

Nancy Fairy

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
from *Ananzi Tales*

There was once an old woman called 'Nancy Fairy'. She was a witch, and used to steal all the little babies as soon as they were born, and eat them. One day she stole a little baby, who was so beautiful that she had not the heart to eat her; but she took her home and brought her up. She called her 'daughter', named her 'Nancy Fairy', after herself, and the girl called the old woman 'Granny'.

So the girl grew up, and the more she grew the more beautiful she got.

The old woman never let her daughter know of her doings; but one day when she had brought a baby home, and had locked herself in a room, her daughter peeped through a chink to see what she was about, and the old woman saw her shadow, and thought her daughter had seen what she was doing, and the daughter thought her granny had seen her, and was very much afraid.

So the old woman asked her, 'Nancy Fairy, did you see what I was doing?'

'No, Granny.'

She asked the girl several times, 'Nancy Fairy, did you see what I was doing?' and the girl always said, 'No, Granny.'

So the old woman took her up to a hut in a wood, and left her there as a punishment; and she took her food every day.

One day it happened that the king's servant, going that way, saw the beautiful girl come out of the hut. Next day he went again and saw the same beautiful girl again. So he went home and told the prince that he could show him in the wood a girl more beautiful than he had ever seen. The prince went and saw the girl, and then sent a band of soldiers to fetch her home, and took her for his bride.

A year after she had a baby. Soldiers were set to keep guard at the gate, and the room was full of nurses; but in the middle of the night

the old woman came in a whirlwind and put them all to sleep. She stole the child, and on going away gave the mother a slap on the mouth which made her dumb.

Next morning there was a great stir, and they said the mother had eaten the child. There was a trial, but the mother was let off that time.

Next year she had another baby, and the same thing happened again. The old woman came in the middle of the night in a whirlwind, and put them all to sleep. She stole the child, and struck the mother on the mouth, which made it bleed.

In the morning there was a stir; and the servant maid, who was jealous, said the mother had eaten the child. All believed it, as her mouth was covered with blood; and, besides, what would be expected of a girl brought out of the wood? So she was tried again, and condemned to be hanged.

Invitations were sent out to all the grand folk to come and see her hanged; so many fine carriages came driving up. At last, just before the time, there came a very grand carriage, all of gold, which glistened in the sun. In it were the old woman and two children, dressed in fine clothes, with the king's star on them. When the queen saw this grand carriage she got her speech and sung,

'Do spare me till I see that grand carriage.'

The old woman came into the courtyard, and asked the people if they saw any likeness to any one in the children. They said, 'they were like the prince', and asked her how she came by them, and told her she had stolen them. She said she had not stolen them; she had taken them, for they were her own; the prince had taken away her daughter without her leave, and so she had taken his children; but she was willing to give them back, if they would allow that she was right.

So they consented, and the old woman made the prince and his queen a present of the grand carriage, and so they lived happily. The old woman was allowed to come and see the children whenever she liked. But the servant girl, who said the queen had eaten her babies, was hanged.