

AN ENGINEERED TALE

(A Grimm Fairy Tale)

by Dennis Denby

Once upon a time, there were two young brothers, Jacob and Wilhelm, who lived in a house in the forest. Jacob, who was the eldest, and Wilhelm lived with their family and were very poor. Though they were brothers, they were different as night and day. Jacob tended to daydream and was known for his great imagination and stories, while Wilhelm was more serious, with great curiosity and love of text books. One Friday night as Jacob was imagining great adventures and Wilhelm studied his books, a flash of light crossed their bedroom window. Thinking it might be an alien ship (Jacob), or an atmospheric anomaly (Wilhelm), the boys dashed to the window and threw back the threadbare curtains. By the fading day's light, the boys could just make out a young girl with a strong flashlight and basket wandering through the woods. The girl was indeed quite beautiful, and had flowing golden locks of hair.

"She must be a princess," whispered Jacob to himself.

"I have never in my life seen such a magnificent flashlight!" declared Wilhelm. "I must get a closer look!"

Being a cold and damp night, Wilhelm grabbed his worn jacket and backpack and, with Jacob on his heels, dashed out of the house and into the evening to follow the beautiful young woman.

The young girl was obviously lost, looking this way and that way, and in time heard the boy's footsteps behind her.

"Who goes there?!" she turned and shouted into the darkening forest.

"Do not be afraid; it is only I, Wilhelm, and my brother Jacob. We saw your light from our window, and came to see the source."

The young girl was relieved to find friendly companions in the dark forest, and asked them for directions to her grandmother's house. "For tomorrow is my grandmother's birthday, a day that we share, and I am taking her these treats. We were even born at the same time, at 8:10 in the morning!"

"8:10 on 12/14", thought Wilhelm. "What a wonderful arithmetic sequence!" Wilhelm did not know the way, but said, "I am sure that I can help you find your grandmother's house. If you lend me your flashlight, I will show you the way."

The young girl gladly obliged, and the trio went down the dark, wooded trail together.

A short time later, they came upon a rickety wooden bridge. Under the bridge lived an odd little fellow who was dancing on the muddy stream bank, singing a song:

"Today I bake, tomorrow brew,
The next I'll have the queen's young child.
Ha, glad am I that no one knew
That Rumpelstiltskin I am styled"

"What a perfect match," declared Jacob. "Such an odd little fellow with an equally odd name!"

Wilhelm could see that the bridge was in no shape to carry the three of them across it. "Say, little fellow, is this your bridge?"

"What business is it of yours?!" shouted the startled little man. "Go away, for it IS my bridge, and you may not cross without paying my toll!"

Wilhelm carefully looked at the bridge. "Your bridge is a simple span with supports that fall in the waterway, where they are easily washed away. If you use a truss design, formed by equilateral triangles, you can have a longer and stronger span that will go from bank to bank. You can even cover it to protect the wood and make it last longer. If we help you, may we cross?"

The little man could not refuse the chance to improve his bridge, and gladly let Wilhelm build him another. The brothers and young girl cut and hammered all night until the bridge was done. The strange little man waved them across and laughed at his cleverness.

A short time later, the trio came to a fork in the path.

"Do you know where we go from here?" said the girl.

Wilhelm and Jacob had never been this deep in the forest before, and had never seen this fork.

"Yes, we take the right fork to get to your grandmother's house," Wilhelm boldly said. They had just gone a short distance when they heard a blood-curdling howl, and turned to see a pair of evil, yellow eyes in the dark shadows of the trees.

"The woods are a dangerous place for strangers," the wolf growled. "Perhaps you are lost?"

"Why yes, kind sir, we are....." But Wilhelm cut the girl off. "We are going to grandmother's house, and don't need your help to get there!"

The girl looked closer at the fiendish wolf. "My, what big ears you have!" she exclaimed.

"All the better to hear with, my child," glared the wolf. "But as you wish, sir, I will be back to my chore. But beware of bears and other hungry creatures of the forest. They may not be as kind as I. I haven't time for you now, as I have an appointment with some pig-friends of mine," the wolf sneered. "I must finish twisting these vines into rope. But I dare say that you haven't seen the last of me!"

Feeling fortunate that the wolf was preoccupied, the trio quickly traveled up the lane, and soon came upon a magnificent palace that could only belong to a king. But in front of this beautiful castle sat the most pitiful sight - a sobbing, heartbroken woman, closely holding her infant in her arms.

"Is the child sick, madam?" the young girl softly asked.

The startled woman looked up at them. "No, young child, it is worse. My beautiful baby is healthy and well, but I will lose him to a horrible little man if I do not guess the wretched man's name. I have exhausted all the resources of my kingdom, but have not yet correctly guessed. Tomorrow the small devil comes back, and will surely take my child!" With that the queen again erupted into a sea of tears.

Jacob, who had absorbed all of this, told the queen of the little man by the river, and his odd song and name. The queen thanked them profusely, and offered food and water to them, and for the girl's basket.

Their stomachs full and spirits lifted, the three happily forged ahead. As they traveled, they noticed along the side of the path what was left of a small straw hut. It looked as if it had been struck by a terrible wind. A short distance farther, another fallen hut appeared, this time made of sticks. Just around the next bend, they saw a stout looking brick hut, with three small pigs busily scurrying about. The nervous pigs were desperately trying to cover the top of the chimney with straw and sticks. When they saw the three young people, the pigs told them their tale of a wicked wolf with evil, yellow eyes that had destroyed two of their homes, and had promised to return and destroy this home and eat them as well. While Jacob marveled at the pig's tale, Wilhelm told them of the wolf they encountered, and the rope the wolf was making.

"Instead of covering the chimney with those useless sticks and straw, why not let the wolf come down the chimney into a big, boiling pot?!"

The pigs squealed with delight, and thanked the children. They brought in all the sticks and straw, and started the biggest and hottest fire they could make.

The girl asked if they could hurry, as the hour was getting late and they had not yet found her grandmother's house. The path they followed

rose up a great slope, which the three struggled to climb. At long last they came to the top, and saw a pleasant little house. The mailbox said "Bears x 3", and they could smell just a trace of honey in the air. They had traveled a great distance since breakfast, and were all suddenly very hungry.

"Can we knock and see if we could get a bite to eat?" pleaded the golden-haired girl.

But on the front door was a small sticker that read "PROTECTED BY ACME ALARM SERVICE". Wilhelm could see a motion detector installed by the front door, and was sure it would set off an alarm if they passed by it. He quickly took out the girl's flashlight, snapped it on, and shone it directly on the detector. The three carefully walked by while the detector was disabled by the light. As they ate some delicious porridge they found in the kitchen, Wilhelm told them of the poor construction of the furniture he observed in the simple house, while Jacob could only imagine what would happen if the bears returned to find them there!

Once again with full stomachs, the trio set off down the path. Soon they saw a small farm by a river, but no farm animals were in the pasture. Between the river and the home was the largest beanstalk that anyone had ever seen, and across the river was a great stand of trees. Suddenly, a woman appeared from around the corner, frantically muttering to herself. She was so preoccupied with her worries that she almost ran right into Jacob!

"What worries you so, madam?" the girl asked.

"Oh child, my son has climbed this stalk against my wishes, and I fear that he has come to harm. He has told me of a giant ogre that lives in the sky, and how he seeks children to eat!" Jacob marveled at the tale. Before they could respond, the ground began to shake. They all looked up and saw a small boy carrying a goose shimmy down the great stalk. As their gaze continued upward, they could just make out what look to be a giant boot where the beanstalk met the top of the clouds.

"Quick, we must hide. The ogre is coming!!" panted the boy.

As Wilhelm looked at the thick beanstalk, he knew they had no time to cut it down. He glanced over the river, and saw a team of woodcutters working in the timber. He ran to them as fast as he could, and had them cut the stand of riverbank trees so they fell into the river. One after another, the trees fell until the river was dammed. As the water rose, it flooded the field and saturated the ground around the stalk. As the giant ogre shook the ground and stalk, slowly the massive beanstalk began to sway. With each earth-shaking step that the ogre took, the thick beanstalk swayed more and

more, and loosed in the saturated soil. Just as the ugly head of the ogre cleared the clouds, the beanstalk shuddered and fell, killing the giant!

"What a magnificent story!" thought Jacob.

"I know you!" exclaimed the girl to one of the woodcutters. "You cut in the woods by my grandmother's house!!"

"Yes ma'am" the woodsman said, "Her house is the next one around the bend."

With that, the three raced to the house, and threw open the door to find her grandmother and other grandchildren there, celebrating the birthday. The grandmother was overjoyed to see her granddaughter, as well as her new friends. She quite enjoyed the wonderful tales that Jacob told of their adventures, but no more than the children, who hung on every word that Jacob uttered.

But Wilhelm tired of the nonsense and the exaggerated tales that his brother spun. "Jacob Grimm, will you tell the story right! You've made our adventure into a fairy tale!" he finally exclaimed in frustration.

But the grandmother patted poor Wilhelm on the head and said "Oh Wilhelm let your brother go. Look how the children love this Grimm's fairy tales!"

"Worthless stories," muttered Wilhem. "Who cares about such nonsense?!"

With that, Wilhelm went on to complete his studies in engineering and happily work long hours to make life better and safer for the public in ways that they may never know or may never appreciate.

Jacob, armed with his vivid imagination and wonderful tales of adventure, wrote and published his famed fairy tales that untold generations of children read and enjoy.

Such is the story of the Grimm brothers, each fulfilling their dreams in very different ways - or perhaps not as different as one might first think! For the world would undoubtedly be poorer without each, and that, dear friend, is the moral of this story!