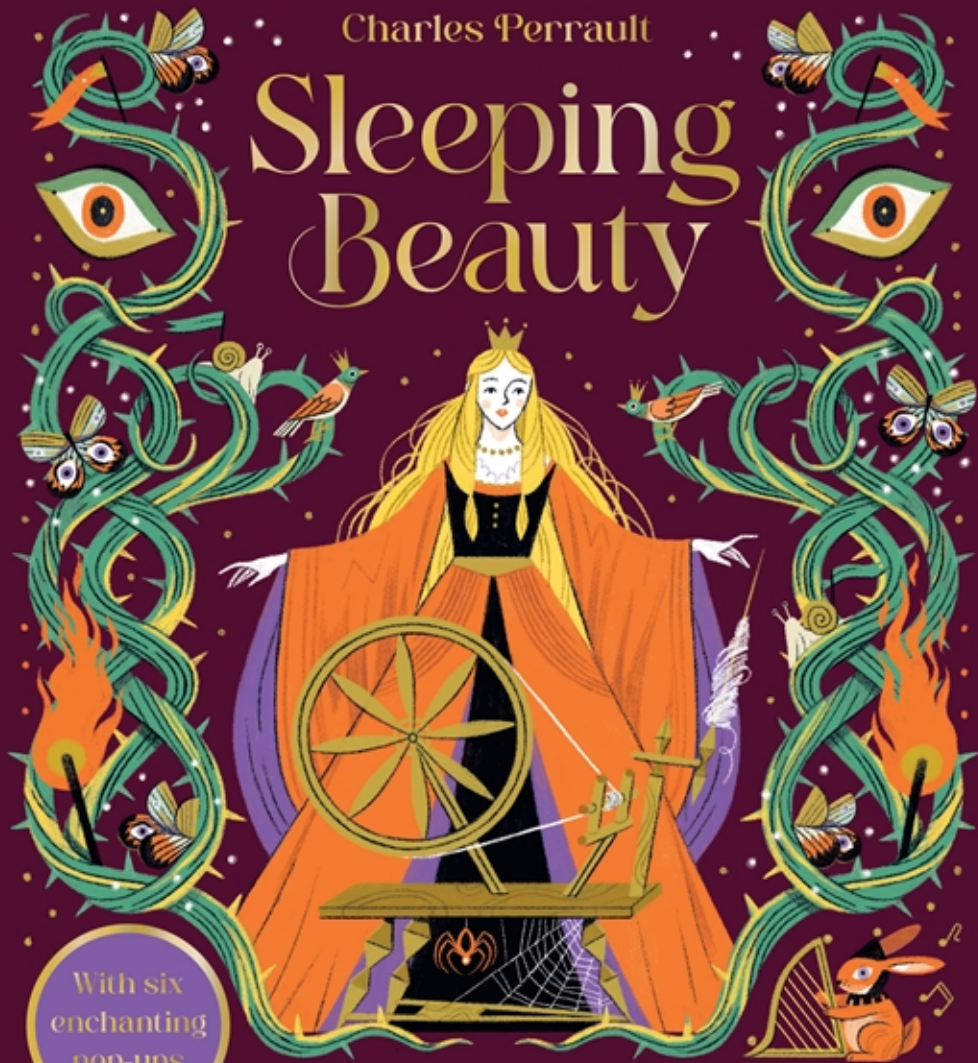


Charles Perrault

Sleeping Beauty



With six
enchancing
pop-ups

Illustrated by Anja Sušanj



Long ago, in a kingdom of sunshine, kindness and fragrant flowers, there lived a king and queen who ruled with wisdom and kindness. Every day, they sat on golden thrones in a magnificent castle, wearing jewel-encrusted crowns and robes woven by the finest weavers. They were surrounded by many books and ornaments, and had a whole kingdom of loyal subjects who adored them. It seemed that they had everything anyone could want. All that is, except the one thing they wished for more than anything: to have a child.

Each morning, by a crystal-clear pond in the castle gardens, the king and queen knelt down and wished for a baby son or daughter, wishing with all their hearts. Then one day, to their great delight, a frog hopped out of the pond. "Your wish is granted!" declared the frog. "Within a year you will have a baby girl." And so it was.

When the new princess was born, the whole kingdom was struck with delight. But the king and queen, who had waited so long for this precious gift, were the most delighted of all. All day long, they watched their baby girl smiling in her exquisite cradle. Laughter and smiles filled the castle like sparkling stars.

In honour of the new princess, the King and Queen threw open their doors and announced a great celebration. A fanfare of brass trumpets sounded, and messengers were sent in every direction to carry the invitation far and wide. They invited friends, family, neighbours, and, as special guests of honour, the wise fairies of the kingdom. There were seven in total, but the King said, "There are only six golden plates for them to eat from! One fairy will have to stay at home."

So the celebration began — without the seventh fairy!



The King and Queen wanted to prevent the curse of the seventh fairy. That very day they sent out a command to their knights, soldiers and hunters: "Go to every house across the kingdom, find every spindle, and destroy them all!"

From all corners of the land, spindles were collected into one mountainous pile and set alight. Orange-red tongues of fire and flame danced high into the sky. Soon there were no spindles left anywhere in the kingdom – all had been burned to ashes. No new thread could be spun, and no new clothes made. But it was a small price to pay for the safety of the princess.

So the princess grew from a baby, into a child, into a young woman, without ever seeing a spindle. Nobody was allowed to tell her of the curse: the King and Queen wanted their daughter to be perfectly happy.

And she was happy – with each passing year, the promises of the fairies came true.

By the time she was fifteen years old, because of their gifts, the princess had more talents and skills than anyone could wish for. And more – she became so brave, kind, and curious about the world that everyone who saw her loved her. She listened to people, made friends from all over the kingdom, and spent her days exploring the craggy mountains, crystal-clear waterfalls, and yellow buttercup-filled meadows of the kingdom. Whenever she spoke, the princess inspired everyone around her to be as brave, kind and curious as she was herself.

So when preparations began for the princess's sixteenth birthday party, it was no surprise that everyone in the kingdom offered to help. From small cottages to huge mansions, in fields and farms and shops, up and down narrow lanes and broad city streets, people bustled to and fro. The air of the kingdom hummed with excitement for the coming celebration.

At last, the day of the princess's sixteenth birthday arrived. She awoke early, but found the castle empty: everyone was out preparing for the party. Alone for the first time, a strange impulse drew the princess's feet toward the castle's abandoned wing. There she roamed silent halls, corridors lined with ancient books and secret passageways she had never walked before.

She turned key after key to room after room, until she came to an old stone tower, a narrow staircase winding up towards a room at the top. In the middle of the room, beside a little bed, a strange old woman sat spinning thread at a whirling wheel. It spun round and round, as the woman's foot tapped up and down. The princess had never seen such a thing before.

"What's that?" she asked.

The old woman answered, "A spindle, to make thread to weave into beautiful clothes."

"Can I try it?" asked the curious princess.

"Yes, please do," replied the old woman.

The princess reached out to take hold of the spindle, and cried "Ouch!" She had pricked her finger on its sharp point.

Instantly, her eyes closed. She swayed, then sank onto the bed, straight into a deep sleep, just as the seventh fairy had promised.

And when the princess fell asleep, so did everyone else. Sleep spread over the castle like a warm soft blanket. The king and the queen, their servants, and the cook – just arrived home from their errands – all fell asleep. The horses in the stables, the dogs, geese and hens in the yard, the pigeons on the roof and even the flies on the walls all slept. The fires in the fireplaces died down, food stopped cooking and soon everything settled into stillness. All was silence, but for the sound of peaceful breathing.



As the castle slept, the forest around the castle awoke. Deep roots of oak, ash, and elm stretched down into the earth, and green-leaved branches stretched up and out, twisting towards the sunlight. An enchanted thicket of twisting briars sprang up to fill the spaces between the branches and tree trunks, covered with sharp thorns like little knives and hard black buds, but no flowers.

Over time, the briars grew higher and thicker, tangling together like a green-brown web, until even the flag that hung from the highest turret of the castle was hidden from view.

Time spooled out like a long golden thread. Rumours, legends and stories spread through the land: a sleeping castle behind an enchanted forest and, inside, a sleeping beauty under a hundred-year-long spell. In those legends, princes and brave explorers came and tried to force their way through the thorns. But the thorns held fast together like clasped hands.

A young boy who lived nearby warned all who passed: "Beware! Many an explorer who goes into the thorn forest, never comes out!"

One hundred years passed. That boy became an old man with a family of his own. One day, as he told the legend of the Sleeping Beauty and the Deadly Thorns to his great great grandchildren, a prince from another country rode by. Hearing the story, the prince instantly decided to try his luck and, against the old man's advice, set out toward the forest of thorns.

When the prince arrived, a wall of tangled briars cast black shadows over him. He lifted his sword to slash through the branches, but they grew back twice as thick, surrounding him. Thorns pricked him from every side like sharp claws, but he fought on, dodging and cutting as fast as he could.

Then – just as the prince began to tire – the thorns suddenly sprang back. It was as if they had spoken to each other and agreed the time was right. Before the prince's amazed eyes, every bud on every dark briar burst into blooms of red roses, and the briars and branches parted. The prince sheathed his sword and armed, through that forest of new roses, towards the sleeping castle.



The prince walked past the sleeping dogs and hens in the castle courtyard and beneath the pigeons on the roof. He went past the king and queen asleep in their throne room, past the silent kitchen where the cook and servants slept, until he came to a winding staircase of an old tower, and a room at the top with the door still ajar.

He pushed it open, and saw that a princess lay asleep on the bed, as she had been for a hundred years. A ray of sunlight from the tower's high window fell across her peaceful face.

As soon as he saw her, the prince fell to his knees, utterly captivated. As he did, the princess's eyes fluttered open like tiny bird's wings. She sat up slowly, looked around the room, and saw the prince smiling up at her. And because she was brave and kind and curious, she smiled back at him, took his hand and said, "What has happened? Tell me everything!"

The prince told the princess all that he knew, and the princess listened with wide sparkling eyes and an open heart.

Now the princess was awake, the hundred year enchantment was lifted and the whole castle woke up too. Fires crackled in the fireplaces, the flies on the walls began to buzz, and lights which had been dimmed shone brightly again. The king and queen, their servants, the cook and everyone else opened their eyes as if they had slept just a short while. Dogs barked and hens clucked in the courtyard, and pigeons cooed on the roof, filling the air with sound.

Laughing and talking like old friends, the princess and prince descended the stairs from the old tower to greet the king and queen. The prince was invited to stay, and gladly accepted. In time, the friendship between the pair deepened into true love. And so, in that kingdom of sunshine and birdsong and flowers, the princess and prince went on to live happily ever after.