

# THE THREE BROTHERS AND THEIR SISTER

Once upon a time there lived a clogmaker and his wife. They had three sons and were expecting their fourth child.

Because they were very poor the clogmaker grew afraid that he would not be able to feed them all. One day he said to his wife:

“Wife, if your fourth child is a boy, we shall tighten our belts, and manage as best we can. However, if it is a girl I shall kill our three elder children, and leave only her.”

His wife was filled with fear and she called her sons to her.

“Go my children,” she said. “Take a walk in the forest, and when you return, if you see a pair of trousers fastened to the chimney then a boy has been born, and you may come in. If there is a dress on the chimney, a girl has been born, and your father will already be sharpening his knife to kill you. You will have to run away into the woods.”

The little boys spent all that day in the forest. The next morning they returned to their home and saw a dress fastened to the chimney. Then they knew that they had to flee, and they went into the depths of the wood, and people heard no more of them.

The years passed away, and there was now plenty of bread in the clogmaker’s cottage. The brothers were never spoken of, even though the mother often sighed over them, and the little girl was never told about what had happened.

When she was about nine years old, she went to her mother.

“Where are my three brothers?” she asked. “I long to embrace them. Tell me where they have gone and I will go to them.” Her mother began to cry.

“God only knows where they have gone,” she said. “And a little girl like you could not find them.”

Still the little girl’s longing grew and grew and one day she set off without telling her parents. She walked through the land, asking everyone she met if they had heard of her brothers. At last she met an old woman who felt sorry for her.

“No, my dear,” she said. “I cannot tell you where your brothers are, for I do not know. However, I can help you to find them. Take this ball of yarn

and let it roll out before you, whilst saying ‘Roulet, pellennig, ke ne gavein me zri brérig’ (Roll, little ball, so long as I have not met my three brothers). Wherever they are hiding, it will lead you there.”

The little girl rolled out the ball of yarn, and it led her to a clearing in which stood a small hut. The hut was empty, but a cauldron of soup was simmering over the fire, and the table was laid for three people.

“I am tired and hungry,” said the little girl. “Even if the owners are angry with me, I must stop here.”

She entered the hut and, seeing a chest in the corner, hid inside it. No sooner had she closed the lid, but the owners of the hut returned. They were three young men, and they were all very angry.

“What a wretched life we lead here, in this forest,” said the first. “How could our father be so cruel as to turn out three children?”

“Yes, and all for the sake of a sister who nobody wanted,” said the second.

“If the little minx fell into our hands our father would be made to regret his cruelty to us,” said the third.

The little girl saw that she had indeed been led to the house of her three brothers. When they had eaten, the elder two went out hunting. The youngest stayed behind to put things in order.

The little girl gently lifted the lid of the chest, and jumped out.

“Dearest brother, I am your sister,” she said. “I heard your unkind words. Do you truly wish to kill me for something which is not my fault?”

The young man stared at her in wonder, and then rushed to embrace her.

“No, neither I nor my brothers will kill you,” he said. “Your love for us brought you here, and we would be men without hearts if we did you any harm.”

When the other brothers came home they said the same thing.

“Stay here with us,” they said. “Having been separated so long will only make us love you the more. While we go out hunting you can prepare our meals. All we ask is that you never let the fire go out. If you do, you will have to seek the help of our neighbour, the Caragine, who lives across the clearing. He will certainly slay you, for he loves to eat human beings.”

The child promised to remember their words, and the brothers and sister lived very happily together for some time.

The maiden never forgot the Caragine, and while she was cooking she often muttered: “You shalt not have me today, cruel Caragine.”

One day she stayed in the wood for a long time, listening to the song of

a bird. When she returned home the fire was out. Full of sorrow, she went to the home of the Caragine. He lived in a deep cave, and the door was made of iron. As soon as she knocked upon the door, it flew open, and the Caragine stood before her. He had black hair and glowing eyes. When he saw the maiden he seized her by the arm.

“I have been hungry a long while,” he said. “Come into my palace and I will have a fine meal.”

“I cannot protect myself from you,” said the maiden. “But if you kill me, my three brothers are not afraid of you and they will be revenged.”

“Do you mean the three hunters in the forest?” said the Caragine.

“Yes, I am their sister.” said the girl. The Caragine looked afraid.

“What do you want me to do for you?” he asked.

“My fire has gone out; I want you to help me relight it.”



“That is easy enough,” said the Caragine. “But I do not give something for nothing. There is nothing I like so well as human blood. If I help you, you must give me a drop of yours every day.”

The maiden agreed and returned home with an ember with which to relight her fire. Henceforward she went every day to the Caragine. She passed her little finger through the keyhole in the iron door, and the Caragine drank a drop of blood. After a month the maiden grew so pale that her brothers asked her if she was ill. She told them what had happened and they swore to be revenged.

“Tell the Caragine that you are growing too weak to go to him, and that henceforward he must come here,” they said. “You can leave the rest to us.”

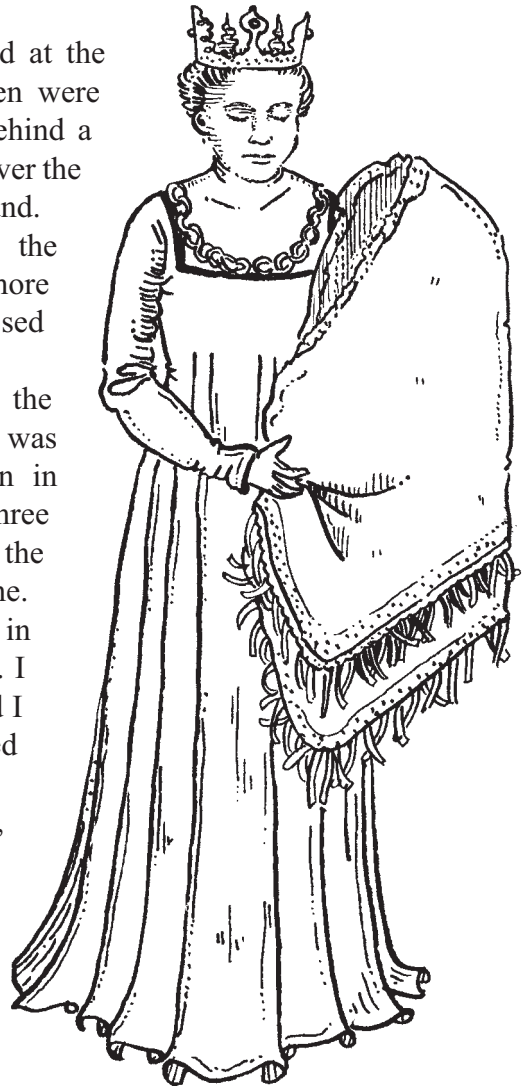
The next day the Caragine arrived at the hut. He thought that the young men were from home but they were hiding behind a door, with an axe. When he stepped over the threshold, they felled him to the ground.

With the death of the Caragine the brothers and their sister had no more to fear, and several more years passed happily away.

One day word reached them that the King was preparing to go to war. He was calling together all the young men in his kingdom to go and fight. The three brothers would have to obey, and the poor little sister would be left all alone.

“Dear God,” she said. “I cannot live in this wild forest without my brothers. I would rather they became sheep, and I could watch over them, as they grazed on the heath.”

Immediately her wish came true, and the young men were changed into sheep. One day, as they were grazing on the heath, the King’s son rode by. He stopped in surprise to see someone so lovely in such a place.



“In all my father’s court there is no one so beautiful as this shepherdess,” he said. “Tell me, will you be my wife?”

“I will,” said the girl. “All I ask is that I can bring my three sheep with me to live in the court.”

The King’s son agreed and the marriage was celebrated. A year later the maiden gave birth to a boy.

The King’s son began to look amongst the neighbouring kings for a godfather, but his wife said, “I will have the oldest sheep, and no other.”

It was a strange request but no one had the heart to refuse her.

Soon the King’s son received a second surprise. No sooner was the baby christened but the three sheep changed into handsome young men.

Now instead of the animals in his stables, the King’s son had three valiant companions. Although they had refused to fight for him, he made them his chief ministers and put them in command of his army, and they all lived together in great happiness for many years.

*Told by Madame Le Govic, of Bieuzy*