

The Cranberry Flute

Once upon a time there lived an old man and his wife. He had a daughter and she had a daughter.

One day the two stepsisters went to the woods to pick some berries. The old man's daughter picked and picked until she had a bowlful, but the old woman's daughter would pick one berry and then pop it into her mouth. After awhile the lazy sister said, "Let's go home and divide up the berries." So they set off for home, and on the way the old woman's daughter said, "Let's lie down and rest awhile, sister."

Since the old man's daughter was tired, she agreed and soon fell fast asleep. While she slept, the old woman's daughter took a knife and plunged it into her stepsister's heart. Then she dug a hole and buried her. After that she set off for home. When she arrived she said, "See how many berries I picked!"

But the old man asked, "What has happened to my daughter?"

"She's lagging behind," replied the girl.

Meanwhile, some ox-cart drivers were passing by through the woods and one said, "Let's stop here and rest awhile, comrades." So they stopped and looked around. Near the road they noticed a mound on which grew a beautiful cranberry bush. They cut a branch from it and made a flute.

One of the men took it and began to play. The flute sang,

"O gently, so gently, young wagoner, play.

Please do not harm me any more I pray.

My sister has dared to take my young life,

For into my heart she has plunged a sharp knife."

And the other wagoners said, "It must surely mean something for a cranberry flute to play such a tune."

Soon they arrived at the village where the old man and his wife lived. They went to his house and when he came to the door they said, "Old man, may we spend the night here? We'll tell you all about our adventures."

He invited them in. As soon as they had made themselves comfortable, one of them sat on the bench and another stood nearby and said, "Well, comrade, take out your flute and play us a tune." The other did so and the flute then sang,

"O gently, so gently, young wagoner, play.

Please do not harm me any more I pray.

My sister has dared to take my young life,

For into my heart she has plunged a sharp knife."

Then the old man said, "What kind of flute is it that plays with such feeling that I want to weep? Give it to me to play." The wagoner handed it to the old man. As soon as he began to play the flute sang,

"O gently, so gently, my dear father, play.

Please do not harm me any more I pray.

My sister has dared to take my young life,

For into my heart she has plunged a sharp knife."

And the old woman sitting on the stove ledge said, "Give the flute to me, old man, and I'll play it." So he gave it to her. As soon as she began to play it the flute sang,

"O gently, so gently, my stepmother, play.

Please do not harm me any more I pray.

My sister has dared to take my young life,

For into my heart she has plunged a sharp knife.”

The old woman’s daughter, seated near the stove in the corner, was afraid that she would be discovered. Then the old man said, “Give the flute to her to play!” So he gave it to her. As soon as she began to play it, the flute sang,

“O gently, so gently, you killer, play.

Please do not harm me any more I pray.

You sister have dared to take my young life,

For into my heart you have plunged a sharp knife.”

Then everyone knew her for what she had done. They all recalled the old man’s daughter with a kindly word, but the old woman’s daughter they threw out of the house and banished forever.