



THE FORBIDDEN GARDEN

The Fable of Belinda, Maidservant of the Sevenfold Magical Powers

It began seven hundred and seven years ago. While the Forbidden Garden today reveals dark secrets, a maidservant just ten years old was sent to tend the patch in order to conceal them. Soon, Belinda had created a magnificent garden containing not only the world's most powerful medicinal plants, but also (unbeknownst to the local villagers) its most poisonous ones. The villagers, particularly the Matriarch, loved Belinda as their own child, as she tended the garden with such care, and so prudent and modest, she knew how to use the healing power of the plants.

When Belinda turned seventeen and blossomed into beautiful womanhood, the farmer's son pricked himself on the thumb and contaminated his blood with deadly nightshade. On that night, Belinda, who was well aware of her powers, paced back and forth restlessly in her chamber. Then, her faithful companion, the wise white bird, whispered a magical recipe that only a *Nichtlinde*, an herbalist with the sevenfold magical powers, could prepare. She was to dig up a spruce, stake a ram's head upon its roots, soak mandrake in goat's milk, and on the seventh day stir in ram's fat and salt to make a thick salve. But meanwhile, the black mark rose high up the farmboy's arm. During the Sunday sermon at the village church, the hellish poison went into the veins of the emotional child, sending him wild and screaming through the pews. The priest considered the boy possessed by the devil, and decided to visit the farmhouse.

This happened on the seventh day.

Belinda had no time to waste, and hurried to finish the ointment. But just as she was bringing it to the garden, the farmer led the priest there and discovered the boy, who was so startled by the frightening ram's head, that he immediately suffered a heart attack. In desperation, Belinda tried to apply the healing ointment, but the priest held her back and decried her as a witch. The child died a short time later, and the priest and farmer held a dark suspicion: They searched Belinda's chamber and found all sorts of instruments of witchery. Belinda would be held responsible for the boy's death.

The same day, they set her on fire. Just then, the heavens opened and it rained apple-sized hail, wind and rain drenching the mourners. All that remained was a half-burnt pile of wood. Where Belinda, the *Nichtlinde*, disappeared to, no one knows. So she shall remain an escapee, and the young men who encounter her shall have their minds stolen. After seven hundred years, they will return, and a wooden porter will be awaiting them.

Cherished visitors, beware of the dangers that lurk here, because poisonous infernal and witchy weeds would like to ensnare you. Meanwhile, Rostolph, Belinda's wise and faithful companion, robbed of his senses by her disappearance, awakens today as an iron-wrought Raven with a disturbing perspective over your every move!

1 The Wooden Porter

Woe to he who rings seven times. With an elevated view the porter watches over everyone who dares enter the gate of the Forbidden Garden. Take heed, and touch not the poison foliage and devil's weeds – for few who enter ever returns!



2 The Staked Ram's Head

When the farmboy tainted his blood with the juice of the nightshade, Belinda followed the instructions of her wise white bird and prepared a magical ointment of goat's milk, mandrake, ram's fat and salt. Where a spruce had once grown, a ram's head was staked as a witness to promise the child's rapid recovery.



3 The Screaming Wooden Men in Quicksand

When, in times past, a young, beautiful girl travelled through the valley, many of the young village men would take it as an invitation. But they did not expect Belinda's magical powers. Into a tincture of bittersweet nightshade, poppy, hemlock and tallow, she drizzled just enough extract of wolfsbane that the young men found themselves in raging pain – until they had sunken into the earth up to their abdomens.



4 Nichtlinde, keeper of the Forbidden Garden

A *Nichtlinde* is an herbalist with the sevenfold magical powers. The maidservant Belinda was one, and seven hundred and seven years ago, she planted a garden of lovely flowers and exquisite plants. When she made use of her sevenfold magical powers, steam would flow from her nose and mouth and her wavy hair would rise with the wind. Seven years later, the herbalist maiden was bound and burnt at the stake for witchcraft.



5 The Matriarch

Entwined opposites, Belinda and the village Matriarch were connected by intimate affection. The frail woman, for whom Belinda was maidservant for seven years, owed her health to the girl. Because of green vegetables and meat, rosemary, parsley and aromatic spices, a new energy arose within the warm-hearted but weak old lady. When she lost both her son and her beloved maidservant, she nearly expired from grief.



6 Rostolph, the Iron Raven

When Belinda was tied to the stake, her wise constant companion, the white bird, lost his mind. The seeds and saplings of promising plants like Japanese spurge, Salomon's seal, sage, meadowsweet, poppy and saffron from near and far were bewitched by the dark form of Rostolph, the Iron Raven, who replaced everything in his path with stones. He stole everything from the farmers that was not nailed down, leaving a gruesome assortment of skulls, bones and stones in his wake.



7 Nichtlinde's Well

Night after night, Belinda brewed healing tinctures, ointments and soporific, sense-stealing elixirs that had served the purposes of her herbalist aunt. Here, at this well, she washed her instruments and vessels in rainwater.

