



Magic Beans

A Handful of Fairy Tales
from the Storybag

by Jacqueline Wilson, Philip Pullman,
Michael Morpurgo and many more . . .

☆ Contents ☆

Cover

About the Book

About the Authors

Title Page

Adèle Geras

The Six Swan Brothers

Anne Fine

The Twelve Dancing Princesses

Henrietta Branford

Hansel and Gretel

Jacqueline Wilson

Rapunzel

Malorie Blackman

Aesop's Fables

Philip Pullman

Mossycoat

Tony Mitton
The Seal Hunter

Alan Garner
Grey Wolf, Prince Jack and the Firebird

Berlie Doherty
The Snow Queen

Gillian Cross
The Goose Girl

Kit Wright
Rumpelstiltskin

Michael Morpurgo
Cockadoodle-doo, Mr Sultana!

Susan Gates
The Three Heads in the Well

Linda Newbery
The Little Mermaid

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Acknowledgements and Publication Details

About the Book

Magic Beans. Sow them. Plant them. Watch them grow.

Each and every one of the stories in this anthology is a magic bean: a wondrous tale that will capture your imagination. Prepare to be dazzled by Rapunzel's golden tresses. Prepare to be moved by the suffering of the Little Mermaid. Prepare to laugh yourself silly as 'Mr Sultana' struggles to get the better of a little red rooster!

Stories written by Adèle Geras, Gillian Cross, Henrietta Branford, Jacqueline Wilson, Berlie Doherty, Alan Garner, Kit Wright, Susan Gates, Michael Morpurgo, Malorie Blackman, Philip Pullman, Linda Newbery, Tony Mitton and Anne Fine.

About the Authors

MALORIE BLACKMAN'S books have won several awards, including the Children's Book Award for *Noughts and Crosses*. She has also won the W. H. Smith Mind-Boggling Books Award and the Young Telegraph/Gimme 5 Award, as well as being shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal. *Pig-Heart Boy* was adapted into a BAFTA-award-winning TV serial. In 2008 Malorie was honoured with an OBE for her services to Children's Literature.

HENRIETTA BRANFORD was born in India in 1946 but grew up in a remote part of the New Forest. Her first novel, *Royal Blunder*, was published in 1990. After that she wrote many different sorts of books, from picture books to teenage novels, including *Dimanche Diller* (Smarties Prize and the Prix Tam-Tam) and *Fire, Bed and Bone* (Guardian Children's Fiction Prize). After her death in 1997 a prize was established to commemorate her and her editor Wendy Boase - the Branford Boase Award for a first novel.

GILLIAN CROSS was born in 1945. Although she is now a full-time writer, she has had a number of informal jobs, including being an assistant to a Member of Parliament. Her books include *Wolf* (Carnegie Medal 1990), *The Great Elephant Chase* (Whitbread Children's Book Award, Smarties Prize, 1992) and the titles in the 'Demon Headmaster' sequence, which was also made into a TV series.

BERLIE DOHERTY began writing for children in 1982, after teaching and working in radio. She has written more than thirty-five books for children, as well as for the theatre,

radio and television. She has won the Carnegie Medal twice: in 1986 for *Granny Was a Buffer Girl* and in 1991 for *Dear Nobody*. She has also won the Writer's Guild Children's Fiction Award for *Daughter of the Sea*. Her work is published all over the world, and many of her books have been televised.

ANNE FINE has been an acknowledged top author in the children's book world since her first book, *The Summer-House Loon*, was published in 1978, and has now written more than fifty books and won virtually every major award, including the Carnegie Medal (more than once), the Whitbread Children's Book Award, the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize, the Smarties Prize and others. Anne Fine was the Children's Laureate from 2001-2003. Her best-known books include *Madame Doubtfire* (which was made into the film *Mrs Doubtfire*), *Goggle-Eyes* and *Flour Babies*.

ALAN GARNER OBE (born in Congleton, Cheshire, in 1934) spent his childhood in Alderley Edge, Cheshire. Many of his works, including *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen* and its sequel *The Moon of Gomrath*, are drawn from local legends. *The Owl Service* won both the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize and the Carnegie Medal in 1968. *The Stone Book* (which received the Phoenix Award in 1996) is poetic in style and inspiration. His collection of essays and public talks, *The Voice That Thunders*, contains autobiographical material as well as critical reflection upon folklore and language, literature and education, the nature of myth and time.

SUSAN GATES was born in Grimsby, England. Before she became a full-time writer she lived and worked in Malawi, Africa, then taught in schools in Coventry and County Durham in England. She has written more than 100 books for children, many of which have won prizes. She has been

overall winner of the Sheffield Children's Book Award twice, commended for the Carnegie Medal, and Highly Commended for the Nasen Special Educational Needs Award.

ADÈLE GERAS was born in Jerusalem and travelled widely as a child. She started writing over thirty years ago and has published more than eighty books for children and young adults. *Ithaka* was shortlisted for the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize and the Whitbread Children's Book Award. She lives in Cambridge with her husband, and has two grown-up daughters and two grandchildren.

TONY MITTON is an award-winning poet, whose delightful verse has proved enormously successful with both adults and children, particularly in picture books. He has written for reading schemes and flip-the-flap books, but is best-known for such series as *Rap Rhymes*, *Amazing Machines* and *Amazing Animals* as well as his own poetry books. He lives in Cambridge with his wife and two children.

MICHAEL MORPURGO is one of today's most popular and critically acclaimed children's writers, author of *War Horse* (made into an enormously successful stage play) and *The Wreck of The Zanzibar* amongst many other titles. He has won a multitude of prizes, including the Whitbread Children's Book Award, the Smarties Prize and the Writer's Guild Award. Michael Morpurgo's work is noted for its magical use of storytelling, for characters' relationships with nature, and for vivid settings.

LINDA NEWBERY is the author of over twenty-five books for children and young adults, including *At the Firefly Gate* (nominated for the Carnegie Medal), *Catcall* (Silver Medal, Nestlé Children's Book Prize), *Set in Stone* (Costa Children's Book Prize), *Sisterland* (shortlisted for the

Carnegie Medal) and *The Shell House* (shortlisted for the Carnegie Medal and the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize). She lives in an Oxfordshire village with her husband.

PHILIP PULLMAN is one of the most highly acclaimed children's authors. He has been on the shortlist of just about every major children's book award in the last few years, and has won the Smarties Prize for *The Firework-Maker's Daughter* and the Carnegie Medal for *Northern Lights*. He was the first children's author ever to win the overall Whitbread Book Award (for his novel *The Amber Spyglass*). A film of *Northern Lights* (titled *The Golden Compass*) was made in 2008 by New Line Cinema. He lives in Oxford.

JACQUELINE WILSON is one of the world's most popular authors for younger readers. She served as Children's Laureate from 2005-7. *The Illustrated Mum* was chosen as the British Children's Book of the Year in 1999 and was winner of the Guardian Children's Fiction Prize in 2000. She has won the Smarties Prize and the Children's Book Award for *Double Act*, which was also highly commended for the Carnegie Medal. In 2002 she was given an OBE for services to literacy in schools, and in 2008 was appointed a Dame.

KIT WRIGHT was born in 1944 and is the author of more than twenty-five books, for both adults and children. His books of poetry include *The Bear Looked Over the Mountain* (1977), which won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize and the Alice Hunt Bartlett Award, and *Short Afternoons* (1989), which won the Hawthornden Prize and was joint winner of the Heinemann Award. His poetry is collected in *Hoping It Might Be So: Poems 1974-2000* (2000).

Magic
Beans



*A Handful of Fairy Tales
From the Storybag*



David Fickling Books

The Six Swan Brothers



Retold by Adèle Geras

Illustrated by Ian Beck





THERE WAS ONCE a King who had seven children: six strong sons and a daughter whose name was Cora. They lived in a palace on the shores of a lake, and they loved one another greatly. Their mother died on the very day her daughter was born, and the King and his sons mourned her for a long time. Later, when Cora grew up, laughter returned to the palace, and the days were as like one another as beads on a string, all sparkling with happiness.

Then one day, the King went hunting in the forest. His men rode with him, of course, but he soon left them far, far behind him. He had caught sight of a wild boar, and plunged after it into the places where the trees grew closest together, and branches knotted into one another overhead to make a canopy that kept out the light of the sun.



All at once he came to a clearing, and there was no sign of the boar. He realized that he was lost and called to his men, but there was no answer. Suddenly a woman stepped out from between the dark columns of the trees. The King knew at once that she was a witch, because her head

nodded and nodded, and her yellow eyes were weak and rimmed with scarlet.

‘Greetings, good lady,’ he said in as firm a voice as he could manage. ‘Will you show me the best way home? I fear I am lost.’

‘I have the power to send you home along straight paths,’ the woman whispered, and her voice was like a rusty blade. ‘But you must do something for me in return, or I will leave you here alone and soon you will be nothing but a complicated arrangement of bones.’

‘I will do anything,’ said the King, for there was nothing else that he could say.

He followed the Witch to her hut, and there beside the fire sat a beautiful young woman.

‘This is my daughter.’ The Witch twisted her mouth into something like a smile. ‘You will marry her and make her Queen. That is my condition.’

‘It will be my pleasure,’ said the King, and he took the young woman’s hand and set her on his horse. The touch of her fingers filled him with a loathing and disgust he did not understand. She is beautiful, he told himself as they rode together. I should be happy, but her eyes are full of ice and darkness and her red lips seem stained with poison. He made up his mind that she should never know anything about his children, for he was sure that she would harm them if she could. And so, he took the Witch’s Daughter to a house near the palace, and said to her:

‘You will stay here only until I make all ready for our wedding, my dear. Everything must be perfect.’

And she was satisfied.



That very night, the King took his children to another castle, which was so well hidden in the green heart of the forest that even he could not find it without help. He had in his possession a ball of enchanted yarn, which a wise woman had given him, and if he threw that along the ground a little way, it unrolled all by itself, and showed him the path he had to follow.

So there they stayed, the King's six sons and Cora, his little daughter, hidden and safe, while the King and the new Queen celebrated their marriage. After the wedding, the new Queen noticed that he was away from the palace almost every day, and she became suspicious.

'He is hiding something from me,' she said to herself, 'and I will discover what it is no matter what I have to do.'

She summoned the stable-hands, and said to them: 'My husband leaves my side each day, and goes somewhere. Tell me,' she whispered, and her voice was like treacle. 'Tell me where he goes, and I will pay you in gold pieces ... more gold pieces than you will ever count.'

And because gold has the power to bend and twist even the strongest will, the stable-hands told her of the magical yarn, and of what it could do. Then, one day when the King was visiting a neighbouring country, the Witch's Daughter crept to the Treasury. There she found what she was looking for, and she took it and put it into her pocket.

She followed the silver thread as it unwound between the trees, and at last she came to the castle where the King's children were hidden. She arrived at dusk and saw six handsome young men returning from the hunt.

'Those are my husband's sons,' she said to herself. 'I am certain of it.'

When she considered how much he must love them, a bright flame of hatred leaped up in her heart. 'It is fortunate,' she thought, 'that my husband is far away, for I have work to do.'

She looked no further, and so she never found Cora, who was in her chamber, high up in the tower. The magic thread led her back to the palace and rolled itself up behind her as she walked.



The Witch's Daughter locked herself up in a small room and cut out six shirts from white silk. Then she began to sew with a long and wicked needle that caught the light as she worked. She sang a spell as she sat there and she sang it six times, once for each garment:

*'White as Ice
silken stitches
gifts I bring.
Hearts may yearn
but flesh will know
how feathers grow
from poisoned silk
smooth as milk.
Turn and burn
turn and burn
turn limb to wing.'*

When the garments were ready, the Witch's Daughter unlocked her door and went to find the ball of enchanted thread. At the edge of the forest, she spoke these words:

'Your master returns tomorrow, but for now you are mine. Find them again, for the last time.'

The silver thread slipped away between the trees, and the Witch's Daughter came to the hidden castle once again. Cora saw her from the high window of her chamber, and

immediately she knew that something terrible was going to happen. She hid behind the curtain and peeped out at the stable yard, where her brothers were gathered, back from the day's hunting.

'Welcome, madam,' said the eldest. 'Our house and hospitality await you, as they do every stranger lost in the forest.'

'I am not lost,' said the Witch's Daughter. 'I have brought you gifts from the King, your father. See, here is a shirt for each of you, made from white silk.'

The young men took the shirts, and before their sister could cry out to warn them, they had thrust their arms into the sleeves.

'You will see,' said the Witch's Daughter. 'They will become like second skins.' She turned and was gone, swallowed up in the darkness between one tree and another.

Cora found she could not move. She went on staring down from the window, thinking that perhaps she was mistaken, and perhaps her heart should not be filled with dread and foreboding. But her brothers' beautiful necks were stretching and stretching and their heads shrinking and shrinking and their brown arms flapping and growing white and soon there was nothing left of men in any of them, and the air was filled with the sound of beating wings, as six swans rose and moved along the soft currents of the evening breeze towards the sunset beyond the forest.

'Wait!' Cora called after them. 'Wait for me!' But they had disappeared and she was left alone.



After they had gone, she was cold with fear and the sound of her own breathing was as loud in her ears as a sighing wind. She did not know whether to try and make her way to her father's palace, or to stay where she was and hope that he would find her. In the end, she decided to leave the castle, for the rooms were full of silence, and frightened her. Cora longed to weep for her poor brothers, but she knew that she had to follow them at once, or they would be lost for ever. She filled a basket with bread and hard cheese and took her warmest cloak to cover her, and set out for the forest.

Cora walked and walked through the night and through the following day, between bramble bushes thick with thorns like little claws, and over twisted tree roots buried in the earth; with no moon to guide her and the calling of night birds to chill her blood. She put one foot in front of another all through the black hours and at last the dawn came. The young girl looked around her and recognized nothing, so she went on, searching the sky for swans, listening for the music of their moving wings and still, always, putting one foot in front of another. As night was falling, she came upon a hut. Her legs were stiff with weariness and her feet hurt from walking.

'I will see,' Cora said to herself, 'whether perhaps some kind woodcutter will let me rest here for a few hours.'

She knocked at the door of the hut, but it stood wide open. Whoever had once lived there had long ago moved on. She sank on to a bed in the corner and slept.



And as she slept, she dreamed. In her dream, six swans flew in through the window and stood around the bed.

Cora cried out: 'Why are you not the brothers that I love? Where, where are they?'

'We are here,' said a voice, and Cora thought the voice was speaking in her head, and opened her eyes at once, for surely that was her dear brother speaking? It was then that she saw them all, standing around her in their glorious human shape, gazing down and smiling.

'There is no time for joy,' said one. 'We are allowed to return to our human forms for a few minutes only, every evening, and after that we are swans again.'

'Is there nothing I can do?' Cora wept. 'I would do anything ... anything in the world to break the spell.'

'What you would have to do,' said her youngest brother, 'is too much.'

'Nothing is too much,' she said. 'Tell me.'

'You must weave six shirts from starwort and river reeds,' he said. 'One for each of us.'

'I will do it,' Cora said. 'I will walk beside the rivers and the lakes and I will do it. It will take time, but in the end you will be men again.'

'But,' said her eldest brother, 'you must not speak a single word nor make a single sound until the starwort shirts are on our backs, or the spell will never be broken in this lifetime.'

'Not a sound?' Cora felt her heart like a knot of hard wood in her breast.

'Not the smallest sound in the world,' he answered, 'or we will be swans for ever.'

'It will be hard,' she said, 'but I can do it.'

They nodded and went to the door of the hut. The sun's last rays slanted in through the window and then there was a storm of snowy feathers and Cora saw the swans rising into the mauve twilight and growing smaller and smaller as their wide wings bore them away.



She started her work the very next day, and for many weeks all she did was wander beside rivers and streams and little brooks, picking starwort and the stoutest reeds that she could find, preparing herself for the weaving she would have to do. She took shelter under trees and in caves and hollows, and the rain fell on her and the sun burned her, and all the words she was forbidden to speak buzzed in her head and fixed themselves into rhymes which she said over silently to herself without the smallest breath of sound passing her lips. This is the song that Cora sang in her heart as she worked:

*'River reed and starwort stem
cut and dry and weave and hem
twist and stitch and pull and bind
let white silence fill my mind
gather plant and gather stalk
stifle laughter stifle talk
sew and fold by candlelight
all the hours of every night
like a statue let me be
till my brothers are set free
freeze my words before they're spoken
let the evil spell be broken
river reed and starwort stem
cut and dry and weave and hem.'*

The weeks passed and the months and the making was slow and hard. At first, Cora's fingers bled from working the

sharp grasses but, after a while, she grew used to the weaving and at the end of the year, when the snow began to fall, she had finished one shirt, and she folded it carefully and put it into her basket.



One day, when Cora was sitting in the lowest branches of a tree, a Prince came riding by on a fine white horse, and his courtiers came with him.

‘Look, Your Highness,’ one said. ‘There’s a young woman in this tree. Shall we pull her down?’

‘Leave her,’ the Prince said. ‘I will speak to her and ask her kindly to step down.’

Cora did step down when he spoke to her, but not one single word did she utter in answer to his questions.

‘She cannot speak,’ the Prince said to his men. ‘She is mute.’

To Cora he said: ‘I will take you back to my castle and you shall be dressed in the finest gowns and I will hang necklaces of silver round your white throat, for you are the bride I have been seeking.’

And so she went with him. She married him and lived in a castle and her days were easier. Still, she did not make a sound, and still she had to wander the country round about, searching for river reeds and starwort stems.

By day, Cora worked at her loom, and by night she slept in a soft bed next to the husband she had grown to love. She would have been happy, but for the Old Queen, her mother-in-law. Always, she felt her presence, as if she were a black spider hanging in its web in a shadowy corner of the room. The Old Queen’s hatred touched Cora like a breath of cold air. She spoke openly to the Prince, saying:

'You are a fool, my son. Cora is no mute, but an evil enchantress. See how her eyes widen! She knows I can smell secrets all over her. Oh, she is not what she appears!'

'Hush, Mother,' the Prince would answer. 'One more wicked word and I will banish you for ever.'

The Old Queen smiled, and soon her dark words were for Cora's ears only, and she was careful, very careful, to say nothing when her son was nearby.



The months passed. Cora continued to weave, and soon two shirts were finished. She put them into a cedar-wood chest, folding them carefully so that the prickly stems did not break, and then she set to work on the next garment. And after a time, her first child was born. During the birth, she could not cry out when the pains gripped her, but she was glad to be suffering, for soon, she knew, her own baby would be there, nestled close to her breast.

As soon as the child was born, the Old Queen appeared at the side of the bed. She picked up the baby.

'I will wash him,' she said to Cora, 'and return him to you.'

So Cora slept, and when she woke, her arms were empty. She looked into the cradle and that was empty, too. The Prince and his mother stood by the bed, and the Prince was weeping bitterly.

'She has devoured her own baby!' the Old Queen shrieked. 'Look at her mouth! Her mouth is full of blood! Throw her to the wolves in the forest!'

Cora shook her head from side to side, and threw herself from the bed, and clung to the Prince's knees, but she did not speak.

‘No,’ said the Prince, and he lifted her up. ‘I will not believe that you have done such a thing. I know you are innocent. And you, Mother, will never speak such poisoned words ever again, on pain of banishment.’

Cora wept and wept. She wandered through the long corridors of the castle like a madwoman, peering behind every curtain, and listening for the faintest sound of a crying child. The Old Queen watched her. She was the one who had smeared Cora’s mouth with lamb’s blood. She had stolen the baby and sent it far away to be cared for by one of her own maids in a cottage beyond the mountain, but no one in the palace knew this secret.



Two years went by. Cora continued to weave the stiff stems of the starwort plants into a garment, and there were three finished shirts folded into the cedar-wood chest in her bedchamber. Then, in the spring of her third year of marriage, she was once more expecting the birth of a baby. Cora felt the Old Queen watching her as she grew large; felt an icy wickedness reaching out to her, wherever she went.

When Cora’s second child was born, the Old Queen stayed far away, and instead allowed the servants to attend her daughter-in-law. One of them came to her after the child was born, and gave her a glass of cool water to drink, but this woman was the Old Queen’s creature, and did her bidding at all times. She had put a sleeping draught into the cup and before long, Cora’s eyes closed and she slept.

When she woke up, the baby had disappeared, and the blood was caked and dry in the corners of her mouth. Once again, the Old Queen shrieked terrible accusations at her

son, and once again his wife lay silent and turned her face to the wall. The weeping Prince stood at the foot of the bed and refused to believe his mother. And Cora once again became like a madwoman, fretting and weeping and roaming the dark corridors in absolute silence.



After five years, five shirts were ready, and lay carefully folded in the cedar-wood chest. Cora began to dream of the day when the spell that bound her brothers would be broken for ever. Then she found that she was pregnant again and her heart was full of fear. Still, she did not stop weaving the dry stems of river reeds and the green starwort stalks, either by day or by night.

On the day that her third child was born, the sixth shirt was complete but for the left sleeve. When my baby is here, Cora told herself, I will finish it and all will be well for ever.



When the baby was born, everything that happened twice before, happened again. This time, the Prince had to believe his mother and he condemned Cora to death. She would be burned at the stake, he told her, weeping, because that was the customary punishment for witches.

As the time for the execution drew near, Cora went to the cedar-wood chest in her bedchamber and unfolded the starwort shirts that she had made. She carried them as she went to the stake, and all who saw her wondered at the

strange garments that filled her arms as she walked. Cora thought of nothing but her brothers, and she closed her eyes and prayed for a miracle.

Then, all at once the air was filled with the sound of beating wings, and the crowd looked up and saw six white swans flying overhead. Down and down they fluttered to where Cora was standing, and they surrounded her in a cloud of feathers. Cora took a shirt and covered the first swan, and as she did so, the bird's neck shrank and shrank, and its head grew and grew and soon a man stood before her. She did the same with the other shirts she had woven, and there all at once were her six beloved brothers: complete men but for the youngest who, because she had not woven the left sleeve of the sixth shirt, still had one swan wing. Cora cried out with joy and her brothers kissed her and held her in their arms and rejoiced in their new human forms.

'You have saved us, little sister,' they said. 'You have saved us with your silence, and now your own life is in danger. Speak. Tell your husband everything.'

Cora said: 'My heart is singing to see you again, my brothers, and you, my dear husband, must now know the truth, which I could not speak before.'

She turned to the Old Queen and pointed at her. 'You took my children from me and murdered them. You are the wickedest of women.'

'No, no,' cried the Old Queen. 'How could I murder my own grandchildren? They are living in a cottage beyond the forest.'

The Prince spoke sadly: 'You may not have murdered them, Mother, but you were willing to stand by and see my wife go to her death. You will perish instead of her.'

And so the Old Queen was burned at the stake, and Cora's children were brought back to the palace and lived happily there for many years, listening over and over again to the story of the six swans. They knew that it was true,