

The Golden Slipper

Once upon a time there lived a man and a woman and they had one daughter. The mother was pretty, but the daughter was beautiful. When the daughter was still in her teens, the mother died. Before she passed away, she called her daughter to her and whispered these words, “Here is a little seed, darling daughter. Do not tell anyone you have it. When ill luck befalls you, plant it and from it there will grow a young willow tree. When you have need of anything, go to the tree and all your wishes will be fulfilled. You have only to say, ‘Open up, O willow tree. The maiden Ann has need of thee.’”

And so the man buried his dear wife. He mourned and mourned for her. Later he married again—a widow with a daughter of her own. The new wife spared her own daughter but the man’s daughter she hated with a great hatred so that life became very bitter for the poor girl. The old woman’s daughter was very lazy and did nothing all day long, whereas the man’s daughter was an industrious and obedient girl. She worked very hard at whatever tasks were set before her, but never got any thanks from her stepmother. The poor girl had to go around in rags because she never got any new clothes to wear.

One day the stepmother got to scheming. “You lazy thing, go and herd the young ox,” she ordered the girl. “And here is a bundle of hemp that I want you to crush, soak, spin, wind into thread, weave into cloth and bleach. When you have done that, bring the linen home. And take care, for if you don’t get it all done, you won’t live to tell the tale.” The girl took the hemp and chased the young ox to the pasture. As she was herding him, she cried, “Whoever heard of doing so much all in one day!”

Then she remembered her mother's gift. So she took the little seed, planted it in the meadow and watered it. Then she sat down and began to weep. She cried and cried until she fell asleep. When she awoke, she saw that the seed had grown into a pretty young willow tree and beneath it there was a little spring of water. The water was cold, and clear as tear drops. The girl went up to the willow tree and said,

“Open up, O willow tree.

The maiden Ann has need of thee.”

The willow tree opened up and a bevy of pretty girls came out of its trunk, saying,

“Maiden Ann, our beloved one,

What do you wish to be done?”

And the girl replied, “Here is a bundle of hemp. It has to be crushed, soaked, spun, wound into thread, woven into linen and bleached.”

They said to her,

“Maiden Ann, our beloved one,

Weep no more, it shall be done.”

Saying this, they all vanished into the willow tree. The girl herded the young ox until evening came, when she spoke again to the willow,

“Open up, O willow tree.

The maiden Ann has need of thee.”

Lo and behold the willow tree opened up, and the young girls brought forth linen so fine, so white, that it was all ready to be sewn into shirts. The girl took the linen, herded the young ox

home and gave the linen to her stepmother, who almost ground her teeth in vexation when she saw it, but said nothing.

Afterwards she sent her own daughter to pasture the young ox and said to her, "Here is a small bag of hemp to be spun, but if you don't finish it, bring it as it is."

The daughter chased the ox to the pasture, threw away the hemp and in the evening brought back the ox. "I had such a headache, Mother, that I could hardly stand," she said.

"Well, darling, lie down and rest yourself," the mother replied.

When Sunday came they got ready for church. The stepmother saw to it that her own daughter was dressed up in the finest clothes and led her proudly to church. Before she left, she thundered at her stepdaughter, "Heat up the stove, you lazy good-for-nothing! Make the dinner, tidy up the house and sew a shirt out of the linen before we return from church. Be sure to do it or you won't live to tell the tale."

The woman and her daughter left for church. The girl quickly heated up the stove, cooked the dinner, tidied the house, then ran to the willow tree in the meadow and recited these words,

"Open up, O willow tree.

The maiden Ann has need of thee."

The willow tree opened up and from it came forth a bevy of pretty girls saying,

"Maiden Ann, our beloved one,

What do you wish to be done?"

And she replied, "From this linen a shirt must be sewn before church is over. Also, I have nothing to wear but rags, and I must have some suitable clothes as I wish to go to church, also."

They immediately bustled around and dressed her in the most beautiful clothes. On her feet they put little golden slippers. Then there appeared a fine carriage with horses. She seated herself in it and drove off. When she entered the church, she illuminated it like the sun. The people could hardly contain themselves when they saw this marvel. "Who is she? Is she the daughter of a king? We have never seen such a beauty before," they said.

Now at this very moment a prince happened to be in church. When he beheld her glory he couldn't take his eyes from her.

After the service was over, the girl was the very first to leave the church. She entered the carriage and rode away. She drove up to the willow tree and when it had opened up, she took off all her splendid clothes and put on her old rags once more. The maidens presented her with the finished shirt. The horses and carriage disappeared into the tree. The willow tree closed up and the girl went into the house. She sat down and awaited the arrival of the others from church.

When the stepmother got back she asked her, "Well now, did you make the dinner?"

"Yes, I did," replied the girl.

"Did you sew the shirt?" her stepmother inquired.

"Yes, I did," answered the girl.

The stepmother looked disappointed, but did not say a word. She only shrugged her shoulders and snapped, "Serve the dinner, then!"

Everyone sat down to eat and began to talk about the beautiful young maiden they had seen at church. She was so lovely she shone like the sun, they said. Even the prince forgot his prayers, so intent was he in staring at her.

"Whom did she resemble?" asked Ann.

The stepmother and stepdaughter laughed scornfully and replied, "Not you, that's certain!"

Another week went by. The old man, his wife and her daughter once more went off to church.

The poor girl was ordered by her stepmother to heat up the stove and do a great deal of work besides. Knowing it was impossible to get it all done in time she quickly hastened to the willow tree and said,

"Open up, O willow tree.

The maiden Ann has need of thee."

The willow tree opened up and from it came forth a bevy of pretty girls, saying,

"Maiden Ann, Our beloved one,

What do you wish to be done?"

She again told them her wishes and also asked for suitable clothes so that she could go to church.

They dressed her in the most beautiful costume and put on her feet the golden slippers. Then she drove off to church in her carriage.

The prince was already there. When she entered the church the whole place was illuminated. The people were struck dumb. "What a beauty she is! Who is she?" they wondered. But no one knew.

As for the prince, he couldn't take his eyes off her. "Surely she must be a princess," he said to himself.

After the service, she was the first to leave the church. When she arrived home she took off her splendid clothes and put on her old rags. Then she sat down and awaited the arrival of the others from church.

They soon appeared and sat down to dinner and once more began to speak of the lovely young lady. "The prince is good looking, but she is beautiful!" they remarked.

The prince for his part began to make inquiries. "Who is the young lady?" he asked everyone.

But no one seemed to know.

At last a young lad came up with a good idea. "On the spot where she stands in church, put a bit of tar and her little slippers will stick to it so she won't be able to get away after the service," he said. So this was done.

The beautiful unknown maiden came to church the following Sunday and stood on the spot of tar. The prince and his noblemen watched her intently. The service ended and she started to leave the building, but found she couldn't move from her place. She tried to pull herself from the spot. Finally she managed to get away but one little shoe was left behind. She ran off and rode back home in the carriage. When she arrived she dressed herself once more in her old rags and sat down to await the others.

Soon they arrived from church and once more their talk was only the beautiful young lady and the little slipper she had left behind. "Such a tiny slipper," they said. "There isn't anyone who will fit it."

"But maybe I would," said the girl quietly.

The stepmother got so cross that she and her daughter began to make fun of the poor girl. "You good-for-nothing! You are only fit to rake the cinders. Your feet are like big blocks of wood! To whom are you comparing yourself?" The stepmother beat her and chased her out of the house.

Meanwhile the prince kept asking everyone, "Who has lost a golden slipper?" But no one could supply the answer. What was to be done?

The same young lad came up with an idea. "Send your messengers everywhere to find out who fits the golden slipper. She whose foot slips into it easily is the owner."

And that is what they did. The messengers went forth through the land. At first they visited all the princesses, then the titled ladies. My how the ladies hoped the little shoe would fit them so they would become the wife of the prince! But it fitted neither the princesses nor the titled ladies. Next they visited the townsfolk, but no one claimed the slipper. Finally they had to go amongst the peasants. All the girls tried on the little slipper, but it didn't fit anyone. At last they arrived at the home of the man and his wife.

The woman espied the messengers and told her daughter to tidy up because they were coming to fit the little slipper. To her stepdaughter she snarled, "And you untidy, ungrateful girl! Go and hide yourself in a corner so that no one will see you!" And she chased the poor girl away.

Presently the messengers entered and said, "Good day to you."

"God give you health," replied the woman.

"Have you any young maidens here?" they inquired.

"Why yes. I have one daughter," replied the woman. "Daughter dear, come here. See if your little foot will fit this golden slipper.

Her daughter stepped forth boldly. "Here is my beloved child. Look at her dainty little feet," she boasted.

The messengers brought out the golden slipper and the girl tried to put her big foot into it. Of course it didn't fit.

"Now dearie," insisted the woman. "You simply must put your foot into it a little harder. Surely it will fit." The girl thrust her foot into the dainty little slipper but it would not go in.

Meanwhile the man's daughter peeped out from her corner of the stove.

"What kind of girl is that sitting near the stove?" asked one of the messengers.

“Oh, that’s only a lazy, good-for-nothing,” said the stepmother. And to the girl she yelled, “Why are you coming out, you untidy girl? I told you to sit there!”

“No, old woman,” scolded the messenger. “Let her come here.”

The girl came from her corner and began to try on the slipper. It was a perfect fit!

“Well, old woman,” said one of the messengers. “We are taking this girl away from you.”

“That’s ridiculous!” screamed the stepmother. “Whoever heard of such a scarecrow becoming the wife of a prince? Is it seemly? I won’t allow it!”

“Old woman, she’s coming with us,” replied the messengers.

The stepmother kept on. “She is nothing but a drudge who lives amongst the cinders. She hasn’t a shirt to her back.” But the messengers wouldn’t listen to her ravings.

Then the girl spoke. “Wait a moment. I have something to do first.” So she hurried off to the meadow and said,

“Open up, O willow tree.

The maiden Ann has need of thee.”

The willow tree opened up and a bevy of young girls came forth. She told them what she wanted.

Instantly they dressed her in the most dazzling costume. Then she returned to the house, which became illuminated by her glorious presence. Everyone was struck by her great beauty.

“Let me put on the other slipper, she said. The messengers gave her the slipper, which she put on. Then she stood before them arrayed as a bride.

The carriage with the horses appeared and she entered it and soon drove away to the king’s palace. The prince claimed her for his bride and the wedding took place soon after. The willow

tree and the spring sank back into the ground and reappeared instead in the garden of the prince and his lovely bride, who lived happily ever after.