

Fair Maria Wood

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Italian

Easy
9 min read

There was once a husband and wife who had but one child, a daughter. Now it happened that the wife fell ill and was at the point of death. Before dying she called her husband, and said to him, weeping: "I am dying; you are still young; if you ever wish to marry again, be mindful to choose a wife whom my wedding ring fits; and if you cannot find a lady whom it fits well, do not marry." Her husband promised that he would do so. When she was dead he took off her wedding ring and kept it until he desired to marry again. Then he sought for some one to please him. He went from one to another, but the ring fitted no one. He tried so many but in vain. One day he thought of calling his daughter, and trying the ring on her to see whether it fitted her. The daughter said: "It is useless, dear father; you cannot marry me, because you are my father." He did not heed her, put the ring on her finger, and saw that it fitted her well, and wanted to marry his daughter *volens volens*. She did not oppose him, but consented. The day of the wedding, he asked her what she wanted. She said that she wished four silk dresses, the most beautiful that could be seen. He, who was a gentleman, gratified her wish and took her the four dresses, one handsomer than the other, and all the handsomest that had ever been seen. "Now, what else do you want?" said he. "I want another dress, made of wood, so that I can conceal myself in it." And at once he had this wooden dress made. She was well pleased. She waited one day until her husband was out of sight, put on the wooden dress, and under it the four silk dresses, and went away to a certain river not far off, and threw herself in it. Instead of sinking and drowning, she floated, for the wooden dress kept her up.

The water carried her a long way, when she saw on the bank a gentleman, and began to cry: "Who wants the fair Maria Wood?" That gentleman who saw her on the water, and whom she addressed, called her and she came to the bank and saluted him. "How is it that you are thus dressed in wood and come floating on the

wanted to go out to service. "What can you do?" "I can do all that is needed in a house, and if you would only take me for a servant you would be satisfied."

He took her to his house, where his mother was, and told her all that had happened, saying: "If you, dear mother, will take her as a servant, we can try her." In short, she took her and was pleased with this woman dressed in wood.

It happened that there were balls at that place which the best ladies and gentlemen attended. The gentleman who had the servant dressed in wood prepared to go to the ball, and after he had departed, the servant said to his mother: "Do me this kindness, mistress: let me go to the ball too, for I have never seen any dancing." "What, you wish to go to the ball so badly dressed that they would drive you away as soon as they saw you!" The servant was silent, and when the mistress was in bed, dressed herself in one of her silk dresses and became the most beautiful woman that was ever seen. She went to the ball, and it seemed as if the sun had entered the room; all were dazzled. She sat down near her master, who asked her to dance, and would dance with no one but her. She pleased him so much that he fell in love with her. He asked her who she was and where she came from. She replied that she came from a distance, but told him nothing more.

At a certain hour, without any one perceiving it, she went out and disappeared. She returned home and put on her wooden dress again. In the morning the master returned from the ball, and said to his mother: "Oh! if you had only seen what a beautiful lady there was at the ball! She appeared like the sun, she was so beautiful and well dressed. She sat down near me, and would not dance with any one but me." His mother then said: "Did you not ask her who she was and where she came from?" "She would only tell me that she came from a distance; but I thought I should die; I wish to go again this evening." The servant heard all this dialogue, but kept silent, pretending that the matter did not concern her.

In the evening he prepared himself again for the ball, and the servant said to him: "Master, yesterday evening I asked your mamma to let me, too, go to the ball, for I have never seen dancing, but she would not; will you have the kindness to let me go this evening?" "Be still, you ugly creature, the ball is no place for you!" "Do me this favor," she said, weeping, "I will stand out of doors, or under a bench, or in a corner so no one shall see me; but let me go!" He grew angry then, and took a stick and began to beat the poor servant. She wept and remained silent.

After he had gone, she waited until his mother was in bed, and put on a dress finer than the first, and so rich as to astonish, and away to the ball! When she arrived all began to gaze at her, for they had never seen anything more beautiful. All the handsomest young men surround her and ask her to dance; but she would have nothing to do with any one but her master. He again asked her who she was, and she said she would tell him later. They danced and danced, and all at once she disappeared. Her master ran here and there, asked one and another, but no one could tell him where she had gone. He returned home and told his mother all that had passed. She said to him: "Do you know what you must do? Take this diamond ring, and when she dances with you give it to her; and if she takes it, it is a sign that she loves you." She gave him the ring. The servant listened, saw everything, and was silent.

In the evening the master prepared for the ball and the servant again asked him to take her, and again he beat her. He went to the ball, and after midnight, as before, the beautiful lady returned more beautiful than before, and as usual would dance only with her master. At the right moment he took out the diamond ring, and asked her if she would accept it. She took it and thanked him, and he was happy and satisfied. Afterward he asked her again who she was and where from. She said that she was of that country

That when they speak of going to a ball, They are beaten on the head;

and said no more. At the usual hour she stopped dancing and departed. He ran after her, but she went like the wind, and reached home without his finding out where she went. But he ran so in all directions, and was in such suffering, that when he reached home he was obliged to go to bed more dead than alive. Then he fell ill and grew worse every day, so that all said he would die. He did nothing but ask his mother and every one if they knew anything of that lady, and that he would die if he did not see her. The servant heard everything; and one day, when he was very ill, what did she think of? She waited until her mistress's eye was turned, and dropped the diamond ring in the broth her master was to eat. No one saw her, and his mother took him the broth. He began

at it and recognized the diamond ring! They thought he would go mad. He asked his mother if that was the ring and she swore that it was, and all happy, she said that now he would see her again.

Meanwhile the servant went to her room, took off her wooden dress, and put on one of silk, so that she appeared a beauty, and went to the room of the sick man. His mother saw her and began to cry: "Here she is; here she is!" She went in and saluted him, smiling, and he was so beside himself that he became well at once. He asked her to tell him her story,—who she was, where she came from, how she came, and how she knew that he was ill. She replied: "I am the woman dressed in wood who was your servant. It is not true that I was a poor girl, but I had that dress to conceal myself in, for underneath it I was the same that I am now. I am a lady; and although you treated me so badly when I asked to go to the ball, I saw that you loved me, and now I have come to save you from death." You can believe that they stayed to hear her story. They were married and have always been happy and still are.

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