The Fairest of Them All delivers a trove of forgotten fairy tales to readers and returns the Snow White of Disney and the Brothers Grimm to her international context.

— Wall Street Journal

Snow White and 21 Tales of Mothers and Daughters

Exclusive Mother’s Day mini ebook

Maria Tatar
Promotional mini ebook produced by the Belknap Press of Harvard University Press in April 2020

All material is taken from The Fairest of Them All: 21 Tales of Mothers and Daughters by Maria M. Tatar published by Harvard University Press, April 2020

"Little Snow White"

“The Enchanted Stockings”

Not for sale
The Fairest of Them All

21 Tales of Mothers and Daughters

Maria M. Tatar

The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press
Praise for

The Fairest of Them All

“The Fairest of Them All delivers a trove of forgotten fairy tales to readers and returns the Snow White of Disney and the Brothers Grimm to her international context.”

—Wall Street Journal

“This is a properly magical, erudite book that follows Snow White’s trail into the darker forests of the human psyche in which she originated.”

—Literary Review

“Tilt the magic mirror this way, that, and you’ll find in The Fairest of Them All nearly two dozen reflections, each dazzling, of the ur-fairy tale known as Snow White. With her trademark brio and deep-tissue understanding, Maria Tatar opens the glass casket on this undying story, which retains its power to charm twenty-one times, and counting.”

—Gregory Maguire, author of Wicked and Mirror Mirror
“Is the story of Snow White the cruelest, the deepest, the strangest, the most mythopoeic of them all? The answer must be yes. Maria Tatar trains a keen eye on the appeal of the bitter conflict between women at the heart of the tale, unearths retellings from far and wide, and spreads a feast of rich thoughts on the tale’s remarkable aesthetic migrations into literature and film. *The Fairest of Them All* is an exciting and authoritative anthology from the wisest good fairy in the world of the fairy tale.”

—Marina Warner, author of *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale* and *Stranger Magic: Charmed States and the Arabian Nights*

“Going to the root of a story is a journey to the very core of the soul. Reading across the world, the inimitable Maria Tatar offers us a maze of mothers and daughters and within that glorious tangle an archetype with far more meaning than we imagine when we say ‘Snow White.’”

—Honor Moore, author of *Our Revolution: A Mother and Daughter at Midcentury*
A Note From the Author

Fairy tales, up close and personal, always give us something to talk about. Taking us into the safe space of “once upon a time,” the story of Snow White allows our imaginations to run wild with perils and possibilities, hypotheticals and counterfactuals, fantasies and fears. At a time like this, when we are all also sheltering in place in our own cozy or all-too-snug cottages, it’s time to travel around the world, looking at stories about beautiful girls and their jealous mothers, stepmothers, aunts, and mothers-in-law. Mother’s Day, a time when we acknowledge all the wonders of the women who raised us, is also a good time to explore the dark side of family conflicts and consider how to find happily-ever-afters for us all.

I hope you enjoy these two tales that I translated for *The Fairest of Them All*, first “Little Snow White” from the Brothers Grimm and then a French tale called “The Enchanted Stockings.”

Stay safe and healthy wherever you are sheltering.

—Maria Tatar
The Grimms’ “Little Snow White” appeared in its canonical form in the final edition of their Children’s Stories and Household Tales, published in 1857. It was cast in a literary style that reflected the brothers’ investment in writing down the story in its most “poetic” form. The earlier manuscript version of “Snow White” (the second story printed below) represented an effort to set down a “first draft,” a tale that combined features from the many Snow White stories available to the Grimms. That version has a rough-hewn quality to it, a patchwork in some instances, with a queen who hails from England. An alternative beginning to that tale follows the two stories below. The value of white, red, and black as the colors of poetry and as fairy-tale colors becomes evident in the mantra-like repetition of Snow White’s attributes, a coding that is not a vital element in other German folk narratives about beautiful girls who arouse the envy of their mothers.
Once upon a time in the middle of winter, when snowflakes were falling down from the sky like feathers, a queen was sitting by a window with a black ebony frame. She was sewing, and while she was looking out at the snow, she pricked her finger with her needle. Three drops of blood fell down onto the snow. The red looked so beautiful against the white snow that she thought to herself, “If only I had a child as white as snow, as red as blood, and as black as the wood on this window frame.” Not much later she gave birth to a little girl, who was white as snow, red as blood, and black as ebony, and she was called Snow White. The queen died soon after the child was born.

A year later the king married another woman. She was a beautiful lady but proud and arrogant. She could not bear being second to anyone when it came to beauty. She owned a magic mirror, and when she stood before it and looked at herself, she would repeat the words,

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who’s the fairest of them all?”

The mirror would reply,

“Oh, my queen, you are the fairest of them all.”

Then she felt satisfied, for she knew that the mirror always spoke the truth.

In the meantime, Snow White was growing up and becoming more and more beautiful with each passing day. By the time she was seven years old, she was as beautiful as the bright day and more beautiful than the queen herself. One day the queen asked the mirror,
“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,  
Who’s the fairest of them all?”  

The mirror replied,  

“My queen, you are the fairest one here,  
But Snow White is a thousand times fairer!”

When the queen heard those words, she began to tremble, and she turned green with envy. From that moment on, she hated Snow White, and whenever she set eyes on her, her heart became cold as a stone. Envy and pride grew like weeds in her heart. Day and night, she never had a moment’s peace. One day she summoned a huntsman and said, “Take the girl out into the forest. I never want to set eyes on her again. Kill her and bring me her lungs and liver as proof of your deed.” The huntsman obeyed and took the girl out into the woods, but just as he was pulling out his hunting knife and about to plunge it into her innocent heart, she began weeping and pleaded with him, “Alas, dear huntsman, spare my life. I promise to run into the woods and never return.”

Snow White was so beautiful that the huntsman took pity on her and said, “Just get out of here and run away, you poor child.”

“Wild animals will devour you before long,” he thought to himself. He felt as if a great weight had been lifted from his shoulders, for at least now he would not have to kill her. Just then a young boar ran past him, and the huntsman stabbed it to death. He took out its lungs and liver and brought them to the queen as proof that he had murdered the girl. The cook was told to boil them in brine, and the wicked woman dined on them, thinking that she had eaten Snow White’s lungs and liver.

The poor child was left all alone in the vast forest. She was so
frightened that she could only stare in silence at all the leaves on the trees and had no idea what to do next. She started running and sped over sharp stones and raced through bushes with thorns in them. Wild beasts darted near her at times, but they did her no harm. She ran as far as her legs could carry her. When night fell, she saw a little cottage and went inside to rest. Everything in the house was tiny and indescribably dainty and spotless. There was a little table, with seven little plates on a white cloth. Each little plate had a little spoon, seven little knives and forks, and seven little cups. Against the wall were seven little beds in a row, each made up with sheets white as snow. Snow White was so hungry and thirsty that she ate a few vegetables and some bread from each little plate and and took a sip of wine from each little cup. She didn’t want to take everything away from one place. Later, she was so tired that she tried out the beds, but they did not seem to be the right size. The first was too long, the second too short. But the seventh one was just right, and she stayed in it. Then she said her prayers and fell fast asleep.

Once it was completely dark outside, the owners of the cottage returned. They were seven dwarfs who spent their days in the mountains, mining ore and digging for minerals. They lit their seven little lanterns, and when the cottage brightened up, they saw that someone had been there, for some things were not the way they had left them.

The first one asked, “Who’s been sitting on my little chair?”
The second asked, “Who’s been eating from my little plate?”
The third asked, “Who took a bite out of my little loaf of bread?”
The fourth asked, “Who’s been eating from my little plate of vegetables?”
The fifth asked, “Who’s been using my little fork?”
The sixth asked, “Who’s been cutting with my little knife?”
The seventh asked, “Who’s been drinking from my little cup?”

The first one turned around and noticed that the sheets on his bed were wrinkled, and he said, “Who climbed into my little bed?”
The others came running and shouted, “Someone’s been sleeping in my bed too.”

When the seventh dwarf looked in his little bed, he saw Snow White lying there, fast asleep. He called to the others, who came running and who were so astonished that they raised their seven little lanterns to let the light shine on Snow White.

“My goodness, oh my goodness!” they exclaimed. “What a beautiful child!”

The dwarfs were so delighted to see her that they decided not to wake her up, and they let her continue sleeping in her little bed. The seventh dwarf slept for an hour with each of his companions until the night was over.

In the morning, Snow White woke up. When she saw the dwarfs, she was frightened, but they were friendly and asked, “What’s your name?”

“My name is Snow White,” she said.

“How did you find our house?” asked the dwarfs.

Then she told them how her stepmother had tried to kill her and how the huntsman had spared her life. She had run all day long until she found their cottage.

The dwarfs told her, “If you will keep house for us, cook, make the beds, wash, sew, knit, and keep everything neat and tidy, then...
you can stay with us, and we’ll give you everything you need.”

“That’s perfect,” Snow White replied, and she stayed with them.

She kept house for the dwarfs. In the morning, they went up to the mountains to search for minerals and gold. In the evening, they returned, and dinner had to be waiting for them. Since the girl was by herself during the day, the good dwarfs gave her a stern warning: “Beware of your stepmother. She’ll know soon enough that you’re here. Don’t let anyone in the house.”

After the queen had finished eating what she thought were Snow White’s lungs and liver, she was sure that she was once again the fairest of all in the land. She went to the mirror and said,

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who’s the fairest of them all?”

The mirror replied,

“Here you’re the fairest, dear queen,
But little Snow White, who plans to stay
With the seven dwarfs far, far away,
Is now the fairest ever seen.”

When the queen heard those words, she was horrified, for she knew that the mirror could not lie. She realized now that the huntsman had deceived her and that Snow White must still be alive. She thought long and hard about how she could kill Snow White. Unless she herself was the fairest in the land, she would never be able to feel anything but envy in her heart. Finally, she came up with a plan. Once she stained her face and dressed up as an old peddler woman, she was completely unrecognizable.
She traveled beyond the seven hills to the seven dwarfs in her disguise. Then she knocked on the door and called out, “Pretty wares for a good price.”

Snow White peeked out the window and said, “Good day, old woman, what are you selling?”

“Nice things, pretty things,” she replied. “Staylaces in all kinds of colors,” and she took out a silk lace woven in many colors.

“I can let this good woman in,” Snow White thought to herself, and she unbolted the door and bought the pretty lace.

“Oh, my child, what a sight you are! Come, let me lace you up properly.”

Snow White wasn’t the least bit apprehensive. She stood in front of the old woman and let her put on the new lace. The old woman laced her up so quickly and so tightly that Snow White’s breath was cut off, and she fell down as if dead.

“So much for being the fairest of them all!” the old woman shouted and rushed away.

Not much later, in the evening, the seven dwarfs came back home. When they saw their beloved Snow White lying on the ground, they were horrified. She wasn’t moving at all, and they were sure she was dead. They lifted her up, and when they saw that she had been laced too tightly, they cut the staylace in two. Snow White began to breathe, and gradually she came back to life. When the dwarfs heard what had happened, they said, “The old peddler woman was none other than the wicked queen. Beware, and don’t let anyone in unless we’re at home.”

When the wicked woman returned home, she went to the mirror and asked,
“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who’s the fairest of them all?”

The mirror replied as usual,

“Here you’re the fairest, dear queen,
But little Snow White, who plans to stay
With the seven dwarfs far, far away,
Is now the fairest ever seen.”

The blood froze in her veins when she heard those words. She was horrified, for she knew that Snow White was still alive. “But this time,” she said, “I will dream up something that will destroy you.”

Using all the witchcraft in her power, she fashioned a poisoned comb. Then she changed her clothes and disguised herself as a different old woman. Once again she traveled beyond the seven hills to the seven dwarfs, knocked on the door, and called out, “Pretty wares at a good price.”

Snow White peeked out the window and said, “Go away. I can’t let anyone in.”

“But how about just taking a look?” said the old woman, and she took out the poisoned comb and held it high up in the air. The child liked it so much that she was completely fooled and opened the door. When the two had agreed on a price, the old woman said, “Now I’ll give your hair a good combing.”

Poor Snow White suspected nothing and let the woman go ahead, but no sooner had the comb touched her hair than the poison took effect, and the girl collapsed and fell to the ground.

“There, my beauty!” said the wicked woman. “Now you’re
finished,” and she hurried away.

Fortunately, it was almost evening, and the seven dwarfs were on their way home. When they saw Snow White lying on the ground as though dead, they suspected the stepmother right away. They examined Snow White and found the poisoned comb. As soon as they pulled it out, Snow White came back to life and told them what had happened. Again they warned her to be on guard and not to open the door to anyone.

At home, the queen stood before the mirror and said,

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who’s the fairest of them all?”

The mirror answered as before,

“Here you’re the fairest, dear queen,
But little Snow White, who plans to stay
With the seven dwarfs far, far away,
Is now the fairest ever seen.”

When the queen heard the words spoken by the mirror, she began trembling with rage. “Snow White must die!” she cried out. “Even if it costs me my life.”

She went off into a remote chamber, hidden away where no one ever set foot, and there she made an apple full of poison. On the outside it looked beautiful—white with red cheeks—so that once you set eyes on it, you longed to eat it. But anyone who took the tiniest bite would die. When the apple was finished, she stained her face, dressed up as a peasant woman, and traveled beyond the seven hills to the seven dwarfs. She knocked at their door, and Snow White put her head out the window to say, “I can’t let anyone in. The seven dwarfs won’t allow it.”
“That’s all right,” replied the peasant woman. “I’ll get rid of my apples one way or another. Here, let me give you one.”

“No,” said Snow White, “I’m not supposed to take anything from anyone.”

“Are you afraid that it’s poisoned?” asked the old woman. “Here, I’ll cut the apple in two. You eat the red half; I’ll eat the white.”

The apple had been made so artfully that only the red half was poisoned. Snow White felt a craving for the beautiful apple, and when she saw the peasant woman eating it, she could no longer stop herself. Putting her hand out the window, she took the poisoned half. But as soon as she took a bite, she fell down on the ground dead. The queen stared at her with savage eyes and burst out laughing, “White as snow, red as blood, black as ebony! This time the dwarfs won’t be able to bring you back to life!”

At home, she asked the mirror,

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Who’s the fairest of them all?”

And finally it replied,

“Oh, queen, you are the fairest in the land.”

Her envious heart was finally at peace, as much as an envious heart can be.

When the little dwarfs returned home in the evening, they found Snow White lying on the ground. Not a breath of air came from her lips. She was dead. They lifted her up and looked around for something that might be poisonous. They unlaced her, combed her hair, and washed her with water and wine, but it did no good. The dear child was dead, and nothing could bring her
back. They placed her on a bier, and all seven of them sat down by it and mourned her. They wept for three days. They were about to bury her, but she still looked just like a living person with beautiful red cheeks.

“How can we possibly lower her into the dark ground?” they asked. They had a transparent glass coffin made so that you could see Snow White from all sides. They put her in it, wrote her name in golden letters, and added that she was the daughter of a king. They brought the coffin up to the top of a mountain, and one of them was always there to keep vigil. Animals also came to mourn Snow White, first an owl, then a raven, and finally a dove.

Snow White lay in the coffin for a long, long time. But she did not decay and looked as if she were sleeping, for she was still white as snow, red as blood, and with hair as black as ebony. One day the son of a king was traveling through the woods and arrived at the dwarfs’ cottage. He wanted to spend the night there. On top of the mountain, he saw the coffin with beautiful Snow White lying in it, and he read what had been written in golden letters. Then he said to the dwarfs, “Let me have the coffin. I will give you whatever you want for it.”

The dwarfs answered, “We wouldn’t give it to you for all the gold in the world.”

Then he said, “Make me a gift of it, for I can’t live without seeing Snow White. I will honor and cherish her as if she were my beloved.”

The good dwarfs took pity on him when they heard these words, and they gave him the coffin. The prince ordered his servants to hoist the coffin up on their shoulders and take it back home. It happened that they stumbled over a shrub, and the jolt
freed the poisonous piece of apple lodged in Snow White’s throat. She returned to life. “Good heavens, where am I?” she cried out.

The prince was overjoyed and said, “You are with me,” and he described what had happened and said, “I love you more than anything else on Earth. Come with me to my father’s castle. You shall be my bride.” Snow White had tender feelings for him, and she agreed to go with him. A marriage was soon celebrated with great splendor.

Snow White’s wicked stepmother was also invited to the wedding feast. She put on beautiful clothes, stood before the mirror, and said,

“Mirror, mirror on the wall:  
Who’s the fairest of them all?”

The mirror replied,

“My queen, you may be the fairest here,  
But the young queen is a thousand times fairer.”

The wicked woman let loose a curse, and she was so upset that she had no idea what to do. At first she didn’t want to go to the wedding feast. But she never had a moment’s peace after that and had to go and see the young queen. When she entered the castle, Snow White recognized her right away. The queen was terrified and just stood there, unable to budge an inch. Iron slippers had already been heated up over a fire of coals. They were brought in with tongs and set right in front of her. She had to put on the red-hot iron shoes and dance in them until she dropped to the ground dead.
THE ENCHANTED STOCKINGS

Collected by the renowned French folklorist Paul Sébillot, this story, published in 1880, was told by a fifty-eight-year-old cooper named Pierre Derou de Collinée. The touching contrasts between murderous hostility and warm hospitality, both triggered by beauty, fuel the story’s narrative power, which gives us everything from hunger pangs and aerial suspension to costume changes and startling reanimation, reminding us that even the simplest of tales can sound full dramatic chords.
Once upon a time there lived a queen who had a grown daughter, almost old enough to be married. The queen was renowned for her beauty, and she was still so graceful and pretty that she was often taken for the elder sister rather than the mother of the princess.

One day, when the queen and her daughter were standing on the balcony of the palace, some soldiers walked by and said, “The queen is very beautiful, but her daughter is even more beautiful.”

When the queen heard those words, she grew jealous of her daughter, whom she could no longer bear to have near her, and she made up her mind to get rid of her. She ordered two of her servants to take the girl into the forest and kill her. The poor princess followed them into the woods, without even an inkling of their intentions. When they reached the middle of the forest, the two servants looked at her and were so taken by her beauty and innocence that they did not have the heart to carry out the queen’s orders. They said to each other, “It would be a sin to kill a princess who is so pretty and who has never spoken a harsh word to a soul. We will leave her here in the woods, where she will lose her way, for we are very far from the castle. No one will ever know what became of her.”

They completed their task and disappeared. The princess called after them and tried in vain to find her way back. For four days she wandered around in the forest, unable to find anything to eat or drink, trembling at the slightest noise and fearful that at any moment wild beasts would devour her. Then suddenly a beautiful castle appeared in a clearing, and she entered it, hoping to beg for a crust of bread.

Three brothers lived in that castle. Every day two of them went off to hunt, while the third stayed at home to attend to the
household. It was around noon when the princess reached the castle. The brother guarding the house had just gone down into the cellar to find some wine for dinner. He had removed a roast chicken from the spit, and it was on the table, where the princess caught sight of it. She had not eaten for four days, and when she saw the chicken and took in its smell, she grabbed it, planning to take just a leg or a wing. But she heard a noise and fled, taking the chicken with her and hiding in the stable where the dogs were kept.

The two brothers returned from the hunt with hearty appetites and found nothing but an empty platter on the table. They asked the brother who had stayed home, “Why didn’t you prepare anything for dinner?”

“I did,” he replied. “I roasted a whole chicken, took it from the spit, and put it on the table. Then I went down to the cellar to fetch some wine. Who in the world could have taken it?”

“The dogs must have swiped it,” one of the brothers said.

They whistled, and the dogs came running, but one of them was missing. They walked over to the stable to make sure he was not ailing or had not run away, and they discovered a young girl there, feeding the bones of the chicken to the dog.

When the girl saw them, she cried out, “Oh, my dear sirs! You are probably ready to kill me for stealing from you, but I have had nothing to eat for four days.”

“No, no,” they replied. “We have no intention of harming you. The only thing we want is to make sure that you are safe and have a home.”

They took her over to the castle, and the girl charmed all three brothers with her beauty and her endearing manner. A few days later they said, “We can’t all three marry this beautiful
girl, and if one of us were to marry her, the others might grow jealous. If she stays here as our sister, we can keep the peace in our home. She can look after the household while we go out to hunt.”

The princess happily agreed to this arrangement, and she did her best to manage the household for the three brothers.

One day, when she was by herself in the castle, an old woman came begging for alms and recognized the girl as the queen’s daughter. The old woman, who had imagined the girl to be dead, hurried back to the palace and told the queen that her daughter must be alive, for she had seen her with her own two eyes.

The queen was shocked by the news and said to the poor woman, “Take these stockings to the princess, but don’t tell her they are from me. If you manage to persuade her to put them on, your future will be secure.”

The beggar woman returned to the castle. When the princess was alone, the old woman made her way to her chamber and presented the girl with the stockings. The girl suspected that they were a gift from her mother, who was up to no good. Still, she put them on. As soon as she pulled up the second stocking, her eyes closed, and she fell into a deep trance, unable to move. The old woman took her leave as quickly as possible.

The three brothers returned home and began to worry when their adopted sister seemed to have disappeared. They went up to her room and found her stretched out on a chair, looking as if she were dead. They suspected that the old woman had cast a spell on her, and they ran after her; but they were unable to catch up with her. When they returned to the castle, they were distraught, for they loved the girl with all their heart.

“What shall we do with our sister?” asked the eldest.
“Let’s put her in a casket with a glass lid, and that way we will be able to keep her with us. Even in death, she is beautiful.”

They placed her gently in a glass-covered casket, and they went to see her often. But she never stirred.

Now it came to pass that the three young men were sent into battle. Before setting off, they took the casket from the castle and hoisted it up into the branches of one of the trees in the forest.

Before long a hunter, who was roaming through the forest in search of game, saw a flicker of light in the branches of a tree. The next day he noticed a shining object up in the same place, and he made up his mind that if he saw that light a third time, he would climb up the tree and get to the bottom of things. The next day he climbed up the tree and discovered the casket and saw through the glass lid the most beautiful woman you could imagine, but motionless and with her eyes closed, as if she were dead.

He managed to bring the casket down to the ground and carried it back home, where he lived with his three sisters. The girls were enraptured by the beauty of the sleeping princess, and the youngest of the three, who was playful and loved to giggle, said, “Yes, she is pretty, but she would be even prettier if she put on my fine stockings and one of my dresses.”

“What are you thinking?” her sisters said. “How did you come up with that? Just leave her alone.”

The youngest sister was given permission to keep the glass casket in her chamber. One day, when her sisters were away, she opened it up, slipped one of her dresses on the girl, and took off the girl’s stockings so that she could put on the finer ones she owned.

As soon as she pulled off the second stocking, the princess
opened her eyes, sat up, and cried out, “Oh!” just like a person who has been woken up. The young girl raced down the stairs on all fours, as frightened as if she had seen a ghost.

“Don’t be afraid!” the princess shouted. “Come back here. I am as alive as you are, but I have been asleep for a long, long time.”

When the sisters realized that the beautiful young girl had come back to life, they were overjoyed, and their brother was even happier. He fell in love with the princess and asked her to marry him, and she consented, for he was a handsome young fellow.
We hope you enjoyed this sampler from
*The Fairest of Them All*
by Maria M. Tatar

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