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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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# The Twelve Brothers

Once upon a time there was a king and a queen with twelve sons. The queen was expecting a thirteenth child. One day the king told his wife that the twelve sons had to die if the baby was a girl. The baby girl would then inherit the whole kingdom on her own. The king had twelve coffins made and hid them in a private room. His wife was not allowed to talk about them to anyone.

The queen was unhappy and her youngest son Benjamin noticed it. "Mother," he said, "why are you so sad? My dear child, I must not tell you," the queen replied. The boy kept asking about it. Finally, she showed him the private room containing the twelve coffins. 'Mother, don't worry,' the youngest son said. We will flee into the forest and look after ourselves. We will pick a spot where we can see the tower of the castle. Hang up a white flag if a brother is born and a red flag if it is a sister.'

One day Benjamin saw the red flag and they knew they were supposed to die. The poor brothers swore that they would take revenge on every girl they met.

They fled further and found an abandoned



cottage. 'This will be our new home,' they said. The youngest brother took care of the household. The older brothers took care of the food. Meanwhile, the little sister grew up to be a very sweet and beautiful girl. She wore beautiful clothes and had a golden star on her forehead. On the day she turned ten, she found twelve shirts in a wardrobe, too small to be worn by her father. "Who do these shirts belong to?" she asked her mother.

The queen sighed and told her that they belonged to her twelve brothers. Twelve brothers!" the girl cried. 'Where are they? Why have I never heard of them?' 'Nobody knows where they are,' sobbed the queen, 'your father wanted to kill them so you would be the only heir.' 'Mother dearest, don't cry,' the daughter said, 'I'm going to find my brothers.'

Immediately the girl went into the forest until she arrived at a cottage in the evening. There she saw a boy who blushed at the sight of the sweet and beautiful girl. 'What are you doing here?' he asked her. 'I am looking for my twelve brothers,' she replied, showing him the shirts she had brought. Benjamin realized that she was his sister and said, 'I am your youngest brother, Benjamin.'

They fell into each other's arms with joy and happiness. 'Dear sister,' said Benjamin, 'soon your brothers will come home. We have sworn to kill all the girls in revenge for what happened to us. So hide behind this tub until I have explained everything to them.' When they returned, Benjamin told them he had news which

he would only tell if they made him a promise. The brothers promised.

Benjamin asked them to promise him that they would not kill the first girl they met. 'Your sister is here,' said Benjamin. When the brothers saw her, they thought she was so sweet and they embraced her lovingly. The sister stayed and helped Benjamin with the household. In the garden grew twelve beautiful white lilies. The little sister wanted to pick them as a surprise for her brothers. As she carefully picked the flowers, her brothers all turned into ravens and flew away. The house disappeared before her eyes.

Behind her, an old witch appeared. 'My child, what have



you done,' she scratched in her voice, 'why didn't you let the flowers grow on their stems?' 'Your brothers will now forever have to live as ravens.' 'Is there anything I can do to undo it?' the girl cried. 'Only if no smile appears on your face and no word comes out of your

mouth for seven years. If you fail at this only once, your brothers will die instantly,' the witch replied. The sister climbed a tree to live there unnoticed for seven years and not speak a word to anyone.

But one day, she was spotted by a king. He was very impressed by her beauty and asked her to marry him. She did not speak a word, but only nodded. The

wedding was celebrated lavishly soon after. But the bride did not speak nor laugh. They lived happily together for a while... until the king's mother began to doubt the queen's good intentions. Why doesn't she talk and why doesn't she ever laugh? She must have a guilty conscience! What do you actually know about this woman?" she argued with the king. Finally, she managed to persuade the king to prosecute his wife as a witch. The king watched in tears as his wife was led to the stake.

At that time, it was exactly seven years ago since her brothers had turned into ravens. Twelve ravens flew in. Once they landed on the ground, her twelve brothers appeared. Now the queen was allowed to speak again, and she could tell the king the reason for her silence and inability to laugh. The king was overjoyed that she was innocent and warmly welcomed the brothers. They safely stayed in the castle. Together, they lived happily ever after.

