

THE MILLER'S DAUGHTER

The Miller's daughter, Maria, was a high-spirited girl, who was as brave and strong as any man. There was one time, when she had to remain at home to guard the isolated millhouse, while all of its other inhabitants attended the distant church. After they had left she dutifully locked herself in and went about her tasks. She was soon finished, and after a while, very bored, and kept going to the window to see if the others were returning. After a while, she saw three strangers in the distance, walking straight towards the house. It wasn't long before they were at the door, and knocked. Maria didn't like this at all, and, at first, may have been a little frightened. But, she soon pulled herself together and stayed quietly inside, behind the locked doors. Then...

... She remembered the cellar door, which opened onto the street. It was also locked and bolted, but it had a large hole for the cats, which somebody could just about crawl through. Silently she took up an axe, and crept down to the cellar. She didn't have to wait long, before a head appeared in the hole. Maria brought down the axe, and in a single blow, sent the head rolling to the far corner of the cellar. Then, she grabbed the body by the shoulders and quickly pulled it inside, through the hole.

When his partners saw the first robber disappear through the door, they obviously thought that he had safely got inside. So, the second tried to follow him. As his head came through the hole, it was also promptly lobbed off with single blow, and his body pulled inside. Then came the third, but Maria swung her axe too soon. It only hit the top of his head, which he quickly pulled back. Now knowing what had happened to his friends, he ran off without hesitation back into the forest to tend his wounds.

Not long after, when the service was over, her family and friends returned from church. She ran out to meet them, and with a beating heart, and some pride, she told them all that had happened that morning. They were very impressed with her presence of mind, and grateful for her saving all their property and livelihoods. The two bodies, were then delivered on the same day to the magistrate, and later buried beneath the gallows.

About two years later, a journeyman miller came by one morning, looking for work. The Miller liked the look of the young man, and needed the extra hands, so he took him on. The new man worked very hard and did his job well, and soon became a favourite of everybody in the mill, especially the women. Nobody in the millhouse had any secrets, and soon he heard all the stories of the stories about the mill, including the deeds of the Miller's daughter a few years back. Even Maria herself, happily repeated the story many times. Only when she came to the third robber, she couldn't completely hide her fear of him coming back to finish what he had started. When she said this, the young man smiled and rubbed his fingers under the red cap which he always wore, and never too off.

In return, he often told his story of how was the son of a rich Miller, some way off, and how much land his father owned.

Maria hung on his every word, and very soon the Miller's daughter started to fall in love with the rich Miller's son. In time, he told her the same, and it wasn't long before he asked her father for her hand in marriage. When this was promptly given, the young man wished to take his future bride to acquaint her with his family and their land. The visit was agreed to, and soon the pair set off.

The road led deep into the forest. On each side there were thick walls of wild briars and ferns, and from above everything was in the shade of huge old grey pines. There was nothing else to see, or hear. There were no other voices or footsteps, only silence. In the deepest, darkest part of the woods, the young man suddenly stopped and stood still. He turned to Maria and removed his cap.

"Do you recognise this?", he asked, pointing to a wound on his head.

"Jesus Maria!" cried the Miller's daughter. A weaker girl would have fainted from shock, but not her. It was the same wound that she had given the third robber.

"You did this to me! And killed two of my friends." continued the robber, "For that, you will pay the price."

Maria begged and cired for her life, but all to no avail. Her captor dragged her further through the forest, like an animal to slaughter.

They hadn't gone far when they stopped at a farmhouse, from which stormed an unruly gang of men. The first of them greeted their comrade, and asked him if this was 'the girl'. He told them it was. The whole group cheered and carried them both into the house. They found themselves in a large room, where there was a huge fireplace. The robbers then instructed the housekeeper to make the fire ready, because they were going to prepare a great roast.

The housekeeper started the fire, and then brought the men plenty of wine and food, which they soon demolished. In the meantime, Maria was hanging from a hook beside the fire. The men laughed as they watched her wriggle and squirm, and joked about how long it would take her to cook. After a while, when Maria thought that she would surely die from the heat, the robbers received word that some rich merchants had lost their way in the forest. In an instant, the robbers all stood up, drained their glasses and hurried out of the door, leaving Maria alone with the landlady.

The young girl then begged the old lady to help her escape. As she told the housekeeper that she would be eternally grateful, tears as clear as the morning dew streamed down her cheeks. This may have softened the heart of the older lady, but it may have been the thought that the same fate would befall her. Anyway, she unbound the girl, and they left the house together.

The two women went on their way to escape certain death and win their freedom, silently through the forest. They hadn't even gone halfway, when they heard the distant noise of the robbers returning. What should they do to avoid the? The quick witted Maria soon had an idea, and started to climb a nearby tree. She was as nimble as any squirrel, and soon was high into the branches. The older lady was just as fit, and quickly followed behind. Soon, they were both sitting in the swaying branches, high above the band of robbers. There were now twenty two of them, resting below the tree and discussing how they were going to deal with the two women.

High above, the Maria and the housekeeper heard every word. They were so afraid that they broke into a sweat, or one of them may have shed a few tears. In any case, something dripped from the tree onto the place where the robbers were sitting. When they noticed the falling drops, the men below predicted a coming rainstorm, packed their things together, and hurried home.

As soon as the coast was clear, the two women climbed down, and hurried off in the opposite direction, without looking back. They quickly reached the end of the trees, but didn't stop to rest. Instead, they carried on to the nearest village. Here, Maria had friends, with whom she sought refuge and told what had happened. As often happens in villages, the story spread quickly. The villagers banded together, took their weapons, and headed off to the house in the forest. There they found the robbers, fought and killed every one of them.

Maria returned home the same day, with the housekeeper, who lived in the millhouse from then on, until she died of old age.