

## THE CROW

Once upon a time there were three Princesses who were all three young and beautiful; but the youngest, although she was not fairer than the other two, was the most loveable of them all. About half a mile from the palace in which they lived there stood a castle, which was uninhabited and almost a ruin, but the garden which surrounded it was a mass of blooming flowers, and in this garden the youngest Princess used often to walk. One day when she was pacing to and fro under the lime trees, a black crow hopped out of a rose-bush in front of her. The poor beast was all torn and bleeding, and the kind little Princess was quite unhappy about it. When the crow saw this it turned to her and said: 'I am not really a black crow, but an enchanted Prince, who has been doomed to spend his youth in misery. If you only liked, Princess, you could save me. But you would have to say good-bye to all your own people and come and be my constant companion in this ruined castle. There is one habitable room in it, in which there is a golden bed; there you will have to live all by yourself, and don't forget that whatever you may see or hear in the night you must not scream out, for if you give as much as a single cry my sufferings will be doubled.' The good-natured Princess at once left her home and her family and hurried to the ruined castle, and took possession of the room with the golden bed. When night approached she lay down, but though she shut her eyes tight sleep would not come. At midnight she heard to her great horror some one coming along the passage, and in a minute her door was flung wide open and a troop of strange beings entered the room. They at once proceeded to light a fire in the huge fireplace; then they placed a great cauldron of boiling water on it. When they had done this, they approached the bed on which the trembling girl lay, and, screaming and yelling all the time, they dragged her towards the cauldron. She nearly died with fright, but she never uttered a sound. Then of a sudden the cock crew, and all the evil spirits vanished. At the same moment the crow appeared and hopped all round the room with joy. It thanked the Princess most heartily for her goodness, and said that its sufferings had already been greatly lessened. Now one of the Princess's elder sisters, who was very inquisitive, had found out about everything, and went to pay her youngest sister a visit in the ruined castle. She implored her so urgently to let her spend the night with her in the golden bed, that at last the good-natured little Princess consented. But at midnight, when the odd folk appeared, the elder sister screamed with terror, and from this time on the youngest Princess insisted always on keeping watch alone. So she lived in solitude all the daytime, and at night she would have been frightened, had she not been so brave; but every day the crow came and thanked her for her endurance, and assured her that his sufferings were far less than they had been. And so two years passed away, when one day the crow came to the Princess and said: 'In another year I shall be freed from the spell I am under at present, because then the seven years will be over. But before I can resume my natural form, and take possession of the belongings of my forefathers, you must go out into the world and take service as a maidservant.' The young Princess consented at once, and for a whole year she served as a maid; but in spite of her youth and beauty she was very badly treated, and suffered many things. One evening, when she was spinning flax, and had worked her little white hands weary, she heard a rustling beside her and a cry of joy. Then she saw a handsome youth standing beside her; who knelt down at her feet and kissed the little weary white hands. 'I am the Prince,' he said, 'who you in your goodness, when I was wandering about in the shape of a black crow, freed from the most awful torments. Come now to my castle with me, and let us live there happily together.' So they went to the castle where they had both endured so much. But when they reached it, it was difficult to believe that it

was the same, for it had all been rebuilt and done up again. And there they lived for a hundred years, a hundred years of joy and happiness.