# The Twins With the Golden Star

Once upon a time something happened. If it hadn't happened, it wouldn't be told.There was an emperor, who ruled over a whole world, and in this world lived an old shepherd and shepherdess, who had three daughters, Anna, Stana, and Laptitza(Little Milk-white).Anna, the oldest sister, was so beautiful that the sheep stopped feeding when she went among them; Stana, the second, was so lovely that the wolves watched the herd when she was the shepherdess, but Laptitza, the youngest, who had a skin as white as the foam of milk, and hair as soft as the wool of the lambkins, was as beautiful as both of her sisters put together, beautiful as only she herself could be.One summer day, when the sunbeams were growing less scorching, the three sisters went to the edge of the forest to pick strawberries. While searching for them, they heard the tramp of horses' hoofs, as if a whole troop of cavalry were dashing up. It was the emperor's son, hunting with his friends and courtiers, all handsome, stately youths, sitting their horses as if they were a part of their steeds, but the handsomest and proudest of all rode the most fiery charger, and was the emperor's son himself.When they saw the sisters, they curbed their horses and rode more slowly."Listen to me, sisters," said Anna; "if one of those youths should choose me for his wife, I'd knead a loaf of bread which, when he had eaten it, would make him always feel young and brave.""And I," said Stana, "would weave my husband a shirt, in which he could fight against dragons, go through water without being wet, or fire without being burned.""But I," said Laptitza, the youngest sister, "would give my husband two beautiful sons, twin boys with golden hair, and on their foreheads a golden star, a star as bright as Lucifer."The youths heard these words, and turning their horses dashed toward the maidens."Sacred be thy promise, thou shalt be mine, fairest empress," cried the emperor's son, lifting Laptitza with her berries upon his horse."And thou shalt be mine!" "And thou shalt be mine!" said a second and third youth; so bearing their lovely burdens on their steeds, all dashed back to the imperial court.The three weddings were celebrated the very next day, and for three days and nights the festival was held throughout the empire with great pomp and splendor. After three days and nights the news went through the whole country that Anna had gathered grain, ground, boiled, and kneaded it, and made a loaf of bread, as she had promised while picking strawberries. Then, after three more days and nights, tidings went through the land that Stana had collected flax, dried, and hackled it, spun it into linen, wove the cloth, and made her husband a shirt as she had promised while seeking for her strawberries. Laptitza alone had not yet kept her word, but great things require time.When seven weeks had passed, counting from the wedding day, the emperor's son, now emperor, appeared before his brave companions and the other courtiers with a very joyous face, and in a much softer voice than ever before informed them that henceforth he should not leave the court for a long time, his heart moved him to stay with his wife night and day.So the world, the country, and the whole empire rejoiced in the expectation of seeing something never beheld before.But many things happen in this world, among them much that is good and much that is evil.The emperor had a step-mother, who had brought with her to the palace a daughter of her first husband, a girl with beautiful hair. But woe betide those who have such relationships.The step-mother had intended that her daughter should become the emperor's wife and empress of the whole country, instead of little Milk-white, the shepherd's daughter. Therefore she determined that if things fell out as Laptitza had promised, the emperor and the world should believe they did not happen according to the prediction.But the step-mother could not carry out her plan, because the emperor remained with his wife day and night. Yet she thought that gradually, by coaxing and cunning, she might get rid of him, and then Laptitza would be left in her care and she would provide for every thing.But she could not get rid of the emperor by means of a few coaxing words. The wind blew them away, and all her craft was useless. Time passed, the day for the fulfillment of Laptitza's promise was drawing near, and still the emperor never left his wife.When the step-mother saw that no plot succeeded, she felt as if a stone were lying heavy on her heart, and sent a message to her brother, whose kingdom was very near, to ask him to come with his soldiers and summon the emperor to a war.This was a clever plan and, as will be seen, not an unsuccessful one. The emperor fairly leaped into the air in his rage, when he heard that hostile soldiers were on the march to attack his country, and that something would occur which had not happened for a long time—a battle, a terrible battle, a battle between two emperors. The young husband saw that there was no help for it, he must do what needed to be done.That is the way with emperors. No matter how much they wish to guard their wives—if they hear of war, their hearts fairly leap in their bodies, their brains swell almost to bursting, their eyes grow dim, and leaving wife and children in God's care, they dash like the wind to battle.The emperor departed at the first sign of peril, moved as swiftly as one of God's judgments, fought as only he could fight, and at dawn on the morning of the third day was back again at the imperial court, his heart soothed by the battle, but full of unsatisfied longing to know what had happened during his absence.And—this had happened. Just at dawn on the morning of the third day, when the stars were paling in the sky, and the emperor was only three steps from the palace-gate, the Lord's gift came down to the earth, and Laptitza's promise was fulfilled—two beautiful twin princes, exactly alike, each with golden hair and a golden star on his forehead.But the world was not to see them!The step-mother, as wicked as her thoughts, hastily put two puppies in the place of the beautiful twins, and buried the golden-haired children at the corner of the palace, just under the emperor's windows.When the monarch entered the palace he saw and heard nothing except the two puppies the step-mother had put in the twins' place. No words were wasted. The emperor saw with his own eyes, and that was enough. Laptitza had not kept her promise, and there was nothing to be done except mete out her punishment.He could not help it, and though his own heart was torn, commanded that the empress should be buried to her breast in the earth and so remain before the eyes of the world, in token of what befell those who tried to deceive an emperor.The next day the step-mother's wish was fulfilled. The emperor married a second time, and again the wedding festivities lasted three days and three nights.But God's blessing does not rest upon unjust deeds.The two princes found no rest in the earth. Two beautiful aspens sprang up where they were buried, but when the step-mother saw them she ordered them to be pulled up by the roots. The emperor, however, said: "Let them grow, I like to see them before the window. I never beheld such aspens before."So the trees grew, grew as no other aspens ever had grown, every day a year's growth, every night another year's growth, but in the dawn of morning, when the stars were paling in the sky, three years' growth in a single moment. When three days and three nights had passed, the two aspens were lofty trees, lifting their boughs to the emperor's window, and when the wind stirred the branches, he listened to their rustling all day long.The step-mother suspected what they were, and pondered all day trying to find some way to get rid of the trees at any cost. It was a difficult task, but a woman's will can squeeze milk from a stone, a woman's cunning conquers heroes—what force can not accomplish, fair words win, and when these fail, hypocritical tears succeed.One morning the empress sat down on the side of her husband's bed and began to overwhelm him with loving words and tender caresses. It was a long time before the thread broke, but at last—even emperors are mortal!"Very well," he said, reluctantly, "have your own way; order the aspens to be cut down, but one must be made into a bedstead for me, the other for you."This satisfied the empress. The aspens were cut down, and before night the beds were standing in the emperor's room.When he lay down, he felt as if he had become a hundred times heavier, yet he had never rested so well; but it seemed to the empress as if she were lying on thorns and nettles, so that she could not sleep all night long.When the emperor had fallen asleep, the beds began to creak, and amid this creaking the empress fancied she heard words that no one else understood."Is it hard for you, brother?" asked one of the beds."No, it isn't hard for me," replied the bed in which the emperor was sleeping, "I am happy, for my beloved father rests upon me.""It's hard for me," replied the other, "for on me lies a wicked soul."So the beds talked on in the empress's ears until the dawn of morning.When daylight came, the empress planned how she could destroy the beds. At last she ordered two bedsteads exactly like them, and when the emperor went hunting, placed them in his room without his knowledge; but the aspen beds, down to the very smallest splinter, she threw into the fire.When they were burned so entirely that not even a bit of charcoal remained, the empress collected the ashes and scattered them to the winds, that they might be strewn over nine countries and seas, and not an atom find another atom through all eternity.But she had not noticed that just when the fire was burning brightest two sparks rose, and soaring upward, fell again into the midst of the deep river that flowed through the empire, where they were changed into two little fishes with golden scales, so exactly alike that nobody could help knowing they were twin brothers.One day the imperial fishermen went out early in the morning, and threw their nets into the water. Just at the moment the last stars were fading, one of the men drew up his net and beheld what he had never seen before: two tiny fishes with golden scales.The other fishermen assembled to see the miracle, but when they had beheld and admired it, determined to carry the fish alive to the emperor for a gift."Don't take us there, we've just come from there, and it will be our destruction," said one of the fishes."But what shall I do with you?" asked the fisherman."Go and gather the dew from the leaves, let us swim in it, put us in the sun, and don't come back again till the sunbeams have dried the dew," said the second little fish.The fisherman did as he was told, gathered the dew from the leaves, put the little fish into it, placed them in the sun, and did not come back till the dew was all dried up.But what had happened! What did he see?Two boys, handsome princes with golden hair and a golden star on their foreheads, so exactly alike that no one who saw them could help knowing that they were twin brothers.The children grew very rapidly. Every day enough for a year, and every night enough for another year, but in the dawn of morning when the stars paled in the sky, enough for three years in a single moment. Besides, they grew as no other children ever had grown, three times as fast in age, strength, and wisdom. When three days and nights had passed, they were twelve years in age, twenty-four in strength, and thirty-six in wisdom."Now let us go to our father," said one of the princes to the fisherman.The fisherman dressed the lads in beautiful clothing, and made each a lambskin cap, which the boys drew low over their faces, that no one might see their golden hair and the golden star on their foreheads, and then took the princes to the imperial palace.It was broad daylight when they arrived."We want to speak to the emperor," said one of the princes to the guard, who stood armed at the door of the palace."That can't be done, he's at table," replied the soldier."Just because he is at table," said the second prince, passing through the door.The guards ran up and tried to drive the boys out of the court-yard, but the boys slipped through their fingers like quicksilver. Three paces forward, three up, and they were standing before the great hall, where the emperor was dining with all his court."We want to come in," said one of the princes sharply, to the servants who stood at the door."That can't be done," one of the lackeys answered."Indeed! We'll see whether it can be done or not," cried the other prince, pushing the men aside right and left.But there were a great many lackeys, and only two princes. A tumult and uproar arose outside, that resounded through the palace."What is going on out there?" asked the emperor angrily.The princes stopped when they heard their father's voice."Two boys are trying to enter by force," said an attendant, approaching the emperor."By force? Who seeks to enter my palace by force? Who are these boys?" cried the emperor in the same breath."We know not, your majesty," replied the lackey, "but there must be something uncommon about them, for the lads are as strong as young lions, they overpowered the guard at the gate, and have given us plenty to do. Besides, they are proud, they don't lift their caps from their heads."The emperor flushed scarlet with rage."Throw them out!" he cried. "Set the dogs on them.""Never mind, we will go," said the princes, weeping at the harsh words, as they went down the steps again.As they reached the gate, they were stopped by a servant, who was out of breath from running to overtake them."The emperor has commanded you to come back, the empress wants to see you."The princes hesitated, then turned, climbed the stairs, and still with their caps on their heads appeared before the emperor.There stood a long, wide table, at which sat all the imperial guests; at the head was the emperor, and beside him the empress, reclining on twelve silk cushions.As the princes entered, one of these twelve cushions fell to the floor, only eleven remaining under the royal lady."Take off your caps!" cried a courtier."To wear the head covered is a token of rank among men. We wish to be what we are.""Why, yes!" exclaimed the emperor, softened by the musical words that fell from the boys' lips. "Remain what you are, but who are you? Whence do you come, and what do you want?""We are twin brothers, members of a family that is broken in twain, half in the earth, half at the head of the table; we come from whence we went, and have reached the place whence we came; we have had a long journey, have spoken in the sighing of the wind, given a voice to wood, sang in the ripples of the water, but now we wish to chant in human language a song you know without knowing it."A second cushion fell from under the empress."Let them go home with their nonsense!" she said to her husband."Oh! no, let them sing," replied the emperor. "You only wanted to see them, but I wish to hear them. Sing, boys!"The empress was silent, and the princes began to sing the story of their lives."There was once an emperor," they began, and a third cushion fell from under the empress.When they described the emperor's departure to the war, three cushions fell at once, and when the princes had finished their song not a single one remained. But when they took off their caps and showed their golden hair and the golden star on their foreheads, guests, courtiers and emperor closed their eyes, that they might not be dazzled by so much radiance.Afterward, what ought to have been from the beginning, happened.Laptitza sat at the head of the table beside her husband, but the step-mother's daughter served as the humblest maid in the palace, and the wicked step-mother was fastened to the tail of a wild mare and dragged around the earth seven times, that the whole world might know and never forget, that whoever plans evil comes to a bad end.

## http://www.fairytales247.com/catalog/romanian-folktales/the-twins-with-the-golden-star-1357/