





*Nasty fairy tales from across the globe featuring
real fairies, horrible trolls, cannibalism,
bestiality, ghosts, shapeshifters and a changeling child,
amongst other horrors. Adults only.*

Viktor Wynd



DARK
FAIRY
TALES



*Stories from Around the World
(That Are Definitely Not Suitable for Children)*

illustrated by
Luciana Nedelea

PRESTEL

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*For the three most beautiful princesses in the world,
Daphne, Phoebe and Leonora, who must not read this book until
they are older. (You will know the stories, for I
have told them to you many times – just not all the details.)*

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Viktor Wymd
at his desk -
Suffolk, June 2024

INTRODUCTION

ON FAIRY TALES

*Ask me who I am, Ask me who I am
I'm a Tinker, a Deep Tinker*

*Ask me who I am, Ask me who I am
I'm a Tailor, a Story Tailor*

*Ask me who I am, Ask me who I am
I'm a Baker, a Master Baker.*

I do not know what fairy tales are, where they come from, who wrote them, or who they belong to, but what I *do* know is a lot of stories. I have listened to and learnt stories wherever I have travelled, since I was a child on my grandmother's knee.

People have noses for things that really interest them. Some will always be able to find a good pub, a good restaurant, a football game, a hairdresser, orchids, birds, or even a good TV show. (I rarely watch TV. It's not that I don't like it, it's just that I can't find good things to watch. They do exist, I know – I've seen amazing things on TV – but most of the things I try to watch are boring and bad, and I'd much rather read a book. I can

always find a good book.) My nose is for stories. Wherever I go and wherever I look, I seem to find them.

None of the stories in this book are *my* stories; whose they are, I do not know. Sometimes I can tell you when or where I first heard them on my travels, but as I have heard so many of them from different people in different places at different times (and even sometimes read in books), I may not be a reliable witness.

My wife says she doesn't believe a word I say, that I am a congenital liar. I say that I am a storyteller; that some people are fraudsters, con men, crooks and bastards, and some people are writers. These stories, I believe, are living

things in themselves. They travel from host to host, like a virus. And like a virus, they change and mutate, they retell themselves in our heads. Sometimes when I open my mouth to tell a story, I have no idea what will come out or where it came from. The characters seem to be running around inside my head, speaking for themselves, and the story itself takes over. Other times, the story will come out word for word as it was told to me. I don't know how and I don't know why, but that's how it is.

One thing I want you to know is that there is nothing original within these pages. The stories may be horrible, but it is not *my* horror. My editor insists that here I must add an explanation for anything that you may find offensive. I am no Walt Disney and these are no saccharine retellings; they are raw in blood and lust and magic. They may be offensive – indeed they often *are* offensive – but that is the way of the world. What one culture at one time enjoys, another finds repellent.

For example, I will sit on the floor of a Sepik spirit house in New Guinea and eat enormous wriggling sago beetle larvae and I will not judge (even if it is not my favourite dish in the world – there's always a taste there that somehow reminds me of poo, and I'm not so keen on things wriggling in my mouth... well, not so keen on my *food* wriggling in my mouth, at any rate). So I will listen to stories, and I will not judge.

Please, gentle reader, remember that these stories were around before we were born and will be around long after we are dead. If you are of a timid disposition, do not read. If you *enjoy* being offended, read on. But please, I pray of you, do not be offended with *me* – accept my apologies. These are not my stories, not my sins; they've all happened, all will happen again.

In these stories, there may be monsters, and they may or may not be of the Other World. Those from the Other World might be easier to understand, but as we all know well, within churches and schools, strange country houses and behind firmly-locked doors lurk all manner of evils. So if we venture back to the time of these stories, a time without the modern state and concept of law universally applied, these evils must be magnified.

There ought to be fairies in a fairy tale, I think. They don't always have them, but as long as they have an ogre, a shapeshifter, or a magical being, I will be content. Most societies across the world have these creatures, and in many places I travel, they are as real to the locals as double-decker buses or post boxes are to us Brits. I think, indeed I *know*, that they are all real. For the purpose of this book I will merely say that a fairy tale is one in which people interact with the Other World in some shape or form, though there may be a story or two that takes place wholly there. We

will see. Fairy tales flow with the logic of dreams. People, things, places, all come and go for no apparent reason – but in their own world, they make perfect sense.

Wherever I have been in the world I have heard stories, and I have always been a traveller (or a tourist; I am quite happy with either designation). When I was a child, there was a vast map of the world on the kitchen wall of my parents' North London flat – though we only ventured as far as the continent a handful of times. I, meanwhile, looked at the map and dreamt. I read every book that Gerald Durrell and David Attenborough had written. I read travellers' tales, from Ibn Battuta to John Mandeville. There was a huge world out there that I wanted to see when I was older (before becoming Robert Musil, Salvador Dalí and world king, rolled into one).

The first choice I was given as an almost-adult was what to study at university. I chose Islamic history at London's School of Oriental and African Studies. True, it was not travelling, but it was all about the far away world. I lived frugally in a tiny room in a council flat and saved up so I could visit the places I'd only read about. I've been travelling ever since, and learning stories. My feet are itchy; I cannot sit still.

In 2018 I started my travel agency, Gone with the Wynd, because I needed to travel, and the places I wanted to go to and the things I wanted to do were too expensive to go to alone. You need

guides, porters, cooks, boats and cars, and the cost for one person is not much different as for six. I cannot afford to go alone, so I take people, and I try to go to places where few, if any, other agencies go, specialising in New Guinea and West Africa. I have spent my whole life dreaming of these places, but why do so few people want to come with me? (Conversely, those that do come say it's because they don't have any friends that like to travel.) The truth is that people who *need* to travel, travel. They will always find a way.

For people like me, travelling and collecting interesting things are linked psychological conditions. My home has long since filled up, so I have a museum in east London called the Viktor Wynd Museum of Curiosities, Fine Art & UnNatural History, now equally overflowing with wonders. When I have to be in England, I can look (you can come and look with me) at my treasures and travel in my mind. But I digress: I don't want to lose you, dear gentle reader. Come with me to fairy land – turn the page and start my book.

(If there are any children reading this, they need to stop now. This is not a Ladybird book; these are not tales for young and tender ears.)



HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

In olden days, the storyteller took the place of yesterday's books and today's television; everyone listened to us and we were everywhere. In the sad, gloomy and lifeless modern world, we have been displaced. But we are still there if you go looking for us, surviving on the edges.

Some say that to write a story down kills it. I don't agree, as long as no one thinks that there is a correct version of a tale, and there are no qualifications. Anyone can, and indeed *should*, tell stories, no audience needed (though it can be rather nice).

I would like this book to be used in a certain way, my dear gentle reader. I would be delighted if you lay in bed and read it to yourself at night. But really, you should first read it aloud to

the person next to you, on the phone to a friend, or to your cat. (Do not worry if the person looks bored, or even falls asleep. I tell my children stories until they fall asleep. I tell my wife stories, though perhaps she only pretends to be asleep in the hope that I will shut up. I tell strangers stories, though of course it is the stories that are using me as a vessel to tell themselves.)

Next, you should tell the story to someone without the book being there. Let it live in your mind, let it tell itself, and let it come out as a whole new story – or perhaps it is the same story.

At the end of the book are some instructions for telling stories. You shouldn't need them; it should be innate. But sometimes, a nudge is as good as a wink.



WALES



*Perfect was Gweir's prison in the Faery Fort.
Due to the ministry of Pwyll and Pryderi
none before him had entered therein.
In the heavy blue chain a faithful servant kept him
and for the Spoils of Annwfn keenly he chanted
and unto Doom shall continue in bard-orison.
Three fulnesses of Prydwen we entered in:
Save for seven none came up from Fort Faery.*

Taliesin



Memories from when I am very small are vague. Some are as clear as yesterday. Others have been told and retold among my family so many times that it's not always clear if I am remembering the actual event or just its discussion; if the vision in my mind comes from memory or just from photographs.

I do remember that I only visited my great-grandmother Topsy in Wales once. She lived in a tiny cottage high in the hills above Harlech in Snowdonia. I can see it now. Even though it was summer, it was raining. It might only have been five miles from the caravan park by the dunes where we stayed, but it took over an hour of twisting, turning lanes, of opening gates and driving through fields of sheep, to get there.

The cottage was nestled in the mountains, and smoke came out of the chimney. We parked and crossed the ancient stone hearth. It was made up of two rooms, with a fireplace in the centre that heated them both. One room held a bed, a great sofa, some faded black-and-white family photos of grim-looking people in black suits, a rocking chair and a great wardrobe. We went into the other room – the kitchen – to sit around the table. (Or rather, first to the loo – it was a long drive and I was a small boy. I remember the loo because, even in those days, it was unusual for it to be outside. I also remember the cottage as being without electricity or running water, but my older brother says this is nonsense, it couldn't have had a loo and not had running water. Besides, there was a sink in the kitchen. Where I remember a cauldron over a fire, he remembers a coal-fired kitchen stove with an oven and a hot top where the kettle boiled.) The rest I have heard so many times at family gatherings,

to much laughter, that either it must be true or it must be a good story – but I'm not sure that I remember it.

My father had to remind his grandmother who he was. She grunted, then he said he'd brought her newest great-grandson – me – to visit. She grunted again and said, 'Let's have a look at him.' Then she said something to me in Welsh. I didn't reply, so she turned to my father and, in English, asked if I spoke Welsh. 'Of course not, Granny,' he replied. She turned her back on me and supposed that my parents would like a cup of tea. She'd never been interested in my father, because, he said, he did not speak Welsh and she hated the English. (Which is odd because it is not a common Welsh sentiment. However, once upon a time she had had an English husband and he, family memory says, was not very nice.) My brother and I played in the stream and then we drove back to the caravan. My father said we'd spent more time driving there and back than with her, and we didn't need to see her again. She'd never liked him and wasn't interested in us anyway.

We didn't go to Harlech again. Instead we went to the Brecon Beacons. We'd camp in Farmer Davies's field, the same field my father had camped in with his friends when he was at the university. When it rained, which it seemed to do more often than not, Mrs Davies would invite us into the fine old farmhouse with slate floor to sit by the fire in the kitchen and eat toasted teacakes or buttered toast. Sometimes, the farmer's mother, old Mrs Davies, would be there, and she used to tell us stories: stories of dragons, Pwyl, Pryderi, Manawydan and Merlin. One particularly wet summer, when it rained like it had never rained before, I spent a lot of time with old Mrs Davies and filled an exercise book with her stories – but then my tent flooded, and the book was ruined. Some of these stories I remember her first telling me when I was a little boy. Others I have picked up along the way.

Two last memories I have of Wales as a child: my first sight of a yellow wagtail, bobbing and waving on the rocks in the stream, and high tea at the farm. Young Mrs Davies brought a great dish of roast potatoes to the table and, looking at me, said, 'You don't like these, do you?' But oh how I *loved*, and still love, roast potatoes. Sarcasm is wasted on children.



Vekker Wynd's
goat-herd's cottage
Burn Crook,
1980

*Our little girl does not want to go down the mine.
The Christian does not want the little people – the pooka – to be fed.
But who will have the power? Who will have the glory?*

The Pooka and the Old Ways Triumph Over the Christian



ong, long ago – perhaps as long ago as the time the blessed saints Julian and Aaron were martyred – the people of Great Orme, next to what is now Llandudno, were copper miners. Life was hard on the grim north coast of Wales. It was not possible to scratch a good living from farming, but scratching down beneath the rocks, they'd found copper. Everyone worked down the mines and everyone lived well, but they did not work alone, for the pooka lived in the mines and helped them. I can't describe a pooka because I have never seen one, but they are still about, I'm told. Every description I have ever heard is different. Some say they are very small; others say they are very big. They are like us, but they are not us. They change their shapes and become animals, but when they look like us, there's often something slightly wrong – they're mischievous, they think in the moment, act quickly – so perhaps they'll still be all covered with fur, have a tail, a hare's ears, a dog's nose, or some other thing about them that makes you realise they are of the otherworld.

