



Catherine and Her Fate

Thomas Frederick Crane

Italian

Intermediate

10 min read

There was once a merchant who was very rich and had greater treasures than the king. In his reception room stood three wonderfully beautiful seats. One was of silver, the second of gold, and the third of diamonds. This merchant had an only daughter, whose name was Catherine, and who was fairer than the sun.

One day as Catherine was sitting in her chamber, the doors suddenly opened of itself, and there entered a tall, beautiful lady, who held in her hand a wheel. "Catherine," said she, "when would you rather enjoy your life, in youth or in old age?" Catherine gazed at her in amazement, and could make no answer. The beautiful lady again asked: "Catherine, when would you rather enjoy your life, in youth or in old age?" Then thought Catherine: "If I say in youth, I must suffer for it in old age; wherefore I will rather enjoy my life in old age, and in youth God's will be done." So she answered: "In old age." "Be it as you have wished," said the beautiful woman, turned her wheel once, and disappeared. Now this beautiful tall lady was poor Catherine's Fate.

A few days later, her father suddenly received news that some of his ships had been wrecked in a storm; a few days after, he learned that several more of his ships had foundered; and to cut the matter short, scarcely a month had passed when he was himself deprived of all his riches. He had to sell all that he had, and this, too, he lost, until at last he remained poor and wretched. From grief he fell ill and died.

So poor Catherine remained all alone in the world, without a penny, and with no one to give her shelter. She thought: "I will go to another city and seek me a place there." So she set out and walked until she came to another city. As she was going through the streets a noble lady happened to be standing by the window and

?" "Ah! noble lady, I am a poor girl, and would like to find a place to earn my bread. Can you not find use for me?" So the noble lady received her, and Catherine served her faithfully.

Some days later the lady said one evening: "Catherine, I must go out for a time, and will lock the house door." "Very well," said Catherine, and after her mistress had gone she took her work and sat down and sewed. Suddenly the door opened, and her Fate entered. "So?" she cried, "are you here, Catherine? and do you think now that I am going to leave you in peace?" With these words, her Fate ran to all the cupboards, dragged out the linen and clothes of Catherine's mistress, and tore everything into a thousand pieces. Catherine thought: "Woe is me if my mistress returns and finds everything in this condition; she will certainly kill me!" And in her anguish she opened the door and fled. Her Fate, however, gathered up all the torn and ruined things, made them whole, and laid them away in their places. When the mistress returned she called Catherine, but Catherine was nowhere to be seen. "Can she have robbed me?" she thought; but when she looked about, nothing was gone. She was very much astonished, but Catherine did not return, but hastened on until she came to another city. As she was passing through the streets, another lady, standing by the window, asked her: "Where are you going, all alone, pretty maiden?" "Ah! noble lady, I am a poor girl, and would like a place to earn my bread. Can you not make use of me?" Then the lady took her in, and Catherine served her and thought now she could rest in peace. It lasted, however, but a few days. One evening, when her mistress was out, her Fate appeared again and addressed her harshly: "So, here you are now? Do you think you can escape me?" Then the Fate tore and destroyed everything that it found, so that poor Catherine again fled, in her anguish of heart. To cut the matter short, poor Catherine led this frightful life seven years, flying from one city to another, and everywhere attempting to find a place. Her Fate always appeared after a few days, and tore and destroyed her employers' things, so that the [Pg 107] poor girl had to flee. As soon as she had left the house the Fate restored everything and put it in its place.

Finally, after seven years, her Fate seemed weary of always persecuting the unfortunate Catherine. One day Catherine came again to a city and saw a lady standing at a window, who asked her: "Where are you going, all alone, pretty girl?" "Ah! noble lady, I am a poor girl, and would like to find a place to earn my bread. Can you not find use for me?" The lady answered: "I will give you a place willingly, but you must perform daily a service, and I do not know whether you have strength for it." "Tell me what it is," said Catherine, "and if I can, I will do it." "Do you see yonder high mountain?" asked the lady. "Every morning you must carry up there a large board covered with fresh bread, and cry with a loud voice: 'O my mistress' Fate! O my mistress' Fate! O my mistress' Fate!' thrice. Then my Fate will appear and receive the bread." "I will do that willingly," said Catherine, and the lady took her into her service.

Now Catherine remained years with this lady, and every morning she took a board with fresh bread and carried it up the mountain, and when she had called three times: "O my mistress' Fate!" there appeared a beautiful tall lady, who received the bread. Catherine often wept when she thought that she, who had once been so rich, must now serve like a poor maid. One day her mistress said to her: "Catherine, why do you weep so much?" Then Catherine told her how ill it had fared with her, and her mistress said: "I will tell you what, Catherine, when you take the bread to the mountain to-morrow, ask my Fate to try and persuade your Fate to leave you now in peace. Perhaps that will do some good." This advice pleased poor Catherine, and the next morning, after she had taken the bread to her mistress' Fate, she disclosed her trouble to her, and said: "O my mistress' Fate, beg my Fate to persecute me no longer." Then the Fate answered: "Ah, poor girl, your Fate is just now covered with seven coverlets, so that she cannot hear you; but when you come to-morrow I will take [Pg 108] you to her." After Catherine had returned home, her mistress' Fate went to the young girl's Fate and said: "Dear sister, why are you never weary of making poor Catherine suffer? Permit her again to see some happy days." The Fate answered: "Bring her to me to-morrow and I will give her something that will help her out of all her trouble." When Catherine brought the bread the next morning, her mistress' Fate conducted her to her own Fate, who was covered with seven coverlets. Her Fate gave her a small skein of silk, and said: "Preserve it carefully; it will be of use to you." Then Catherine went home and said to her mistress: "My Fate has given me a little skein of silk; what shall I do with it? It is not worth three grani." "Well," said her mistress, "preserve it; who knows of what use it may be?"

Now it happened, some time after this, that the young king was to marry, and on that account had royal garments made for himself. As the tailor was about to sew a beautiful dress, there was no silk of the same color to be found. So the king proclaimed throughout the whole land that whoever had such silk should bring it to the

. "Catherine," said her mistress, "your skein is of that color; take it to the king so that he may make you a handsome present." Then Catherine put on her best clothes, and went to the Court; and when she appeared before the king, she was so beautiful that he could not keep his eyes from her. "Royal Majesty," said she, "I have brought you a little skein of silk, of the color that could not be found." "I will tell you what, royal Majesty," cried one of his ministers, "we will pay the maiden for the silk with its weight in gold." The king was satisfied and they brought a balance; in one scale the king laid the silk, in the other, a gold coin. Now just imagine what happened: no matter how many gold coins the king laid in the scale, the silk was always heavier. Then the king had a larger balance brought, and threw all his treasures into the scale, but the silk still weighed the more. Then the king at last took his crown from his head and placed it with all the [Pg 109] other treasures, and behold! the scale with gold sank and weighed exactly as much as the silk. "Where did you get this silk?" asked the king. "Royal Majesty, it was a present from my mistress," answered Catherine. "No, that is impossible," cried the king. "If you do not tell me the truth, I will have your head cut off." Then Catherine related all that had happened to her since she was a rich maiden.

Now there lived at the court a wise lady, who said: "Catherine, you have suffered much, but you will now see happy days; and that it was not until the golden crown was put in the scale that the balance was even, is a sign that you will be a queen." "If she is to be a queen," cried the king, "I will make her one, for Catherine and none others shall be my wife." And so it was; the king informed his betrothed that he no longer wished her, and married the fair Catherine. And after Catherine in her youth had suffered so much, she enjoyed nothing but happiness in her old age, and was happy and contented.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com