



The Golden Maiden

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Armenian

Intermediate
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Once upon a time there was a wicked widow who had an ugly daughter. She married a second husband who had a beautiful daughter and a son by his first wife. The step-mother hated the two motherless children, and used every means to persuade her husband to take them away to the mountains and abandon them as a prey to wild beasts. The poor man loved his children, but being frail was unable to resist the frequent importunities and threats of his wife. Therefore one day he put bread in a bag, and taking the two children went to the mountains. After a long journey they came to a lonely wilderness. The man said to the children:

“Sit here and take a little rest,” and then, turning his face away, he began to sob bitterly.

“Father! father, why are you weeping?” exclaimed the children, and they also began to weep.

The man opened the bag and gave them bread, which they soon ate.

“Father,” said the boy, “I am thirsty.”

The man drove his stick into the ground, and placing his cloak over the stick, said:

“Come, children, sit here under the shadow of this cloak; I will go and see if there is a fountain near by.”

The children seated themselves under the cloak, while their father disappeared behind the trees and rocks.

After waiting a long time, the two innocent children grew tired and began to ramble about in search of their father, but in vain.

“Father! father!” they exclaimed, but only the echo of the mountains returned them answer—“Father! father!”

The children came back, crying: “Alas! alas! the stick is here, the cloak is here, but father is not here!”

Thus they cried for a long time, but seeing that nobody appeared, they rose up, and one of them took the stick and the other the cloak and they began to wander about in the wilderness, not knowing where to go. After a long ramble, they came to a place where some rain-water had gathered on the ground in a print made by the hoof of a horse.

“Sister,” said the little boy, “I am thirsty; I want to drink of this water.”

“No,” said the maiden, “do not drink of this water; as soon as you drink of it you will become a colt.”

Soon they came to another print made by the hoof of an ox, and the boy said:

“Sister, I am thirsty; I want to drink.”

But she would not let him drink, saying: “As soon as you drink of this water you will become a calf.”

Then they came to another print made by the paw of a bear, and the boy wanted to drink; but his sister prevented him lest he should become a cub of a bear. Then they came to a track made by the foot of a pig, and the boy again wanted to drink, but the maiden prevented him, lest he should turn into a young pig. Soon they came to a print made by the foot of a wolf; but the boy did not yield till they came to one made by the hoof of a lamb.

“Sister,” exclaimed the boy, “I am thirsty; I cannot wait any longer; I will drink from this at any risk.”

“Alas!” said the maiden, “what can I do? I am ready to give my life to save you, but it is impossible. You will turn into a lamb the moment you drink of this water.”

The boy drank, and was at once changed into a lamb, and began to follow his sister bleating. After a long and dangerous journey they found the way to the town, and came to their house. The step-mother was angry to see them come back, though one of them was now but a lamb. As she had great influence over her husband, he

used every means to please her. One day she said to him:

“I want to eat meat; you must kill your lamb that I may eat it.”

The sister, hearing this, at once took her lamb-brother and fled secretly to the mountains, where, sitting on a high rock, she spun wool while the lamb grazed safely near her. As she was thus spinning, her spindle fell suddenly from her hand, and was precipitated into a deep cave. The maiden, leaving the lamb grazing, went down to find her spindle. Entering the cave, she was surprised to see an old fairy woman, a dame a thousand years of age, who perceiving the maiden, exclaimed: “Maiden, neither the bird with its wing, nor the snake on its belly can enter here; how could you venture to come hither?”

The terrified maiden was at a loss for an answer, but she replied with a gentle voice: “Your love brought me here, grandmother.”

The old fairy was pleased with this kind answer, and calling the maiden, gave her a seat beside herself and inquired of her many things concerning the upper world. The more she talked with the maiden the better she liked her and she said:

“Now you are hungry; let me bring you some fishes to eat.”

She went into the cave, and returned with a plateful of cooked snakes, at the sight of which the maiden shuddered with horror and began to weep.

“What is the matter?” inquired the old dame; “why are you weeping?”

“Nothing at all,” answered the maiden, shyly; “I remembered my dead mother who was so fond of fish, and therefore I wept.”

Then she told the old dame her sad story, and the ill treatment of the wicked step-mother. The fairy woman was very much interested in what the maiden told her, and said to her:

“Be seated, and let me sleep in your lap. In yonder fire-place there is a ploughshare heated in the fire. When the Black Fairy passes do not waken me; but when the Red-and-Green Fairy passes, at once press the red-hot ploughshare on my feet, that I may awake.”

The poor maiden shuddered with fear, but she could do nothing but consent. Accordingly the old fairy woman

lay down in the maiden's lap and slept. Soon a fairy as black as night passed through the cave; but the maiden did not stir. After him the Red-and-Green Fairy appeared and the whole cave was gilded with his radiant beams. The maiden at once pressed the red-hot ploughshare on the feet of the sleeping fairy woman, who immediately started up exclaiming:

“Oh! what is biting my feet?”

The maiden told her that nothing had bitten her, but it was the red-hot ploughshare she felt, and that it was time to get up. The old dame arose and at once caused the maiden to stand up as the Red-and-Green Fairy proceeded, whose gleaming rays had such an effect upon her that her hair and garments were all turned to gold and she herself was turned into a fairy maiden. After the Red-and-Green Fairy disappeared, the maiden, kissing the fairy woman's hand, took leave of her, and taking her lamb-brother, went home. Seeing that the step-mother was not at home, she at once took off her golden garments and hiding them in a secret corner, put on her old rags. Soon the step-mother entered, and seeing the golden hair of the maiden, exclaimed:

“How now, little elf! what did you do to your hair to turn it into gold?”

The maiden told her what had taken place. On the following day the step-mother sent her own daughter to the same spot. There, on purpose, she let her spindle fall, and entered the cave as if to pick it up. The fairy woman saw her, and taking a dislike to her, changed her into an ugly thing, so ugly that it is impossible to describe her appearance. She came home, and the step-mother seeing her own daughter changed into a form of so great ugliness, was the more enraged against the two step-children.

One day the Prince of that country sent out heralds to proclaim all over his realm that his son was to be married, and that the most beautiful maiden in all the land should be his bride. He commanded all the marriageable maidens to assemble in the palace courtyard where the young Prince would make his selection. At the appointed time all the maidens of the land had crowded into the courtyard. The step-mother dressed her own daughter in the best garments and ornaments she could procure, veiling her ugly face very carefully, however, and took her to the courtyard, hoping that the Prince would select her for his bride. In order to prevent the orphan maiden from appearing before the Prince, the step-mother scattered a measure of wheat in the yard, and bade the maiden to pick up the wheat before she returned, threatening to beat her to death in case she failed to finish the task. Soon after the step-mother went away, however, the maiden let loose the chickens, which in a moment picked the wheat up to the very last grain; and she, putting on her golden

garments, was changed to a fairy maiden so beautiful that she might say to the sun: "Sun, you need not shine, for I am shining."

Then she went to the Prince's courtyard, where she was the object of the admiration of all the crowd. But she could not stay very long lest her step-mother should return first, and not finding her at home should beat her upon her return, so she ran hastily back, and hiding her golden garments put on her old rags. But in her haste she had dropped one of her golden slippers in the Prince's fountain.

Soon the young Prince, who had looked at the maidens without making a selection, came on horseback leading his animal to the fountain to water him; but the horse was frightened by the radiant beams from the slipper. The servants immediately entered the fountain, and taking out the slipper gave it to the Prince, who seeing it at once declared that the maiden who wore that slipper should be his bride. He and his peers began to search every house and to try the feet of the maidens to find the true owner of the slipper. They had just approached the house of the Golden Maiden, when the step-mother took her and hid her in the great kitchen pit which is used as a furnace, presenting her own ugly daughter as the owner of the golden slipper. Of course, the slipper did not fit. As the Prince and his peers were leaving the house, the cock flying from his roost perched on the top of the door, and cried:

"Goo-goo-lig-goo-goo! the Golden Maiden is in the pit!"

The pit was immediately opened, and lo! the maiden jumped out. The slipper fitted, and the maiden, taking out her golden garments and the mate of the slipper from the corner where she had hid them, put them on, and was changed to a fairy maiden. The Prince seeing this embraced her as his bride. Taking the lamb-brother with them, they went to the Prince's palace, where their nuptials were celebrated for seven days and seven nights.

One day the step-mother took her own daughter and went to the Prince's palace to pay a visit to her step-daughter, who conducted them to the Prince's orchard for a walk. As they came to the seashore the step-mother said:

"Come, daughters, let us take a bath in the sea."

No sooner had they entered the sea, than the step-mother, intending to drown the golden bride, pushed her into the deep water. A great fish, however, chanced to be there and swallowed her. The step-mother at once

gathered up the golden dresses of the bride, and putting them on her own ugly daughter, brought her to the palace. There she left her in the place of the golden bride, veiling carefully her ugly face.

The true bride remained in the belly of the fish for several days. One day, very early in the morning, she heard the sexton ringing the bell and inviting the people to church. She cried to him from the belly of the fish:

“Sexton! sexton! who ring your morning bell,

Crossing your face, send the devils to hell,

For God’s sake, go to the young Prince and tell,

Let him not kill my lamb-brother, or sell.”

The sexton, hearing this call repeated several times, went and informed the young Prince, who had by that time discovered the loss of his fairy bride. He immediately came to the seashore, where the sexton had heard the voice. Once more it was repeated, and the Prince recognized it as the voice of his bride. He drew his sword and leaped into the sea. Splitting the fish’s belly, he drew out his bride, and taking her in his arms brought her to the palace. Soon he called the step-mother before him, saying:

“Now, kind mother, which gift do you prefer, a nimble-footed horse or a keen sword?”

“Let your keen sword stab your enemies,” answered the step-mother, overjoyed with the expectation of a valuable present; “I will have the nimble-footed horse.”

“I take you at your word,” said the Prince; “you shall have the horse.”

He ordered his men to bind the step-mother and her ugly daughter to the tail of a wild horse. It was done, and the horse being whipped, carried the two wicked women away to the mountains. They were thrown from stone to stone, and from tree to tree, until they were dashed into pieces.

The wicked persons being punished, the Prince celebrated a new nuptial for forty days and forty nights, because he had found his lost golden bride. She, being released from her rival, thenceforth enjoyed a happy life with her lamb-brother.

Three apples fell from Heaven;—one for me, one for the story-teller, and one for him who entertained the company.

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