



THUMBELINA

Once upon a time there was a lonely woman desperately yearning for a child. She lived far from the nearest village and spent most of her time tending to her garden and her orchard. She only had one friend, who happened to be a gifted witch. The witch knew how badly her friend wanted to be a mother, so one day she came to visit and gave the lonely woman a gift. When the woman opened the gift, though, all that was there was a tiny little seed.

“Whatever happens,” the witch said, “You have to take very good care of the seed. Plant it in the best soil you can find, water it with the cleanest water, and more than anything, make sure you talk to it.”

This was very confusing for the woman, but she was pleased to have something to care for even if it was very tiny.

As soon as the witch left, the woman did exactly as she’d been told. She found the nicest flower pot she had, dug up a tiny hole in the dirt, and gently put the seed in. She watered it and told it about her day. Soon, she noticed that the seed was sprouting, and in fact the plant was growing significantly faster than all the others, and in two days the bud of a tiny flower had appeared.

“What a lovely little flower you are!” the woman said to the bud, and as gently as possible she touched the tiny closed petals. Suddenly, the flower opened. Amazed, the woman looked closer and saw that inside the little yellow flower

THUMBELINA

there was a tiny, sleeping little girl.

“Is it possible?” the woman thought. “Is it possible that this is the daughter I’ve always longed for?” She picked up the tiny girl and held her in her palm. She was barely the size of a thumb, and so the woman decided to name her Thumbelina.

“Hello, my dear child,” whispered the woman happily, and when the little girl mumbled the word mama, the woman wept with joy.

That evening, the new mother set to work making the perfect little bed for her daughter. She took a walnut shell, padded it with moss and petals, and laid the tiny girl inside. Then she rocked her bed just a little and kissed her goodnight.

Thumbelina was the sweetest little girl the woman could have imagined. As she got older, her golden hair grew long and her mother made her beautiful dresses from the petals of flowers in the garden.

The woman spent all her time with Thumbelina. Her loneliness had finally gone. They sewed dresses together, read stories, looked after plants and sang songs. Thumbelina especially had a lovely voice and could never stop singing. And for a long time, they were very happy.

Then, one night, as Thumbelina was getting ready for bed and singing, a giant toad noticed the tiny girl.

“What a lovely creature! She would be a perfect bride for my son!” croaked the toad. She waited until the girl had gone to sleep, then snuck in, picked up the whole walnut bed, and carried it away with the girl inside. Thumbelina was too deep in her sweet dreams to notice she was being stolen away from her mum.

And so the toad carried her off to the swamp where she lived with her warty son.

“Look what I brought you, boy. This is going to be your bride,” said the toad and dropped the bed on the ground in front of him. Thumbelina woke up as soon as her bed hit the ground, but she thought she must be dreaming.

“Oh, yes, very pretty,” croaked the young toad.

“What’s happening, where am I?” asked the girl.

“You’re going to live here from now on. Now be quiet while we prepare the wedding,” said the mother toad.

“Wedding?” Thumbelina asked. “What wedding? I... I don’t want to marry a

THUMBELINA

toad,” stuttered the frightened girl, shaking her head and pulling her blankets around her.

“You cheeky little brat!” scolded the toad. She picked the girl up and put her on a lily pad in the middle of a stream. “Now shut your mouth and wait here while we set the swamp up for the wedding.”

Poor Thumbelina didn’t want to marry a toad, of course, but she had no hope of escaping. There was water all around her, and it was moving too fast for her to be able to swim to shore.

“Please, help me!” she cried out. “Someone please save me!” She shouted for help for what felt like hours, and finally she sat down and wept. Suddenly some fish passing by heard her whimpers and, learning what the situation was, decided they would help her. Determinedly, they chewed through the stem that anchored the lily pad in place, and when they got through it the lily pad began to float downstream. Thumbelina was free! She rejoiced, thanked her rescuers profusely, and waved them goodbye as she drifted away from the toads’ swamp.

She floated for a long time, and once she was sure she had escaped without the toads noticing, she began to look around. The surrounding nature enchanted her. Everything was so green! There were flowers everywhere, colourful butterflies fluttering over her head, and birds twittering in the treetops. It was like she was in one of her very beautiful dreams.

Soon enough, the stream washed her ashore and she set off to roam the country and try to find her way home. She wandered for a long time, until the heavenly summer turned into chilly autumn, and the autumn turned into a harsh, cold winter. Thumbelina was numb with cold, and even the mossy coat she had fashioned for herself couldn’t keep her warm. Then, finally, she came across a giant tree with a hole in the trunk. It seemed like a perfectly good place to hide from the wind and snow, so she hurried inside. As soon as she got in she saw a little grey mouse and realized she was in the mouse’s nest.

“I’m so sorry to intrude!” the girl said. “Please, could I stay here for a night or two? It’s so cold and I’m sure if I stay outside a minute longer I’ll freeze to death.” “Of course you can, dear,” the mouse said, kindly. “You must be starving!”

THUMBELINA

“Oh, yes, I’m so hungry I could eat a horse!” said Thumbelina.

The mouse gave her some grains and when she saw how little the tiny girl had eaten, she laughed and said,

“Well! If that’s your idea of eating a lot, then I don’t see why you mightn’t stay with me for the rest of the winter.”

“Oh, I’d love to!” exclaimed Thumbelina gratefully, and she hugged the mouse with all her might.

The two soon became very good friends. The mouse had a lot of food stored up for the winter, and in return for food and shelter Thumbelina would sing and keep her company. One day, the mouse brought Thumbelina some news.

“My friend Mr. Mole is going to pay us a visit tomorrow,” she said. “He comes to visit quite often in the warmer weather. He’s very rich and has a big house, but sadly he’s also blind. He loves music though, so I’m sure he’s going to love your singing.”

Thumbelina was delighted. She loved to meet new people, especially when they were friends of her friends.

The next day, the mole arrived. He liked Thumbelina immediately.

“I believe I could listen to her sing for the rest of my life, my friend!” he said to the mouse. And for a time it seemed that he would, for he began to visit every day to hear Thumbelina sing. She was happy for the company, but after a while, when he had just left, the mouse came to Thumbelina yet again.

“Well, Thumbelina, I’ve heard that you are going to be a bride!” she announced, happily. “Mr. Mole tells me he is going to marry you!”

This was news to Thumbelina. She didn’t want to marry him in the slightest. He was decent company, but most of the time he was a bit snotty and uppity, and just that morning she had learned that he hated flowers!

“Oh no, my friend, I don’t want to be his bride!” said Thumbelina desperately, but the mouse had already begun wedding preparations and ignored all of Thumbelina’s protestations.

The winter was finally coming to an end when Mr. Mole announced that he wanted to show his future wife the house where they would soon live together.

THUMBELINA

Thumbelina didn't know what to do. No matter how often she said she wouldn't marry him, no one ever seemed to hear her.

The mole's house was underground, where there was absolutely no sunshine and no flowers. She couldn't imagine living like that, but she agreed to go with him to look at it. As they approached the house, they came across a little bird lying on the ground. It was frozen stiff and completely motionless.

"Oh, poor thing!" Thumbelina exclaimed, and knelt down to help.

"Serves him right," the mole said. "Stupid birds, with their bothersome twittering all summer. Serves them right, freezing to death in the winter! It's what they get for being too lazy to gather food before the first snow." And then he kicked the bird and continued walking home.

Thumbelina couldn't understand how the mole could be so heartless. She got closer to the bird and discovered that it was a swallow. When Thumbelina put her ear to its chest, she heard a weak beating. Thump thump. Thump thump. It was still alive! And with all her strength, she slowly dragged the bird back to the mouse's nest.

Thumbelina nursed the bird for days, covering it with her blankets and sleeping beside it to make sure it was never wanting for anything. Soon, the swallow could stand up, and within a few days she had recovered completely.

When the swallow was finally ready to leave, she asked Thumbelina if she would like to go with her. The swallow had a feeling that the girl was not entirely happy, and thought perhaps she could help.

"I can't leave the mouse yet, I owe her too much for taking care of me. I suppose I have to stay with her for now. But you can come visit anytime!" said Thumbelina, and gave the bird a big hug.

Thumbelina spent the whole spring with the mouse, helping her friend to gather more seeds and nuts for the next winter. They got along well, but the mouse talked more and more about Mole and Thumbelina's wedding. Thumbelina still didn't want to marry him, but the mouse just wouldn't seem to believe her. On top of that, he had started spending most of his time with them, and Thumbelina was starting to feel as if she were locked up in a prison.

THUMBELINA

When Autumn came and the wedding was just a few weeks away, Thumbelina started to get very worried. The mole was happier and happier every day, but Thumbelina was miserable and couldn't find a way to get out of her predicament. Just in time, the swallow came for a visit. As soon as she heard what was happening with Thumbelina, she said,

"I'm going to fly South for this winter, so if you want to come with me, now's your chance."

This time, she didn't need to ask twice.

"Yes," Thumbelina said. "I'd love to. Please, take me with you."

And so she climbed onto the swallows back and with a flutter of the bird's wings, they took off. Thumbelina hadn't been this relieved since she'd escaped the toads! They flew for a long, long time. They whooshed above green forests, mountains and seas, until finally they landed at a place so beautiful that Thumbelina thought it must not be real. The air was pleasant and warm, and there was a field full of flowers so vast she couldn't even see the other side. The swallow offered to bring Thumbelina to her nest, but the girl loved the flower field so much she decided she would try to make her own home.

"Be safe, my friend," the swallow said. "And remember that if you ever need anything, all you have to do is sing a song of help and I will hear you and come to your aid."

They embraced and the bird took off. Thumbelina was terribly tired after the long journey, so she started looking for a flower to take a nap in. She looked around for a while before climbing a stalk up to a yellow flower that looked just like the one where she'd been born. But someone else was already lounging there! He had wings and a glittering crown on his head, and he was exactly the same size as her. Thumbelina thought he was very handsome, though she was still very surprised to find another tiny person in a flower.

"Hello!" he said. He thought he'd never seen such a pretty girl in his life, but he wanted to be polite. "I'm Avens, the prince of the flowers. What's your name?"

"My name is Thumbelina," she answered, shyly. "I'm sorry if I was intruding, I was just looking for a place to lie down for a while."

THUMBELINA

The prince laughed and explained that he, too, had been in the flower so he could take a nap. He was a fairy prince, he said, and he asked if she would like to come with him and meet the rest of the fairies.

“I would love to!” Thumbelina said.

And so the prince took Thumbelina to the land of the fairies, where everyone was her size. She saw flowers more beautiful than she had ever seen in her life, and before long, she fell in love with the prince. He was kind and warm-hearted, and cared about what she wanted. And the day Thumbelina married him, a pair of wings grew from her shoulders. She was, truly, a fairy!

The couple visited Thumbelina’s mother as soon as they could. She had missed Thumbelina very much, but she was so happy to find that her daughter was not only safe, but happy. And, for the rest of her life, Thumbelina lived happily, singing and dancing with her fairy friends in her new, magical home.