

# The Sleeping Beauty



I

III



# *The Sleeping Beauty*

Once upon a time there was a faraway kingdom; a vast green land which lay just beyond the sunrise. It was a place that could scarcely be found on a map but, some say, could be seen from the meadows when the light of dawn glinted from the dew of a rose petal. This land was ruled by a King and Queen who, though they were just and beloved by their subjects, were very sad for they had all that they could desire except a child, and they so longed for a baby girl.

One morning, while the Queen was picking roses in the garden, she was startled by a strange noise and the sound of a splash of water against rock. She followed the sound to the pond in the middle of the garden and spied a fish struggling piteously upon the cobblestones. Somehow it had been displaced and would die in the sun if it did not return to the water.

The arguably short life of a fish might not have stirred much concern for some but the Queen, whose name was Rosalie, had an inherent love for all living things. She therefore stooped down, lifted the fish by the tail and returned it to the safety of the water.

A good deed unheeded by any but herself was all Queen Rosalie thought of it, but this simple act of mercy would change her life forever. For the poor creature she saved that morning was no ordinary fish but a friend of the Fairy Queen. Therefore the fish returned to the surface of the pond in gratitude and spoke to her. "Good Queen you have spared me from a pitiful fate and your kindness will not be forgotten. I know what desire is in your heart. I shall bring it to the attention of the Fairy Queen herself and I promise you that one year from this very day, upon the breaking of dawn, you shall give birth to a baby girl." Then the fish disappeared beneath the rippling water and the Queen was left to ponder this momentous and joyous prophesy.

A year passed swiftly for Rosalie and her noble husband, King Florestan, as they awaited the coming of their new child. Sure enough, just as the fish had promised, Queen Rosalie gave birth to a girl at daybreak exactly one year from the day she had saved the creature's life. And because this child's birth was heralded by the rising sun, they named her Aurora, for she too brought light into their lives.

When the time for Aurora's christening approached, all the kingdom rejoiced and a great celebration was planned. Dignitaries and royalty were invited from all over the world and though the King and Queen had wished to invite the Fairy Queen herself as thanks for her kindness, the Great Mother had many duties and, thus, could not be present. Florestan and Rosalie, however, would be sure to invite the Queen's graceful fairy daughters in her stead. Catalabutte, the King's minister, compiled a guest list and sent word to all the fairy sisters who dwelt in that region.

There was Rose who granted strength to the stems of flowers to keep them healthy in troubling times. There was Bluebell who gave all flowers their beauty, and Lily who gave them their lovely aromas. There was Goldenrod who was responsible for granting them sunlight and Ivy who gave them good soil. Then there was Lilac who was responsible for making each flower stir feelings of love and affection within those who beheld them.

There were, altogether, seven of the Fairy Queen's children living in that land but Catalabutte was bothered by a small problem. He had already invited so many dignitaries and noblemen and women that the seven fairies just exceeded their available place-settings by one. You see, they had only enough beautiful silver plates for all of their guests and six of the fairies. Florestan was troubled by the prospect of having to serve any one of his guests a plain dish when the others received silver and came to the difficult decision of leaving the Black Fairy, Carabosse, off of the list of guests. "For," he said, "She lives deep inside the earth, laden with duties and cares, and would neither know of nor wish to attend such a celebration."

Catalabutte reluctantly did as his lord commanded and, on the day of the great event, the kingdom was alive with music and song and the palace was filled with well-wishers from all across the land. The kings and queens of the neighboring kingdoms came with their children and their servants to pay their respects to the infant Princess Aurora.

But the guests of honor were surely the daughters of the Fairy Queen. Six of the lovely fairies came to see the Princess and to bestow gifts upon her as her godmothers. Rose granted the infant fortitude and the red fairy promised, "She shall grow with health and strength through the years so that no trial shall overcome her."

Next came Bluebell who granted the baby beauty. "She will be the loveliest and fairest creature upon the face of the earth," The Blue Fairy promised.

Next came Lily, the White Fairy, who granted Aurora grace, saying, "The young princess will be a woman of singular virtue and kindness to be a model for people all over the world."

Goldenrod, the Yellow Fairy, then granted her happiness, stating, "No trouble or shadow of grief will mar her joy, and her life will be one of hopeful bliss."

Ivy, the Green Fairy, then granted her intelligence, saying, "She will possess wisdom beyond the years of many so that she might be vexed by no problem she encounters."

When these five fairies had all placed their blessings upon Aurora, Lilac prepared to do the same and considered the child especially precious to her. She wished to grant her the promise of true love; of a prince who would dedicate his life to her happiness and well-being. But before Lilac could utter a word, there was a crash at the front gates of the palace.

The guards were overcome and the doors of the great hall were thrown aside as a horde of ghastly creatures forced their way into the assembly. Goblins, ogres, witches, trolls, and evil spirits of every kind marched into the throne room and, at their head, appeared Carabosse, the Black Fairy.

Carabosse was responsible for the utterly thankless job of destroying the weak flowers so that stronger ones could grow in their place. It was a duty that garnered no appreciation whatsoever, despite its importance. She was the oldest and strongest of the Fairy Queen's many children. She was proud and had reason to be for she had great power, wisdom and, at one time, great beauty. But the years of being despised and unwelcome had made her bitter and cold and she was most displeased at having been, once again, insulted in this way.

She strode up to Catalabutte, who shuddered at her approach; her thorny wings twitching eagerly and the tip of her cane echoing against the floor with each step. Her

face had a wicked beauty and her eyes were deep and large. A forest of jet black antlers spread out from her white forehead; more majestic than the crown of any queen. She gripped the cringing minister by his collar, swept the wig from his bald head, and snatched the guest list from his hands with a sneer; asking why she had been so callously overlooked.

Florestan and Rosalie both stood over Aurora's cradle and fearfully explained their reasons for not inviting the great and noble Black Fairy. They begged her pardon and asked for her to quell her wrath.

"But I am not angry," Carabosse replied with a reassuring smile. She approached the infant's bassinet and looked upon Aurora lovingly. "I am this child's godmother as well, and I too wish to grant her my blessing. I promise that the Princess will grow into a healthy young woman. She will possess all the beauty, grace, happiness, strength and wisdom any princess could desire. She will truly be a star among stars, a beacon of hope rivaling the very sunlight she is named for." Then Carabosse clasped her hands over her heart. "And before the sun sets on her sixteenth birthday she will prick her finger on the spindle of a spinning wheel and die."

With that dreadful doom pronounced, the Black Fairy and her wicked servants disappeared from the palace, leaving the King and Queen to mourn for their baby daughter's future. Truly it was a terrible fate and one that the other fairies could not undo. But Lilac had yet to bestow her gift upon the girl. "Carabosse's power is mightier than mine and I cannot remove the curse she has placed upon your daughter. I can, however, do my best to soften the blow of this doom. Should she prick her finger, as Carabosse has vowed, she shall not die but sleep in ageless silence until her true love comes to awaken her. This is my promise."

The years rolled by in the kingdom and all of the fairies' blessings came to fruition in the young Aurora as she grew into a Princess unmatched in beauty, both of body and spirit. Her lips were red as the roses, her skin white as the lilies, her hair gold as the goldenrods, her eyes blue as the bluebells, her dress green as the ivy, and the flowers she wore in her hair were always lilacs. She was, to her kingdom, the greatest treasure in all the world. But to her parents she *was* the world. Since the day of her christening they lived in fear of Carabosses' evil curse and, therefore, King Florestan ordered that all the spinning wheels in the kingdom be gathered up and burned and that, henceforth, they and all spindles were forbidden in that land. The punishment for breaking that law would be death and Catalabutte took on the unfortunate job of enforcing it.

In scarcely the time it takes a flower to rise and bloom and wilt, sixteen years had passed, and not one spindle had been seen in Florestan and Rosalie's kingdom, and the day of Aurora's long-awaited birthday had come at last. As the kingdom prepared for a grand celebration, the King and Queen hoped beyond hope that they would be able to keep their daughter safe that day and, thus, defy the wicked fairy's prophesy. That morning Catalabutte searched every inch of the kingdom for a spinning wheel and found only one spindle in the basement of an abandoned house. He brought it immediately to the attention of King Florestan, humbling himself before the wrath of the King. Florestan raged at this news and, because the owner of the spindle could not be discerned, he held Catalabutte himself responsible for it.

A sentence of death for the minister was close at hand, but good Queen Rosalie calmed her husband's anger and begged him to show their loyal minister mercy. With the King's rage subsided, Catalabutte was dismissed and ordered to seal the gates of the kingdom so that none many enter for the remainder of the day. Then Florestan threw the spindle into the fire so that it might trouble his family no further and he and the Queen watched fearfully as their radiant daughter joined the festivities in the village square. For, though they had labored hard to spare their beloved Aurora from suffering the fate laid out for her, they still dreaded the crafty power of Carabosse's magic.

Therefore, they were determined to make certain Aurora would have a true love to awaken her, should the curse come to pass. They invited four of the finest princes from across the world; from Africa, from Ireland, from India, and from Russia; to vie for Aurora's hand in marriage. While these young men pronounced their love for the Princess and vowed to protect her, Aurora was gay and carefree that day, for she knew nothing of Carabosse or the curse placed upon her. She had not been told at all for fear it would cast a shadow upon her happiness. Therefore, while her maids of honor wove long strings of garland, Aurora danced and sang and reveled in the moment, giving no thought at all to what tomorrow might bring.

And while she and all the kingdom celebrated the safe passing of her sixteenth birthday, the royal guard stood tripled on each side of the city's walls, ready to turn away any who might sneak a spindle into the celebration. About midday, a little old woman in a tattered cloak approached the gates of the city, entreating the guards to allow her to enter.

"Your pardon, old woman," said the guard, "But the King has ordered that no person be admitted through the gates this day."

"But I am the royal seamstress to the Princess Aurora and I must take my spindle and wheel into the city to begin work on her wedding dress at once." Again the guards refused to admit the woman and so she tapped her cane upon the ground and, immediately, there appeared a host of demons, clad in armor and bearing sabers and poleaxes. As these monstrous soldiers marched forward to overtake the guards, the old woman placed the head of her cane against the gates of the city and they were battered inward. Undeterred, she and her minions flooded into the kingdom in silence.

None knew of this for all were gathered beneath the palace walls as the princes presented their birthday gifts to Princess Aurora. After them came many others with offerings of jewels and stunning dresses; trinkets and baubles of all kinds. Finally, a hooded woman stepped up to the dais where Florestan and Rosalie were seated with their daughter. Catalabutte eyed the woman suspiciously and, not wishing to incur the wrath of the King again, decided to question her.

"Who are you, old woman? I expect I shan't find you upon the list of guests."

"And I fear you never shall," replied the woman with a laugh, "for always my invitation is mislaid."

"What is that you have there?" the minister inquired with a penetrating gaze.

"Merely a paltry gift for the lovely Princess on her birthday." She drew a most perfect-looking rose from the folds of her cloak, fresh from the briar, and presented it to the Princess. The woman's eyes flashed gratefully as Aurora accepted the rose and began to dance with it. It was nearing nightfall now and Florestan and Rosalie were relieved that Aurora had been kept safe all throughout the celebration.

But the Princess suddenly cried out as she pricked her finger upon one of the thorns of her rose. She let it fall from her hand but what clattered upon the ground was not a flower, but a spindle wound with red thread. The King and Queen rose from their seats, seized with panic as their daughter turned to them in pain and fell silently to the ground. Immediately, the palace guard was summoned to arrest the old woman, but she had disappeared. Where she stood was the antlered and winged form of Carabosse, the Black Fairy, who gazed victoriously down upon the unmoving form of the Princess.

Spears and swords were drawn against her but a single look from her piercing eyes cast them down where they stood. Her fell minions crowded into the square and besieged the kingdom from all sides and, though the four princes and their guards leapt to the people's aid, they could scarcely restrain the servants of the Black Fairy. As she strode majestically toward the helpless Aurora, Carabosse raised the head of her cane at the girl, preparing to destroy her forever. The Lilac Fairy, however, appeared and turned aside her wicked sister's magic.

"You shall not touch a hair upon this girl's head," Lilac warned. "For she is under my protection. She sleeps now in safety and shall do so undisturbed by any but her true love. Begone now and trouble this land no more." Feeling that her vengeance had been satisfied for the present, Carabosse ceded to Lilac and withdrew her guard from the square.

Now all the kingdom wept and none louder than Florestan and Rosalie. They ordered Aurora's sleeping body to be carried up to her bedchamber in the central tower of the castle and there laid peacefully upon her bed. For days they grieved as each of the four princes attempted, in vain, to awaken her. Every man in the kingdom and in those surrounding was summoned to the palace, but none could break the spell, and so they continued to grieve. But Lilac said finally, "You shall grieve no longer, for you too shall sleep in blissful and ageless ignorance until Aurora's true love can be found. And while you sleep neither time nor magic nor point of sword shall touch you." And so she weaved a mighty spell casting the entire kingdom into a deep sleep so that all might be preserved until a hero could be found to break Aurora's curse.

As she left the city behind, Lilac peered sadly at the castle's tower, fearing for her gentle goddaughter, and recoiled in dread when she saw Carabosse standing upon the battlements of the city wall. With a raise of the witch's cane, the walls were overtaken with the grotesque forms of her evil servants, and the gates were sealed shut with an iron groan. Then a great twisting wall of thorny vines rose up around the city until the entire kingdom had become overgrown with an impenetrable mantle of black brambles. The Black Fairy would allow no one to break her spell and so claimed all of Florestan's kingdom for herself. Lilac shrank in defeat but she was determined to find Aurora's one true love, a prince of valor and honor, to defeat Carabosse's magic and end the curse, even if she had to search for a hundred years.

The sun set many times on that sleeping kingdom since the Princess' birthday, and the leaves of the surrounding forest dried up and fell to the earth a hundred times before the snows came. And afterward the spring brought new buds and the trees burst forth again a hundred more times. In the distance sat the city of King Florestan, surrounded by its high thorn-covered walls, and the grand castle rising up from its midst. It was dark now and the once shining stones had been dulled by moss and lichens, and

were cracked where the twisting vines had dug between the bricks. It was nothing more than a monument now; a source of legend which told of a beautiful sleeping princess trapped within. Few believed this story and, of those who attempted to penetrate the wall of thorns and rescue this famed princess, none succeeded. Eventually they stopped trying altogether and people avoided the old castle at all costs.

The Lilac Fairy was deeply troubled by this. She had searched far and wide for four hundred seasons and still she had not found a man worthy of breaking Aurora's curse. But her hope was rekindled when a horn resounded throughout the land. It happened that on a spring morning a Prince named Florimund was riding through the woods after a hunt. With him were some of his pages and attendants, as well as a group of friends and his sister, Florine. They had set up a camp where they decided to throw a small celebration in honor of the Prince's birthday.

Among his friends were several noblemen and women who brought costly favors with them to honor the Prince, but he was not looking for gifts. "I invited you all here," he said, alighting from his horse. "because I wished only to share the company of my friends on this day. Too often I am surrounded by social and political figures whose friendship with me begins and ends with my crown. You, who have known me from childhood, are my true companions."

They prepared a great feast with mutton and wild boar, and casks of wine were sent around the gathering. "Today you are sixteen, and you spend it in the company of childhood's leftovers," announced one of Florimund's good friends, who was a viscount. "When on earth do you plan to marry? Surely you must find a Princess soon." Florimund began to laugh at this, for he had famously declined every marriage his mother and father had proposed for him; though they were to some of the most beautiful women in the world. "I hear," the viscount continued. "that there is a prince in Italy who just married a commoner named Cinderella. Perhaps your destined bride is not a princess at all!"

Florine placed a slender white hand on Florimund's shoulder and said, "My brother will find his true love, whether she be royalty or not."

"Perhaps the Sleeping Beauty is your destined princess," another said. "Just beyond the forest is a kingdom that was cursed with a spell of eternal sleep. Within the castle rests a Princess of unrivaled beauty and grace; doomed to sleep until her true love awakens her." The notion of the Prince marrying a myth caused all gathered to burst forth into laughter and the feasting continued without another word about princesses or marriage.

As the sun was setting that night, Florimund left the gathering behind as Florine regaled their friends with tales of the Prince's achievements in swordplay and archery. He wandered away from the camp, not knowing where he was or where he was headed. For something strange about that story had stirred him in a way he could not explain. He did not exactly believe the legend of the Sleeping Beauty, but part of him longed for it to be true; that somewhere there was a girl awaiting her destined prince. It made his seemingly hopeless search for love almost justified. Perhaps she was waiting for *him* all this time.

He came to a clearing near the edge of the wood where the trees were not so thick, and between the trunks he could see the light of the setting sun. As he continued toward the light he beheld, in the distance, a great old city with turrets rising just over

the horizon. It was black against the sunset, with thorns all about it and a spectacularly high tower springing up from the middle. "Could it be," he thought. "that this legend is true?"

"It is true," said a gentle voice behind him. He turned about and saw a young woman in a dress of lilac petals. She had shimmering wings fluttering behind her and a tiara of flowers around her head, set with gems. Her hair was a pale violet color and glimmered in the evening light. "I am the Lilac Fairy," she said. "the guardian of the sleeping Princess Aurora. For a hundred years I have searched for a prince who might wake her and break the spell." She told Florimund the whole tale of how Aurora had fallen victim to the wrath of the Black Fairy and how only the kiss of her true love could save her.

Florimund, however, was reluctant to believe the Lilac Fairy. He had heard of witches who roamed the forest at night, luring in men to their dooms with tales of riches and princesses. He had also heard that any who attempted to rescue this Sleeping Beauty in the past had met with a terrible end, and he feared his fate would be no different. But then the Lilac Fairy showed him a looking glass and in its reflection he beheld a wonderfully fair, golden-haired maiden dancing in the city square; an emerald green dress billowing around her with each graceful step. As he watched her, he realized why this tale had stirred him so and, when he looked into her deep blue eyes, he knew at once that this Aurora was his fated bride and that he would risk any danger for her sake.

Florimund returned immediately to his camp and saddled his horse. He took a pack of provisions for the journey and packed also his bow, sword and shield "For," the Lilac Fairy had warned him, "this venture will be fraught with danger. Carabosse, the Black Fairy, still rules over Aurora's kingdom and commands a terrible host of servants who will stop at nothing to protect their mistress." Florimund had excelled at all manner of swordplay but, though he had never been in real combat, he felt his steps would be guided to his love and that no danger would be so great he could not overcome it.

"Where are you going to, Brother?" Florine asked, her face growing pale as she looked upon the sword strapped at his side and the buckler slung over his back.

"I am off to find my Princess," he replied, mounting his horse and galloping off toward the edge of the forest where the Lilac Fairy awaited him. The sun had fully set by the time Florimund and Lilac crossed the border of the woods and made their way toward the silent city. The moonlight guided his horse's steps as Lilac showed him the way over the countryside to where the thicket of brambles marked the road to the front gates. She signaled for him to halt as they came to an ancient, crumbling bridge and just over the opposite side yawned the great entrance to old King Florestan's kingdom. The thicket of thorns was spread heavily over the bridge and its vines were hard as wrought iron but they, as do all things, had a weakness. Florimund dismounted, drawing his sword, while the Lilac Fairy showed him where their vulnerable nodes were so that, striking certain points, he was able to clear a way over the bridge.

Florimund was disheartened when he reached the gates and realized they were sealed shut by many crossbars and two gratings full of iron teeth. Lilac instructed him that there was but one way into the city now and that was by scaling the walls. "You will have to climb the vines to reach the top, young Prince." He peered down at his hands and knew his light leather gloves would offer little protection against the thorns, but still

he resolved to carry on. The pain would be momentary and he had already vowed to do everything in his power to release his Princess from her curse.

So he stepped from the rail of the bridge and grasped the barbed vines which stretched across the face of the wall and, with a deep breath, began to pull himself up. With each grip he winced with pain from the black thorns jutting this way and that, but he shut out all thoughts of fear or weakness and continued on until his head passed over the top of the wall and the great, silent city spread out before him.

It was like a graveyard, cold and marked with deep pockets of darkness. Florimund had no way of knowing what it had been like a century ago but, had he known it in its days as a center for light and music and wisdom, he surely would have wept to see what had become of it now. The only lights he could discern within were those of the bonfires the servants of Carabosse had lit for their abominable festivities. They celebrated each night as if it were the mightiest of victories for, to them, it meant that every night they maintained control of this kingdom evil had triumphed over good. Every night, for a hundred years, the Lilac Fairy failed to deliver Aurora and her people from Carabosse's power. Every night, for a hundred years, evil triumphed over good. And so every night, for a hundred years, the children of evil rejoiced.

Florimund stepped lightly across the stones of the parapet, always keeping the grand rising tower in his sight. Surely that was where he would find Aurora. But, as he drew closer to the castle, he spied the moonlight glinting off of the marching armor of Carabosse's guards. Their lines were four men deep with jagged pikes held high in the air. He could not enter the castle through the front gates. But the Lilac Fairy appeared beside him and, without a word, she motioned for him to follow and led him down into the village square.

Swiftly they moved in the shadows, passing camps of monstrous soldiers who let out guttural bellows at each other as they fought over food or drink. And, here and there, Florimund saw the forms of men and women and children strewn about the city. All were lying upon the ground or leaning against the sides of trees or buildings and all appeared to be dead. "They are not dead," the Lilac Fairy assured him. "They are the subjects of Aurora who sleep along with her. Like the Princess, they cannot be harmed while they sleep, nor do they age. They, also, are awaiting your victory."

She led the Prince to the gardens below the palace walls, passing under a stone archway coated in ivy, and halted short as the sound of iron-shod boots echoed against the cobblestones. From behind a column Florimund could see a small company of troll guards escorting what appeared to be a giant mouse with seven heads, dressed in finery and with a series of crowns set upon his many brows. It was Carabosse's diabolical son; a monstrous creature who had conquered many kingdoms with the aid of his mother's magic. Perhaps this was just one more land he hoped to rule.

When the Mouse King and his attendants had passed on, Florimund and the Lilac Fairy stepped silently into the garden behind them. The pond which was once filled with gorgeously colored fish was now dried up and coated with muck and filth. The flowers had all long-since died away since killing flowers was Carabosse's true passion in life and she must have grown bored after destroying Queen Rosalie's exquisite garden. Lilac directed Florimund up a flight of steps which led to the upper battlements surrounding the castle. From there, he would find an overpass connecting to the base of the great central tower.

This was the end of the Prince's journey at last. At the end of this road lay either the promise of true love or the assurance of death. He drew his sword slowly, the metal singing quietly as it rose from the sheath, and lifted the buckler off of his back, holding it steady against his forearm. If he was to die tonight, he would do so delivering such a sting to the Black Fairy's forces that they would feel the pain for the next hundred years.

The moon was high now and the way to the overpass was open before him. Strangely no guards were about but he knew the servants of the enemy were crafty and would not leave so precious a treasure unprotected. In truth, Carabosse and her minions had indeed grown indulgent in their years of inactivity. So many heroes had tried and failed to penetrate even the outermost reaches of the thorny forest that the devils could scarcely now imagine that anyone could have reached the spot where Prince Florimund now stood.

But the Black Fairy's spies could see his velvety blue cape billowing in the wind, and the sheen of his cool blade in the moonlight, and they rushed to sound the alarm. Florimund turned in terror when he heard the fell horn sounding in the distance, being answered by horns at every watch tower and barrack and, soon, the clattering of boots was all around him. He could see the pikes and poleaxes of Carabosse's soldiers rising over the edge of the battlements until a throng of goblins was upon him.

The polearms struck like the stings of scorpion tails, but he turned them aside with his shield and fled toward the base of the tower. There was a long set of steps running up the tower's face and he mounted swiftly, turning only momentarily to counter a host of goblin blades. He scaled the tower steps with all haste with nothing in his mind but reaching Aurora. A flock of miniature dragons fluttered past the moon and, looking out toward the outer walls of the palace below, he beheld a line of troll archers with their sights trained on him.

He raised his shield and dropped to one knee as a wall of whistling arrows rose up against him like a wave of darts. He could feel the reverberation of the steel bolts as they impacted against his buckler and, when all was silent, he rose and resumed his journey up the tower. The bowmen were reloading but his pursuers were close behind now. He could hear them hollering with evil delight as they gave chase up the twisting stair.

Florimund bounded up the second level of the tower and found himself suddenly faced with two monstrous ogres with broad-headed mallets. Upon seeing him they immediately set upon him, battering the stonework around him to dust. He wove between them and thrust his sword into the gaps of their greaves, harming the beasts just enough to distract them while he dashed to the upper stair.

But by this time Carabosse had learned of Florimund's presence and the Black Fairy, herself, now appeared to bar the Prince's way. She would not allow any to take her captive Princess or her kingdom away and she called upon all of her wicked powers to destroy Florimund. She summoned a storm of wind and thunder to halt the Prince's advance and he, a mortal man, could not resist it. Florimund was flung to the ground, his sword knocked from his grip. Now Carabosse thrust her cane at the wounded Prince, who raised his shield with weakened arms, struggling to keep the wicked fairy at bay.

But she had waited a century for this moment and would not allow any human to insult her ever again. She was determined to crush him as easily as she had crushed

scores of roses and daffodils. With one wave of her hand, she summoned a grasping net of vines from the stone beneath Florimund, studded with razor thorns, to envelop the Prince and snuff out the candle of his life once and for all. He gripped his buckler ever tighter as he felt the spurs against his sides and shoulders.

But before the vines could strangle him, the Black Fairy ceased her assault, for the Lilac Fairy had stayed her hand. "Your persecution of Aurora and her people must end tonight, Carabosse. The hundred years of darkness are over and dawn must come at last!" Lilac raised her arms above her head and the castle was suddenly bathed in a brilliant light. The sun had risen and all the terrible host of the evil kingdom was blinded by its sight. Carabosse, too, was stunned by the rays of dawn and was far too full of terror to realize the true danger she was in. For in that moment of weakness the mighty Black Fairy was run through the side by Florimund's shining blade.

She collapsed to the ground, entreating to her servants for aid, but her cowardly slaves all fled from the sunrise to hide in the darkest holes they could find. Alone and wounded, she could not stop the racing prince from reaching the second stairway to the top of the tower. He beat in the braced doors and continued up the winding stair to Aurora's chamber. As Florimund entered, he saw the Mouse King standing over her bed, his seven heads seething with rage. The demonic rodent drew his sword and was prepared to face the Prince in combat but, when he heard the piteous cries of his mother, knew that her magic would not be able to aid him. Without that he feared he could not defeat Florimund in a fair fight and, so, fled the castle and his injured mother forever.

Carabosse had worked too hard to allow the Prince and the Lilac Fairy to undo her plans now and, even wounded as she was, would do all in her power to stop them. She summoned a great storm to envelop the tower and sent tongues of lightning to sting Florimund. When she realized he had already reached the bedchamber she flew, herself, to the top of the tower. Lilac offered her no further resistance for she knew, as Carabosse soon would, that it was already too late.

Florimund knelt beside the sleeping form of the beautiful Aurora; her hands clasped together over her breast, and her radiant hair resting about the sides of her head like a halo of sunlight. She was more beautiful, more lovely and more delicate than he ever could have imagined. Truly, she was the love he was destined to find. Gripping her dainty hand, he stooped over her and laid his lips upon hers. He could feel a great power passing between them and, in a matter of moments, she opened her fathomless eyes of blue and their gazes locked. Her rose-hued lips curled into a smile of contentment. She had found her Prince.

The moment Aurora's eyes had opened, Carabosse felt a fierce pain deep inside and she knew that her curse had been undone. The power of good had finally triumphed over her and now she, who was as ancient and boundless as the world itself, was seeing the last of it. In the light of the morning sun the Black Fairy was reduced to the dry soil of a withered garden and fell to dust forever.

Florimund helped Aurora to rise from the bed and, together, they stepped out of the tower and were bathed in the light of the early morning sun. It was the first thing she had ever seen upon entering the world and it seemed appropriately comforting that the sunrise would welcome her back after so long. The Lilac Fairy approached them and

kissed them both on the forehead as the shadows all throughout the kingdom were swept away.

In the garden fresh water filled the pond and the shimmering fish returned there to live while, all around, the flowers burst forth from the once dormant soil and bloomed more radiantly than ever before. All through the city Aurora's subjects awakened to a world that was scarcely changed from when they left it and, in the throne room, good King Florestan and Queen Rosalie resumed their mourning until they saw their daughter with her Prince at her side. Then they rejoiced as did all the kingdom and the lands surrounding. At last the spell had been broken.

With the end of the Black Fairy's reign, and the return of the Princess Aurora, a great ball was to be held to celebrate her marriage to Prince Florimund. Again Catalabutte was tasked with inviting the host of the gentry of foreign lands but he had a difficult time of it. You see, because a hundred years had passed since their last celebration they had awakened to a new world and knew no one in it. So Prince Florimund called for his mother and father and his ministers, and he called for his sister, Florine, and their noble friends and, together, they sent word to all they knew.

Of course Lilac's remaining sisters, Rose, Ivy, Bluebell, Goldenrod, and Lily were invited. They also knew many admirable people whom they had met in their journeys around the world and so they summoned several of their friends, and their invitations were treasured by all who received them. Standing in the great hall of Florestan's castle, Aurora and Florimund eagerly awaited their honored guests.

First to arrive was Florimund's own sister Princess Florine and her little friend the Bluebird who fluttered around her head as she walked. Cinderella and her Prince Charming came next. Her dress glittered like diamonds and her glass shoes sparkled with each step. After them came Snow White and her prince suitor, along with their seven friends, the crooked but jovial dwarves. Then entered the Three Little Pigs with their flute, fiddle and trumpet in hand. Tom Thumb arrived next with Thumbelina and, because they were both so tiny, they were carried in by Tom's brothers.

Behind them entered Red Riding Hood who led in the Big Bad Wolf on a chain. The Wolf made all gathered tremble, especially the little Pigs, for he was once a servant of the Black Fairy. But, since her defeat, he had lost the will to do evil and was generally docile. Another who had left the service of evil was the Ogre of Lonely Mountain who once guarded the entrance to Carabosse's domain. He was greatly shocked at having been invited by the Lilac Fairy and wished to be present if only to apologize for his poor behavior. Behind the Ogre came Puss in Boots with stately steps, gripping the hilt of his sheathed sword with one paw and a rose with the other. His companion, the White Cat was enamored of his magnificence and none could blame her.

Last to arrive were the six fairies. Rose came and brought with her rubies from the lands to the south. Bluebell came with precious sapphires from the east. Ivy came with emeralds from the west. Lily came with diamonds from the north. Goldenrod came with gold and silver from the deep places of the earth. Finally, Lilac came with blessings from all the magical rulers of the four corners of the world; from the Sea King and the Lord of the Dwarves and the Cloud Waker and, of course, the Fairy Queen. And she also brought two enchanted rings for Aurora and Florimund to serve as wedding bands that would seal their love for all time.

When Florimund's parents had arrived and joined with King Florestan and Queen Rosalie, the wedding celebration commenced. There was music and dancing and jubilation the likes of which had not been seen for ages. The gowns of the princesses cast luminous colors against the walls of the great hall as their gems caught and reflected the light of the chandeliers. The Fairies danced also. Lilac did the dance of love and Bluebell the dance of beauty. Goldenrod did the dance of joy and Ivy the dance of wisdom. Lily did the dance of grace and Rose the dance of strength.

After the Fairies' dances, a gust of wind burst through the doors of the great hall, nearly snuffing the light of the thousands of candles set about the chamber. All turned their heads toward the doorway and there stood the seven-headed son of Carabosse, the Mouse King. None knew how he had gained entry into the castle; or perhaps he had never left but had rather kept himself hidden somewhere like the coward he was. No one dared halt him now for there was a terrible ire burning in his fourteen eyes as he stared down the gathering of his mother's enemies.

He was greatly angered by the Prince and Princess for having so callously destroyed his beloved mother, but he knew also that he was to blame for abandoning her in her hour of need and so his rage was multiplied. He drew his sword and, pointing the blade toward Aurora and Florimund, issued forth a horrendous curse in whose face Carabosse's spell utterly paled in comparison. But his mastery over the powers of darkness were not so strong as hers and, in the face of that noble gathering of Fairies and children of the Light, his curse carried no weight. Puss in Boots, who had heard quite enough from the wretch, drew his blade and challenged the Mouse King to a duel. None had yet defeated the valiant feline swordsman and certainly no mouse could prove a match for him. Knowing this, the wicked Mouse King begrudgingly sheathed his sword and withdrew himself from the castle, never to return.

With the threats of the Mouse King forgotten, the remainder of the celebration continued as joyously as ever. Princess Florine danced with her little Bluebird, Cinderella and Prince Charming became the darlings of the ball, the Three Little Pigs played wonderful music, and Tom Thumb and Thumbelina proved that even the tiniest of people can be the most profound friends. Red Riding Hood struggled to dance while maintaining her leash on the Big Bad Wolf and, though the Wolf snapped his chain at one point, he was stopped by the Ogre, of all guests, who frightened the beast into submission and made certain he behaved for the rest of the night. The Little Pigs, among others, were greatly relieved.

Once the dancing had been finished for the time being the bishop was summoned to the dais and, with words of grace and the blessings of Heaven, Aurora and Florimund were at last joined in marriage. There was a symphony of cheer and gaiety the likes of which had never been heard and, I expect, may never be heard again, in those lands. For all of the enchanted countries had reason to celebrate this momentous union. The royal soldiers performed an honorary march to mark an occasion unparalleled in history. The Fairy Queen, herself, had arrived to congratulate the Prince and Princess and the blessing she laid upon them ensured that no malicious or maleficent power could ever harm them or their kingdoms again. And the Fairy Queen's promise was not something to be taken lightly.

At last Aurora and Florimund had found each other through the seas of time, triumphed over evil and were joined together so that nothing could drive them apart.

And, under the watchful eyes of their Fairy friends, their love truly did last forever. Still, it is said, they dwell together in the kingdom beyond the sunrise; a place which can scarcely be found on a map. But I've heard tales that, when the light of dawn is glinting from the dew of a rose petal, the towers of their castle can be seen in the distance, and one might even catch the Princess, herself, dancing in the morning's aurora.

THE END