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Title: Grimm's Fairy Tales: Peter the Goatherd

Date of first publication: 1930

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Illustrator: Noel Pocock (1880-1955)

Date first posted: October 13 2012

Date last updated: October 13 2012

Faded Page eBook #20121025

This ebook was produced by: David Edwards, Donna M. Ritchey & the Online Distributed Proofreading Canada Team at <http://www.pgdpCanada.net>

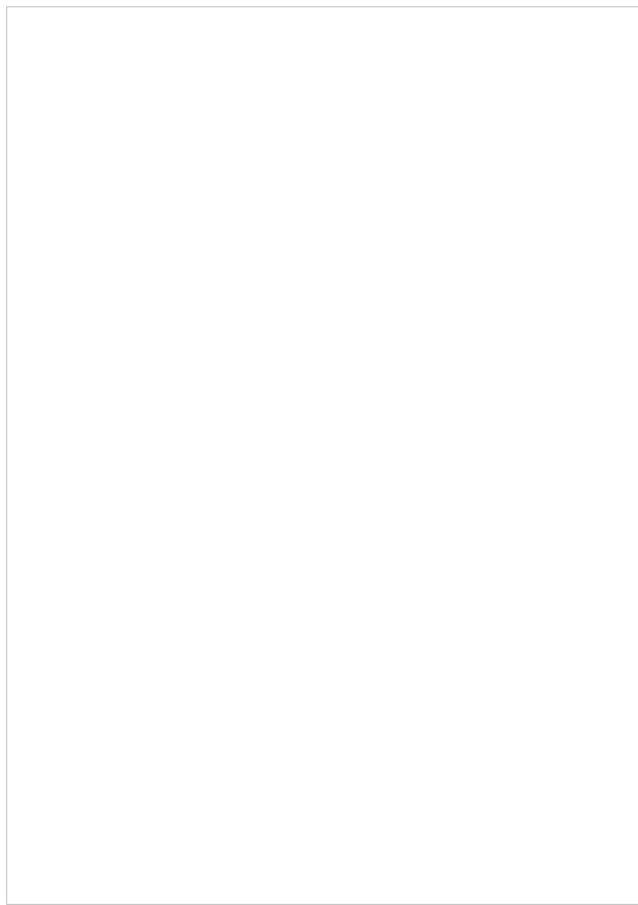
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Peter the Goatherd

In the wilds of the Hartz Forest there is a high mountain, where the fairies and goblins dance by night, and where they say the great Emperor Frederic Barbarossa still holds his court among the caverns. Now and then he shows himself and punishes those whom he dislikes, or gives some rich gift to the lucky wight whom he takes it into his head to befriend. He sits on a throne of marble with his red beard sweeping on the ground, and once or twice in a long course of years rouses himself for a while from the trance in which he is buried, but soon falls again into his former forgetfulness. Strange chances have befallen many who have strayed within the range of his court—you shall hear one of them.

A great many years ago there lived in the village at the foot of the mountain, one Peter, a goatherd. Every morning he drove his flock to feed upon the green spots that are here and there found on the mountain's side, and in the evening he sometimes thought it too far to drive his charge home, so he used in such cases to shut it up in a spot amongst the woods, where an old ruined wall was left standing, high enough to form a fold, in which he could count his goats and rest in peace for the night. One evening he found that the prettiest goat of his flock had vanished soon after they were driven into this fold, but was there again in the morning. Again and again he watched, and the same strange thing happened. He thought he would look still more narrowly, and soon found a cleft in the old wall, through which it seemed that his favourite made her way. Peter followed, scrambling as well as he could down the side of the rock, and wondered not a little, on overtaking his goat, to find it employing itself very much at its ease in a cavern, eating corn, which kept dropping from some place above. He went into the cavern and looked about him to see where all this corn, that rattled about his ears like a hail-storm, could come from: but all was dark, and he could find no clue to this strange business. At last, as he stood listening, he thought he heard the neighing and stamping of horses. He listened again; it was plainly so; and after a while he was sure that horses were feeding above him, and that the corn fell from their mangers. What could these horses be, which were thus kept in a mountain where none but the goat's foot ever trod? Peter pondered a while; but his wonder only grew greater and greater, when on a sudden a little page came forth and beckoned him to follow; he did so, and came at last to a court-yard surrounded by an old wall. The spot seemed the bosom of the valley; above rose on every hand high masses of rock; wide branching trees threw their arms overhead, so that nothing but a glimmering twilight made its way through; and here, on the cool smooth shaven turf, were twelve old knights, who looked very grave and sober, but were amusing themselves with a game of nine-pins.

Not a word fell from their lips; but they ordered Peter by dumb signs to busy himself in setting up the pins, as they knocked them down. At first his knees trembled, as he dared to snatch a stolen sidelong glance at the long beards and old-fashioned dresses of the worthy knights. Little by little, however, he grew bolder; and at last he plucked up his heart so far as to take his turn in the draught at the can, which stood beside him and sent up the smell of the richest old wine. This gave him new strength for his work; and as often as he flagged at all, he turned to the same kind friend for help in his need.



"Shaking his head, and hardly knowing whether he were in his right mind, he wound his way among the mountain steeps."

Sleep at last overpowered him; and when he awoke he found himself stretched out upon the old spot where he had folded his flock. The same green turf was spread beneath, and the same tottering walls surrounded him: he rubbed his eyes, but neither dog nor goat was to be seen, and when he had looked about him again the grass seemed to be longer under his feet, and trees hung over his head which he had either never seen before or had forgotten. Shaking his head, and hardly knowing whether he were in his right mind, he wound his way among the mountain steeps, through paths where his flocks were wont to wander; but still not a goat was to be seen. Below him in the plain lay the village where his home was, and at length he took the downward path, and set out with a heavy heart in search of his flock. The people who met him as he drew near to the village were all unknown to him; they were not even drest as his neighbours were, and they seemed as if they hardly spoke the same tongue; and when he eagerly asked after his goats, they only stared at him and stroked their chins. At last he did the same too, and what was his wonder to find that his beard was grown at least a foot long! The world, thought he now to himself, is turned over, or at any rate bewitched; and yet he knew the mountain (as he turned round to gaze upon its woody heights); and he knew the houses and cottages also, with their little gardens, all of which were in the same places as he had always known them; he heard some children, too, call the village by its old name, as a traveller that passed by was asking his way.

Again he shook his head and went straight through the village to his own cottage. Alas! it looked sadly out of repair; and in the court-yard lay an unknown child, in a ragged dress, by the side of a rough, toothless dog, whom he thought he ought to know, but who snarled and barked in his face when he called him to him. He went in at an opening in the wall where a door had once stood, but found all so dreary and empty that he staggered out again like a drunken man, and called his wife and children loudly by their names; but no one heard, at least no one answered him.

A crowd of women and children soon flocked around the long gray-bearded man, and all broke upon him at once with the questions, "Who are you?" "Whom do you want?" It seemed to him so odd to ask other people at his own door after his wife and children, that in order to get rid of the crowd he named the first man that came into his head—"Hans, the blacksmith!" said he. Most held their tongues and stared, but at last an old woman said, "He went these seven years

ago to a place that you will not reach to-day." "Frank the tailor, then!" "Heaven rest his soul!" said an old beldame upon crutches; "he has laid these ten years in a house that he'll never leave."

Peter looked at the old woman, and shuddered as he saw her to be one of his old friends, only with a strangely altered face. All wish to ask further questions was gone; but at last a young woman made her way through the gaping throng with a baby in her arms, and a little girl about three years old clinging to her other hand; all three looked the very image of his wife. "What is thy name?" asked he wildly. "Mary." "And your father's?" "Heaven bless him! Peter! It is now twenty years since we sought him day and night on the mountain; his flock came back, but he never was heard of any more. I was then seven years old." The goatherd could hold no longer. "I am Peter," cried he; "I am Peter, and no other;" as he took the child from his daughter's arms and kissed it. All stood gaping, and not knowing what to say or think, till at length one voice was heard, "Why, it is Peter!" and then several others cried, "Yes, it is, it is Peter! Welcome neighbour, welcome home, after twenty long years!"

[The end of _Grimm's Fairy Tales: Peter the Goatherd_ by the Brothers Grimm]