

The Little Lamé Duck

Once upon a time lived an old man and an old woman. They had no children, so felt very sad.

One day the old man said to his wife, "Let's go to the woods and pick mushrooms." So off they went.

As the old woman bent down to pick a mushroom, she spied a nest in the bushes and in it there was a little duck. She cried out to her husband, "Look! What a pretty little duck!"

And the old man said, "Let's take it home and look after it." The old woman agreed.

As they handled the little duck, they noticed that it had a broken leg. They took it gently and brought it home. They made a small nest, lined it with feathers and put the little duck inside. As for themselves, they went off once more to pick mushrooms.

When they returned home, they saw that the house had been made tidy and a pot of borsch was ready for them to eat. They inquired of their neighbours, "Did you see who did all our work for us?" But no one knew anything.

Another day, the old man and woman went to the woods to pick mushrooms. When they returned home they found a pot of dumplings, all ready for them to eat. On the window ledge they saw some spun thread on a spindle. Again they inquired of their neighbours, "Did you see anyone about?"

This time the neighbours replied, "We saw a maiden bringing water from the well—such a pretty maiden, but she was slightly lame."

The old man and old woman thought and thought but could not guess who it could be. Later on the old woman said to the old man, "Here is an idea. Let's pretend that we are going to pick mushrooms. Instead, we'll hide and watch to see who is bringing water from the well."

So they did just that. They stood behind the storehouse watching, when out of the house came a maiden with a pail. She was very pretty but slightly lame. As she started to walk toward the well, the old man and woman went into the house. When they looked at the nest they saw that it was empty. The duck was not there, just the nest full of feathers. So they took it and threw it into the stove and burnt it.

Just then, in came the maiden with the water. When she saw the old man and woman she went toward the nest, but it wasn't there. So she began to weep. The old man and woman went up to her and said, "Don't cry, dearie. You will be our daughter. We shall love and cherish you as our own child."

But the maiden replied, "I would have lived with you forever if you hadn't burnt my nest and spied on me. Now I can't. So dear Grandpa, make me a spinning wheel and spindle for I must leave."

The old man and woman cried and begged her to remain, but she refused. So the old man made her a spinning wheel and spindle. She took it and sat down to spin. Soon a flock of ducks flew by. When they saw her they sang out,

"See a maiden without peer,

She's our lovely Eva dear,

Seated in the courtyard clean,

On the carved post see her lean.

Her wheel is a-whirring,

Her spindle is chirring.

Let each give her a feather,

And then fly off together.”

But the maiden replied,

“I will not fly with you away

For when in my sick bed I lay

Because I broke my leg one day

You didn’t listen to my plea

And flew away without me.”

Thereupon the ducks each gave her one feather and off they flew. Then another flock of ducks

flew by and they also sang,

“See a maiden without peer,

She’s our lovely Eva dear,

Seated in the courtyard clean,

On the carved post see her lean.

Her wheel is a-whirring,

Her spindle is chirring.

Let each give her a feather,

And then fly off together.”

But the maiden replied,

“I will not fly with you away

For when in my sick bed I lay

Because I broke my leg one day

You didn’t listen to my plea

And flew away without me.”

Then there flew by a third flock of ducks. They saw the maiden and sang,

“See a maiden without peer,

She’s our lovely Eva dear,

Seated in the courtyard clean,

On the carved post see her lean.

Her wheel is a-whirring,

Her spindle is chirring.

Let each give her a feather,

And then fly off together.”

But the maiden replied,

“I will not fly with you away

For when in my sick bed I lay

Because I broke my leg one day

You didn’t listen to my plea

And flew away without me.”

The ducks then each gave her a feather. The maiden wrapped herself in the feathers and immediately turned into a duck and she flew off with the rest of the flock.

As for the old man and woman they were left all alone once more in the world.