

JEANNE, JEANETTE AND JEANETON

Once upon a time there were three sisters called Jeanne, Jeanette and Jeaneton. Their parents were dead and they lived alone in the forest of Grégo, not far from Vannes. They were all industrious and cheerful and although they were very poor, they managed to earn a living. In winter they knitted woollen stockings for the farmer's wives and in Summer they picked the woodland berries and sold them at the market.

One morning they took their baskets and set out from their little cottage into the wood. Each sister took a different path, and soon they were all picking busily. Jeanne had almost filled her basket when she saw an old



woman coming towards her. She was bent and walked with a stick; her face was wrinkled and she looked at least a hundred years old. She was dressed in rags and must have gone without food for some time, for she seemed very weak, and once or twice she almost fell.

"I come from far away, and I have wandered a long time without eating," she said. "May I have some of your strawberries, my dear?"

"You may have them all, Grandmother," said Jeanne, "I will soon find more."

So saying she tipped all her strawberries into the old lady's apron.

"Thank you," said the old lady. "I wish I had something to give you in return, but I am not rich. All I have is this ribbon; take it and it may do you a service some day."

She put the ribbon into Jeanne's hands, and then hurried away. Jeanne went back to the cottage and did not mention the meeting to her sisters.

The next day it was Jeanette who met the old lady. She greeted her with the same words.

“I come from far away, and I have wandered a long time without eating,” she said. “May I have some of your strawberries, my dear?”

Jeanette gave her all her berries, and the old lady gave her a tiny bag in return. Then she disappeared into the forest, and Jeanette went home and did not mention the meeting to her sisters.

The next day Jeaneton was searching among the long grass for berries when she saw the old lady.

“I am very hungry my dear, may I have some of your berries?”

“Of course, take them all,” said Jeaneton.

“I am glad to see that all three sisters are generous-hearted,” said the old lady. “Here, take this in return.”

She produced a tiny bell from beneath her rags, then disappeared into the forest. Jeaneton went back to the little cottage, and she did not mention the matter to her elder sisters.

One evening the three girls began to talk about their adventure, and they showed each other the gifts the old lady had given them. For the first time they wondered what they could do with them.

“I shall tie my hair up with my ribbon, like the town girls do,” said Jeanne.

“I am a little ashamed of my bag,” murmured Jeanette. “I will never have any money to put in it.”

As she said these words the bag began to swell and swell. At last it burst, overturning the cottage, and a magnificent farm house appeared in its place.

Jeaneton was softly tinkling her bell, and now the three sisters had a second surprise. With each tinkle, farm animals came running into the yard. Horses, cows, sheep, pigs, ducks and hens gathered about them; they were all docile and handsome, and seemed to be saying, “Now



we are yours, do with us what you will.”

The sisters were rich, richer than any of the other farmers, and could hardly believe their good fortune.

Only Jeanne looked sad, and her sisters asked her what was wrong.

“I see that only you have been given anything,” she said. “ I am still poor. I must have displeased the old lady, for my ribbon is useless.”

“Do not say that!” cried the two sisters. “You know that whatever is ours is yours. We always share everything. If we are rich, you are too!”

Jeanne was ashamed that she had doubted her sisters’ goodness of heart. She was filled with happiness, and went out into the meadow to pick them a bouquet of flowers. When she had gathered an armful she began to tie them up with her ribbon.

No sooner did she unroll it but it flew from her hands, and in its path there appeared a beautiful garden, full of fruit trees, laden with fruit, and flowers of all the colours of the rainbow.

Truly, the fairy had not deceived them, but had amply rewarded their generosity.

*Told by Ferdinand Le Jallé, from *Theix**