

The Cast-Iron Stove

In the days when wishing still helped, an old witch with her magic imprisoned a prince in a cast-iron stove deep in the forest. There he stayed for many years and no one could set him free. One day a princess got lost in the forest and couldn't find the way back to her father's kingdom. After wandering about for nine days, she caught sight of the cast-iron stove and a voice from inside it asked her: "Where have you come from and where are you going?" She replied: "I'm lost and I can't find the way back to my father's kingdom." The voice from the stove said "I'll see that you get home in no time if you promise to do what I ask. My father is a greater king than yours, and I want you to marry me."

That gave her a turn. "Good Lord," she thought, "what will I do with a cast-iron-stove?" But she wanted very much to go home to her father, so she promised to do as he asked, and he said: "You must come back with a knife and scrape a hole in the iron." Then he gave her a companion who said nothing, but walked beside her and brought her home in two hours. There was great rejoicing in the palace when the princess got back. The old king fell on her neck and kissed her, but she was very sad. "Dear father," she said, "what a time I've had! I'd never have got out of that big wild forest if I hadn't come across a cast-iron stove and promised to go back and set it free and marry it." The king was so horrified he almost fainted, for her had only one daughter. They talked it over and finally decided to send the miller's beautiful daughter instead. They took her to the place, gave her a knife, and told her to scrape at the cast-iron stove. She scraped for twenty-four hours, but none of the iron came off. At dawn a voice came from the stove: "I think the dawn is breaking." And she replied: "I think so too. That clatter must be my father's mill." "In that case, you're a miller's daughter. Go straight home and tell them to send the king's daughter here." She went back to the palace and told the king that whoever it was out there didn't want her, he wanted the king's daughter.

The old king was horrified and his daughter burst into tears. But they still had a swineherd's daughter, who was even more beautiful than the miller's daughter, and they decided to pay her to go out to the cast-iron stove instead of the king's

daughter. So she was taken to the place, and she too scraped for twenty-four hours, but none of the iron came off. At dawn a voice came from the stove: "I think the day is breaking." And she replied: "I think so too. That must be my father blowing his horn." "Then you're a swineherd's daughter. Go straight home and tell them to send the king's daughter here. Tell her I'll do as I promised, but if she doesn't come the whole kingdom will be destroyed and no stone will be left standing on another."

When the king's daughter heard that, she began to cry. There was no help for it, she had to keep her promise. She took leave of her father, put a knife in her pocket, and went to the cast-iron stove in the forest. When she got there, she began to scrape. The iron gave way, and in two hours she had scraped a small hole. She looked in and saw a beautiful young man, heavens above! So radiant with gold and jewels that her soul delighted in him. She went on scraping until the hole was big enough for him to get through, and then he came out. "You are mine and I am yours," he said. "You are my betrothed and you have set me free." He wanted to take her home with him to his kingdom, but she asked leave to say good-bye to her father, and he granted it, but said: "You must say no more than three words to your father, then you must come back." She went home, but she said more than three words to her father. Instantly, the cast-iron stove vanished and was carried far away, over glass mountains and sharp swords, but the prince had been set free, and he wasn't shut up in it any more.

Then she said good-bye to her father and took some money with her, but not much. She went back to the forest and looked for the cast-iron stove, but it was nowhere to be found. Nine days she searched, and by then she was so hungry she didn't know what to do, for she had nothing left to eat. When evening came, she climbed a small tree, meaning to spend the night there, for she was afraid of the wild beasts. At midnight she saw a little light in the distance and thought: "Oh, perhaps I'm saved." She climbed down from the tree and walked in the direction of the light, praying as she went. Finally she came to a little house with a lot of grass growing around it and a little pile of wood out in front. "My goodness," she thought to herself. "What kind of place have I come to now?" She looked through the window and there was no one inside except a fat toad

and some little ones, but there was also a table spread with wine and roast meat, and the plates and cups were of silver. She took heart and knocked at the door. The fat toad cried out:

“Little green maid
Perched on a log
Hobgoblin’s dog,
Wobblin’ goblin,
Quick, go and see
What that knocking can be.”

At that a little toad came out and opened the door for her. When she went in, they all bade her welcome and made her sit down. “Where have you come from and where are you going?” they asked. She told them everything that had happened and how, because she had disobeyed the prince’s orders to say no more than three words, the stove was gone and the prince too. “And now,” she said, “I’m going to journey over hill and dale and search until I find him.” At that the fat old toad said:

“Little green maid
Perched on a log
Hobgoblin’s dog,
Wobblin’ goblin,
That box you see,
Bring it here to me.”

When the little toad had brought her the box, they gave the princess food and drink and took her to a lovely made-up bed, as soft as silk and satin, and she lay down and slept the sleep of the just. When she got up next morning, the old toad gave her three needles out of the big box. “You’ll need them,” it said, “for you will have to cross a high glass mountain and three sharp swords and a great water, and if you manage to do all that you will get your loved one back again.” And it gave her three big needles, a plow wheel, and three nuts.

The princess started on her journey, and when she got to the smooth glass mountain she stuck the three needles into the glass, first behind her feet and then, on the downward slope, ahead of them. That way she managed to get across and when she came to the other side she hid them in a place she took good note of. When she came to the three swords, she got up on her plow wheel and rolled over them. Last she came to the great water, and after sailing across it, arrived at a big beautiful castle. She went in and introduced herself as a poor girl in need of work; for she knew that the prince she had freed from the cast-iron stove in the great forest was inside. So she was taken on as a kitchen maid at a low wage.

Now the prince had already chosen another girl and he was going to marry her, for he thought the princess had long been dead. In the evening, when the kitchen maid had finished washing up, she put her hand in her pocket and found the three nuts the old toad had given her. She cracked one with her teeth, meaning to eat the kernel, but what do you know!—there was a magnificent queenly dress inside. When the bride heard about it, she came and asked for the dress and offered to buy it and said a kitchen maid had no need for such a dress. “No,” she replied. “I won’t sell it, but you can have it on one condition, that you let me spend a night in the bridegroom’s bedchamber.” The bride consented, because the dress was so beautiful and she had none like it. That evening she said to her betrothed: “That stupid girl wants to spend the night in your room.” “If you don’t mind,” he said, “neither do I.” But she gave him a glass of wine into which she had mixed a sleeping potion. So the kitchen maid and the prince went into the bedchamber and he slept so soundly she couldn’t wake him. She wept all night and lamented: “I rescued you from the great wild forest and the cast-iron stove. I searched for you and crossed a glass mountain, three sharp swords, and a great water before I found you, and now you won’t listen to me.” The servants were sitting outside the door. They heard her weep all night and told their master about it in the morning.

Next evening when she had finished washing up, she cracked the second nut with her teeth, and the dress inside was more beautiful than the first. When the bride saw it, she wanted to buy it, but the kitchen maid wouldn’t take money and asked leave to spend a second night in the bridegroom’s bedchamber. But the bride gave him a sleeping potion and he slept so soundly he couldn’t hear a thing. The kitchen maid wept all night and lamented: “I rescued you from a forest and a cast-iron stove. I searched for you and crossed a glass mountain, three sharp

swords, and a great water before I found you, and now you won't listen to me." The servants were sitting outside the door. They heard her weep all night and told their master about it in the morning.

The third evening when she had finished washing up, she cracked the third nut with her teeth and there was a still more beautiful dress inside, woven of pure gold. When the bride saw it, she wanted it, but the kitchen maid said no, not unless she could spend a third night in the prince's bedchamber. This time the prince took good care to pour the sleeping potion away. When she began to weep and lament: "O my dearest, I saved you from the cruel wild forest and the cast-iron stove," the prince jumped up and said: "You are the right bride. You are mine and I am yours." The same night he got into a carriage with her, and they took the false bride's clothes away so she couldn't get out of bed. When they came to the great water, they sailed across, and when they came to the three sharp swords they rode over them on the plow wheel, and when they came to the glass mountain they stuck the three needles into it. Finally they reached the little old house, but when they went in, it was a big castle. The toads had been set free, they were all princes and princesses now, and they were very happy. The wedding feast was held and they stayed in the castle, which was much bigger than her father's. But the old man complained about living alone, so they drove to his castle and brought him back to stay with them. So then they had two kingdoms and lived in happy matrimony.

There's a mouse. Now it's gone.

And my stories gone.