The Sleeping Princess

Once upon a time, there was a Queen who had a beautiful baby daughter. She asked all the fairies in the kingdom to the christening, but unfortunately forgot to invite one of them, who was a bit of a witch as well. She came anyway, but as she passed the baby’s cradle, she said, “When you are sixteen, you will injure yourself with a spindle and die!”

“Oh, no!” screamed the Queen in horror. A good fairy quickly chanted a magic spell to change the curse. When she hurt herself, the girl would fall into a very deep sleep instead of dying.

The years went by, the little Princess grew and became the most beautiful girl in the whole kingdom. Her mother was always very careful to keep her away from spindles, but the Princess, on her sixteenth birthday, as she wandered through the castle, came into a room where an old servant was spinning.

“What are you doing?” she asked the servant.

“I’m spinning. Haven’t you seen a spindle before?”

“No. Let me see it!” The servant handed the girl the spindle … and she pricked herself with it and with a sigh, dropped to the floor.

The terrified old woman hurried to tell the Queen. Beside herself with anguish, the Queen did her best to awaken her daughter but in vain. The court doctors and wizards were called, but there was nothing they could do. The girl could not be wakened from her deep sleep. The good fairy who managed to avoid the worst of the curse came too, and the Queen said to her, “When will my daughter waken?”

“I don’t know,” the fairy admitted sadly.

“In a year’s time, ten years or twenty?” the Queen went on.

“Maybe in a hundred years’ time. Who knows?” said the fairy.

“Oh! What would make her waken?” asked the Queen weeping.

“Love,” replied the fairy. “If a man of pure heart were to fall in love with her, that would bring her back to life!”

“How can a man fall in love with a sleeping girl?” sobbed the Queen, and so heart-broken was she that, a few days later, she died. The sleeping Princess was taken to her room and laid on the bed surrounded by garlands of flowers. She was so beautiful, with a sweet face, not like those of the dead, but pink like those who are sleeping peacefully.

The good fairy said to herself, “When she wakens, who is she going to see around her? Strange faces and people she doesn’t know? I can never let that happen. It would be too painful for this unfortunate girl.”

So the fairy cast a spell; and everyone that lived in the castle – soldiers, ministers, guards, servants, ladies, pages, cooks, maids and knights – all fell into a deep sleep, wherever they were at that very moment.

“Now,” thought the fairy, “when the Princess wakes up, they too will awaken, and life will go on from there.” And she left the castle, now wrapped in silence. Not a sound was to be heard, nothing moved except for the clocks, but when they too ran down, they stopped, and time stopped with them. Not even the faintest rustle was to be heard, only the wind whistling round the turrets, not a single voice, only the cry of birds.

The years sped past. In the castle grounds, the trees grew tall. The bushes became thick and straggling, the grass invaded the courtyards and the creepers spread up the walls. In a hundred years, a dense forest grew up.

Now, it so happened that a Prince arrived in these parts. He was the son of a king in a country close by. Young, handsome and melancholy, he sought in solitude everything he could not find in the company of other men: serenity, sincerity and purity. Wandering on his trusty steed he arrived, one day, at the dark forest. Being adventurous, he decided to explore it. He made his way through slowly and with a struggle, for the trees and bushes grew in a thick tangle. A few hours later, now losing heart, he was about to turn his horse and go back when he thought he could see something through the trees . . . He pushed back the branches . . . Wonder of wonders! There in front of him stood a castle with high towers. The young man stood stock still in amazement, “I wonder who this castle belongs to?” he thought.

The young Prince rode on towards the castle. The drawbridge was down and, holding his horse by the reins, he crossed over it. Immediately he saw the inhabitants draped all over the steps, the halls and courtyards, and said to himself, “Good heavens! They’re dead!” But in a moment, he realised that they were sound asleep. “Wake up! Wake up!” he shouted, but nobody moved. Still thoroughly astonished, he went into the castle and again discovered more people, lying fast asleep on the floor. As though led by a hand in the complete silence, the Prince finally reached the room where the beautiful Princess lay fast asleep. For a long time he stood gazing at her face, so full of serenity, so peaceful, lovely and pure, and he felt spring to his heart that love he had always been searching for and never found. Overcome by emotion, he went close, lifted the girl’s little white hand and gently kissed it . . .

At that kiss, the princess quickly opened her eyes, and wakening from her long sleep, seeing the Prince beside her, murmured, “Oh, you have come at last! I was waiting for you in my dreams. I’ve waited so long!”

Just then, the spell was broken. The Princess rose to her feet, holding out her hand to the Prince. And the whole castle woke up too. Everybody rose to their feet and they all stared round in amazement, wondering what had happened. When they finally realised, they rushed to the Princess, more beautiful and happier then ever.

A few days later, the castle that only a short time before had laid in silence, now rang with the sound of singing, music and happy laughter at the great party given in honour of the Prince and Princess, who were getting married. They lived happily ever after, as they always do in fairy tales.