

# The Three Little Men in the Woods

(or how to grow strawberries in winter)



Adaptation by Joshua Pearce of original story by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm

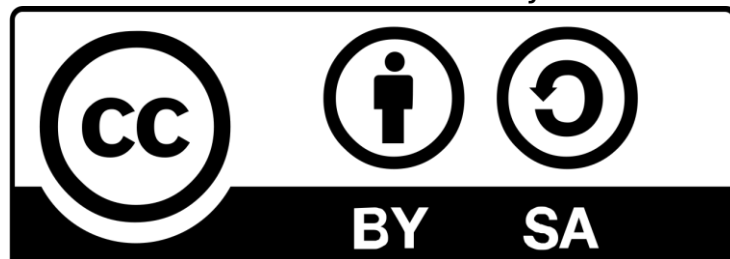
# FAST Press Story



- Source: Die drei Männlein im Walde, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales -- Grimms' Fairy Tales), 7th ed. (Berlin, 1857), no. 13.
- The Grimms' source: Dorothea (Dortchen) Wild (1795-1867) provided the version included in the first edition of the *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. (1812). For the second edition (1819) the Grimms expanded the tale with material provided by Dorothea Viehmann (1755-1815) and Amalie Hassenpflug (1800-1871).
- Written and illustrated by J. Pearce using completely free and open source software: LibreOffice Writer, Stable Diffusion, and the GNU Image Manipulation Program on an Ubuntu Linux computer.
- Sponsored by Western University Carbon Solutions.

Dedicated to those with hope for the future.

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A long time ago, there was once a poor man whose wife died. Today, with modern medicine she would have survived, but back then many people died quite young. The man was sad. He was a good man and a hard worker, so although they were poor and often hungry, his wife was loved and loved him dearly. Closer to town in a fine house a rich woman also mourned as her husband had just died. Before her husband was even cold, many men called to try to capture the heart of the woman to get at her wealth.

She was beautiful and a talented seamstress before she married into money. The experience of dispatching one greedy suitor after another had left her cold. It had actually made her quite greedy herself. She was afraid she would lose her riches and end up on the streets scrounging for rags to sew again. This fear gnawed at her.

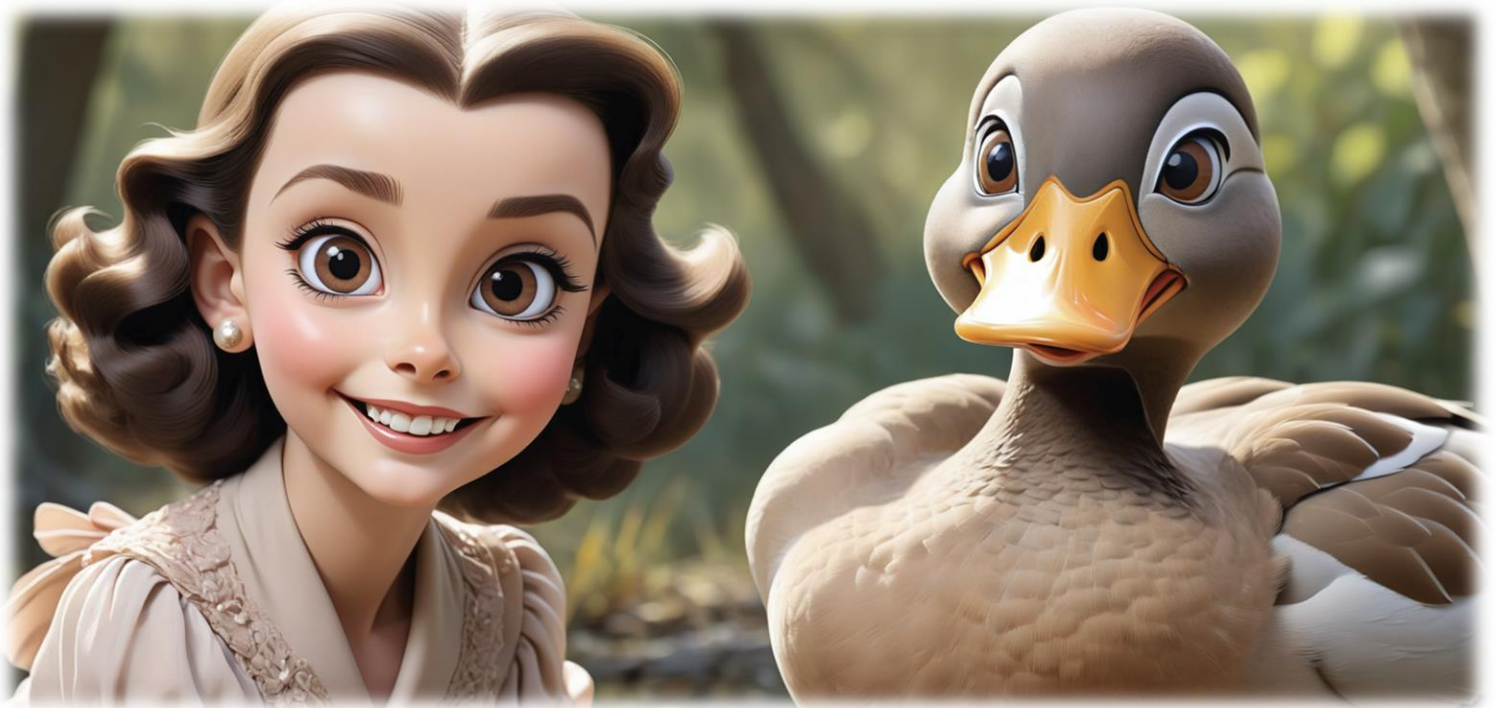


She had trouble sleeping. She tossed and turned all night worrying that she would be poor if she let a greedy man marry her. This nightmare of greed came every night as she tried to think of a way out of her troubles.

It was driving her crazy.

Now it just so happens that both the man and the woman had daughters.

The poor man's daughter was named Mary. She was kind and bright. The type of person that would always make you a bit happier when you met her on the path to town. Even with no mother and living in a tiny house on the side of the woods, she lit up a room with her big smile. She helped the forest creatures and had even nursed a duck back to health when she found one with a broken wing. Overall, she was just a great human being.



The woman's daughter was named Gwenhilda. She had grown up with every comfort and was fawned over by her mother. She became spoiled and bratty. She whined about everything. She even whined about whining! Her mother demanded the best of everything for Gwenhilda - everything she did not have as a girl herself.

As Gwenhilda was so whiny, she did not have many friends. Mary was so kind; however, she would go out of her way to help 'Gwen' do fun things like pick flowers in the woods. They were never big enough or smelled good enough for Gwen, but Gwen came along because she liked looking down on Mary who did not have a giant flower garden to play in and had to make do with the weeds in the forest.

One day long after the funerals the girls went on just such a walk together to look for flowers. Gwen was whining about the length of the walk, and the smell of leaves, and her sore feet. Mary kept her upbeat spirit and helped Gwen manage over the fallen trees and tall grass.

Finally, Mary agreed to walk Gwen home and they came to see Gwen's mom in her house.



Upon meeting Mary and hearing about her father, being kind and poor, the woman had finally had a plan. She said to the Mary, "You are so lovely and I am sorry that your mom died. You need a mom and Gwen needs a good dad. Listen, I know your father is a good man, tell him that I would like to marry him, and then you shall wash yourself in milk every morning and drink strawberry juice for breakfast! But my own daughter is a bit of a brat, so shall wash herself in water and drink water." Gwen, as you might guess, was not happy about that arrangement and shouted, "Well I have never!" and stormed off to her room.



Mary awkwardly promised she would pass on the message to her father and left quickly. She went home and told her father exactly what the woman had said.

Her father said, "What shall I do? Marriage can be joy, but I fear this will be a torment."



On the one hand wealth would help the family, on the other, Gwenthilda was infamous in the village for being a brat. Finally, being unable to reach a decision, he had an idea. Mind you, it wasn't a really good idea, but at least he had one.



He jumped on the kitchen table. He pulled out an old boot from the rafters, knelt down to Mary and said, "Take this boot. It has a hole in its sole. Take it to the dock, hang it on a big nail, and then put a bottle of water into it. If it holds the water, then I shall again take a wife, but if the water runs through it, then I shall not."

Mary had never head of such a thing but did as she was told.

She opened the bottle of water turned it upside down and shoved it into the boot. As she started pouring in the water, the boot was so dirty and dusty on the inside that a thick mud was formed that sealed the hole, and not a drop of water fell from the boot.



Mary ran back home and told her father what had happened. Then he himself went out to see it and when he saw that she was right, he went to the widow and wooed her.

He was a reasonably charming guy - and he was pleasantly surprised that the widow was pretty and seemed nice. She seemed happy by the arrangement so everything went well.

Mary never mentioned anything about the boot to Gwen or anyone else.

Their parents were married in the widow's rose garden in a quiet ceremony.



At first everything seemed fine.

Happy even.

The next morning when the two girls got up, there was milk for Mary to wash in.

She had never seen anything so decadent. She did ask to wash off with water afterwards because she was pretty sure old milk would not smell so good.



Better than the milk wash, there was strawberry juice for her to drink for breakfast and a giant plate of pancakes.



Mary had never seen so many pancakes and she loved strawberry juice.



On the other hand, there was water for Gwen to wash herself with and water for her to drink. Mary tried to give some strawberry juice to Gwen but was harshly rebuked by her new stepmom.

On the second morning, the woman had sent Mary's father away to work in a far away city on a new job that had better pay than anything he could get locally, the only problem is he would have to live far from home. He reluctantly left Mary but wanted to make his



new wife happy.

This started the troubles for Mary. On the second day, there was water for washing and water to drink for Mary as well as for Gwen.

This was less exciting, maybe they were not as rich as they seemed and her father really did need to go to work far away, at least they still had food.





And on the third morning there was water for washing and water to drink for Mary again. No big deal as that was what she was used to. But there was milk for washing and strawberry juice to drink for the Gwen. Gwen, for her part, never offered to share. And so it continued all throughout the fall and into the winter.



The woman became her stepdaughter's worst enemy, and from one day to the next she did whatever she could to make the Mary's life more miserable. Mary missed her mom and her dad. Furthermore, Mary's new stepmother was envious because her stepdaughter was beautiful and kind, while her own daughter was disgusting. Gwen had a habit of picking her nose. It was just gross.



Once in winter, when everything was frozen as hard as a stone, and the hills and valleys were covered with snow, the woman had an awful idea. She gathered up some old newspapers and pulled out her old seamstress tools. She started to cackle uncontrollably as she worked.

Soon Mary could see what she was doing.



Her stepmother had made a dress of paper.

She called her stepdaughter, and said, "Here, put this dress on and go out into the woods and fetch me a basketful of strawberries. I have a longing for some."

"Good heavens."

said Mary.

"Strawberries don't grow in the winter. The ground is frozen, and furthermore the snow has covered everything. And why am I to go out in this paper dress? It is so cold outside that one's breath freezes. The wind will blow through the dress, and the thorns will tear it from my body."

"Will you contradict me?" said the evil stepmother.

"Be on your way, and do not let me see you again until you have the basket full of strawberries."



Mary was obedient and put on the dress of newspaper. The stepmother had actually done a pretty good job as far as paper dresses go. It was weird.



Then stepmother gave her a little piece of hard bread and said, "You can eat from this all day," while thinking, "You will freeze and starve to death out there, and I shall never see you again. Moohoo ha!" At this point it is pretty clear the stepmother was crazy and was not very nice. Mary obeyed and in the paper dress, took the stale bread and went out with the basket. She grabbed some more newspaper to make a shawl for more warmth and a hat on her way out.





There was nothing but snow far and wide, and not a green blade of grass was to be seen. Mary walked out of the village back into the woods in search of strawberries. After walking deep into the woods, she saw a small house. It had the light on and a quaint wreath on the door. I wonder who lives here thought Mary to herself. "Maybe they will let me come and warm myself", she thought.





Just as she was about to knock, three little dwarfs peeped out. She greeted them and politely asked if she could come in and join them to get out of the cold.

They exclaimed at once, "Come in," and she went into the room and thanked them profusely. They offered her a bench and she sat down by the stove to warm herself and eat her breakfast of stale bread.



The dwarfs said, "Will you give us some of your bread, too."

"Gladly," she said, and despite having so little she broke her piece of bread in four equal parts, giving them each a quarter and keeping only a small bit for herself.

They asked,  
"What are you  
doing here in the  
woods in the  
wintertime and in  
a thin paper  
dress." "Oh," she  
answered, "I am  
supposed to  
gather a basketful  
of strawberries  
and am not allowed  
to go home until I have them."



The dwarves looked at each other perplexed. Then one by one, they smiled.

You see, Mary was quite lucky as these particular dwarves had great magic and knew the secret of growing strawberries in winter. The three little men said to one another, "What shall we give her for being so polite and good and sharing her bread with us."





The first one said, "I grant her that every day she shall grow more beautiful."

"Thank you," said Mary.

The second one said, "I grant her that a king shall come and ask her to be his wife."

Mary blushed.



The third one, who was a bit weird, said, "I grant her that when she speaks gold will fall from her mouth and when she is about to drown will turn into a duck until the king knights her."

Mary stood with her lips pulled tightly shut as she was not quite sure what to make of that last gift.

Finally, in unison they said, "To get your strawberries, we all grant you the secret of the agrotunnel." "It will solve your problem," said the first dwarf.

"Yes, good things come to good people that share", said the second dwarf

"Come with me", said the third dwarf, "We want to show you the *agrotunnel*." "What is an agrotunnel?", thought Mary, but she dare not speak for fear of gold coming out of her mouth.

Behind their house built into a great mound of earth was a circular door. The dwarves opened the door that led to another door and beyond that a great room bathed in light. Mary felt the heat and moisture as she entered. In the great room partially buried in the ground there was something only the dwarves had ever seen before.



Inside the agrotunnel the light was blinding, but as Mary's eyes adjusted, she saw rows of walls. Wall after white wall had hundreds of holes in them. Out of each hole grew a strawberry plant and on those plants were strawberries. Thousands of them! Mary could scarcely believe her eyes.

It was a like a library but rather than books shelves there were walls covered in strawberry plants.

The first dwarf explained it was hot because the agrotunnel was well insulated under the ground and they used a magical *heat pump* to move heat inside.

The second dwarf explained that magical water pumps, a few times a day, pushed water to the top of the grow walls and then it dripped down into the pots that held the strawberry plants mounted on the walls. They added nutrients to the water that pooled at the bottom of the walls. They called the system *aeroponics*.

The third dwarf showed Mary the magical long bars of *grow lights* that made it just like a bright sunny day even during the night.

Then they all had a taste. The strawberries were delicious! The dwarves encouraged Mary to eat her fill, which she did smiling.





When she was done, she was allowed to pick more to fill her basket. Joyfully she gathered her basketful and an old garden hat from the dwarves.

She thanked the little men quietly and shook hands with each of them gently.

Then she ran home to take her stepmother what she had demanded.



Upon coming home, she changed and was so excited that she forgot not to speak.

She said, "Good evening," and a piece of gold fell out of her mouth. Then in a great rush she told what had happened to her in the woods, but with every word she spoke gold pieces fell from her mouth, and soon the whole room was covered with them.



The stepmother was at first dumbfounded. But rather than happiness Mary was greeted with angst. "Just look at her arrogance," shouted the stepsister *Gwen*, "to throw gold about in such a manner." *Gwen* was envious and she too begged her mother to go into the woods to look for strawberries.



*Gwen's* mother said, "No, my dear little daughter, it is too cold. You could freeze to death."

However, Gwen gave her mother no peace, so finally the mother gave in. She sewed a magnificent fur coat for Gwen and had her put it on. She gave her buttered bread and cake for her journey. The vain Gwen admired herself in the mirror, then went into the woods and followed Mary's directions straight up to the little house. The three little dwarfs peeped out again, but she did not greet them, she just barged into their house like she owned it.



While ignoring them she stumbled into the room, sat down by the stove, threw her coat on the floor and complained "This dingy cabin is for poor peasants". She began to eat her buttered bread and cake.

"Please share with us," requested the first little man kindly.

She replied, "There is not enough for me myself. How can I give some of it to others like you?" She snickered.

The three little men frowned.





Then she pulled out the cake and greedily scarfed that down as well. She could feel the dwarves watching her. When she was finished eating, they said, "Now that you have warmed yourself by our fire, and would not share your food, perhaps you can help us sweep."



"Sweep for yourselves," she answered. "I am not your maid." Their frowns grew. Gwen's selfishness was a shock after the kind Mary. They stood with their arms folded over their chests.

Seeing that they were not going to give her anything and she had not really followed what Mary was saying about an agrotunnel, she walked out the door. On her way out she stepped on the foot of the third dwarf. Without so much as a 'excuse me' she was gone.

Then the three little men said to one another, "What shall we give her for being so impolite and having a wicked and envious heart that will never let her give a thing to anyone?"

The first one said, "I grant that every day she shall grow uglier so her outside matches her inside."



The second one followed her outside and said, "I grant that a toad shall jump out of her mouth with every word she says."



The third one, and perhaps the angriest said, "I grant that she shall go over a waterfall in a barrel." The girl looked outside for strawberries, but finding none, she grew bored and went home angrily. On the way home she seemed to age. Her coat kept her warm, but her once pretty features were worn and deep wrinkles formed on her face.



She finally found her way home having decided that there were no strawberries in winter. And when she opened her mouth to tell her mother what had happened to her in the woods, a toad jumped out of her mouth with every word she said. Her mother was repulsed.



The stepmother now became even more angry, and she could think of nothing else but how she could torment Mary, who nonetheless grew more beautiful every day even as Gwen already looked older than her mother.

Finally, the woman had another idea. Another wonderful, awful idea. She took a kettle, set it on the fire, and boiled yarn in it.

When it was boiled, she hung it on the poor girl's shoulder.





Mary's stepmother was so repulsed; she couldn't look at Gwen who seemed to be getting uglier by the minute. She told Gwen to go to her room. Then the stepmother grabbed an axe and roughly gave it to Mary.





The evil stepmother told Mary to go to the frozen river, chop a hole in the ice, and rinse the yarn. The idea is she would fall in and freeze. Mary obeyed and went to the river.

Mary found a good spot in the ice and started to shatter it with the axe.

While she was chopping, a splendid carriage approached, with the king seated inside.

The carriage stopped, and the king stuck his head out and asked, "Dear woman, who are you, and what are you doing here?"

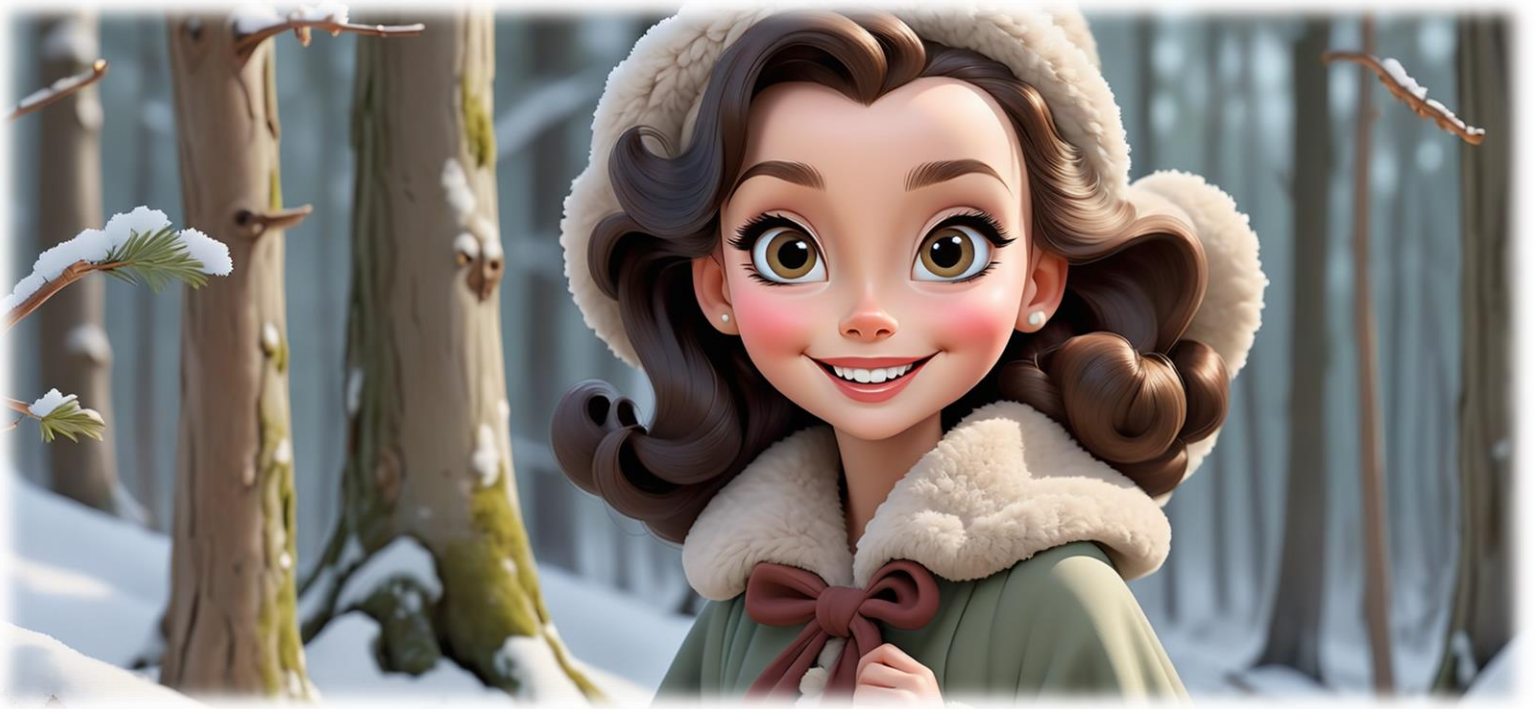




"I am just a poor girl, and I am rinsing yarn on the request of my stepmother," she said as she carefully hid the gold coins with her hand.

The king felt compassion and stepped out of the carriage to see her more closely. When he saw how very beautiful she was, he said to her, "Will you ride with me?"



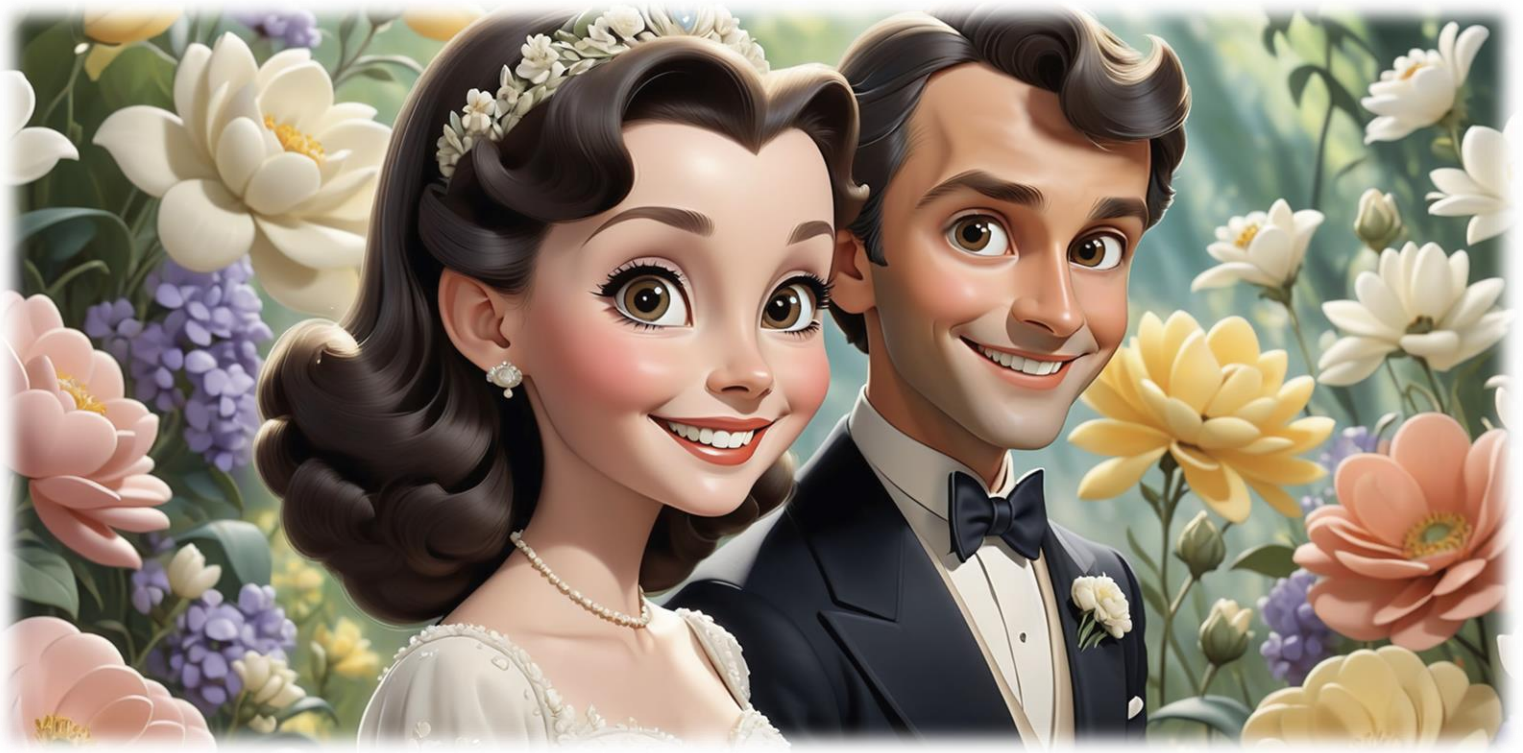


"Gladly," she answered as she stealthy grabbed the gold coin before he saw, for she was happy to get away from the mother and sister.

So, she got into the carriage and rode away with the king.

At first, she was very quiet and as kind and helpful as she could be without speaking. But after the king was also very kind to her and could not take his eyes off of her as she grew more beautiful every day. Finally, he expressed his love for her. She told him her secret and as they talked long into the night, they became very rich.





They were deeply in love at this point and he soon asked for her hand in marriage, just as the dwarf predicted. Mary said "Yes!". Then they were married in summer surrounded by flowers just as she had always dreamed. When they arranged everything, their wedding was celebrated with great pomp. They were very happy together.

A year later the young queen happily gave birth to a son.





When the stepmother finally heard of Mary's good fortune, she came with her daughter to the palace, pretending that she wanted to pay her a visit. She planned to get rid of Mary once and for all. That evening when the king went out on important royal business, the wicked woman tiptoed into the queen's room while she slept, seized the Mary by the head, while Gwen seized Mary by the feet. They lifted her out of her bed and threw her out the window into the stream that flowed by the castle wall. Mary awoke in the cold water gasping for breath.



The water was freezing and the strong currents were dragging her under. Just as she was about to drown, she magically turned into a duck. Mary thought to herself - I finally understand what the third dwarf had done for me. She was so thankful. Mary swam upstream with her webbed feet to get back to the castle.



Meanwhile, *Gwen*, the ugly daughter growing uglier and older by the day, lay down in the bed to take *Mary's* place. The old woman barely able to look at her covered her up over her head and said, "I don't know if this will work but let's trick the king to get rich."



When the king returned and wanted to speak to his wife, the old woman said, "Quiet. Quiet. You cannot talk to her now. She has a very high fever. You must let her rest today."

The king suspected no evil. He slept downstairs on the couch and did not return until the next morning.

He went upstairs and asked the woman in his bed, who he presumed was his wife, how she was feeling.

She said she was not well.

As he talked with her and she answered him, a toad jumped out with every word, whereas previously a piece of gold had fallen out.

His wife wouldn't show him her face.

When he asked what was the matter, the old woman said that it came from her high fever again, and that she would soon lose it.

The king was not a fool, he knew something was up, but he trusted the old woman who after all was his mother-in-law and let himself be pushed out of the room.

Toads followed hopping along merrily and he asked the kitchen boy to catch them and throw them into the river running by the castle walls.



Early the next day the kitchen boy was finishing up cleaning out all the frogs that seems to have infested the castle. He saw a duck swimming along the gutter. It seemed to follow him and then it said, "What are you doing? " He was awestruck and at first said nothing.



Receiving no answer, the duck said, "What are my guests doing?"

The fact that a duck talked was starting to seem normal to him, so the kitchen boy answered, "They are fast asleep it is early morning."



The duck asked further, "What is my little baby doing?"

He was a clever kitchen boy so he figured this duck must be the queen.

He answered, "He is sound asleep in his cradle in the queen's room." This seemed to make the duck very happy. "Go and tell the king to bring his sword and swing it over me three times. I will wait here."



The kitchen boy ran and told this to the king, who came with his sword as it was not even the weirdest thing he had been asked to do that week. He swung his sword over the duck three times.



After the third time, as by pure magic his wife was standing before him, vigorous, alive, and healthy, as she had been before. Only now she was a little wet. He hugged and kissed her. She explained what had happened and that her stepmother and stepsister had thrown her in the river.



They collected the gold coins from the water bottom and agreed to keep it quite for now. She snuck upstairs with the king. She was so happy to see her baby again. She nursed their baby, fluffed up his cover and tucked him in. Then she dried off and joined her baby in the nursery. They got wrapped up in a warm blanket together and hid.



The king was elated, but he kept the queen hidden in the baby's room until the Sunday when the baby was to be baptized.

Before the baptism could start, and everyone in the kingdom was present, he said to the crowd, "What does a person deserve who drags someone out of bed and throws him into the river?"

The old woman had given up on tricking the king into thinking her daughter was Mary.

Now that Mary was gone, however, she hoped to gain favor in the court herself.

She became enraged on behalf of the king and answered, "The scoundrel deserves nothing better than to be put into a barrel stuck full of nails, and then rolled downhill into the water."

Then the king who would not have his queen and newborn threatened again, said, "You have pronounced your own sentence and that of your evil daughter."



The king immediately ordered a barrel large enough to fit two people to be brought to the castle. He left the nails out as that seemed a tad too cruel.

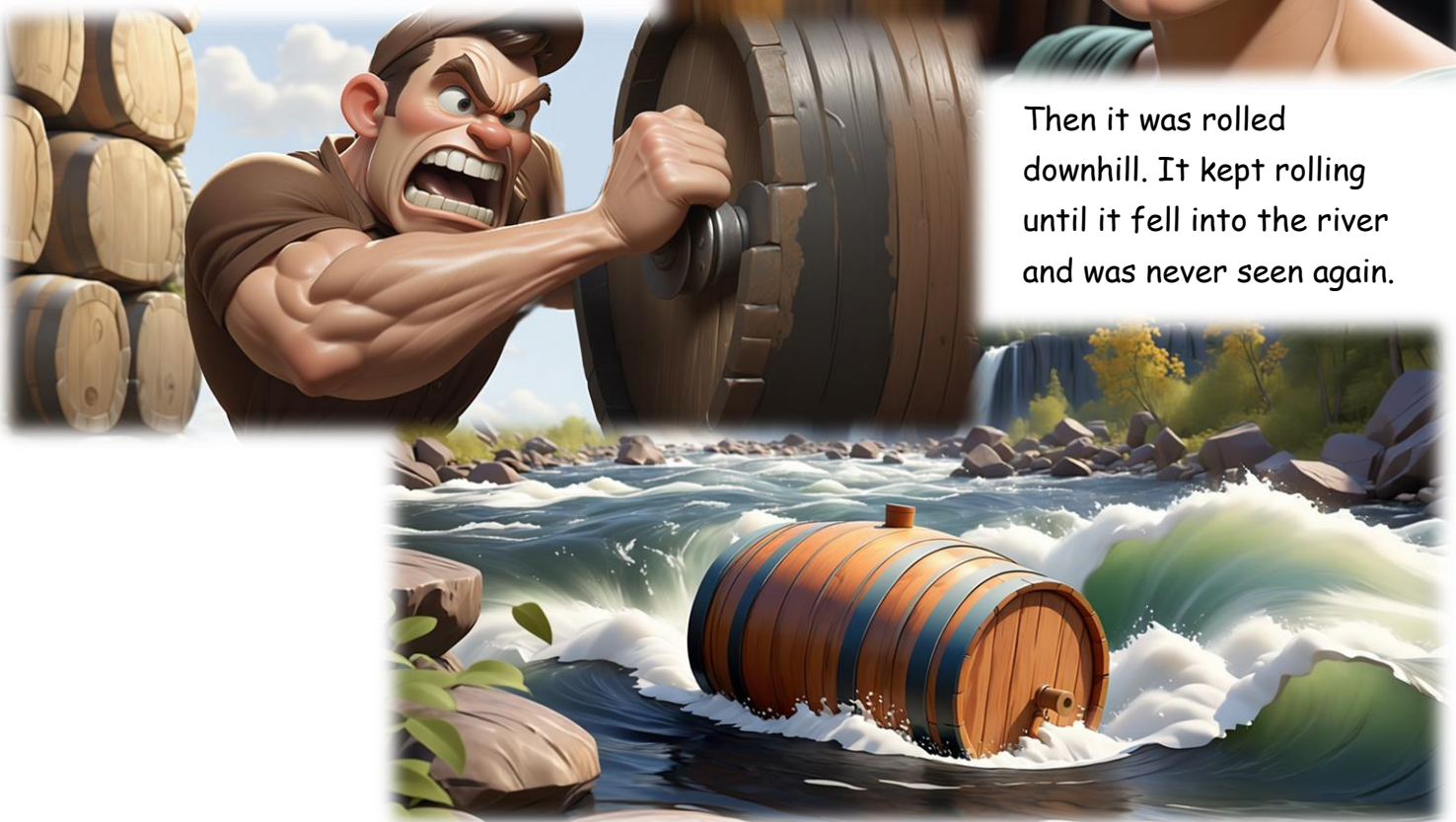


The old woman and now her looks older-than-her daughter were put into it. They were sad that they were being punished for their evil ways and how they had treated Mary.

Without much pomp, the top was hammered shut by the royal carpenter. It was rolled along the grass away from the castle.



Then it was rolled downhill. It kept rolling until it fell into the river and was never seen again.





Meanwhile, Mary hired the carpenter with her gold coins and started manufacturing agrotunnels and shipping them throughout the realm. Some were above ground and others buried under the surface just like the first one she had seen from the three dwarves.

She was a popular queen as she had brought food security to the realm. No one was hungry or was without strawberries again, even in the winter. Mary, her husband, the king, and their son all lived happily ever after.



**The End**



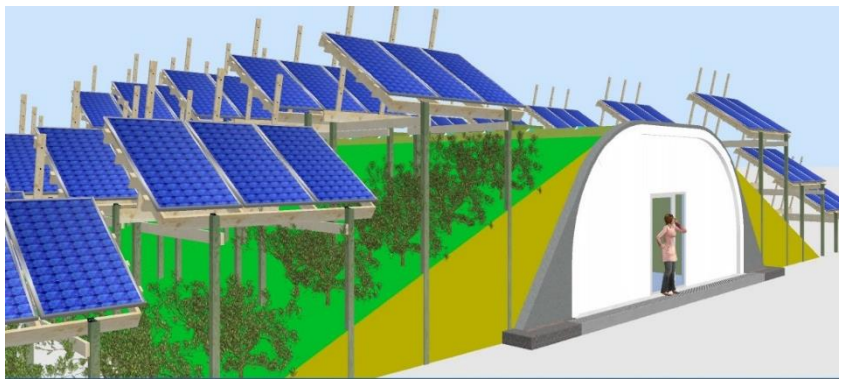
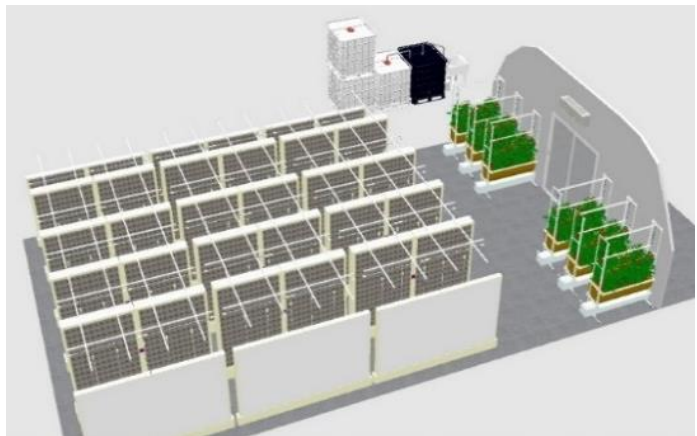
**The technology in the story is real!**

As you read this book the **Western University Free and Appropriate Sustainability Technology (FAST) Lab** in collaboration with the manufacturer **Food Security Structures Canada** is growing strawberries year-round in Canada. Their secret is to couple an agrotunnel with agrivoltaics.

**Agrotunnels** are earth and vegetation covered tunnels that hold high-density vertical aeroponic systems to grow berries and other foods just like the dwarves had in the story. **Aeroponics** is when you grow plants in an air and just drip nutrient rich water on their roots, eliminating the need for soil. Instead of the magic in the story, the electricity to run the

agrotunnel is all supplied by agrivoltaics. **Agrivoltaics** are the co-location of agriculture and solar **photovoltaics**, which convert sunlight directly into electricity. Photovoltaics help keep the

costs down because they make low-cost electricity. The solar panels are also used as shields to protect the outdoor plants from extreme weather, create a microclimate to conserve water, and provide all of the electricity needed to run the lights, water pumps and heat pumps inside of the agrotunnel. As solar energy is available almost everywhere people live, this makes the system portable to most locations within Canada and the whole world. When it is done right an agrivoltaics agrotunnel can provide a net zero energy method to produce resilient food year-round.



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(or how to grow  
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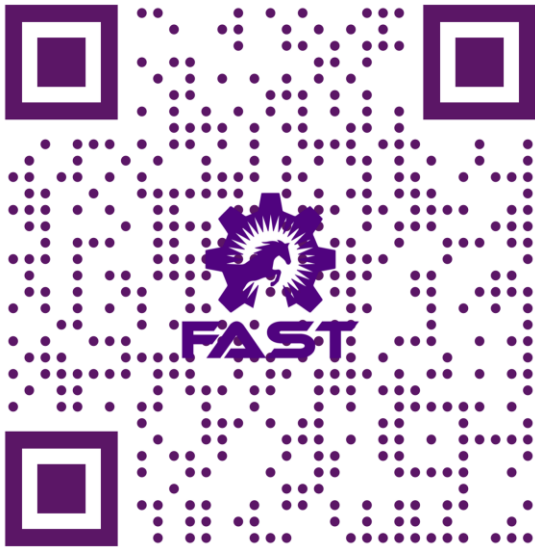


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## Summary

A heartwarming story of a nice girl who overcomes a great personal misfortune when she meets three mysterious little men in the woods. She is on what seems an impossible mission but is rewarded for her kindness with the secret of how to grow strawberries during the winter.



Find all the real technology in this story at the Western University Free & Appropriate Sustainability Technology (FAST) Lab

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