

SEVEN FAIRY TALES



ROBERT KELLY

**Metambesen
Annandale-on-Hudson
2015**

SEVEN FAIRY TALES is the twenty-seventh
in a series of texts and chapbooks
published by Metambesen.

The reader is free to download and print it
without charge or permission.

Copyright © 2015 by Robert Kelly.
Cover image © 2015 by Charlotte Mandell.

for Charlotte

The Wind and the Wolf

One night the wind was howling and a wolf looked up. Are you talking to me?, asked the wolf. The wind howled some more. You *are* talking to me, I can tell, but I'm not sure what you're saying. The wind howled even louder so the wolf howled back. The wind howled more, and the wolf understood.

It is cold tonight, so cold. You make me colder, colder even than the winter and the dark, but my fur keeps me warm, or warm enough. And the wolf curled up into a snug bundle under the low snow-heavy branches of the spruce.

Then the wind really began to howl, louder and louder and at a high pitch that almost hurt the wolf's sensitive ears. The wolf covered his ears with his paws, but the wind went on.

Suddenly the wolf understood what the wind was saying.

You are cold but you have fur, the wind says. I am running through this cold world, says the wind. I am running so fast but I have no fur and no coat and no paws to cover my lips, I howl with cold and there is no one to warm me, says the wind. I howl with cold, I hope I wake

somebody up who will warm me, I hope I wake everybody up and maybe all their breaths together will warm me.

Only time will really warm you, said the wolf, but I'll try. And the wolf got to his feet and faced into the wind, and opened his big mouth and breathed out a low, long hot howl, quivering his hot red tongue to make the howl warble and trill, and his breath was hot with the blood of all the animals he had from hunger been forced to kill and eat, hot with his own hot blood and anger and fear, because a wolf has great fear, and out he breathed it all into the wind, the face of the wind.

The wind felt it, and sank low for a moment, sighed a little with relief. Thank you, said the wind to the wolf. Now both the wind and the wolf were a little less cold now, felt the same relief. The wind said thank you again, and the wolf said that too.

And the wind said I never knew that wolves could be afraid.

The wolf answered, Fear makes language, fear makes us speak. Everything that speaks knows how to be afraid.

The Witch and the Well

Long ago, all the people in the town knew that the widow woman who lived all alone in a little cottage beyond the last field that anybody plowed was a witch. She wasn't very old, because her husband had gone off to be a soldier and died in a war they were having at the time. But she lived alone and that was strange. And she never came into town if she could help it, and that was even stranger. So she must be a witch, and was so called, and people did not scruple to name her a witch even when speaking aloud to friends and family.

That is how young Thaddeus came to know that the widow woman was a witch. He didn't know much about witches, just enough to be afraid. So when one day he was walking along the road on the edge of town, on his way to an old pear tree on nobody's land, cranky old tree, but it still bore sweet pears now and then, especially if you came by in late winter or earliest spring and whacked the trunk of it with a stick to wake up the juice inside the tree.

As he walked along, he noticed the witch's cottage ahead to his left, and knew he'd have to pass it to get to his tree. He hastened his steps, and he was in a hurry anyhow, to get to the tree before other people had stripped it bare—so he didn't have to think he was hurrying just out of fear of the witch lady.

But as he hurried past the rickety fence in front of her yard, sure enough the witch was there, looking right at

him, and she called out to him by name. How did she know his name? He guessed that witches knew things like that, knew somebody's name just by looking at them. She called him again, and though he didn't at all want to go to her, his feet had other ideas, and he started moving to the witch. He came through the little gate, which was open and no door in it at all, and came close to the woman. She smiled at him and said, "Thaddeus, I have some water for you. Some special water. Come have a drink."

She turned her back and went over to the well in the yard, canopied by old wood, tree limbs with the bark still on them. She turned her back to him and bent over the well, and seemed to be hauling up a bucket of water. Special water, Thaddeus thought, and was very afraid.

Like most children, he had been taught, or somehow learned, to hate witches, to throw stones at them if you could do it without them seeing. He had heard stories of people killing their cats or even setting fire to their houses. Thaddeus didn't think that was a right thing to do, even to a witch, but he was very afraid, and his fear made him do something he probably would not have done. He rushed at the witch with all his force and pushed her into the well.

But she didn't go into the well. She wasn't even there. Thaddeus had passed right through the image of her body and kept going, and it was he who fell into the well. And there he lay, stunned. The well was not deep as he thought, and he had fallen only a couple of feet, just enough to have the breath knocked out of him. And there

was no water in the well, just soft earth, and flowers growing densely in the shadow. Blue flowers of a kind he'd never seen. He lay there, confused but oddly happy, snuggled down in the flowers.

When he looked up, he could see the round dark roof of the well, and all the daylight around it. As he watched, the witch's face appeared. She looked down at him, smiling still.

"Do you like my water, Thaddeus, my son? I told you it was special. How do you like it?"

He couldn't imagine why she called him her son, but he thought the least he could do would be polite, considering what he had done. Or tried to do. Or had he done anything at all?

"It is very pleasant here, missus, The flowers are very pretty."

"I'm glad you like them," said the witch. "They only grow where the sun can't hurt them, and my special water keeps them moist and happy. Now would you like to try my special bread? I baked it just for you. It tastes of honey and of pears, and I know you like pears."

Thaddeus was not altogether a dull child, so he thought out loud: "If I can't drink your special water, but only lie in it, will I be able to eat your special bread?"

The witch smiled again. This time her smile seemed sweet and loving, full of the sunshine. He could feel the flowers around him shivering with worry at all that gleaming. She smiled and smiled and said, "O dear son,

you already have. My bread is in your body now, and you will never forget me.”

Then she was gone. Thaddeus waited a little while to see if she'd come back, or if anything else was going to happen. But nothing did, so he stood up and climbed easily enough out of the well. When he got onto the grass of the yard, he looked back into the well, and now all he could see was water, dark water down there, and his own face looking back up at him.

People in the town never saw the witch again. Her house stood empty for many a year, shunned by those who should have known better. But Thaddeus would come visiting from time to time, even sit in the witch's old chair and light a fire in her hearth, always easy to kindle and quick to catch. As he grew older he grew more learned, and eventually became the town physician and general authority on this and that, a quiet, grave man who never married. And once when the King passed through the neighborhood, it was in Thaddeus's house he stopped for a cup of cider and a slice of bread, and the men looked at one another like people who had known one another long ago, but couldn't be sure.

The Three Latin Scholars

One time in a town long ago and in a country where nobody spoke English, there were three little boys who were just beginning to learn Latin. That is the language they had been hearing in the church all their short lives, but now they had to learn it so they could grow up and be wise merchants or lawyers or councilors. No way to be wise if you don't know Latin, everybody knew that.

The old priest who was teaching them had begun by explaining that in Latin, the verb (the word that means doing something) had a different sound depending on who was doing it. *Amo deum*, I love God, *Amas deum*, you love god. *Deus amat nos*. God loves us. He explained it that way. And since he was a silly old priest, and there were three little boys, he nicknamed them *Amo*, and *Amas*, and *Amat*. I love. You love. He, she, or it loves.

Little by little the boys started calling each other by these names too, just out of respect for the priest, and to practice their new language. When they were playing in the street, they'd call each other. Once it happened that *Amas* cried out, "Hey, *Amat*, *Amat*..." trying to get the third boy's attention to a wounded sparrow he had just found and wanted advice on caring for. Just as he cried *Amat*, *Amat*! a young man was passing, with his mind full of his girlfriend (her name was that of a flower we don't have here). The young man heard the cry and blushed, terribly embarrassed, thinking the boy was

mocking him: He loves, he loves, he's in love with Gillyflower!

How did the boy know? Had his secret been discovered? Or did this boy have some magical power, to read the mind of a passerby?

The young man decided he had to know. So, being brave as a young man should be (and brave as Gillyflower would want him to be), he called to the boy.

"What's your name, sonny?" he said in what he hoped was a pleasant way.

"Amas," the boy answered, looking at him with frank and open face.

The young man was startled. Because he understood the boy's name as saying "You love." And understood it as if it meant: You're in love, and I know it, and I'll tell the world."

The young man handed the boy an apple he'd been saving for elevenses, and hurried away, convinced that magic was in the air.

When he went to confession that Saturday afternoon, so he could be clean and fresh for taking the Sacrament the next morning, he eased his mind by telling the priest the story of the strange boy. As it happened, the priest was not the same one who taught the boys, or nothing more would come of this story. But the priest was young and earnest, and naturally feared the work of the Devil, well known to be active in towns of any size. He tried to ease the young man, warned him against excessive thinking about his girlfriend, or indeed about anyone but

the Lord and His saints. And urged him to keep an eye on the boy, warily. "I am not sure," said the priest, "that you should have offered an apple to him – he might be a limb of Satan." The young man shuddered, and went away.

Meantime, Amas had taken the apple, had a bite, called his friends again. This time they came at his call, and studied the wounded bird. They all had bites of the apple, and pried off little chunks of soft flesh they brought to the bird's beak. He actually ate a few nibbles. Amo, who was good with his hands, gently carried the bird back to Amat's house, the nearest, and nestled him in a little box near the fire, to keep him warm. And sure enough, whether it was the apple or the warmth or the care, the bird took to fluttering, and soon enough flew out the kitchen door and away to his business.

While the boys were doing all this, the young earnest priest was writing to the bishop, telling him of the devilish child who knew the secret thoughts of a decent parishioner. When the bishop got the letter he was not much troubled. He was an old man, and had not had any trouble from Satan in many years, and was inclined to leave the Devil alone, hoping for the same in return. But to please the young priest he came the next Sunday to the church when all the people were gathered together. After the Mass and the singing, he had the beadles bring the boy to the front of the church. The boy asked his two friends to come with him and give him strength – they had no idea what was the matter.

The Bishop looked at the boy and said to him in Latin Who do you think I am? The boy, shaky in his Latin, answered with the one word he was sure of, his name. Amas, he said. And the bishop, who indeed was a loving and gentle person as bishops go, was amazed at the child's honesty. He called to another boy and asked in Latin, Can you tell us what God does? Amat, the child answered, his surest word. He loves us indeed, cried the bishop. And you young sir, he said to the boy who had been silent all this while, What do you say to God? Amo, said the boy, taking a cue from his friends. Ah, you love the Lord. That is well.

And with that, from a gold thing in his hand, he sprinkled holy water on the boys. Instantly the three schoolboys rose slowly into the air, and the people all gasped and then began singing a hymn, I forget which one, there are so many, as the boys floated above the congregation. Slowly they floated down the nave and out the great doors of the church into the sunlight, while the bishop and priests marveled aloud.

The next morning the good little boys went to the old priest for their lessons, to begin learning their next verb.

The Crow Girl

Once upon a time on the side of the hill turned away from to the rising sun there lived a girl who was very good to crows. Every morning she would come downstairs and carefully bring together all the scraps of food from the night before that she or her family – for they were frugal – had not managed to eat before they went to sleep. She would take the scraps outside and toss them on the snow or on the grass depending in the season, so that the crows could come and have their own breakfast too. After her own breakfast, she always made sure to have three or four or five or six or sometimes more cookies or scraps of bread to bring out to her friends the crows.

Now as you know, crows understand a great deal. And they are very good to people in general, especially to people who are good to them. But whether you're good to crows or not, a crow is always looking out for your best interests. If you're walking in the woods at night or just before night, and you don't know which way to turn, listen for the crow. The crow will caw caw caw in the direction you're supposed to go. Just follow the crow. Well, crows are like that to everybody, but they're especially attentive to those who, like the girl on the side of the hill, take good care of the crows.

One morning, in a season of the year that was not full winter yet and had not been summer for a long time, fairly early the girl came downstairs to look around the kitchen and living room and the dining room (and those

are the only rooms the house had downstairs) but she could find no scrap of food for her friends. She looked in the breadbox and found a couple of stale pieces of bread – think if the crows were given just this sad bread. You wouldn't want to think about their disappointment. She took the two pieces of bread and stood by the fire and toasted them a little, then spread some honey on, and brought them outside and put them on the ground. They looked so pretty sitting there on the dew. Then she realized it would be hard work for a crow to pick up the big bread in its slim beak. So she bent down and broke up the toast into little bits that she arranged neatly and gently on the grass, They looked even prettier now, like stars. Then the girl licked the honey off her fingers as she went back towards the house, and as she finished licking the last finger clean (it was the ring finger on her left hand, it was), something happened in the back of her mind.

She seemed to sail up in the air, till she was high above the house, high above the trees, even above the hill. She was looking down on house and hill, floating easy, and she skimmed gently in the sky. It is cold up there so she shivered a little and the shivers ran down her arms and along her sides, and the shivers seemed to take on a life of their own. They were her feathers. They rippled and lifted her along, or she moved them, she wasn't certain which came first, the feather or the bird. She must be a bird, she thought, and looked about and saw that she was, and knew she could skim along the cloud and rise

easily on the current of warm air coming up from the sunlight that had just begun to warm the other side hill. She could ride that current or just stand quietly in the sky and cry out to her friends. Caw, caw, she said, and the sound felt good coming out of her mouth.

But it is hungry work, she found, this flying business, especially on a brisk morning when you haven't had your breakfast. Down there she spotted the bits of bread and honey like stars on the grass, and swooped down to have a taste. But as she landed, she remembered that she had put them out for her friends the crows. But I'm a crow, she thought, opening her beak towards one of the morsels. But then she thought, I'm not those crows, my crows. This food is for them. Just then, two crows landed not far away, keeping their distance, the way they do, and looked at her.

You must be you, said one crow to her. Yes, I am, she said, and you're my friends. Come have some breakfast. We've eaten already, said the other crow, but a snack would be pleasant. With that, the two crows hopped over to the toast.

How big crows are! she suddenly realized, big as her whole self, these huge black friendly birds with such bright eyes. She watched them pick at the toast, then each picked up a morsel and flew off to a branch and watched her as they ate. Thank you, one crow said, and thank you, said the other.

She was very hungry now, and the toast looked very tempting. But it was for them, imagined, intended, given.

So she thought she'd go into the house and see what else there might be to eat. She hopped across the lawn and up the old stone step and in at the kitchen door. No sooner was she in the house than she became a girl again. She looked back at the tree, the crows were watching. She wasn't sure she was glad or sad, being a girl again. She waved to the crows, and tried to call, but it sounded now a little more like barking. She laughed at herself, and tried again. The crows, both of them, cawed at her. Encouraging, it sounded. And she realized she could understand what they were saying, just as plain as speaking English. One crow said, See how easy it is? And the other crow said, Any time, any time.

The Old Man and the Magpie

Everybody knows that when you see a magpie first thing, you have to say "Good day, Sir!"

Well, there once was a somewhat somber old man who would rather say something rough than something pleasant, and would really rather say nothing at all. He wasn't exactly what children call mean, though there were some thoughtless people, and not just children, who called him a mean old man.

He was nice enough in his own way, though. He'd feed birds and squirrels if they happened to be near him when he was sitting in the park snacking, or feed ducks at pondside if he happened to have some bread in his pockets. And he often did, because deep down he was a kindly man, just a man who didn't have much use for talking with people, gossip, speculation, news. Whatever was going on around him was news enough for him, and whatever was going on in his head was conversation enough.

One day as the old man toddled out of his house and headed down the road towards the baker's, a magpie came hopping up the walk, all shining blue and black and white the way they do.

"Good day, Sir," said the man, more dutifully than with enthusiasm.

“Good day, yourself,” said the magpie.

The old man was surprised, but not at much as you might think. He had always had the idea that birds, especially busy, noisy birds like crows and magpies and sparrows could talk if they wanted to.

“Good day indeed, Sir,” said the man. “It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

“Not really meeting,” said the bird, “since we’ve seen each other 1,674 times before today, and many of those times you greeted me, as is proper. Today I thought I should speak to you, since you look a little gloomy.”

“No more than usual,” said the man sadly.

“Exactly,” said the magpie. “I thought it was time to do something about it.”

“What can you do?” The old man said this not in a disagreeable way, just simply as someone requesting information. And so the magpie understood it.

“Various things. Would you like to be young again?”

The old man thought about it, but not very long.

“No, I don’t think so. I’ve been young already. In fact I was young for a long time, and didn’t enjoy it all that much. I was always waiting for something to happen.”

“Did anything happen?”

“I got older. I wouldn’t want to go through that again.”

The bird in his turn thought a while.

“Most old people want to be young again. I’m impressed that you don’t. How about a nice wife, would you like one of those?”

“Ah,” said the old man, “indeed I would. But wives die, you know, and then I’d be even sadder. Or I would die, and leave her in sorrow. Not good, these things.”

The magpie pecked at its breast with its beak a moment or two, then spoke again.

“You are indeed a thoughtful man. Maybe you can think of what would make you happier...”

“Why, yes,” said the man, “I’ll tell you. I just thought of it while we’ve been talking. I would like to understand the language of birds. It is my belief that birds always tell the truth, and say no more than they have to. They also sing a great deal, which cheers me. Do you think you could teach me the language of birds, at least to understand it? I probably couldn’t learn to speak it, not at my age.”

The magpie hopped up onto the man’s shoulder, which startled the old man. It had been a long time since anyone was that close. But the old man was brave, and didn’t flinch or shrug the bird away.

The magpie was whispering something into his ear.

“That’s my deaf ear,” the man said.

“Sorry,” said the bird, and fluttered to the other shoulder. As it passed the man’s face, the wing feathers brushed across the man’s mouth.

Now the bird set to whispering again into the good ear. He began by reminding the man that for the past few

minutes he had been conversing with a bird, not just understanding but speaking too.

“You have to start with one bird,” the magpie went on, “then slowly you’ll get to know others. Other magpies, first, then crows – who really are, I hate to admit it, the best speakers of all – then cardinals, bluejays, sparrows and so on. In this very life you’ll be able to speak with hawks and falcons, though personally I never trust those birds, so be careful.”

“But how will I learn?”

“You’re already learning. Greet each one, the duck in the pond, the robin on the lawn, and listen to what they say, and say whatever’s on your mind and listen to what they answer. Just listen. Just listen. Just listen.”

And with that, the magpie flew up, circled the man and flew away.

The old man stood for a long time, right in that place, just trying to listen. He heard some finches yattering under a tree, and the steps of a dog trotting by, and a pigeon strutting fatly, cooing a little. And when a young courting couple happened along, he could even hear them too, the words they were saying to one another. He listened and listened and began to understand.

The Seal Wife

There was a man who married a seal, as men of his island sometimes did. This man and his wife had this arrangement between them, that once a year, in the warm season, between Pentecost and Lammas, she would put on her old skin and take to the waves, and sport with her relations undersea, and see to such matters as seals have to concern them.

And so it went, year after year. Every August back she would come, slip out of her sleek wet fur, black with the water in it but brown when dry, and be a woman again, smile at him and put on Christian clothes and be a good wife. She'd be back just in time to help with the harvest and all the weary work that comes with it and more after.

He trusted her deeply, and never doubted her, and never speculated on what wickedness she might be up to deep in the sea or on the sunny rocks. What sin can a seal do, he thought, and was content with his certainty.

But one rainy summer he found himself missing her more than usual. If there was a week with a day of sun in it, it happened only once in that long stretch. The crops were in their soggy fields, and not much to do about it. The man spent much more time in their house than usual, thanks to the weather, and as he sat there day after day, missing her all the while, he fell to wondering what the life of a seal is really like.

He thought it odd that he had never much bothered her with questions about that part of her life, and about the time before they had found each other on the beach and come together. He felt, and he was right to feel, that she didn't much like to be questioned about anything, least of all about the life they did not share. Full enough was her sharing in the life they had together most of the year.

That year she came back promptly, and more joyous than ever, not worried a bit about the bad weather and the crops, just happy to be home and with him. And he with her. And all went well, and the sky shifted and the sun came back and the fields dried out in time for a decent harvest.

When that was over and done with, they rested in the autumn, talked and drank cider and perry and looked at the sea. One day he couldn't help himself, though, and began to ask her.

What is it like, he wanted to know, the life you go down to every year, would I understand it if you told me?

Ah, said she, that is the question, isn't it? Could I tell you, and could you understand? When I am a seal I do not have much use of language, and when I am a woman I'd have a long hard day of translation to put in words what happens without words. I am so happy with you, husband, do you really want to give me the pain of outing words to my knowledge?

No, no, said he, far from that. I am happy with you, just as we are. I was wondering only, when the rain came

every day, and the air was like the sea itself, what it was like for you, darling, out there in it.

She smiled at him, and said no more. They ate their supper, porridge and yellow cheese, talked of this and that and went to their bed.

Next Sunday, when they came back from church and took off their uncomfortable Sunday clothes, she took him by the hand and led him down to the beach. They settled down on a nice old blanket on the shingle and watched the sea.

Husband, she said, I have been thinking of what you asked me – don't fret, I am not troubled by your question, I know it comes from love of me. I think I know a way of telling you what you want to know.

With that, she stood up and told him to take off his clothes. A little shyly, like most men of his island, he did as he was told. And she took off her clothes too. Naked as can be, she led him down to a big rock near just above high tide line, bent down and dug something out from beneath the rock.

Here, said she, put this on, and handed him a big shaggy dark skin of a seal. And no sooner had he begun to pull it over his head than the skin all by itself slipped down over his whole body snug as can be, and he flopped forward on the sand and was a seal.

She meantime had slipped into her own skin. Following her closely, he made his way with her into the waves, and soon found himself swimming almost without effort. It felt as if the sea was swimming him, as

if his body now needed to work hardly at all to keep moving, fast and sinuous, through the water.

For hours they cavorted, sometimes coming out and lying in the warm autumn sun, sometimes nuzzling tenderly. Then at one moment she swam beside him and nuzzled his little ear, and he could hear the thought forming, shall we go back now?

And suddenly he thought of labor, of harvest, of threshing, of winnowing, grinding grain, storing food, killing poor pigs and sheep and salting their meat, and that thought seemed horrible to him. And he thought of churches and schools and taverns, of travelers weary on the road and fishermen lost at sea, he thought of winter storms and summer heat, the blowflies on carrion and the thief at the door, he thought of old age and sickness and the parish cripple and the parish lunatic and the priest berating them for sins they scarcely had time to commit. And he thought to himself, I do not want to go back. Let me be with you here, forever.

His wife heard him, and rejoiced in her heart, for she had learned to love this man she had chanced to meet so many years ago.

Yes, my love, it will be as you say. And seals they were and seals they stayed to this very day. I can show you the empty house where they lived once, and nobody lives there now, since the people in the place have a vague feeling that the house belongs to somebody not far away.

Sometimes you can see husband and wife lying about on the sea rocks on a pleasant day, or sporting about

a boat some child is paddling in the bay. How bright their eyes are, you can tell how happy they are.

The Way to Fairyland

It is a well-known and often lamented fact that there is no way to get to Fairyland. No road leads the solitary traveler anywhere near it. But if one is taken there, led there by the hand of one who knows the way, then nothing is easier, no journey swifter. Every gap in the hedge, cleft between the rocks, any rickety old gate standing alone in an empty field, can lead you right in.

There was once a lonely young man who knew all that, and, like many young men, thought he knew better than what he knew. Many an afternoon he would spend apparently idling as it seems through woodland and meadow, but his eyes kept keen for that gateway he imagined into the land of the Fairies.

One day he had barely entered the wood, just in the first company of trees, where the meadow grasses and gold and purple weeds could still flourish in sunlight before the dim woods shadowed them to sleep. He walked along, looking down mostly, hoping for interesting mushrooms to nibble or walnuts to make dye from.

He heard a sound like a giggle or a chuckle, and saw a pretty girl sitting under a tree, her back against the trunk. She sat crosslegged, with her skirt spread neatly over her knees.

“Were you laughing?” the young man asked.

"Indeed I was," she answered, still laughingly.

"I hope you weren't laughing at me," the boy said.

"Why should I laugh at you? You aren't the least bit funny looking, and you said nothing at all, neither funny nor sad. No, I was laughing at the way the sunlight coming through the leaves while the leaves are moving in the breeze made it look as if my lap were full of flowers."

The young man looked at the skirt, and could see that the light and dark, always moving, made interesting patterns, but they didn't remind him of flowers. So just to have something to say, he said:

"What kind of flowers are they?"

The girl's face looked serious at once. She reminded him of the way the schoolteacher looked when she was about to impart Important Information.

"There are blue heavenwhistles, and yellow don't-think-mes, and pink neverminds."

The boy had never heard of these flowers, so he said only hmmm.

She was a pretty girl, he recognized, not the prettiest girl he'd ever seen in church or carnival or in his dreams, but pretty enough. But by now she was staring back into her spread skirt, her eyes gleaming and moving about as if she were watching goldfish in a pond. He couldn't think of anything to say, so he moved on, wandering among some saplings, not expecting much from such new growth.

After it might have been half an hour, he began to wish he could see the girl again, so he tried to make his

way back to her directly. It took longer than he expected, because he found himself moving (to judge by sunlight and shadows) in the right direction, but through unfamiliar trees and bushes. He was sure she'd be gone by the time he got back to her tree.

But when he finally stumbled out of some unexpectedly tough and close-grown tall grasses and into the clearing where she'd been, he saw her still there. And to his surprise, he saw her lap full of flowers.

"O there are flowers there!" he cried out. "I see them now."

"I thought you might," said the girl. "Come!"

And with that she tossed one of the blue flowers at him. He caught it in midair, and when he looked back at her she was standing, and no flowers to be seen. "Come," she said again.

She reached out her left hand. The boy took it with his right hand. She looked him in the eye, very serious, then turned her head and led him along through the trees.

*Left with right
day and night
hold me tight
and if you dare
we'll soon be there*

she sang as they went along, and he liked well the tune, and the words even better.

Soon they came to a strange looking thing, an old door in its door frame, but no house to it, not even a wall. The whole business looked as if it would fall to pieces any minute.

For the first time since she'd been leading him, she turned to face him.

"Are you sure?" she asked, simply, as if she'd asked him for the time of day and he'd guessed at it.

Am I sure? the young man thought. I think that's all I really am, he thought.

"I am sure," he said, trying to make his voice ordinary, but there was some sort of boast or triumph in it.

The girl looked away, and still holding him with her left hand, opened the door with her right, and pulled him through.

And that is how he came to be in Fairyland, and it is not right to tell of what he found there, and what it was like, or how long he stayed, or if he ever came home. What we can know for certain was the smile of surprise and joy on his face as he walked through the door and looked around from right to left.

December 2013