

The Fish and the Ring

*Adapted by
Gerald P. Murphy*

“The Fish and the Ring” is a fairy tale,
one of many collected by Joseph Jacobs
in his book, *English Fairy Tales*.

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STORY OF THE PLAY

Baroness Agatha, a rich and powerful noblewoman, visits a hermit to get a glimpse of the future for her newborn son, Alex. The hermit reveals that Alex will marry Marie, a mere peasant's daughter. The Baroness will have none of this! She arranges to buy the infant, intending to kill her. Marie, however, somehow survives being thrown into a river and ends up being raised by a fisherman and his wife.

Fifteen years later, the Baroness, Alex and several of their servants take refuge in the same fisherman's hut during a storm. When Alex sees Marie, he instantly falls in love with her.

Once again, Agatha tries to trick the fates by ordering Marie off on a trip with a sealed envelope with orders for Agatha's brother to kill Marie. Luckily, a helpful innkeeper intercepts the letter and changes it to read that Marie must marry Alex immediately.

When Agatha discovers that the wedding she has been fighting has taken place, she takes Marie to a high cliff. She throws Marie's ring into the sea, and says she can only return to Alex if she can return the ring. Fearing for her life, Marie flees to another country.

Finally, Alex and his mother visit the Queen of Westphalia where Marie is the principal cook. While eating the fish dish, Alex chokes on something – Marie's wedding ring. Agatha now sees she can no longer thwart the fates and apologizes for her attempts to keep the two lovers apart. Marie forgives her and the play ends with Alex kissing Marie, his true love.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(approx. 3 m, 8 w, 5 flex; doubling possible)

MOTHER: Greedy peasant. (Sc. 1)
FATHER: Her equally greedy husband. (Sc. 1)
BARONESS AGATHA: Rich and powerful noblewoman.
GRETCHEN: Obsequious servant to Baroness Agatha.
HANNAH: Another.
HERMIT: Holder of the Book of Fate. (Sc. 1)
FISHERMAN: Marie's adoptive father.
WARDEN: Gamekeeper and friend of Fisherman.
FISHWIFE: Marie's adoptive mother. (Sc. 2)
INNKEEPER: Old girlfriend of the Warden. (Sc. 3)
MARIE: Fated to marry Alex.
ALEX: Son of Baroness Agatha.
QUEEN ALICIA: Queen of Westphalia. (Sc. 5)
FRITZ: Queen Alicia's servant. (Sc. 5)
JILL: Another. (Sc. 5)
JOAN: Another. (Sc. 5)
WILLY: Another. (Sc. 5)

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Scene 1: In the forest and in the hut of Marie's birth parents.
Scene 2: The Fisherman's hut, 15 years later.
Scene 3: An inn on the way to Bremen, a day or two later.
Scene 4: The Baroness' estate, several days later.
Scene 5: Queen Alicia's castle, several months later.

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PROPS

baby doll wrapped in blue blankets for Agatha
large book for Hermit
simple cloth sack heavy with gold for Agatha
baby doll wrapped in pink blanket for Mother
fishing pole and a bucket filled with fish for Fisherman
hoods and cloaks for the royal party
small table for Fisherman's hut
cups on a platter for Marie
pouch for Warden containing paper and quill pen
old-fashioned broom for Innkeeper
2 cots with blankets
rope and blindfold for Agatha
long table and several chairs for Queen's castle
goblets, plates, silverware, and covered dishes for a feast
ornate woman's ring (pre-set on dinner plate)

Scene 1

(AT RISE: BARONESS AGATHA enters stage left with two servants, GRETCHEN and HANNAH. Agatha carries a baby wrapped in blankets.)

AGATHA: Have you ever seen such a perfect little baby boy?

GRETCHEN: Indeed, we haven't, Baroness Agatha, and we don't just say that because we are your servants.

HANNAH: He's quite the beauty, he is! He has the perfect eyes and the unblemished skin of an angel!

AGATHA: I really can't imagine a child on earth as wonderful as my little Alex!

GRETCHEN: Nor can we, Baroness Agatha! Nor can we!

AGATHA: Are you sure we have the right directions for this?

HANNAH: Yes, I'm certain, Baroness. The old hermit lives here in the Valley of Desolation.

GRETCHEN: And this same hermit can read from the Book of Fate to tell you the future of your handsome little child!

HANNAH: He can tell you everything that is in the Book of Fate, and that book sees the future for us all!

AGATHA: How will the hermit know we seek him? Should we yell for him?

HERMIT: *(Entering from stage right with a large book.)* Is someone looking for me?

AGATHA: Are you the hermit who reads the Book of Fate?

HERMIT: I am, indeed.

AGATHA: How did you know we were here for you?

HERMIT: Simple. It was written in the Book of Fate. What knowledge is it that you seek?

AGATHA: I have a newborn son, a beautiful product of nobility. I wish to look into the future to see whom my son will marry.

HERMIT: I will consult the Book of Fate.

AGATHA: *(Looking over his shoulder.)* But there are no words in your book. There are only blank pages!

HERMIT: The Book of Fate is blank for all but me. Only I can read the empty pages of the future.

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AGATHA: Then read for me my son's future. Whom shall he marry?

(HERMIT consults the book, fanning through pages until he finally stops.)

HERMIT: He shall marry a peasant's daughter from the village of Riverton. Her name is Marie.

HANNAH: A peasant's daughter?

GRETCHEN: Surely there must be a mistake!

AGATHA: My son is of the nobility. He must marry within his ranks. There can be no diluting of royal blood with a mere peasant, you crusty botch of nature!

HERMIT: He shall marry a peasant's daughter. It is written in the Book of Fate. Nothing can change his future.

AGATHA: But this is impossible. I will not have my son marry into a family of unwashed inferiors. He comes from an honorable family. I shall not have our reputation and our bloodline contaminated with such an unwholesome mongrel girl, some ugly snot-nosed barnacle!

HERMIT: Many have tried to change Fate, but Fate has never been thwarted!

HANNAH: Then Fate has never met the Baroness Agatha!

GRETCHEN: And Fate is in for a rude awakening!

AGATHA: We will go from this hideous place and I will change Fate by destroying the defective peasant baby named Marie! What do you say to that, Hermit?

HERMIT: *(Exiting stage left.)* Whatever you do, fate never changes!

AGATHA: *(Exiting stage right with OTHERS.)* We'll see about that, Hermit! We'll see about that!

(Lights dim momentarily, then FATHER and MOTHER enter stage left.)

FATHER: Now is the time, I tell you! Now is the time!

MOTHER: What are you saying?

FATHER: Now is the time we cut our losses and get a little profit in this game.

End of Freeview

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