The robber bridegroom

There was once a miller who had a beautiful daughter, and when she was grown up he became anxious that
she should be well married and taken care of; so he
thought, "If a decent sort of man comes and asks her in
marriage, I will give her to him." Soon after a suitor
came forward who seemed very well to do, and as the
miller knew nothing to his disadvantage, he promised
him his daughter. But the girl did not seem to love him
as a bride should love her bridegroom; she had no
confidence in him; as often as she saw him or thought
about him, she felt a chill at her heart. One day he said
to her, "You are to be my bride, and yet you have
never been to see me." The girl answered, "I do not
know where your house is." Then he said, "My house
is a long way in the wood." She began to make
excuses, and said she could not find the way to it; but
the bridegroom said, "You must come and pay me a
visit next Sunday; I have already invited company, and
I will strew ashes on the path through the wood, so that
you will be sure to find it."

When Sunday came, and the girl set out on her way,
she felt very uneasy without knowing exactly why; and
she filled both pockets full of peas and lentils. There
were ashes strewed on the path through the wood, but,
nevertheless, at each step she cast to the right and left a
few peas on the ground. So she went on the whole day
until she came to the middle of the wood, where it was
the darkest, and there stood a lonely house, not
pleasant in her eyes, for it was dismal and unhomelike.
She walked in, but there was no one there, and the
greatest stillness reigned. Suddenly she heard a voice
cry,
"Turn back, turn back, thou pretty bride,
Within this house thou must not bide,
For here do evil things betide."
The girl glanced round, and perceived that the voice
came from a bird who was hanging in a cage by the
wall. And again it cried,
"Turn back, turn back, thou pretty bride,
Within this house thou must not bide,
For here do evil things betide."

Then the pretty bride went on from one room into
another through the whole house, but it was quite
empty, and no soul to be found in it. At last she
reached the cellar, and there sat a very old woman
nodding her head. "Can you tell me," said the bride, "if
my bridegroom lives here?" - "Oh, poor child,"
answered the old woman, "do you know what has
happened to you? You are in a place of cut-throats. You
thought you were a bride, and soon to be married, but
death will be your spouse. Look here, I have a great
turtle of water to set on, and when once they have you
in their power they will cut you in pieces without
mercy, cook you, and eat you, for they are cannibals.
Unless I have pity on you, and save you, all is over
with you!"

Then the old woman hid her behind a great cask,
where she could not be seen. "Be as still as a mouse,"
said she; "do not move or go away, or else you are
lost. At night, when the robbers are asleep, we will
escape. I have been waiting a long time for an
opportunity." No sooner was it settled than the wicked
gang entered the house. They brought another young
woman with them, dragging her along, and they were
drank, and would not listen to her cries and groans.
They gave her wine to drink, three glasses full, one of
white wine, one of red, and one of yellow, and then
they cut her in pieces. The poor bride all the while
shaking and trembling when she saw what a fate the
robbers had intended for her. One of them noticed on
the little finger of their victim a golden ring, and as he
could not draw it off easily, he took an axe and
chopped it off, but the finger jumped away, and fell
behind the cask on the bride's lap. The robber took up
a light to look for it, but he could not find it. Then said
one of the others, "Have you looked behind the great
cask?" But the old woman cried, "Come to supper, and
leave off looking till to-morrow; the finger cannot run
away."

Then the robbers said the old woman was right, and
they left off searching, and sat down to eat, and the old
woman dropped some sleeping stuff into their wine, so
that before long they stretched themselves on the cellar
floor, sleeping and snoring. When the bride heard that,
she came from behind the cask, and had to make her
way among the sleepers lying all about on the ground,
and she felt very much afraid lest she might awaken
any of them. But by good luck she passed through, and
the old woman with her, and they opened the door, and
they made all haste to leave that house of murderers.

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The wind had carried away the ashes from the path, but the peas and lentils had budded and sprung up, and the moonshine upon them showed the way. And they went on through the night, till in the morning they reached the mill. Then the girl related to her father all that had happened to her.

When the wedding-day came, the friends and neighbours assembled, the miller having invited them, and the bridegroom also appeared. When they were all seated at table, each one had to tell a story. But the bride sat still, and said nothing, till at last the bridegroom said to her, "Now, sweetheart, do you know no story? Tell us something." She answered, "I will tell you my dream. I was going alone through a wood, and I came at last to a house in which there was no living soul, but by the wall was a bird in a cage, who cried,

"Turn back, turn back, thou pretty bride, Within this house thou must not bide, For evil things do here betide."

And then again it said it. Sweetheart, the dream is not ended. Then I went through all the rooms, and they were all empty, and it was so lonely and wretched. At last I went down into the cellar, and there sat an old woman, nodding her head. I asked her if my bridegroom lived in that house, and she answered, 'Ah, poor child, you have come into a place of cut-throats; your bridegroom does live here, but he will kill you and cut you in pieces, and then cook and eat you.' Sweetheart, the dream is not ended. But the old woman hid me behind a great cask, and no sooner had she done so than the robbers came home, dragging with them a young woman, and they gave her to drink wine thrice, white, red, and yellow. Sweetheart, the dream is not yet ended. And then they killed her, and cut her in pieces. Sweetheart, my dream is not yet ended. And one of the robbers saw a gold ring on the finger of the young woman, and as it was difficult to get off, he took an axe and chopped off the finger, which jumped upwards, and then fell behind the great cask on my lap. And here is the finger with the ring!"

At these words she drew it forth, and showed it to the company.

The robber, who during the story had grown deadly white, sprang up, and would have escaped, but the folks held him fast, and delivered him up to justice. And he and his whole gang were, for their evil deeds, condemned and executed.