



# *The Two Step-Sisters*

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Once upon a time there was an old widower, who had one daughter; he married again and took for his wife a widow, who also had a daughter. The widow's daughter was ugly, lazy, obstinate and spiteful; yet as she was her mother's own child, the latter was delighted with her and pushed every thing upon her husband's daughter. But the old man's child was beautiful, industrious, obedient and good. God had gifted her with every virtuous and lovable quality, yet she was persecuted by her spiteful sister, as well as by her step-mother; it was fortunate that she possessed endurance and patience, or she would have fared badly. Whenever there was any hard work to be done, it was put upon the old man's daughter—she was obliged to get dry wood from the forest, drag the heavy sacks of grain to the mill; in short, every task always fell to her lot. The whole livelong day she had no rest, but was kept continually going up stairs and down. Still the old woman and her treasure of a daughter were constantly dissatisfied, and always had something to find fault with. The step-daughter was a heavy cross to the second wife, but her own daughter was like the basil plant, which is placed before the images of the saints.

When the step-sisters went to the village in the evening to spin, the old man's daughter did not allow herself to be interrupted in her work, but finished a whole sieve full of spools, while the old woman's daughter with difficulty completed a single one. When they came home late at night, the old woman's daughter jumped nimbly over the fence and asked to hold the sieve till the other had leaped over it too. Meantime the spiteful girl hurried into the house to her parents, and said she had spun all the spools. The step-sister vainly declared that

they were the work of her own hands; mother and daughter jeered at her words, and of course gained their cause. When Sunday or Friday came the old woman's daughter was brushed and bedizened as though the calves had licked her. There was no dance, no feather-plucking in the village to which the old woman's daughter did not go, but the step-daughter was sternly denied every pleasure of the kind. Yet when the husband came home, his wife's tongue ran like a mill-wheel—her step-daughter was disobedient, bold, bad-tempered, this, that, and the other; he must send her away from home, put her out at service, whichever he chose; it was impossible to keep her in the house because she might ruin her daughter too.

The old man was a jackanapes, or, as the saying goes, under petticoat government. Every thing his wife said was sacred. Had he obeyed the voice of his heart the poor old man might perhaps have said something, but now the hen had begun to crow in the house, and the rooster was of no consequence; yet, if he had thought of opposing them, his wife and her daughter would have soon made him repent it. One day, when he was unusually angry about what his wife had told him, he called the young girl, and said:—

“My dear child, your mother is always saying that you are disobedient to her, have a spiteful tongue, and are wicked, so that it is not possible for you to stay any longer in my house; therefore go wherever the Lord may guide you, that there may no longer be so much quarreling here on your account. But I advise you as a father, wherever you may go, to be obedient, humble, and industrious, for here with me all your faults have been overlooked, parental affection has aided, but among strangers nobody knows what sort of people you may meet, and they will not indulge you as we have done.”

When the poor girl saw that her step-mother and her daughter wanted to drive her out of the house at any cost, she kissed her father's hand with tears in her eyes, and went out into the wide world without any hope of ever returning home. She walked along the road till she chanced to meet a little sick dog, so thin that one could count its ribs.

When the dog saw her, it said: “You beautiful, industrious girl, have pity on me and take care of me, I will reward you some day.”

The girl did pity the poor animal, and, taking it in her arms, washed and cleaned it thoroughly. Then she left it and went on, glad that she had been able to do a good action. She had not walked far when she came to a fine pear-tree in full bloom, but it was completely covered with caterpillars.

When the pear-tree saw the girl, it said: “You beautiful, industrious girl, take care of me and rid me of these

caterpillars, I will repay you for it some day.”

The girl, with her usual diligence, cleared the pear-tree from its dry branches and most carefully removed the caterpillars; then she walked quietly on to seek some place where she might enter into service.

On her way she came to a ruined, neglected fountain, which said to her: “You beautiful, industrious girl, take care of me, I will reward you some day.”

The little maid cleared the fountain, cleaned it thoroughly, and then went on again. As she walked she came to a dilapidated oven, which had become almost entirely useless.

As soon as the oven saw her, it said: “You beautiful, industrious girl, line me with stones and clean me, I will repay you some day!”

The young girl knew that work harms no one, so she rolled up her sleeves, moistened some clay, stopped the holes in the stove, greased it and cleaned it till it was a pleasure to see it. Then she washed her hands and continued her journey. As she walked on, day and night, it happened, I don't know how—that she missed her way; yet she did not lose her trust in God, but walked on and on until early one morning, after passing through a dark forest, she reached a beautiful meadow. In the meadow she saw a little house, completely overgrown with vines, and when she approached it an old woman came out kindly to meet her, and said: “What are you seeking here, child, and who are you?”

“Who should I be, good dame! A poor girl, motherless, and I may say fatherless, too, for God alone knows what I have suffered since my own mother's hands were folded on her breast. I am seeking service, and as I know nobody and am wandering from place to place I have lost my way. But the Lord guided me, so that I have reached your house and I beg you to give me a shelter.”

“Poor child!” replied the old dame. “Surely God himself has led you to me and saved you from danger. I am the goddess of Sunday. Serve me to-day, and I promise that you shall not leave my house empty-handed to-morrow.”

“Very well, but I don't know what I have to do.”

“You must wash and feed my little children, who are now asleep, and then cook my dinner; when I come home from church I want to find it neither hot nor cold, but just right to eat.”

When she had said this, the old woman set off for church. The young girl rolled up her sleeves and went to work. First of all she prepared the water for the bath, then went out-doors and began to call: “Children, children, children, come to mother and let her wash you.”

When she looked up, what did she behold? The court-yard was filled and the woods were swarming with a host of dragons and all sorts of wild beasts of every size. But, firm in her faith and trust in God, the young girl did not quail, but taking one animal after another washed and cleaned it in the best possible way. Then she set about cooking the dinner, and when Sunday came out of church and saw her children so nicely washed and every thing so well done she was greatly delighted. After she had sat down to the table, she told the young girl that she might go up into the attic, choose whichever chest she wanted, and take it away with her for her wages; but she must not open it until she reached her father’s house.

The maiden went to the garret, where there were a number of chests, some old and ugly, others new and beautiful. But as she was not a bit covetous, she took the oldest and ugliest of them all. When she came down with it, the goddess of Sunday frowned slightly, but there was no help for it, so she blessed the girl, who took her trunk on her back and joyfully returned to her father’s house.

On the way, lo and behold! there was the oven full of beautifully risen, nicely browned cakes. The girl ate and ate, as many as she could, then took some with her for her journey and went on. Soon she came to the fountain she had cleaned, and which was now filled to the brim with water as clear as tears and as sweet and cold as ice. On the edge stood two silver goblets, from which she drank the water until she was entirely refreshed. Then, taking one goblet with her, she walked on. As she went, lo and behold! there stood the pear-tree she had cleaned, full of pears as yellow as wax, perfectly ripe, and as sweet as honey. When the pear-tree saw the girl, it bent its branches down to her, and she ate some of the fruit and took more pears to eat on the way, just as many of them as she wanted. From there she journeyed on again, and lo and behold! she next met the little dog, which was now well and handsome; around its neck it wore a collar of ducats which it gave the old man’s daughter as a reward for taking care of it in its sickness.

So the young girl at last reached her father’s house. When the old man saw her his eyes filled with tears and his heart throbbed with joy. The girl took out the dog’s collar and the silver goblet and gave them to her father;

when they opened the chest together, out came countless numbers of horses, cattle, and sheep, till the sight of so much wealth instantly made the old man young again. But his wife stood as if she were dazed, and did not know what to do in her rage. Her daughter, however, plucked up courage and said:—

“Never mind, mother, the world isn’t emptied yet; I’ll go and fetch you still greater treasures.”

After saying this she angrily set off at once. She walked and walked along the same path her step-sister had followed. She, too, met the sick, feeble dog, passed the pear-tree covered with caterpillars, the dry, neglected fountain, and the dilapidated oven which had become almost useless; but when dog, tree, fountain and oven begged her to take care of them, she answered rudely and scornfully: “Do you suppose I’ll soil my delicate hands! Have you often been tended by people like me?”

As they all knew that it is easier to get milk from a dry cow than to make a spoiled, lazy girl obliging, they let her go her way in peace, and no longer asked her for help. As she walked on and on, she too at last reached the Goddess Sunday. But here also she behaved sullenly, saucily, and awkwardly. Instead of cooking the dinner nicely and washing Sunday’s children as thoroughly as her step-sister had done, she burned them all till they screamed and ran off as though crazed by the burns and the pain. The food she scorched, charred, and let curdle so that no one could eat it, and when Sunday came home from church she covered her eyes and ears in horror at what she found in her house. Even the gentle, indulgent goddess could not get along with such an obstinate, lazy girl as this one, so she told her to go up into the garret, choose any chest she wanted, and then in God’s name continue her journey.

The girl went, took the newest and handsomest trunk, for she liked to get as much as possible of the best and finest things, but was not willing to do faithful service. When she came down she did not go to the Goddess Sunday to receive her blessing, but hurried off as if she were quitting an evil house. She nearly ran herself off her feet, in the fear that her mistress might change her mind and follow her to get her trunk back. When she reached the oven there were some nice cakes in it, but when she approached to satisfy her hunger the fire burned her and she could take none. The silver goblets were again at the fountain and the fountain was full of water to the brim, but when the girl tried to seize the cup to drink, the goblets instantly vanished, the water dried up, and the girl almost died of thirst. When she came to the pear tree it stood full of pears, but do you suppose the traveler could taste even one of them? No! The tree had made itself a thousand times as tall as before, so that its boughs touched the clouds! So the old woman’s daughter might pick her teeth, she obtained nothing else. Going further on she met the dog, which again had a collar of ducats round its neck; but when the

girl tried to take it off the dog bit her so that he tore off her fingers and would not let her touch him. The girl, in rage and shame, sucked her delicate little hands, but it did no good.

At last, after great difficulty, she reached her mother's house, but even here she did not find herself rolling in money, for when the old man's wife opened the chest, out came a host of dragons, which swallowed her and her daughter as if they had never been in the world. Then dragons, trunk, and all vanished.

The old man could now live in peace, and possessed countless riches; his daughter he married to a worthy, capable man. The cocks now crowed on the gate-posts, the threshold, and everywhere, but the hens no longer crowed as an evil omen in the house of the old man, who had not many days of life remaining. He was bald and bent, because his wife had quarreled with him too often and looked to see if he didn't need a drubbing.

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