

The Sunchild

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Greek

Easy
6 min read

Once there was a woman who had no children, and this made her very unhappy. So she spoke one day to the Sunball, saying: 'Dear Sunball, send me only a little girl now, and when she is twelve years old you may take her back again.'

So soon after this the Sunball sent her a little girl, whom the woman called Letiko, and watched over with great care till she was twelve years old. Soon after that, while Letiko was away one day gathering herbs, the Sunball came to her, and said: 'Letiko, when you go home, tell your mother that she must bethink herself of what she promised me.'

Then Letiko went straight home, and said to her mother: 'While I was gathering herbs a fine tall gentleman came to me and charged me to tell you that you should remember what you promised him.'

When the woman heard that she was sore afraid, and immediately shut all the doors and windows of the house, stopped up all the chinks and holes, and kept Letiko hidden away, that the Sunball should not come and take her away. But she forgot to close up the keyhole, and through it the Sunball sent a ray into the house, which took hold of the little girl and carried her away to him.

One day, the Sunball having sent her to the straw shed to fetch straw, the girl sat down on the piles of straw

and bemoaned herself, saying: 'As sighs this straw under my feet so sighs my heart after my mother.'

And this caused her to be so long away that the Sunball asked her, when she came back: 'Eh, Letiko, where have you been so long?'

She answered: 'My slippers are too big, and I could not go faster.'

Then the Sunball made the slippers shorter.

Another time he sent her to fetch water, and when she came to the spring, she sat down and lamented, saying: 'As flows the water even so flows my heart with longing for my mother.'

Thus she again remained so long away that the Sunball asked her: 'Eh, Letiko, why have you remained so long away?'

And she answered: 'My petticoat is too long and hinders me in walking.'

Then the Sunball cut her petticoat to make it shorter.

Another time the Sunball sent her to bring him a pair of sandals, and as the girl carried these in her hand she began to lament, saying: 'As creaks the leather so creaks my heart after my little mother.'

When she came home the Sunball asked her again: 'Eh, Letiko, why do you come home so late?'

'My red hood is too wide, and falls over my eyes, therefore I could not go fast.'

Then he made the hood narrower.

At last, however, the Sunball became aware how sad Letiko was. He sent her a second time to bring straw, and, slipping in after her, he heard how she lamented for her mother. Then he went home, called two foxes to him, and said: 'Will you take Letiko home?'

'Yes, why not?'

'But what will you eat and drink if you should become hungry and thirsty by the way?'

'We will eat her flesh and drink her blood.'

When the Sunball heard that, he said: 'You are not suited for this affair.'

Then he sent them away, and called two hares to him, and said: 'Will you take Letiko home to her mother?'

'Yes, why not?'

'What will you eat and drink if you should become hungry and thirsty by the way?'

'We will eat grass and drink from streamlets.'

'Then take her, and bring her home.'

Then the hares set out, taking Letiko with them, and because it was a long way to her home they became hungry by the way. Then they said to the little girl: 'Climb this tree, dear Letiko, and remain there till we have finished eating.'

So Letiko climbed the tree, and the hares went grazing.

It was not very long, however, before a lamia came under the tree and called out: 'Letiko, Letiko, come down and see what beautiful shoes I have on.'

'Oh! my shoes are much finer than yours.'

'Come down. I am in a hurry, for my house is not yet swept.'

'Go home and sweep it then, and come back when you are ready.'

Then the lamia went away and swept her house, and when she was ready she came back and called out: 'Letiko, Letiko, come down and see what a beautiful apron I have.'

'Oh! my apron is much finer than yours.'

'If you will not come down I will cut down the tree and eat you.'

‘Do so, and then eat me.’

Then the lamia hewed with all her strength at the tree, but could not cut it down. And when she saw that, she called out: ‘Letiko, Letiko, come down, for I must feed my children.’

‘Go home then and feed them, and come back when you are ready.’

When the lamia was gone away, Letiko called out: ‘Little hares! little hares!’

Then said one hare to the other: ‘Listen, Letiko is calling;’ and they both ran back to her as fast as they could go. Then Letiko came down from the tree, and they went on their way.

The lamia ran as fast as she could after them, to catch them up, and when she came to a field where people were working she asked them: ‘Have you seen anyone pass this way?’

They answered: ‘We are planting beans.’

‘Oh! I did not ask about that; but if anyone had passed this way.’

But the people only answered the louder: ‘Are you deaf? It is beans, beans, beans we are planting.’

When Letiko had nearly reached her home the dog knew her, and called out, ‘Bow wow! see here comes Letiko!’

And the mother said, ‘Hush! thou beast of ill-omen! wilt thou make me burst with misery?’

Next the cat on the roof saw her, and called out ‘Miaouw! miaouw! see here comes Letiko!’

And the mother said, ‘Keep silence! thou beast of ill-omen! wilt thou make me burst with misery?’

Then the cock spied, and called out: ‘Cock-a-doodle-do! see here comes Letiko!’

And the mother said again: ‘Be quiet! thou bird of ill-omen! wilt thou make me burst with misery?’

The nearer Letiko and the two hares came to the house the nearer also came the lamia, and when the hare was about to slip in by the house door she caught it by its little tail and tore it out.

When the hare came in the mother stood up and said to it: ‘Welcome, dear little hare; because you have

brought me back Letiko I will silver your little tail.'

And she did so; and lived ever after with her daughter in happiness and content.

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