

SON AND DAUGHTER

At the edge of a great forest there lived a poor woodcutter and his wife who had a little son and a little daughter. The family was poor, but the father was an honest man who worked hard to put just enough food on the table to keep them from hunger. His children were as honest and hard working as he was, but the mother was not so nice, as you shall hear.

One day, as the father was working in the woods, his wife sent the children to collect kindling. She told them that she would give a juicy red apple to whoever came back first with as much as they could carry. The children went out into the woods, and worked hard all morning collecting twigs and sticks. When they each had a huge faggot, almost as big as themselves, they strapped them to their backs and hurried home.

When they started back, both children were happy and their loads were light upon their backs. But, the nearer they were to home, the heavier their burdens felt, and the heavier their hearts became. About halfway there, the little boy's shoulder strap came undone, and he asked his sister to wait while he fixed it. She, however, was thinking about how pleased her mother would be with her and the juicy red reward, so she didn't stop to wait. But, a little further along, she had to stop. Her shoulder strap had broken, and her brother caught up with her. This time, she asked him to wait while she fixed it. He refused, telling her "you didn't wait for *me*, so now *I* will get the apple" and ran on ahead.

When he arrived home, he threw his bundle of sticks in the corner of the empty kitchen, and asked his mother for his apple. She told him that the apples were in the chest in the attic storeroom, and if he picked them himself, he could have not one, but three. But, the little boy was not happy. He wanted his mother to choose the best apple for him and give it to him, like she had always done before. So, after much pleading, they went into the storeroom together to choose the apples. His mother lifted the heavy lid of the chest, and the little boy peered over the top. The chest was so high, and he so small that he had to stand on his tip-toes with his head almost inside to see the apples. They were all beautiful, juicy and red, and he didn't know which was best. Suddenly, the heavy lid fell crashing down on him. His head rolled into the chest, and his body fell back onto the floor. Now the family only needed three apples, which the mother took with her into the kitchen.

She hung the body of her son from a hook behind the door, and closed it as her daughter arrived home. The little girl unpacked her bundle, stacked it carefully, and asked her mother if she could also have an apple. The mother smiled, and handed her the juiciest of the three red apples. The little girl bit into the apple, and sat quietly while her mother prepared the food for her to take into the woods to her father. Her mother asked her to find some lard and some flour in the attic storeroom, adding "but don't look behind the door".

In the storeroom, she quickly found the things she needed and then, remembering her mother's words, looked behind the door. There she saw the headless body of her brother hanging from a hook. She stood where she was, standing in front of him, and cried. Her grief was so great that even a stone would have pity on her, and she cried so hard that her tears fell like rain on the floor. But she knew that she would have to return to the kitchen, so, still crying she took the items her mother needed and closed the door behind her. When her mother asked her if she *had* looked behind the door, she wiped her eyes with her apron and said "no". Her mother was happy with this answer, and, shortly after, sent her out into the woods with the food for her father.

On her way to find him, it was very different to when she went out with her brother in the morning. She could no longer feel happy watching the squirrels scampering after her through the trees and stopping to stand to attention in front of her. She didn't even notice the thick carpet of pine needles and wild flowers on the forest floor. She just walked on crying, only stopping to wipe her eyes.

When she found her father, she didn't say anything but just gave him the soup. He was very hungry, and took it and sat under a great beech tree without seeing that his daughter was upset. But, he was very surprised when he put his spoon into the soup and saw that it had meat in it. It had been a very long time since the family had even seen meat, never mind tasted it. He was about to eat the first piece, when a little bird in the branches above him started to sing:

Fee, fie! My mother made me die.
My mother cooked me up.
My sister served the soup.
My father ate it all up.
Fee, fie! My mother made me die.

The hungry woodcutter found this strange, but was more interested in his meal. But the little bird would not let him eat in peace. It continued to sing:

Fee, fie! My mother made me die.
My mother cooked me up.
My sister served the soup.
My father ate it all up.
Fee, fie! My mother made me die.

It was very strange. Every time he raised the spoon to his mouth, the little bird would sing its song. He became worried, and looked around to see his sad little daughter crying, and realised that she had not spoken a word since she brought him his soup. Forgetting the soup and his hunger, they returned home.

In the meantime, his wife had been very busy trying to hide the body of her son. But, the whole time she had been surrounded by a flock of little birds

which flew through the house. Every time she tried to touch the body, they would fly around her head and sing:

Fee, fie! My mother made me die.
My mother cooked me up.
My sister served the soup.
My father ate it all up.
Fee, fie! My mother made me die.

She tried everthing to drive them away, and managed to drive them out through the door. As she raced after them, the door swung shut, hitting her head. The heavy door split her skull clean in two. When the woodcutter and his daughter arrived home, everything was quiet except for the birds singing:

Fee, fie! My mother made me die.
My mother cooked me up.
My sister served the soup.
My father ate it all up.
Fee, fie! My mother made me die.

The father then climbed the steps to the house and opened the door. There he found the bodies of his wife and son lying on the floor.

And now my tale is heard,
I won't say another word,
Unless, if you please,
I tell you of beans and peas.