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FORSYTH
The Wild Girl

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The Story Behind the Grimm Brothers' Fairy Tales

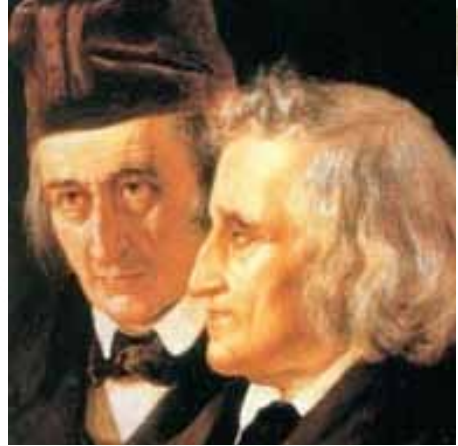
Once upon a time there were two brothers who lived in a small kingdom in the middle of a crazy patchwork of other small kingdoms, each with its own prince or archduke to rule it. Some of these kingdoms were so small the princes could fire at each other from their castle walls.

The two brothers – named Jakob and Wilhelm Grimm – were the eldest of a family of six, all boys except for the youngest who was a girl named Lotte.

Next door to the Grimm family lived a family of six girls and one boy named the Wilds. They lived side-by-side on the Marktgasse in the medieval quarter of a town named Cassel, famous for its palace set in vast gardens and forests.

Jakob and Wilhelm and their family were desperately poor. Their father had died, and the two elder brothers struggled to feed and clothe their siblings.

One day a mighty emperor called Napoleon decided he wished to rule the world. On his way to seize the thrones of the other great kings and emperors of the world, he took over the Grimm brothers' small kingdom and mashed it together with many of its neighbours to create the Kingdom of Westphalia. He set his young brother Jérôme up as king. In his first



week, Jérôme played leapfrog in his underwear with his courtiers through the empty halls of the palace, then spent a fortune ordering new furniture from Paris.

Life was very hard for the Grimms. Everything changed under French occupation – the laws of the land, the weights and measurements, even the language everyone must speak - and censors meant the newspapers only printed what Napoleon wanted people to know.

Partly as an act of defiance, and partly in the hope of making some money, the Grimms began to collect old stories from their neighbours and friends, with the aim of publishing a scholarly book.

The Wild girls who lived next door

knew many stories, particularly Lotte's best friend, the fifth daughter, who was named Dortchen. She told Wilhelm many tales, including *The Frog King*, *Hansel and Gretel*, *Six Swans* and *Rumpelstiltskin*.

Wilhelm and Dortchen fell in love, but the Grimms were so poverty-stricken they could only afford one meal a day. Wilhelm's and Dortchen's only chance to marry was if the fairy tale collection was a success.

Unfortunately, the book was a failure. It was criticised for being too scholarly, too unsophisticated, and filled with too much sex (some of the stories were indeed ripe with sexual innuendo).

It was a time of war and terror and tyranny. Napoleon marched on Russia. The fields of Europe were burned black, and many hundreds of

thousands of people died.

Wilhelm struggled on (his elder brother Jakob was now busy with other scholarly undertakings). He collected more tales, from Dortchen as well as from other storytellers, and he rewrote the stories to make them more palatable to a middle-class audience. He added such terms as 'once upon a time' and 'happily ever after', and made sure the princess did not take the frog into her bed anymore.

Slowly the war was won, and peace returned. Slowly the fairy tales began to sell. Slowly the Grimm brothers' reputation grew. At last, 13 years after they first fell in love, Wilhelm and Dortchen were able to marry. They lived together with Jakob happily until their deaths.

Dortchen's Tales

One young woman named Dortchen Wild told the Grimm brothers almost one-quarter of all the tales in their first collection of fairy stories, when she was just nineteen years old. Stories she told include:

Rumpelstiltskin

Hansel and Gretel

The Frog-King

Six Swans

The Elves and the Shoemaker

The Singing Bone

Sweet Porridge

Mother Hulda

Three Little Men in the Wood (a version of *Diamonds & Toads*)

Sweetheart Roland (about a girl whose betrothed forgets her)

Fitcher's Bird (A Bluebeard variant where the heroine saves herself and her sisters)

The Singing, Springing Lark (a very beautiful version of *Beauty and the Beast*)

All-Kinds-of-Fur (an incest tale)

Dortchen also contributed many folk sayings and proverbs to the tales, and made up some of the rhymes, including the famous verses in *Hansel and Gretel*.

Seven Fascinating Facts about the Grimms & their Fairy Tales

1. The last witch executed in Europe died only three years before Jakob Grimm was born.
2. Although the Brothers Grimm are famous for their collection of old tales, it was actually the younger brother, Wilhelm, who did most of the work, particularly after the first edition was published in 1812.
3. The brothers transcribed all their stories with a quill dipped in ink. Paper was scarce during the Napoleonic Wars, and so they wrote on both sides of the paper and then turned it sideways to write crossways across the page.
4. In 1810, they sent a copy of their manuscript to a poet friend, Clemens Brentano, who had promised to help them find a publisher. Brentano lost the manuscript, which was not found until the early 1920s. Wilhelm had to rewrite the whole collection by hand.
5. Their youngest brother Ludwig was a talented artist who illustrated the first Children's Edition of their tales, published in 1825. It was this book which became an international bestseller.
6. The Grimm brothers published many other books apart from fairy tales, including writings on linguistics, folklore, and the beginning of the first detailed German dictionary. This was not finished until 120 years after their deaths.
7. The Grimm brothers were rebels who were eventually fired from their jobs at the University of Göttingen for protesting the abolition of the constitution by the King of Hanover.

Just how grim are the Grimm tales?

- In the 1812 version of the Grimm's tale *Little Snow-White*, it is the heroine's own jealous mother that wants her dead. She tells the huntsman to bring back her daughter's lungs and liver, for her to eat. Wilhelm Grimm later changed the mother to a step-mother.
- The jealous queen was punished by Little Snow-White and her prince by being forced to dance in red-hot iron shoes till she died.
- In the original (1812) version of *The Frog King*, the princess does not kiss the frog to change him into a prince. Instead, she throws him as hard as she can against a wall.
- In *Aschenputtel*, the Grimm's version of *Cinderella*, one wicked stepsister cuts off her toes to try and make the slipper fit and the other cuts off her heel. In the end, they have their eyes pecked out by pigeons.
- In a later edition (1857) of *Rumpelstiltskin*, the dwarf tears himself in two when the queen guesses his true name. This detail was added in by Wilhelm, quite possibly because he thought it was funny.
- in one Grimm tale, *The Maiden Without Hands*, a girl's hands are chopped off by her own father.
- The villain of *Fitcher's Bird* is a sorcerer that travels about the countryside, kidnapping girls and hacking them to pieces in a hidden room.
- In *All-Kinds-of-Fur*, a girl disguises herself in a coat made from the fur flayed from a thousand animals.
- in many cases, Wilhelm made the stories more violent – particularly the punishments for witches and evil step-mothers.
- nonetheless, nearly all of the tales end happily, with the hero or heroine triumphing because of their courage, goodness, and wit.



The Wild Girl

KATE FORSYTH

One of the great untold love stories – how the Grimm brothers discovered their famous stories - filled with drama and passion, and taking place during a time of war, tyranny, and terror.

The Wild Girl tells the story of Dortchen Wild, the girl who loved Wilhelm Grimm. Growing up Next door to the Grimm brothers in Hesse-Cassel, a small German kingdom, Dortchen told Wilhelm some of the most powerful and compelling stories

in the famous fairytale collection.

Dortchen first met the Grimm brothers in 1805, when she was twelve. One of six sisters, Dortchen grew up Next door to the five Grimm brothers in the medieval quarter of Cassel, a town famous for its grand royal palace, its colossal statue of Herkules, and a fairytale castle of turrets and spires built as a love nest for the Prince-Elector's mistress. Dortchen was the same age as Lotte Grimm, the only girl in the family, and the two became best friends.

In 1806, Hesse-Cassel was invaded by the French. Napoleon created a new Kingdom of Westphalia, under the rule of his dissolute young brother Jérôme . The Grimm brothers began collecting fairy tales that year, wanting to save the old stories told in spinning-circles and by the fire from the domination of French culture. Dortchen was the source of many of the tales in the Grimm brother's first collection of fairy tales, which was published in 1812, the year of Napoleon's disastrous march on Russia.

Dortchen's own father was cruel and autocratic, and he beat and abused her. He frowned on the friendship between his daughters and the poverty-stricken Grimm Brothers. Dortchen had to meet Wilhelm in secret to tell him her stories. All the other sisters married and moved away, but Dortchen had to stay home and care for her sick parents. Even after the death of her father, Dortchen and Wilhelm could not marry – the Grimm brothers were so poor they were surviving on a single meal a day.

After the overthrow of Napoleon and the eventual success of the fairytale collection, Dortchen and Wilhelm were at last able to marry. They lived happily with Wilhelm's elder brother Jakob for the rest of their lives.

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Kate Forsyth

Kate Forsyth is the bestselling and award-winning author of 25 books, translated into 13 languages. Her latest book for adults, *Bitter Greens*, interweaves a retelling of the Rapunzel fairytale with the scandalous life story of the woman who first told the tale, the 17th century French writer Charlotte-Rose de la Force. Her latest book for children is *The Starkin's Curse*, a tale of high adventure and true love set in the same world as her bestselling novels *The Starthorn Tree* and *The Wildkin's Curse*. Kate is currently studying a doctorate in fairytales at UTS.

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Dortchen's Recipe for Damson Plum Jam Cake

(Dortchen cooks this for Wilhelm's birthday)

Ingredients:

2 cups all purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg
1 teaspoon allspice
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon salt
2 large eggs
1 cup caster sugar
1/3 cup canola oil
1/2 cup buttermilk
1 cup dried cranberries
1 cup chopped walnuts
1 cup damson plum jam

Method:

Preheat oven to 350C. Grease and line a loaf pan. In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, baking soda, nutmeg, allspice, cinnamon and salt. Beat the eggs and sugar until combined. Add the canola oil. Slowly beat in the flour mixture. Stir in the buttermilk. With a spatula fold in the cranberries and walnuts. Swirl in the jam in three to four strokes. Pour into the loaf pan and bake for 50 minutes or until a cake tester comes out clean. Allow to cool in the pan for 25 minutes, then turn it out onto a rack. Allow to cool for 5 minutes or so, then serve warm. This cake lasts a week well covered.



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