

# The Singing Bone

and other tales of Aarne-Thompson-Uther type 780  
translated and/or edited by



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## 1. The Singing Bone

### Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

A wild boar was wreaking havoc throughout the country. No one dared venture into the forest where it ran about. With its tusks it ripped to pieces anyone who was bold enough to pursue it and attempt to kill it. Then the king proclaimed that anyone who could kill the boar would receive his daughter for a wife.

There were three brothers in the kingdom. The oldest was sly and clever; the second was of ordinary intelligence; but the third and youngest was innocent and slow witted. They wanted to win the princess, so they set forth to seek out the wild boar and kill it.

The two oldest ones went together, while the youngest one went by himself. When he entered the woods an old man approached him. He was holding a black lance in his hand, and said to him, "Take this lance and fearlessly attack the boar with it, and you will kill it." And that is what happened. He struck the boar with the lance, and it fell dead to the earth. Then he lifted it onto his shoulder, and cheerfully set off toward home.

On the way he came to a house where his brothers were making merry and drinking wine. When they saw him with the boar on his back, they called to him, "Come in and have a drink with us. You must be tired." The innocent simpleton, not thinking about any danger, went inside and told them how he had killed the boar with the black lance, and rejoiced in his good fortune. That evening they returned home together. The two oldest ones plotted to kill their brother. They let him walk ahead of them, and when they came to a bridge just outside the city, they attacked him, striking him dead. They buried him beneath the bridge. Then the oldest one took the boar, carried it to the king, claimed that he had killed it, and received the princess for a wife.

Many years passed, but it was not to remain hidden. One day a shepherd was crossing the bridge when he saw a little bone beneath him in the sand. It was so pure and snow-white that he wanted it to make a mouthpiece from, so he climbed down and picked it up. Afterward he made a mouthpiece from it for his horn, and when he put it to his lips to play, the little bone began to sing by itself:

Oh, dear shepherd  
You are blowing on my bone.  
My brothers struck me dead,  
And buried me beneath the bridge,  
To get the wild boar  
For the daughter of the king.

The shepherd took the horn to the king, and once again it sang the same words. After hearing this, the king had his people dig under the bridge, and they soon uncovered the skeleton. The two wicked brothers confessed their crime and were thrown into the water. The murdered brother's bones were laid to rest in a beautiful grave in the churchyard.

- Source: Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, [Der singende Knochen](#), *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Berlin: Realschulbuchhandlung, 1812), no. 28, pp. 119-22.
- In 1819, with the second edition of their *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, the Grimms introduced numerous stylistic changes to "The Singing Bone" and reduced the number of brothers in the tale to two.
- Link to an English translation of [the final version of "The Singing Bone."](#)

- Link to the final version in the original German: "Der singende Knochen," [\*Kinder- und Hausmärchen\*, 7th edition, vol. 1 \(Göttingen: Verlag der Dieterichschen Buchhandlung, 1857\), no. 28, pp. 149-51.](#)

## 2. The Singing Bones

### French Louisiana

Once upon a time there lived a man and a woman who had twenty-five children. They were very poor. The man was good, the woman was bad. Every day when the husband returned from his work the wife served his dinner, but always meat without bones.

"How is it that this meat has no bones?"

"Because bones are heavy, and meat is cheaper without bones. They give us more for the money."

The husband ate, and said nothing.

"How is it you don't eat meat?"

"You forget that I have no teeth. How do you expect me to eat meat without teeth?"

"That is true," said the husband, and he said nothing more, because he was afraid to grieve his wife, who was as wicked as she was ugly.

When one has twenty-five children one cannot think of them all the time, and one does not see if one or two are missing. One day, after his dinner, the husband asked for his children. When they were by him he counted them, and found only fifteen. He asked his wife where were the ten others. She answered that they were at their grandmother's, and every day she would send one more for them to get a change of air. That was true, every day there was one that was missing.

One day the husband was at the threshold of his house, in front of a large stone which was there. He was thinking of his children, and he wanted to go and get them at their grandmother's, when he heard voices that were saying:

Our mother killed us,  
Our father ate us.  
We are not in a coffin,  
We are not in the cemetery.

At first he did not understand what that meant, but he raised the stone and saw a great quantity of bones, which began to sing again. He then understood that it was the bones of his children, whom his wife had killed, and whom he had eaten. Then he was so angry that he killed his wife, buried his children's bones in the cemetery, and stayed alone at his house.

From that time he never ate meat, because he believed it would always be his children that he would eat.

- Source: Alcée Fortier, [\*Louisiana Folk-Tales in French Dialect and English Translation\*](#) (Boston and New York: Published for the American Folk-Lore Society by Houghton, Mifflin and Company, 1895), [no. 17, p. 61](#).
- Fortier's source: "Informant, old negress, 77 Esplanade Avenue [New Orleans]."

### 3. Under the Green Old Oak-Tree

#### Antigua

Dis a nice little story. Der woman had two chil'ren. One was a boy, an' der oder was a girl. De fader a dese chil'ren die. Moder decide to marry again. She marry to anoder man. Each day dese chil'ren did go to de mountain to get flowers. Dey went on dis day. Girl had a better bucket den what de broder got. Dey comin' wid de flowers.

On his way home, de boy stop wid de gal. He t'inkin' some evil plan. Want dis bucket which was his sister. She would not consent to gi' him dis bucket. He t'ink it best to kill der sister. He kill de sister. He kill dis girl near to a big oak-tree. An' he hide her dere.

After he kill her, he go home. Can't give no account a he sister. Dey all went to search for de girl, but none can find her.

Der broder stay home. Month gone. Shepherd-boy dat is comin' down de mountain meet a big bone like a flute. He pick dis bone under dat same tree. He took up de bone an' play. Comin' home wid de flock, he play on de bone. It play a sweet tune:

My broder has killed me in de woods, an' den he buryth me.  
My broder has killed me in de woods, an' den he buryth me  
Under de green ol' oak-tree, an' den he buryth me.

Dat's all it could play. It play sweet, you know. Comin' home, all dat hear dis tune beg de boy for a play on it. He give dem a play. Now he way down de mountain. Mos' to where de moder is livin'. He meet de moder. She ask him for a play. He give her a play. As quick as she play, t'ing say:

My dear moder, my dear moder, it my dead bone you play.  
My dear moder, my dear moder, it my dead bone you play.

She drop an' faint, but never die. All de people was lookin' for de girl. Dis broder meet de boy. He ask him for a play. Take de bone an' start. T'ing say:

My broder, it is you dat has killed me.  
My broder, it is you dat has killed me.

An' dere he faints an' dies. Dat is de end a da green ol' oak-tree.

- Source: John H. Johnson, "Folk-Lore from Antigua, British West Indies," [\*The Journal of American Folk-Lore\*](#), vol. 34 (1921), [no. 27, pp. 70-71](#).
- Johnson's source: George W. Edwards, 50 years old, a native of Greenbay, Antigua.

## 4. The Griffin

### Italy

There was once a king who had three sons. His eyes were diseased, and he called in a physician who said that to cure them he needed a feather of the griffin. Then the king said to his sons, "He who finds this feather for me shall have my crown."

The sons set out in search of it.

The youngest met an old man, who asked him what he was doing. He replied, "Papa is ill. To cure him a feather of the griffin is necessary. And papa has said that whoever finds the feather shall have his crown."

The old man said, "Well, here is some corn. When you reach a certain place, put it in your hat. The griffin will come and eat it. Seize him, pull out a feather, and carry it to papa."

The youth did so, and for fear that someone should steal it from him, he put it into his shoe, and started all joyful to carry it to his father. On his way he met his brothers, who asked him if he had found the feather. He said, "No," but his brothers did not believe him, and wanted to search him. They looked everywhere, but did not find it. Finally they looked in his shoe and got it. Then they killed the youngest brother and buried him, and took the feather to their father, saying that they had found it. The king healed his eyes with it.

A shepherd one day, while feeding his sheep, saw that his dog was always digging in the same place, and went to see what it was, and found a bone. He put it into his mouth, and saw that it sounded and said, "Shepherd, keep me in your mouth, hold me tight, and do not let me go! For a feather of the griffin, my brother has played the traitor, my brother has played the traitor."

One day the shepherd, with his whistle in his mouth, was passing by the king's palace, and the king heard him, and called him to see what it was. The shepherd told him the story, and how he had found it. The king put it to his mouth, and the whistle said, "Papa! Papa! Keep me in your mouth, hold me tight, and do not let me go. For a feather of the griffin, my brother has played the traitor, my brother has played the traitor."

Then the king put it in the mouth of the brother who had killed the youngest, and the whistle said, "Brother! Brother! Keep me in you mouth, hold me fast, and do not let me go. For a feather of the griffin, you have played the traitor, you have played the traitor."

Then the king understood the story and had his two sons put to death. And thus they killed their brother and afterwards were killed themselves.

- Source: Thomas Frederick Crane, *Italian Popular Tales* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1885), [no. 8, pp. 40-41](#).

## 5. The Dead Girl's Bone

### Switzerland

Once there was a king who died. His wife and two children, a girl and a boy, were still alive. Then one day they asked the mother which of them should someday become king. She said to them, "Dear children, go out into the woods together and look for a certain flower. The first one of you to find it will someday become king."

So the two set forth together, and while searching in the woods they separated, and the girl was the first one to find the flower. She thought she would wait for her brother, so she put the flower in her hand, closed it in God's name, and lay down in the shade.

Then the boy came to her. He had not found the flower, but when he saw it in his sister's hand, a terrible thought came to him: "I will murder my sister, take the flower home with me, and then I will become king."

That is what he thought, and that is what he did. He killed her and buried her in the woods, covering with earth so that no one would know what had happened.

Many years later a shepherd boy who was there tending his sheep found one of the girl's bones lying on the ground. He made a few holes in it like a flute, and blew into it. Then the bone began to sing ever so sadly and told the entire story how the girl had been killed by her brother. To hear the song would bring tears to your eyes.

One day a knight came by where the boy was playing the flute. He bought the flute and played it wherever he went in the land. Finally the old queen heard the knight and became very sad. She had her son removed from the throne, and she mourned for the rest of her life.

- Source: Otto Sutermeister, "s'Todtebeindli," *Kinder- und Hausmärchen aus der Schweiz* (Aarau: H. R. Sauerländer, 1873), [no. 39, pp. 119-120](#).

## 6. The Little Bone

### Switzerland

Many years ago a wicked man lived in a pasture hut. Like other herdsmen, he spent the summer there with his cattle. He was quick tempered and arrogant. He had a poor servant boy, whom he tormented in every possible way with hard work, rough words, and cruel blows. One day he gave the boy a task to do which beyond the his strength. He was then overcome by such anger that he grabbed the boy and thrust his head into a kettle of milk that was being boiled in order to separate it. Thus the boy died, and the herdsman threw his body into a mountain creek. Back at home he said, "The stupid boy must have been carried away by a rockslide. He went off to milk the goats, but never came back."

Many years passed, and the boys' bones hung unavenged on a cliffy bank of the mountain creek. From time to time a particularly strong rush of water would pick up one of the little bones, play with it for a while, and then leave it lying on a remote bank.

Once it happened that there was a fair in the valley. Everyone was making merry. The wicked herdsman, drugged by the wine, music, and dance, had lost all humility and good sense, and was reveling in his sinfulness. It was too hot for him inside, so he went out to the creek, which, swollen by a heavy, warm rain, was rushing by much stronger than usual. He kneeled down and took off his hat to scoop up some water. He drank the water that had run into his hat, but at the bottom he found a small white bone. He stuck it onto his hat and returned to the hall.

Suddenly the little bone began to bleed; and now everyone knew what had happened to the boy. The festivities were quickly brought to a close, and the evildoer was taken forthwith to the place of execution.

- Source: Otto Sutermeister, "Das Knöchlein," [\*Kinder- und Hausmärchen aus der Schweiz\*](#) (Aarau: H. R. Sauerländer, 1873), [no. 14, pp. 42-43](#).
- It was widely believed in medieval Europe that a murdered corpse (or any of its parts) would bleed in the presence of the murderer. A few examples:
  1. The Icelandic legend [Murder Will Out](#), included in the present collection.
  2. Siegfried's body bleeds when approached by Hagen, thus providing legal proof of the latter's guilt. ([The Nibelungenlied](#), chapter 17)
  3. A [superstition from England](#) recorded in the nineteenth century.
  4. [The Parent Murderer of Salzwedel](#), a legend from Germany.

## 7. Binnorie

### England

Once upon a time there were two king's daughters who lived in a bower near the bonny mill dams of Binnorie. And Sir William came wooing the eldest and won her love, and plighted troth with glove and with ring. But after a time he looked upon the youngest, with her cherry cheeks and golden hair, and his love went out to her until he cared no longer for the eldest one. So she hated her sister for taking away Sir William's love, and day by day her hate grew and grew and she plotted and she planned how to get rid of her.

So one fine morning, fair and clear, she said to her sister, "Let us go and see our father's boats come in at the bonny mill stream of Binnorie."

So they went there hand in hand. And when they came to the river's bank the youngest got upon a stone to watch for the beaching of the boats. And her sister, coming behind her, caught her round the waist and dashed her into the rushing mill stream of Binnorie.

"Oh sister, sister, reach me your hand!" she cried, as she floated away, "and you shall have half of all I've got or shall get."

"No, sister, I'll reach you no hand of mine, for I am the heir to all your land. Shame on me if I touch her hand that has come 'twixt me and my own heart's love."

"Oh sister, oh sister, then reach me your glove!" she cried, as she floated further away, "and you shall have your William again."

"Sink on," cried the cruel princess, "no hand or glove of mine you'll touch. Sweet William will be all mine when you are sunk beneath the bonny mill stream of Binnorie." And she turned and went home to the king's castle.

And the princess floated down the mill stream, sometimes swimming and sometimes sinking, until she came near the mill. Now the miller's daughter was cooking that day, and needed water for her cooking. And as she went to draw it from the stream, she saw something floating towards the mill dam, and she called out, "Father! father! draw your dam. There's something white -- a merrymaid or a milk white swan -- coming down the stream." So the miller hastened to the dam and stopped the heavy cruel mill wheels. And then they took out the princess and laid her on the bank.

Fair and beautiful she looked as she lay there. In her golden hair were pearls and precious stones; you could not see her waist for her golden girdle, and the golden fringe of her white dress came down over her lily feet. But she was drowned, drowned!

And as she lay there in her beauty a famous harper passed by the mill dam of Binnorie, and saw her sweet pale face. And though he traveled on far away he never forgot that face, and after many days he came back to the bonny mill stream of Binnorie. But then all he could find of her where they had put her to rest were her bones and her golden hair. So he made a harp out of her breast bone and her hair, and traveled on up the hill from the mill dam of Binnorie, until he came to the castle of the king her father.

That night they were all gathered in the castle hall to hear the great harper: king and queen, their daughter and son, Sir William, and all their court. And first the harper sang to his old harp, making them joy and be glad, or sorrow and weep just as he liked. But while he sang he put the harp he had made that day on a stone in the hall. And presently it began to sing by itself, low and clear, and the harper stopped and all were hushed.

And this was what the harp sung:

Oh yonder sits my father, the king,  
Binnorie, oh Binnorie;  
And yonder sits my mother, the queen;  
By the bony mill dams o' Binnorie.

And yonder stands my brother Hugh,  
Binnorie, oh Binnorie;  
And by him, my William, false and true;  
By the bonny mill dams o' Binnorie.

Then they all wondered, and the harper told them how he had seen the princess lying drowned on the bank near the bonny mill dams o' Binnorie, and how he had afterwards made this harp out of her hair and breast bone. Just then the harp began singing again, and this was what it sang out loud and clear:

And there sits my sister who drownèd me  
By the bonny mill dams o' Binnorie.  
And the harp snapped and broke, and never sang more.

- Source: Joseph Jacobs, [\*English Fairy Tales\* \(London: David Nutt, 1890\), no. 9, pp. 44-47.](#)

## 8. Murder Will Out

### Iceland

Once upon a time, in a certain churchyard, some people who were digging a grave, found a skull with a knitting-pin stuck through it from temple to temple. The priest took the skull and preserved it until the next Sunday, when he had to perform service.

When the day came, the priest waited until all the people were inside the church, and then fastened up the skull to the top of the porch. After the service the priest and his servant left the church first, and stood outside the door, watching carefully everybody that came out. When all the congregation had passed out without anything strange occurring, they looked in to see if there was any one still remaining inside. The only person they saw was a very old woman sitting behind the door, who was so unwilling to leave the church, that they were compelled to force her out.

As she passed under the porch, three drops of blood fell from the skull on to her white head-dress, and she exclaimed, "Alas, murder will out at last!"

Then she confessed, that having been compelled to marry her first husband against her will, she had killed him with a knitting-pin and married another.

She was tried for the murder, though it had happened so many years back, and condemned to death.

- Source: Jón Árnason, [\*Icelandic Legends\*](#) (London: Richard Bentley, 1864), [pp. 155-56](#).

## **9. The Silver Plate and the Transparent Apple**

### **Russia**

There lived once a peasant with his wife and three daughters. Two of these girls were not particularly beautiful, while the third was sweetly pretty. However, as she happened to be a very good girl, as well as simple in her tastes, she was nicknamed Simpleton, and all who knew her called her by that name, though she was in reality far from being one.

Her sisters thought of nothing but dress and jewelry. The consequence was that they did not agree with their younger sister. They teased her, mimicked her, and made her do all the hard work. Yet Simpleton never said a word of complaint, but was ready to do anything. She fed the cows and the poultry. If anyone asked her to bring anything, she brought it in a moment. In fact, she was a most obliging young person.

One day the peasant had to go to a big fair to sell hay, so he asked his two eldest daughters what he should bring them.

"Bring me some red fustian to make myself a sarafan [coat without sleeves]," said the eldest.

"Buy me some yards of nankeen to make myself a dress," said the second.

Simpleton meanwhile sat in a corner looking at her sisters with great eagerness. Though she was a simpleton, her father found it hard to go away without asking her what she would like him to bring her, so he asked her too.

"Bring me, dear father," said she, "a silver plate and a transparent apple to roll about on it."

The father was rather astonished, but he said nothing and left.

"Whatever made you ask for such rubbish?" asked her sisters laughing.

"You will see for yourselves when my father brings them," said Simpleton, as she left the room.

The peasant, after having sold his hay, bought his daughters the things they had asked for, and drove home. The two elder girls were delighted with their presents and laughed at Simpleton, waiting to see what she intended doing with the silver plate and transparent apple.

Simpleton did not eat the apple, as they at first thought she would, but sat in a corner pronouncing these words, "Roll away, apple, roll away, on this silver plate. Show me different towns, fields, and woods, the seas, the heights of the hills, and the heavens in all their glory."

Away rolled the apple, and on the plate became visible, towns, one after another. Ships were seen sailing on the seas. Green fields were seen. The heights of the hills were shown. The beauty of the heavens and the setting of the sun were all displayed most wonderfully.

The sisters looked on in amazement. They longed to have it for themselves and wondered how they could best get it from Simpleton, for she took such great care of it, and would take nothing in exchange.

At last one day the wicked sisters said coaxingly to Simpleton, "Come with us, dear, into the forest and help us pick strawberries."

Simpleton gave the plate and the apple to her father to take care of and joined her sisters. When they arrived at the forest they set to work picking wild strawberries. After some time the two elder sisters suddenly came upon a spade lying on the grass. They seized it, and while Simpleton was not looking they gave her a heavy blow with the spade. She turned ghastly pale, and fell dead on the ground.

They took her up quickly, buried her under a birch tree, and went home late to their parents, saying, "Simpleton has run away from us. We looked for her everywhere but

cannot find her. She must have been eaten up by some wild beasts while we were not looking."

The father, who really had a little love for the girl, became very sad, and actually cried. He took the plate and apple and locked them both up carefully in a glass case. The sisters also cried very much and pretended to be very sorry, though the real reason was that they found out that they were not likely to have the transparent apple and plate after all, but would have to do all the hard work themselves.

One day a shepherd, who was minding a flock of sheep, happened to lose one, and went into the forest to look for it, when suddenly he came upon a hillock under a birch tree, round which grew a number of red and blue flowers, and among them a reed.

The young shepherd cut off the reed and made himself a pipe. But what was his astonishment when the moment he put the pipe to his mouth, it began to play by itself, saying, "Play, play, little pipe. Comfort my dear parents, and my sisters, who so cruelly misused me, killed me, and buried me for the sake of my silver plate and transparent apple."

The shepherd ran into the village greatly alarmed, and a crowd of people soon collected round him asking him what had happened. The shepherd again put the pipe to his mouth, and again the pipe began to play of itself.

"Who killed whom, and where, and how?" asked all the people together, crowding round.

"Good people," answered the shepherd, "I know no more than you do. All I know is that I lost one of my sheep and went in search of it, when I suddenly came upon a hillock under a birch tree with flowers round it, and among them was a reed, which I cut off and made into a pipe, and the moment I put the thing into my mouth it began to play of itself, and pronounce the words which you have just heard."

It so happened that Simpleton's father and sisters were among the crowd and heard what the shepherd said.

"Let me try your pipe," said the father, taking it and putting it into his mouth.

And immediately it began to repeat the words, "Play, play, little pipe. Comfort my dear parents, and my sisters, who misused, killed, and buried me for the sake of the silver plate and transparent apple."

The peasant made the shepherd take him to the hillock at once. When they got to it they began to dig open the hillock, where they found the dead body of the unfortunate girl. The father fell on his knees before it and tried to bring her back to life, but all in vain.

The people again began asking who it was that killed and buried her, whereupon the pipe replied, "My sisters took me into the forest and slew me for the silver plate and transparent apple. If you want to wake me from this sound slumber, you must bring me the water of life from the royal fountain."

The two miserable sisters turned pale and wanted to run away, whereupon the people seized them, tied them together, and marched them off to a dark cell, where they locked them up until the king should pronounce judgement on them.

The peasant went to the palace and was brought before the king's son, and falling upon his knees before the prince, he related the whole story. Whereupon the king's son told him to take as much of the water of life from the royal fountain as he pleased. "When your daughter is well, bring her to me," continued the prince, "and also her evil-minded sisters."

The peasant was delighted. He thanked the young prince and ran to the forest with the water of life. After he had sprinkled the body several times with the water, his daughter woke up and stood before him, prettier than ever. They embraced each other tenderly, while the people rejoiced and congratulated the happy man.

Next morning the peasant went with his three daughters to the palace and was brought before the king's son.

The young prince, when he beheld Simpleton, was greatly struck with her beauty and asked her at once to show him the silver plate and transparent apple.

"What would your highness like to see?" asked the girl, bringing forward her treasures. "Would you like to know whether your kingdom is in good order, or if your ships are sailing, or whether there is any curious comet in the heavens?"

"Anything you like, sweet maiden."

Away rolled the apple round about the plate, on which became visible soldiers of different arms, with muskets and flags, drawn up in battle array. The apple rolled on, and waves rose, and ships were seen sailing about like swans, while flags waved in the air. On rolled the apple, and on the plate the glory of the heavens was displayed. The sun, moon, and stars, and various comets were seen.

The king's son was greatly astonished and offered to buy the plate and apple, but Simpleton fell on her knees before him, exclaiming, "Take my silver plate and my apple. I want no money and no gifts for them, if you will only promise to forgive my sisters."

The young prince was so moved by her pretty face and her tears that he at once forgave the two wicked girls. Simpleton was so overjoyed that she threw her arms round their necks and tenderly embraced them.

The king's son took Simpleton by the hand and said, "Sweet maiden, I am so struck by the great kindness you have shown your sisters after their cruel treatment of you, that I have decided (provided you agree to it) to have you for my wife, and you shall be known henceforth as the *Benevolent Queen*."

"Your highness does me great honor," said Simpleton, blushing. "But it lies in my parents' hand. If they do not object, I will marry you."

It is needless to say that neither parent objected, but gave their consent and blessing.

"I have one more request to ask your highness," said Simpleton, "and that is to let my parents and sisters live with us in the palace."

The young prince made no objection whatever to this proposal (though most probably he felt sorry for it afterwards; however, the story does not say anything about that). The sisters threw themselves at Simpleton's feet, exclaiming that they did not deserve such kindness after all that they had said and done to her.

Next day the marriage was celebrated, and crowds of people ran about everywhere crying out, "Long live our king and queen!"

From that day *Simpleton* was no more, but the BENEVOLENT QUEEN reigned in her stead.

- Source: Edith M. S. Hodgetts, [\*Tales and Legends from the Land of the Tzar: Collection of Russian Stories\*](#), 2nd edition (London: Griffith Farran and Company, 1891), [pp. 14-20](#).
- Hodgetts, who was born and raised in Russia, does not give a specific source for this tale. In her introduction she states, with reference to her sources, "Some of these tales were dictated in the original Russian at school, others were related to me by my nurse and other servants of my father's household, while some are translations which I have made from various collections of Russian stories current among the people. (p. vii)

## 10. Little Anklebone

### Pakistan

Once upon a time there was a little boy who lost his parents; so he went to live with his auntie, and she set him to herd sheep. All day long the little fellow wandered

barefoot through the pathless plain, tending his flock, playing his tiny shepherd's pipe from morn till eve.

But one day came a great big wolf, and looked hungrily at the small shepherd and his fat sheep, saying, "Little boy! shall I eat you, or your sheep?"

Then the little boy answered politely, "I don't know Mr. Wolf; I must ask my auntie."

So all day long he piped away on his tiny pipe, and in the evening, when he brought the flock home, he went to his auntie and said, "Auntie dear, a great big wolf asked me today if he should eat me, or your sheep. Which shall it be?"

Then his auntie looked at the wee little shepherd, and at the fat flock, and said sharply, "Which shall it be? Why, you, of course!"

So next morning the little boy drove his flock out into the pathless plain, and blew away cheerfully on his shepherd's pipe until the great big wolf appeared. Then he laid aside his pipe, and, going up to the savage beast, said, "Oh, if you please, Mr. Wolf, I asked my auntie, and she says you are to eat me."

Now the wolf, savage as wolves always are, could not help having just a spark of pity for the tiny barefoot shepherd who played his pipe so sweetly, therefore he said kindly, "Could I do anything for you, little boy, after I've eaten you?"

"Thank you!" returned the tiny shepherd. "If you would be so kind, after you've picked the bones, as to thread my ankle-bone on a string and hang it on the tree that weeps over the pond yonder, I shall be much obliged."

So the wolf ate the little shepherd, picked the bones, and afterwards hung the ankle-bone by a string to the branches of the tree, where it danced and swung in the sunlight.

Now, one day, three robbers, who had just robbed a palace, happening to pass that way, sat down under the tree and began to divide the spoil. Just as they had arranged all the golden dishes and precious jewels and costly stuffs into three heaps, a jackal howled. Now you must know that thieves always use the jackal's cry as a note of warning, so that when at the very same moment Little Anklebone's thread snapped, and he fell plump on the head of the chief robber, the man imagined some one had thrown a pebble at him, and, shouting "Run! run! We are discovered!" he bolted away as hard as he could, followed by his companions, leaving all the treasure behind them.

"Now," said Little Anklebone to himself, "I shall lead a fine life!"

So he gathered the treasure together, and sat under the tree that drooped over the pond, and played so sweetly on a new shepherd's pipe, that all the beasts of the forest, and the birds of the air, and the fishes of the pond came to listen to him. Then Little Anklebone put marble basins round the pond for the animals to drink out of, and in the

evening the does, and the tigresses, and the she-wolves gathered round him to be milked, and when he had drank his fill he milked the rest into the pond, till at last it became a pond of milk. And Little Anklebone sat by the milken pond and piped away on his shepherd's pipe.

Now, one day, an old woman, passing by with her jar for water, heard the sweet strains of Little Anklebone's pipe, and following the sound, came upon the pond of milk, and saw the animals, and the birds, and the fishes, listening to the music. She was wonderstruck, especially when Little Anklebone, from his seat under the tree, called out, "Fill your jar, mother! All drink who come hither!"

Then the old woman filled her jar with milk, and went on her way rejoicing at her good fortune. But as she journeyed she met with the king of that country, who, having been a-hunting, had lost his way in the pathless plain.

"Give me a drink of water, good mother," he cried, seeing the jar; "I am half dead with thirst!"

"It is milk, my son," replied the old woman; "I got it yonder from a milken pond."

Then she told the king of the wonders she had seen, so that he resolved to have a peep at them himself. And when he saw the milken pond, and all the animals and birds and fishes gathered round, while Little Anklebone played ever so sweetly on his shepherd's pipe, he said "I must have the tiny piper, if I die for it!"

No sooner did Little Anklebone hear these words than he set off at a run, and the king after him. Never was there such a chase before or since, for Little Anklebone hid himself amid the thickest briars and thorns, and the king was so determined to have the tiny piper, that he did not care for scratches. At last the king was successful, but no sooner did he take hold of Little Anklebone than it began to thunder and lighten horribly, whilst the little piper himself began to sing these words:

Oh why do you thunder and lighten, dark heavens?  
Your noise is as nothing to what will arise,  
When the does that are waiting in vain for the milking,  
Find poor Little Anklebone reft from their eyes!

Whereupon the King, seeing that it really was nothing but an ankle-bone after all, let it go.

So the little piper went back to his seat under the tree by the pond, and there he sits still, and plays his shepherd's pipe, while all the beasts of the forest, and birds of the air, and fishes of the pond, gather round and listen to his music. And sometimes, people wandering through the pathless plain hear the pipe, and then they say, "That is Little Anklebone, who was eaten by a wolf ages ago!"

- Source: F. A. Steel and R. C. Temple, [\*Wide-Awake Stories: A Collection of Tales Told by Little Children, Between Sunset and Sunrise, in the Panjab and Kashmir\*](#), (Bombay: Education Society's Press; London: Trübner and Company, 1884), [pp. 127-31](#).
- Steel's and Temple's source: a small boy from the wilds of the Gujranwala District in Punjab, Pakistan ([pp. 362-63](#)).

## 11. The Magic Fiddle

### India

Once upon a time there lived seven brothers and a sister. The brothers were married, but their wives did not do the cooking for the family. It was done by their sister, who stopped at home to cook. The wives for this reason bore their sister-in-law much ill will, and at length they combined together to oust her from the office of cook and general provider, so that one of themselves might obtain it. They said, "She does not go out to the fields to work, but remains quietly at home, and yet she has not the meals ready at the proper time." They then called upon their bonga, and vowing vows unto him they secured his goodwill and assistance; then they said to the bonga, "At midday, when our sister-in-law goes to bring water, cause it thus to happen, that on seeing her pitcher, the water shall vanish, and again slowly reappear. In this way she will be delayed. Let the water not flow into her pitcher, and you may keep the maiden as your own."

At noon when she went to bring water, it suddenly dried up before her, and she began to weep. Then after a while the water began slowly to rise. When it reached her ankles she tried to fill her pitcher, but it would not go under the water. Being frightened she began to wail and cry to her brother:

Oh! my brother, the water reaches to my ankles,  
Still, Oh! my brother, the pitcher will not dip.

The water continued to rise until it reached her knee, when she began to wail again:

Oh! my brother, the water reaches to my knee,  
Still, Oh! my brother, the pitcher will not dip.

The water continued to rise, and when it reached her waist, she cried again:

Oh! my brother, the water reaches to my waist,  
Still, Oh! my brother, the pitcher will not dip.

The water still rose, and when it reached her neck she kept on crying:

Oh! my brother, the water reaches to my neck,  
Still, Oh! my brother, the pitcher will not dip.

At length the water became so deep that she felt herself drowning, then she cried aloud:

Oh! my brother, the water measures a man's height,  
Oh! my brother, the pitcher begins to fill.

The pitcher filled with water, and along with it she sank and was drowned. The bonga then transformed her into a bonga like himself, and carried her off.

After a time she reappeared as a bamboo growing on the embankment of the tank in which she had been drowned. When the bamboo had grown to an immense size, a jogi, who was in the habit of passing that way, seeing it, said to himself, "This will make a splendid fiddle."

So one day he brought an ax to cut it down; but when he was about to begin, the bamboo called out, "Do not cut at the root, cut higher up." When he lifted his ax to cut high up the stem, the bamboo cried out, "Do not cut near the top, cut at the root." When the jogi again prepared himself to cut at the root as requested, the bamboo said, "Do not cut at the root, cut higher up;" and when he was about to cut higher up, it again called out to him, "Do not cut high up, cut at the root." The jogi by this time felt sure that a bonga was trying to frighten him, so becoming angry he cut down the bamboo at the root, and taking it away made a fiddle out of it. The instrument had a superior tone and delighted all who heard it. The jogi carried it with him when he went a begging, and through the influence of its sweet music he returned home every evening with a full wallet.

He now and then visited, when on his rounds, the house of the bonga girl's brothers, and the strains of the fiddle affected them greatly. Some of them were moved even to tears, for the fiddle seemed to wail as one in bitter anguish. The elder brother wished to purchase it, and offered to support the jogi for a whole year if he would consent to part with his wonderful instrument. The jogi, however, knew its value, and refused to sell it.

It so happened that the jogi some time after went to the house of a village chief, and after playing a tune or two on his fiddle asked for something to eat. They offered to buy his fiddle and promised a high price for it, but he refused to sell it, as his fiddle brought to him his means of livelihood. When they saw that he was not to be prevailed upon, they gave him food and a plentiful supply of liquor. Of the latter he drank so freely that he presently became intoxicated. While he was in this condition, they took away his fiddle, and substituted their own old one for it. When the jogi recovered, he missed his instrument, and suspecting that it had been stolen asked them to return it to him. They denied having taken it, so he had to depart, leaving his fiddle behind him. The chief's son, being a musician, used to play on the jogi's fiddle, and in his hands the music it gave forth delighted the ears of all who heard it.

When all the household were absent at their labors in the fields, the bonga girl used to come out of the bamboo fiddle, and prepared the family meal. Having eaten her own share, she placed that of the chief's son under his bed, and covering it up to keep off the dust, reentered the fiddle. This happening every day, the other members of the household thought that some girl friend of theirs was in this manner showing her interest in the young man, so they did not trouble themselves to find out how it came about. The young chief, however, was determined to watch, and see which of his girl friends was so attentive to his comfort. He said in his own mind, "I will catch her today, and give her a sound beating; she is causing me to be ashamed before the others." So saying, he hid himself in a corner in a pile of firewood. In a short time the girl came out of the bamboo fiddle, and began to dress her hair. Having completed her toilet, she cooked the meal of rice as usual, and having eaten some herself, she placed the young man's portion under his bed, as before, and was about to enter the fiddle again, when he, running out from his hiding place, caught her in his arms. The bonga girl exclaimed, "Fie! Fie! You may be a dom, or you may be a hadi of some other caste with whom I cannot marry."

He said, "No. But from today, you and I are one." So they began lovingly to hold converse with each other. When the others returned home in the evening, they saw that she was both a human being and a bonga, and they rejoiced exceedingly.

Now in course of time the bonga girl's family became very poor, and her brothers on one occasion came to the chief's house on a visit. The bonga girl recognized them at once, but they did not know who she was. She brought them water on their arrival, and afterwards set cooked rice before them. Then sitting down near them, she began in wailing tones to upbraid them on account of the treatment she had been subjected to by their wives. She related all that had befallen her, and wound up by saying, "You must have known it all, and yet you did not interfere to save me." And that was all the revenge she took.

- Source: Joseph Jacobs, [\*Indian Fairy Tales\*](#) (London: David Nutt, 1892), [no. 6, pp. 40-45](#).
- Jacobs' source: A. Campbell, [\*Santal Folk-Tales\*](#) (*Pokhuria: Santal Mission Press, 1891*), [pp. 52-56](#).

Revised November 1, 2014.

# The Singing Bone

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

"**The Singing Bone**" is a German [fairy tale](#) collected by the [Brothers Grimm](#), tale number 28.<sup>[1]</sup> It is [Aarne-Thompson](#) type 780.<sup>[2]</sup>

## Synopsis

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A boar lays waste to a country, and two brothers set out to kill it. The [younger](#) meets a dwarf who gives him a spear, and with it, he kills the boar. Carrying the body off, the man meets his older brother, who had joined with others to drink until he felt brave. The older brother lures him in, gives him drink, and learns of the younger brother's adventure. They then set out to deliver the body to the king, but on passing a bridge, the older kills the younger and buries his body beneath it. He takes the boar himself to the king and marries the king's daughter.

One day a shepherd sees a bone under the bridge and uses it to make a mouthpiece for a horn, which begins to sing on its own. The shepherd takes this marvel to the king. On hearing the song, which tells the tale of the murder, the king has the younger brother's skeleton dug up. The older brother cannot deny murdering him and is executed. The younger brother's bones are buried in a beautiful graveyard.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Variations and adaptations

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This tale is also found in ballad form, in "[The Twa Sisters](#)", wherein the siblings are sisters instead of brothers.<sup>[4]</sup> Beth Hahn's literary suspense novel, *The Singing Bone* (2016), is loosely based on "The Twa Sisters".<sup>[5]</sup> The cantata [Das Klagende Lied](#) by the Austrian composer [Gustav Mahler](#) is based partly upon this tale.

## References

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1. *Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. "28: The Singing Bone". [Household Tales](#). *SurLaLune Fairy Tales*.*
2. *Ashliman, D.L. "[The Singing Bone and other tales of Aarne-Thompson type 780](#)". *SurLaLune Fairy Tales*.*
3. *Grimm, Jacob and Wilhelm. "[28: The Singing Bone](#)". *SurLaLune Fairy Tales*. Retrieved September 2, 2002.*
4. *Thompson, Stith (1977). *The Folktale*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press. p. 136.*
5. *Hahn, Beth (March 1, 2016). [The Singing Bone \(1st; Hardcover ed.\)](#). Regan Arts. ISBN 9781942872566.*

This page was last modified on 24 August 2016, at 15:47.

## Twa Sisters, The [Child 10]

**DESCRIPTION:** A knight woos two (three) sisters, choosing the younger. The older drowns the younger. Her body is recovered and made into an instrument by a passing miller/musician. As the knight prepares to wed the older sister, the instrument sings out the truth.

**AUTHOR:** unknown

**EARLIEST DATE:** 1656 (broadside)

**KEYWORDS:** courting homicide music minstrel sister drowning

**FOUND IN:** Britain(Scotland(Aber),England(All)) US(Ap,MA,MW,NE,SE,So,SW) Canada(Newf) West Indies(Jamaica)

### REFERENCES (70 citations):

*Child 10, "The Twa Sisters" (25 texts, 3 tunes) {Bronson's #79, #12, #14}*

*Bronson 10, "The Twa Sisters" (97 versions plus 6 in addenda)*

*Chambers Ballads, pp. 265-267, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text)*

*Bell-Combined, pp. 206-210, "The Cruel Sister" (1 text)*

*Gordon Brown Rieuwerths, pp. 200-205. "The twa Sisters/The Cruel Sister" (2 parallel texts plus a photo of the badly-transcribed tune; also two reconstructed tunes on p. 290)*

*Greig Duncan 2 213, "Binorie" (19 texts, 17 tunes) {B=Bronson's #4, E=#21, G=#16?, H=#6, I=#13, J=#5?, K=#8?, L=#11, M=#9, N=#10, P=#17, Q=#18, O=#19}*

*Lyle-Crawfurd2 106, "The Bows o London"; Lyle-Crawfurd2 137, "The Bows of London" (2 texts)*

*Glenbuchat Ballads, pp. 29-31, "Hey a Rose Malindey" (1 text)*

*Stokoe/Reay, pp. 8-9, "Binnorie; or, The Cruel Sister" (1 text, 1 tune) {Bronson's #7}*

*Broadwood/Maitland, pp. 118-119, "The Barkshire Tragedy" (1 text, 1 tune)*

*Barry Eckstorm Smyth pp. 40-46, "The Two Sisters" (5 texts plus 2 fragments, one from the same informant as one of the texts, 1 tune) {Bronson's #68}*

*Belden, pp. 16-24, "The Twa Sisters" (6 texts, 3 tunes) {Bronson's #38, #46, #30}*

*Randolph 4, "The Miller's Daughters" (8 texts, 5 tunes) {A=Bronson's #66, C=#32, E=#70, F=#94, G=#51}*

*Randolph/Cohen, pp. 18-21, "The Miller's Daughters" (1 text, 1 tune -- Randolph's 4C) {Bronson's #32}*

*Ritchie-Southern, p. 57, "Bow Your Bend to Me" (1 text, 1 tune)*

*Moore-Southwest 6A, "The Twin Sisters"; 6B, "Two Sisters" (1 text plus 1 fragment, 2 tunes)*

*Bronner-Eskin1 15, "Two Sisters" (1 text, 1 tune)*

*Grimes, p. 48, "The Jealous Sister" (1 text)*

*Gardner/Chickering 2, "The Two Sisters" (2 texts, 2 tunes, but the "B" text is "Peter and I Went Down the Lane") {A=Bronson's #22}*

*Gray, pp. 75-77, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text, plus an excerpt from Child's "B" text to pad out the story)*

*Flanders/Olney, pp. 209-210, "The Two Sisters" (1 text, 1 tune)*

*Flanders-NewGreen, pp. 3-4, "The Two Sisters" (1 text, 1 tune) {Bronson's #54}*

*Flanders-Ancient1, pp. 150-170, "The Twa Sisters" (5 English texts plus a fragment; also two variants of a Polish text plus tune and translation; 4 tunes for the English versions) {A=Bronson's #96, B=#54}*

*ThompsonNewYork, pp. 393-394, "(The Twa Sisters)" (1 text, probably an excerpt)*

*Davis-Ballads 5, "The Twa Sisters" (9 texts plus 2 fragments, 6 tunes entitled "The Old Lord of the North Country, or The Three Sisters," "The Old Woman of the North Countrie," "The Two Sisters, or Sister Kate, or The Miller and the Mayor's Daughter," "The Two Sisters"; 2 more versions mentioned in Appendix A) {Bronson's #25, #71, #40, #55, #27, #39}*

*Davis-More 6, pp. 35-50, "The Twa Sisters" (10 texts, 7 tunes)*

*BrownII 4, "The Two Sisters" (3 texts plus 2 fragments)*

*BrownSchinhanIV 4, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text plus 4 excerpts, 5 tunes)*

*Morris, #147, "The Twa Sisters" (3 texts, 2 tunes) {Bronson's #87, #88}*

*Chappell-FSRA 3, "The Two Sisters" (1 short text)*

*JonesLunsford, p. 201, "Old Man in the North Country (The Two Sisters)" (1 text, 1 tune) {same*

source as Bronson's #23, but the transcription is different}

Hudson 3, p. 68, "The Two Sisters" (1 text)

HudsonTunes 25, "The Two Sisters" (1 fragment, 1 tune) {Bronson's #76}

Scarborough-SongCatcher, pp. 164-165, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text, locally titled "The Two Sisters")

Eddy 4, "The Twa Sisters" (1 short text, 1 tune) {Bronson's #78}

Stout 1, pp. 1-2, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text)

Brewster 6, "The Two Sisters" (4 texts plus a fragment, 1 tune) {Bronson's #44}

Carey-MarylandFolkLegends, pp. 93-94, "Balance Unto Me"; p. 95, "Bow Down" (2 texts)

Greenleaf/Mansfield 3, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text)

Peacock, pp. 179-180, "The Bonny Busk of London" (1 text, 1 tune)

Leach, pp. 74-78, "The Twa Sisters" (3 texts)

Leach-Heritage, pp. 11-13, "The Two Sisters" (1 text)

McNeil-SFB2, pp. 150-156, "The Two Sisters"; "The Two Sisters (Wind and Rain)" (2 texts, 2 tunes)

OBB 23, "Binnorie" (1 text)

Warner 98, "The Two Sisters That Loved One Man" (1 text, 1 tune)

Hubbard, #2, "The Two Sisters" (1 text)

Niles 7, "The Twa Sisters" (3 texts, 3 tunes)

Gummere, pp. 171-173+343, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text)

SharpAp 5 "The Two Sisters" (14 texts, 14 tunes) {Bronson's #91, #55, #27, #39, #74, #73, #50, #34, #45, #63, #59, #47, #65, #41}

Sharp/Karpeles-80E 6, "The Two Sisters" (1 text, 1 tune -- a composite text) {Bronson's #45}

Wells, pp. 149-150, "The Two Sisters" (1 text, 1 tune)

Lomax-FSNA 90, "The Two Sisters" (1 text, 1 tune) {Bronson's #67}

Hodgart, p. 32, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text)

DBuchan 3, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text, 1 tune in appendix) {Bronson's #79}

JHCox 3, "The Twa Sisters" (3 texts, 1 tune) {Bronson's #43}

JHCoxIIA, #2A-B, pp. 10-13, "There Was an Old Farmer," "All Bow Down" (2 texts, 1 tune) {Bronson's #69}

Ord, pp. 430-432, "The Bonnie Mill-Dams o' Binnorie"; pp. 459-460, "Hey the Rose and the Lindsay, O" (2 texts, 1 tune)

MacSeegTrav 3, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text plus two variant verses, 1 tune)

TBB 9, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text)

HarvClass-EP1, pp. 54-56, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text)

Abrahams/Foss, pp. 20-24, "The Two Sisters"; "The Two Sisters (The Wind and Rain)" (2 texts, 2 tunes)

LPound-ABS, 4, pp. 11-12, "The Two Sisters"; pp. 12-13, "The Old Man in the North Countree" (2 texts)

Whitelaw-Ballads, pp. 260-261, "The Cruel Sister" (1 text)

Jekyll 3, "King Daniel" (1 text, 1 tune)

Darling-NAS, pp. 56-59, "The Two Sisters"; "Rollin' a-Rollin'"; "Wind and Rain" (3 texts)

Silber-FSWB, p. 224, "The Two Sisters" (1 text)

DT 10, BINNORI\* TWOSIS\* TWOSIS5\* WINDRAIN\* SWANSWIM\* TWOSIS8 TWOSIS9 TWOSI10 TWOSS11

ADDITIONAL: Emily Lyle, *Fairies and Folk: Approaches to the Scottish Ballad Tradition*, Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2007, p. 220, [no title] (1 tune, previously unpublished, for Child's "Q" text)

Tristram P. Coffin and Hennig Cohen, *Folklore in America: Tales, Songs, Superstitions, Proverbs, Riddles, Games, Folk Drama and Folk Festivals*, Doubleday, 1966, pp. 49-50, "The Two Sisters" (1 text, 1 tune)

Walter de la Mare, *Come Hither*, revised edition, 1928; #427, "The Twa Sisters" (1 text)

#### Roud #8

#### **RECORDINGS:**

Horton Barker, "The Two Sisters" (AAFS 33); "Bow and Balance" (on Barker01) {Bronson's #67}

Anita Best and Pamela Morgan, "The Two Sisters" (on NFABestPMorgan01)  
 Loman D. Cansler, "The Two Sisters" (on Cansler1)  
 Lula Curry, "The Squire's Daughter" (on JThomas01)  
 Charlotte Decker, "The Bonny Busk of London" (on PeacockCDROM) [one verse only]  
 Bradley Kincaid, "The Two Sisters" (Supertone 9212, 1928)  
 Jean Ritchie, "The Two Sisters" (AFS; on LC57); "There Lived an Old Lord" (on JRitchie02)  
 Kilby Snow, "Wind and Rain" (on KSnow1)  
 Lucy Stewart, "The Swan Swims So Bonnie O" (on LStewart1)  
 John Strachan, "The Twa Sisters" (on FSB4)  
 John Strachan, Dorothy Fourbister, Ethel Findlater [composite] "The Twa Sisters" (on FSBBAL1) {cf. Bronson's #16.2 in addenda}

**CROSS-REFERENCES:**

cf. "An Sgeir-Mhara (The Sea-Tangle, The Jealous Woman)" (plot)  
 cf. "Trois Graines de Peppernell" (plot)

**ALTERNATE TITLES:**

The Bows of London  
 The Cruel Sister  
 Rolling a-Rolling  
 The Wind and Rain  
 The Swan Swims Bonnie  
 The Old Lord by the Northern Sea  
 Bowie, Bowerie  
 The Little Drowned Girl  
 Lay the Bent to the Bonny Broom  
 Old Man from the North Countree  
 The Youngest Daughter  
 Minorie  
 The Mull Dams o' Binorrie

**NOTES:** The refrains sung with this ballad vary tremendously, but virtually all versions have a refrain of some sort. - PJS

And generally a lyrically attractive one ("the swan swims bonnie," etc.), as has been pointed out by several scholars. I wonder if there isn't something about this ballad that encourages variation; Jean Ritchie reports that, even though they presumably learned the song from the same source, her family had twelve distinct versions. - RBW

The Kilby Snow recording is an unusual one; it contains every element of, "The Twa Sisters" except the sisters; the murderer in this case is the girl's lover. Snow reconstructed the song from early childhood memories of his grandfather (a Cherokee) singing it, though, so it may have diverged at that point. - PJS

Compare the first verse lines of Child 10.H to Opie-Oxford2 479, "There were three sisters in a hall" (earliest date in Opie-Oxford2 is c.1630)

Child 10.H: "There were three sisters lived in a hall, ... And there came a lord to court them all...."

Opie-Oxford2 479 is a riddle beginning "There were three sisters in a hall, There came a knight amongst them all ...." - BS

This item is also found as Baring-Gould-MotherGoose #702, p. 275, but this appears to be simply a greeting rhyme unrelated to the various rather murderous ballads (notably Child 10 and 11) using these lines.

Child of course finds many analogies to this ballad. Joseph Jacobs, collector, *English Fairy Tales*, originally published 1890; revised edition 1898 (I use the 1967 Dover paperback reprint), on p. 236 stresses particularly Grimm #28, "The Singing Bone," in which a murdered man's bone tells the tale of his murder. The similarity to this song is obvious -- but it applies only to this one motif; the conditions leading up to the murder are quite different.

"The Singing Bone" is, however, the motif-type under which this would be filed in the Aarne-Thompson catalog; it is tale-type #780. - RBW

Jekyll's "King Daniel" is classified by Jekyll as an "Annancy" story. It is a cante fable following the Ashanti (West African) tradition: King Daniel is courting Miss Wenchy. Miss Lumpy is jealous and throws Miss Wenchy in a pond where Miss Wenchy drowns. A parrot sees the murder. Miss Lumpy tries to bribe "pretty Polly" with a gold cage with a silver door. The parrot rejects the offer and reports the murder to King Daniel and takes him to the pond where Miss Wenchy's body is found. King Daniel executes Miss Lumpy. The only parts of the story that are sung is the parrot's rejection and report of the crime: "No, no, I don't want it, for the same you serve another one you will serve me the same" and "I brought, I brought a news to the young King Daniel; Miss Lumpy kill Miss Wenchy loss, on becount of Young King Daniel."

Broadwood, looking at the sung text and the parrot as messenger connects this story to Child 4 and Child 68 because of the part played in those ballads by the parrot as messenger (Lucy E.

Broadwood, "English Airs and Motifs in Jamaica" in Walter Jekyll, *Jamaican Song and Story* (New York: Dover Publications, 1966 (Reprint of David Nutt, 1907)), #3, p. 286, "King Daniel"). The parrot's rationale -- you will serve me the same -- is the same as found in Child 68. However, looking at the messenger as the critical part of the story ignores the plot of story itself and another Caribbean [Crucian] example of Child 81 in which a parrot is introduced in place of the porter as a tale carrier (see note there re "Matty Gru"). In "King Daniel" the parrot as messenger replaces the fiddle made of the victim's bones and hair as messenger. My point is that the form of the messenger and the nature of the bribe is a sure indicator that the cante fable tradition has been affected by the Child parrot-as-messenger motif but the plot itself shows how the story should be classified within the Child tradition.

- BS

*Last updated in version 4.0*

File: C010

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Mexico

### Índice tipológico - consulta específica

El tipo **780** - *The Singing Bone*. se ha identificado en los siguientes relatos:

[La flor de la ailalá](#), por Timoteo García, de Valle de Guadalupe, Jalisco

[La flor de la ailalá](#), por Aurelia Arias, de Tepatitlán de Morelos, Jalisco

[La flor de lararay](#), por Teresa López Soto, de La Joya, Veracruz

### Información sobre este tipo cuentístico:

**Description:** A brother (sister) kills his (her) brother (sister) and buries him (her) in the earth. From the bones a shepherd makes an instrument (harp, violin, flute) which brings the secret to light [E632, D1610.34, N271].

Or the murder is revealed by a (speaking [D1610.2]) tree growing from the grave [E631, E632]. Cf. Type 72a.

**Combinations:** 303, 408, 550, 551, and 720.

(Hans-Jörg Uther. *The types of International Folktales. A Classification and Bibliography, Based on the System of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson*. Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedekatemia-Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004.)

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## 2. Acacia Trees

The village chief (*gowda*) had four sons and a daughter. The daughter was the youngest child and her name was Putta ("Little One"). All day, everyone lovingly called her, "Putta! Putta!"

Three of the sons were married. The fourth one was still a bachelor. He didn't like any of the girls he saw; they looked at many in faraway places. Finally, one day, he said, "I'll marry my sister who's right here at home," and he was quite obstinate about it.

People said, "You can't do that. Don't try."

But he would not listen to anyone. "If I have to marry, I'll marry only my sister. Otherwise, I won't marry at all," he said.

The family thought, "Let's go along with it and arrange a wedding. Meanwhile, we'll find another girl and make her his bride on the wedding day." They set the date on an auspicious day, collected groceries and things, and prepared themselves for the wedding. But they didn't tell Putta anything about it.

Relatives started arriving. There was no water in the house, not a drop. Everyone was busy with their tasks. No one had a minute to spare. So Putta herself quickly picked up two brass pitchers and went to the canal to fetch water.

There, she saw a woman named Obamma, bathing in the mouth of the canal, sitting in the hollow. When she saw Putta, she called her, "Puttavva, Puttavva, my back is itching. Will you scratch it a little?"

Putta was in a hurry. She said, "Relatives have arrived. The house is full of people, and there's not a drop of water to drink. How can I stop now and scratch your back?"

She had filled her pitchers and started back when Obamma mocked her: "Marrying your own brother, ha! And you're mincing about already. Great way to marry!"

Putta didn't hear her clearly. She asked, "What, what did you say? I didn't hear it right. I'll rub your back, please tell me." And she scratched Obamma's itching back.

Obamma told her, "The elders in your family have decided to get you married to your own elder brother. That's the truth."

Putta carried the full pitchers of water back to her home, put them on the rim of a well, and looked around. There were two acacia trees growing there on either side of the well. She climbed up one of them, and never went into the house. It was getting late and her parents came looking for her. When they saw her perched on the tree, they called out:

*All the areca nuts are getting hard.*

*All the betel leaves are getting dry.*

*All the relatives are getting up and going home.*

*Come down, daughter.*

Putta answered:

*This mouth calls you Mother.*

*This mouth calls you Father.*

*Do you want this mouth to call you Mother-in-law and Father-in-law?*

*I'll climb, climb, higher, higher, on this acacia tree.*

And she climbed higher.

"What shall we do? We asked her to get down, and she climbed higher," they said, and went home unhappily.

Her three elder brothers came and called out:

*The areca nuts are getting hard.*

*The betel leaves are getting dry.  
The relatives are getting up and going home.  
Come down, sister dear.*

She replied:  
*This mouth calls you Brother.  
Do you want this mouth to call you Brother-in-law?*

And she climbed higher.

They went home and her three sisters-in-law came to the tree and called out:  
*All the areca nuts are hard.  
All the betel leaves are dry.  
All the relatives are going home.  
Come down, dear Sister-in-law.*

She answered:  
*This mouth calls you Sister-in-law,  
Do you want this mouth to call you Co-wife?  
I'll climb, I'll climb.*

All the relatives, some close, some distant, came to the tree and called to her. She gave them all similar replies. Finally, the brother who was going to marry her came there and called out in anger:

*All the areca nuts are hard.  
All the betel leaves are dry.  
All the relatives are going home.  
Come down, you!*

She replied:  
*This mouth calls you Brother.  
Do you want this mouth to call you Husband?  
I'll climb, I'll climb.*

And she climbed higher.

Then he thought he would go after her and bring her down; so he too climbed the acacia tree. She jumped to the other acacia that was next to it. He jumped after her, and she leapt back. Thus they leapt back and forth from one tree to another—the brother pursuing, the sister dodging his pursuit.

After several leaps back and forth, she feared she would get caught. She looked down, saw the well between the trees. She thought it would be better to drown and die, and jumped straight into the well. The brother also jumped in and tried to drag her out of the water. The harder he tried, the more she resisted. After hours of struggle, they both drowned, and died in the well.

The people in the house took the bodies out of the well. The relatives said, "We came for the wedding, and look at this irony, we have to stay for the funeral!" They didn't bury the dead right away, but decided to wait till dawn. The daughter appeared in the mother's dream that night and begged of her, "Mother, please don't bury both of us together. Bury him in the mound. Bury me in the field. Please."

Accordingly, the family buried the son in the mound and the daughter in the field.

In time, a sharp spiny bush of thorn grew over the brother's burial place. Over hers grew a great tree of sweet fruit called Bullock's Heart. One of Putta's sisters-in-law walked that way and saw the tree covered with large fruit. She wanted to eat one. But they were only half-ripe. Anyway, she plucked a fine-looking big fruit, took it home, and left it to ripen in an earthen vessel full of *ragi* grain.

Days later, when she put her hand in the vessel to take out some *ragi* to grind, she found the fruit, the Bullock's Heart. It was good and ripe. She laid it aside while she ground the grain. But as she ground the *ragi* into fine flour, her eyes returned to the fruit many times.

"The fruit is so lovely, lovely as a girl. How I wish it were a girl."

No sooner had she said this than the fruit became a girl, sat in her lap, and told her the whole story.

The fruit-turned-girl said, "Look how things are. My brother did evil (*karma*), so a spiny bush grows on his burial ground. I kept my virtue (*dharma*), and a fruit tree grew out of mine. And I'm here."

## Types and Motifs

Tale type AT 722 Ind. We need a new number for tales like "Acacia Trees," an incest tale. I would suggest 722 Ind., Brother Wishes to Marry Sister, or 451B Ind., because it expresses an extreme or pathological form of the brother-sister bond.

Tale types AT 450–455 are tales about brothers and sisters, mostly expressing love for each other, sister seeking and rescuing brothers (or vice versa) who are in danger or under a spell, transformed into monkeys, cows, or birds. Aarne-Thompson classifies such incest tales under AT 722, which begins with a brother wanting to marry his sister, who flees from him, and lists them only for Russian. Thompson-Roberts (1960) does not report them at all for India. We have many examples of Type AT 722 in Kannada and other Indian languages.

## Variants

In other Kannada tellings, a) the brother and sister fall into a pond and are transformed into fish. Later, a thorn tree grows out of the bones of the brother-fish, and a fruit tree from the bones of the sister-fish; b) when the sister jumps into the water, the moon takes her away into his moon-world, marries her, and gives her children.

## Comments

Among the many brother-sister relations detailed by Kannada tales, we have chosen only three: incest, brotherly/sisterly love, sibling rivalry. "Acacia Trees" is the most explicit treatment of a brother's incestuous wish for his sister. In "Hanchi," the "Kannada Cinderella" story, the heroine is forced to flee when her brother falls in love with her. The motif of the young woman fleeing from a father's or brother's incest appears often in these tales. See Aarne-Thompson on 510B for European examples. [See Ramanujan 1983.]

In many Indian communities, brothers take ritual pledges to love and protect their sisters. These pledges emphasize a woman's social and economic need for protection by a male in her natal family when she has no way of protecting herself. The ritual pledge protects the woman from the brother's own desires as well. The traditional enmity between the husband's sister and his wife may be traced to this pledge and to the lifelong bond between brother and sister that is threatened by the alien woman who marries the brother.

[Motif R 224, Girl flees to escape incestuous brother + AT 780, The Singing Bone.]

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