

MUSIC MIND GAMES[®]

Fairies

By Charles Perrault



For my ninth birthday, my sister, Linda, gave me a book called *The Fairy Tale Book*¹. It is a large book with delicate illustrations where my imagination and I spent many happy hours together. The last story is called, “Fairies”.

Once there was a widow who had two girls. The oldest daughter was just like her mother, who was spiteful and mean. The younger girl was generous and gentle, as her father had been, and she was perfectly beautiful as well. Like likes like they say, and the mother loved the older girl dearly. She hated the younger girl who did the housework and cooking for the three of them.

Twice a day the younger girl went to the well for water. She walked a mile each way, carrying a heavy jugful each time. One day at the well a poor old woman asked her for a drink. “With pleasure, ma’am,” she said, and smiled prettily. She rinsed out her pitcher, and filled it with clear water. Then she held the heavy pitcher as the old woman drank. The woman thanked her. She said, “Because you’re helpful and gentle, I will give you a gift. Every time you speak, a precious jewel or a beautiful flower will spring from your lips.” Then she vanished. She was a fairy who had come to test the girl’s good heart.

With her pitcher full, the girl went home. Her mother scolded her for being so long at the fountain. “I’m sorry, Mother,” said the girl. As she spoke, two roses, two pearls, and two diamonds fell from her lips.

“What’s that?” screeched the mother. “Where do they come from?” The girl was both obedient and truthful. She explained what had happened. In the telling, she spread a carpet of diamonds and flowers about her.

“That stupid fairy made a mistake,” said her mother. “Fairy gifts are too good for a loon like you. They should have been given to your clever big sister. Next time, she will go after the water.” That afternoon the mother said to her elder girl, “You’ll fetch the water today.”

“I will not,” shouted the mean girl.

“You will too,” shouted her mean mother. She finally went. But she left the big pitcher at home. Instead she carried a tiny silver creamer. At the well was a lady in beautiful clothes. The lady asked for a drink. “I’m no servant,” said the rude girl. “This is my pitcher, not yours. Get your own drink if you’re thirsty.”

“Very well,” said the lady, who was the fairy in a new disguise. “I’ll give you a gift to suit your manners. Every time you speak, a toad or a snake will slither from your mouth.” Her mother was waiting for the girl to return. When she saw her, she cried, “Well, daughter?”

“Well, mother?” shouted the rude girl. Two toads and a snake squirmed from her mouth.

“What’s that?” cried her mother. When she heard what had happened, she flew into a fury.

“It’s your fault,” she screamed at the younger girl. Then she chased her out with a broom. The poor girl ran into the forest to hide. The king’s son was coming home from hunting. He saw the beautiful girl leaning against a tree trunk and weeping. He stopped, and said, “What’s wrong, my dear? Why do you weep?”

“My mother put me out,” she said. At each word, pearls and diamonds fell from her lips and blazed in the grass at her feet. “What a marvelous thing,” exclaimed the king’s son. “Do tell me why this happens.” She told him about the fairy at the well. As he listened, he fell in love with her beauty and her good heart. He led her home to his palace. They were married and reigned happily for years and years and years.

As for her older sister, she grew nastier every day. Even her mother couldn’t abide her, especially since she filled the house with slippery, sloppy, slithering things whenever she spoke. At last she left her mother’s house, and wandered up and down the world, alone. No one would have anything to do with her, ever.

Besides using this story to guide my choice of words in my everyday life, I used it to help my own children speak kindly to each other. Although we had our share of toads and snakes to toss out the back door on any given day, I do have quite a collection of jewels and flowers that I treasure. Of course, it’s a guide on how we speak when interacting with others, especially when teaching, so hurtful words do not pass our lips. Furthermore we can guide our students and parents to speak with kindness, humor and encouragement.

¹ *The Fairy Tale Book* (Golden Press, Inc.), © 1958, p. 155 Charles Perrault (1628-1703), a French author who wrote *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella*, *Puss in Boots*, and *The Sleeping Beauty* based on pre-existing folk tales.