

Roland

There was once a woman who was a witch, and she had two daughters, one ugly and wicked, whom she loved the best, because she was her very own daughter, and one pretty and good, whom she hated because she was her step-daughter.

One day the stepdaughter put on a pretty apron, which the other daughter liked so much that she became envious, and said to her mother that she must and should have the apron. "Be content, my child," said the old woman, "thou shalt have it. Thy step-sister has long deserved death, and tonight, while she is asleep, I shall come and cut off her head. Take care to lie at the farthest side of the bed, and push her to the outside."

And it would have been all over with the poor girl, if she had not been standing in a corner near and heard it all. She did not dare to go outside the door the whole day long, and when bed-time came the other one got into bed first, so as to lie on the farthest side; but when she had gone to sleep, the step-daughter pushed her towards the outside, and took the inside place next the wall. In the night the old woman came sneaking; in her right hand she held an axe, and with her left she felt for the one who was lying outside, and then she heaved up the axe with both hands, and hewed the head off her only daughter. When she had gone away, the other girl got up and went to her sweetheart's, who was called Roland, and knocked at his door. When he came to her, she said, "Listen, dear Roland, we must flee away in all haste; my step-mother meant to put me to death, but she has killed her only child instead. When the day breaks, and she sees what she has done, we are lost."

"But I advise you," said Roland, "to bring away her magic wand with you; otherwise we cannot escape her when she comes after to overtake us." So the maiden fetched the magic wand, and she took up the head of her step-sister and let drop three drops of blood on the ground, - one by the bed, one in the kitchen, and one on the steps. Then she hastened back to her sweetheart. When the old witch got up in the morning, she called out to her daughter, to give her the apron, but no daughter came. Then she cried out, "Where art thou?" "Here, at the steps, sweeping!" answered one of the drops of Wood. The old woman went out, but she saw nobody at the steps, and cried again, "Where art thou?"

"Here in the kitchen warming myself," cried the second drop of blood. So she went into the kitchen and found no one. Then she cried again, "Where art thou?" "Oh, here in bed fast asleep!" cried the third drop of blood. Then the mother went into the room, and up to the bed, and there lay her only child, whose head she had cut off herself.

The witch fell into a great fury, rushed to the window, for from it she could see far and wide, and she caught sight of her step-daughter, hastening away with her dear Roland. "It will be no good to you," cried she, "if you get ever so far away, you cannot escape me."

Then she put on her boots, which took her an hour's walk at every stride, and it was not long before she had overtaken them. But the maiden, when she saw the old woman striding up, changed, by means of the magic wand, her dear Roland into a lake, and herself into a duck swimming upon it. The witch stood on the bank and threw in crumbs of bread, and took great pains to decoy the duck towards her, but the duck would not be decoyed, and the old woman was obliged to go back in the evening disappointed.

Then the maiden and her dear Roland took again their natural shapes, and travelled on the whole night through until daybreak. Then the maiden changed herself into a beautiful flower, standing in the middle of a hedge of thorns, and her dear Roland into a fiddle-player. It was not long before the witch came striding up, and she said to the musician, "Dear musician, will you be so kind as to reach that pretty flower for me?" - "Oh yes," said he, "I will strike up a tune to it." Then as she crept quickly up to the hedge to break off the flower, for she knew well who it was, he began to play, and whether she liked it or not, she was obliged to dance, for there was magic in the tune. The faster he played the higher she had to jump, and the thorns tore her clothes, and scratched and wounded her, and he did not cease playing until she was spent, and lay dead.

So now they were saved, and Roland said, "I will go to my father and prepare for the wedding." - "And I will stay here," said the maiden, "and wait for you, and so that no one should know me, I will change myself into a red milestone." So away went Roland, and the maiden in the likeness of a stone waited in the field for

her beloved.

But when Roland went home he fell into the snares of another maiden, who wrought so, that he forgot his first love. And the poor girl waited a long time, but at last, seeing that he did not come, she was filled with despair, and changed herself into a flower, thinking "Perhaps some one in passing will put his foot upon me and crush me."

But it happened that a shepherd, tending his flock, saw the flower, and as it was so beautiful, he gathered it, took it home with him, and put it in his chest. From that time everything went wonderfully well in the shepherd's house. When he got up in the morning, all the work was already done; the room was swept, the tables and benches rubbed, fire kindled on the hearth, and water ready drawn; and when he came home in the middle of the day, the table was laid, and a good meal spread upon it. He could not understand how it was done, for he never saw anybody in his house, and it was too little for anybody to hide in. The good serving pleased him well; but in the end he became uneasy, and went to a wise woman to take counsel of her. The wise woman said, "There is magic in it: get up early some morning, and if you hear something moving in the room, be it what it may, throw a white cloth over it, and the charm will be broken." The shepherd did as she told him, and the next morning at daybreak he saw the chest open, and the flower come out.

Then he jumped up quickly and threw a white cloth over it. So the spell was broken, and a lovely maiden stood before him; and she told him that she had been the flower, and had until now cared for his household matters. She told him all that had happened to her, and she pleased him so much that he asked her to marry him, but she answered "No," because she still remained true to her dear Roland, though he had forsaken her; but she promised not to leave the shepherd, but to go on taking care of his house.

Now the time came when Roland's wedding was to be held; and there was an old custom in that country that all the girls should be present, and should sing in honour of the bride and bridegroom. The faithful maiden, when she knew this, was so sorrowful that she felt as if her heart would break; and she would not go, until the others came and fetched her. And when her turn came to sing she slipped behind, so that she stood alone, and so began to sing.

And as soon as her song reached Roland's ear he sprang up and cried, "I know that voice! that is the

right bride, and no other will I have." And everything that he had forgotten, and that had been swept out of his mind, came suddenly home to him in his heart. And the faithful maiden was married to her dear Roland; her sorrow came to an end and her joy began.

* * *