



The Stepmother (Italian fairy tale)

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Italian

Intermediate
4 min read

There was once a husband and a wife who had two children, a son and a daughter. The wife died, and the husband married a woman who had a daughter blind of one eye. The husband was a farmer, and went to work in a field. The stepmother hated her husband's children, and to get rid of them she baked some bread, and sent it by them to her husband, but directed them to the wrong field, so that they might get lost. When the children reached a mountain they began to call their father, but no one answered. Now the girl was enchanted; and when they came to a spring and the brother wanted to drink, she said to him: "Do not drink of this fountain, or you will become an ass."

Afterwards they found another spring, and the brother wanted to drink; but his sister said to him: "Do not drink of it, or you will become a calf." However, the boy would drink, and became a calf with golden horns. They continued their journey, and came to the sea-shore, where there was a handsome villa belonging to the prince. When the prince saw the young girl, and beheld how beautiful she was, he married her, and afterwards asked her what there was about the little calf, and she replied: "I am fond of him because I have brought him up."

Let us now return to her father, who, from the great grief he had on account of his children's disappearance,

had gone out to divert himself, and wandered away, gathering fennel. He arrived at last at the villa, where was his daughter who had married the king. His daughter looked out of the window and said to him: "Come up, friend." His daughter had recognized him, and asked: "Friend, do you not know me?" "No, I do not recognize you." Then she said: "I am your daughter, whom you believed lost."

She threw herself at his feet, and said: "Pardon me, dear father; I came by chance to this villa, and the king's son was here and married me." The father was greatly consoled at finding his daughter so well married. "Now, my father," said she, "empty this sack of fennel, for I will fill it with gold for you." And then she begged him to bring his wife, and the daughter blind of one eye. The father returned home with his bag full of money, and his wife asked in terror: "Who gave you this money?"

He answered: "O wife! do you know that I have found my daughter, and she is the king's wife, and filled this bag with money?" She, instead of being happy, was angry at hearing that her stepdaughter was still alive; however, she said to her husband: "I will go and take my daughter."

So they went, the husband, the wife, and the blind daughter, and came to the husband's daughter, who received her stepmother very kindly. But the latter, seeing that the king was away, and that her stepdaughter was alone, seized her and threw her from a window into the sea; and what did she do then? She took her blind daughter and dressed her in the other's clothes, and said to her: "When the king comes and finds you here weeping, say to him: 'The little calf has blinded me with his horn, and I have only one eye!'"

Then the stepmother returned to her own house. The king came and found her daughter in bed weeping, and said to her: "Why are you weeping?" "The little calf struck me with his horn and put out one of my eyes." The king cried at once: "Go call the butcher to kill the calf?" When the calf heard that he was to be killed, he went out on the balcony and called to his sister in the sea:—

"Oh! sister,
For me the water is heated,
And the knives are sharpened."

The sister replied from the sea:—

"Oh! brother,
I cannot help you,

I am in the dog-fish's mouth.”

When the king heard the calf utter these words, he looked out of the window, and when he saw his wife in the sea, he summoned two sailors, and had them take her out and bring her up and restore her. Then he took the blind girl and killed her and cut her in pieces and salted her like tunny-fish, and sent her to her mother. When her husband found it out he left her and went to live with his daughter.

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