tree, until blood would appear. He then took to the road.

To make short: everything happened to him like to his brother. He spent a night with the hermit, was taught by him and taken to the foot of the mountain. He went up a little higher than his brother, but he turned back also and was changed into a statue of stone like the others.

The morning that his sister found blood when picking a laurel leaf, she said sadly:

"Oh! Now my little brother has died also. It's now my turn to go look for them, because I caused their death!"



But the old gardener and his wife didn't want to let her go:

"So, it's not enough to lose your two brothers? And how could you, a girl, manage to do what they were not able to do? Have pity on us, do not abandon us in our old age."

"Don't be sad, she told them, something tells me that I will be back home, safe and sound, and that my two brothers will also return with me."

She went on her way. Like her two brothers, she also found the old hermit on the heath.

"Good morning to you, father hermit, she told him."

"and to you too, king's daughter," said the hermit.

"I am not the daughter of a king, father, but the daughter of a gardener."

"No, my child, I know exactly who you are, and also where you want to go. You are going to look for your two brothers, who got lost when they went seeking for you the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth."

"How true, father hermit. Do you know where my poor brothers are?"

"Yes, I know where they are. But I see that you are very tired. Stay and spend the night in my hut, and I will show you how to find your two brothers, as well as the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth."

The young woman stayed with the old hermit, and they spent most of the night in prayer. The following morning, at sunrise, the old man taught the maiden, as he had done her brothers, and he told her, when they were at the foot of the mountain:

"You will have to climb to the top of that mountain, where are the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth. See how steep and difficult the path is!"

"I want to find my brothers first."

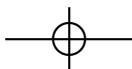
"Yes, you will find your brothers there also. Do you see the stone statues on both sides of the road?"

"Yes."

"Well, the last two, one on each side, are your brothers."

"Oh my God! My poor brothers turned into stone statues!"

"Don't worry, they'll go back to their previous state. All of those statues are people of all ranks and origins who have wanted to find

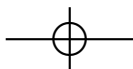


the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth. Because they haven't accomplished the task, they have been transformed in such a way. But you, if you succeed, as I hope, you will free them all, and they will be back to their old selves, kings, princes, dukes, barons, lords and people of all ranks, as they were before."

"Listen closely and do exactly what I'll tell you. When you begin to go up on the mountain, it will rain, and as you go higher, there will be hail, snow, storm wind, lightning and thunder, awful weather. On top of that, you'll hear the statues behind you shouting: 'Where are you going like that, daughter of the king? Turn around, turn around quickly! You must have lost your mind to think of going to the top of the mountain with this weather!' You will even hear your brothers' voices saying: 'Turn around, little sister! Turn around quickly or you'll lose your life!' Don't listen and keep going. And to make sure that you don't hear all that will be said to you, because there will be some foul language, fill your ears with tow. As soon as you set foot on top of the mountain, because I hope, with God's help, that you'll go right to the top of the mountain, the rain, hail, wild wind, lightning, and thunder will stop, as well as all the noise behind you, and the weather will clear up and become beautiful."

"Then you will see a beautiful tree in a meadow full of pretty, fragrant flowers, above a fountain of clear water. Under the tree, there is a lion, always going around the trunk. Near the fountain, there is a dragon that spits fire. A bird will fly from the tree and it will come to flutter above your head, 'Where shall I land? Where shall I land?' Tell him: 'on my ruffles! on my ruffles...' It will immediately land on your ruffles and you'll catch it easily. This will be the bird of truth. Then you will tell it to go and get you an apple from the tree under which is the lion. It will bring you a yellow apple, a beautiful one that you'll put in your pocket. This is the singing apple. Then you'll tell the bird to go and get you a juglet of water from the fountain below the tree, and this juglet you'll tie to its neck. When you have the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth, you will come down the mountain with them, and go home."

"Here is a white stick with which, when you'll be coming down the mountain—there will be no rain, wind, or thunder, but beautiful weather—, you'll touch each stone statue as you go by. And they



will become kings, princes, dukes, lords and people of all ranks, and they will all return to their homes, after thanking you. Your two brothers will be the last two statues and they will stay with you. You will then go home together, safe and sound, and you will have with you the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth.”

The girl had listened carefully to all what the hermit had said. She took from him the juglet and the white stick, and she began to climb the mountain, full of courage and trust. Meanwhile, the old man was on his knees, praying for her at the foot of the mountain.

So, there was thick rain, wild wind, thunder, fire and terrible noise on the mountain. The hermit kept praying, more and more. The girl, in short, got to the top of the mountain with great pain. Everything happened as it had been foretold to her by the hermit. The bird of truth came down on her ruffles, and it then brought her a singing apple and a juglet of the dancing water. She went down the mountain with them, with her stick in her right hand. As she passed by the stone statues, she touched them with her stick, and they would become in an instant people of all sorts. They would thank her and they would then go to their homes, each on their way. When she woke up her two brothers and they saw her, they were very surprised.

“What! Our sister! they said. Where are you going like that, little sister?”

“To get you, my dear brothers. Let’s go home now, since we are reunited.”

“We fell asleep here. But let’s go now to the top of the mountain, the three of us, and get the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth.”

“I have them. Let’s go home quickly.”

At the foot of the mountain, they found the old hermit waiting for them and they went with him to spend the night in his hut. The next morning, after saying goodbye and thanking him, they set out on their return home. The old gardener and his wife had been very sad since they had remained alone. They did not expect to see the two young men anymore, but they were expecting to see the girl



again, since when they went every morning to pick each a leaf of the laurel tree, they hadn't seen any blood yet. When they saw the three of them return together, they were very happy and they all cried while embracing each other.

Their greatest pleasure everyday now was to listen to the singing apple, the bird humming and saying truths, and looking at the dancing water. Instead of being sad, sorrowful, and old, as they were before, they became happy, calm, and even young. All the neighbors came to see the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth, and they were the talk of the town.

The news of it came to the king, who also wanted to see them. So, he invited the two brothers and their sister to come and have lunch with him in his palace. Many gentlemen and ladies, as well as the leaders of the city, were also invited to come. When the two brothers and the sister were going by the courtyard of the palace, they were told to spit, like everyone did, at the face of the wife who put her head in the hole that was in the wall of the tower. They came close to the hole, like everyone else, but they could never spit, as their mouth would go dry when they tried to do it.

They were around the table in the great hall of the palace. The old gardener and his wife were also there, as well as the king's two sisters-in-law and the witch. At the end of the meal, the king said:

"Let's see now those marvels that are the talk of the town, the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth!"

So, the apple, the water in a cristal glass, and the bird in a golden cage, were put on the table. And the girl said:

"Let each do its task!"

And at once the apple sang, the bird hummed, and the water danced. Everyone kept looking at them and listening, without speaking or moving, like stone statues, completely entranced. They were a long time like that, without tiring, when the girl said:

"Now, if you like, Sire, my bird will also tell you truths. His name is bird of truth and whatever he says is true, and he knows a lot of things."

"Yes, said the king, let him say truths now, things that I don't know, however."

"My bird, now tell true things to the king."



“Well, Sire, said the bird then, don’t you recognize your children, seated at the table?”

“My children? said the king, I don’t have children. My wife, alas, has only given birth to little dogs.”

“Yes, you have been made to believe this by evil people that I see here at the table...”

The king’s two sisters-in-law and the midwife looked at each other and were becoming pale with fear.

“But that is not true, Sire, the bird said again, and here is the truth. Your wife has given you three children, two boys and a girl and they are not to be ashamed of. Here they are!”

And the bird flew on the heads of the two brothers and sister, one after another. Everyone was stunned. The king’s two sisters-in-law and the midwife wanted to leave, because they were sick, they said.

“Stop! said the bird, no one will leave the hall until I finish saying my truths.”

“Wring the neck of this evil bird!” the midwife screamed.

But the bird kept talking:

“Yes, Sire, your wife, who was a good wife and loved you, gave you three beautiful children, as you can see! But her two sisters, with their friend the midwife, would put a little dog each time instead of the child, who was placed in a basket on the river, to go with the water, as God pleased. Fortunately, the children were found, fed, and taught, as if they were their own children, by two good, generous people, whom I see here too, your old gardener and his spouse.”

“And are there signs and witnesses to all of this? asked the king.”

“Yes, Sir, there are both. Your wife, if you remember, said that she would give you three children, two sons and a daughter. On the forehead of the older one, there would be the mark of his grandfather’s crown, the two swords of his father on the chest of the younger son, and a star on the daughter’s forehead.”

“True, said the king, so look if these marks can be found.”

And after looking, the grand-father’s crown was found on the older son’s forehead, the father’s two crossed swords on the younger son’s chest, and a beautiful star on the girl’s forehead.



Everyone was stunned and the king more above all.

“And now here is a witness, the bird said again, showing a parrot that had just landed on the window. ‘Isn’t it true, parrot, how the queen gave birth to three children, two sons and a daughter, whom the two sisters-in-law and the midwife replaced with two dogs and a little bitch? You saw everything’.”

“Yes, yes, said the parrot. It is true!”

“Oh, my poor wife! She must be dead by now, I’m sure of it!” the king said with sorrow.

“No, Sire, she is not dead. Have her brought back from the tower where she was jailed.”

The king got up from the table and went himself to get his wife in the tower. Everyone followed him. But before going, he ordered to start a red-hot oven where his two sisters-in-law and their friend the midwife would be thrown afterwards. This was done. When they all got to the tower, they found the queen in good health, charming and pretty still, even though she had been there for eighteen years.

The father, mother, and children embraced and cried tears of joy. The princess was wed and married immediately to the gentleman who had pitied her mother and had prevented her death by hunger and poverty. There were celebrations, feasts, and games for a whole month.

They all lived happily together after that. Kings and princes from the world’s kingdoms came to see them, to see and hear the dancing water, the singing apple, and the bird of truth.

