

Bushy Bride

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
from *Popular Tales from the Norse*

Once on a time there was a widower, who had a son and a daughter by his first marriage. Both were good children, and loved each other dearly. Some time after the man married a widow, who had a daughter by her first husband, and she was both ugly and bad, like her mother. So from the day the new wife came into the house there was no peace for her stepchildren in any corner; and at last the lad thought he'd best go out into the world, and try to earn his own bread. And when he had wandered a while he came to a king's palace, and got a place under the coachman, and quick and willing he was, and the horses he looked after were so sleek and clean that their coats shone again.

But the sister who stayed at home was treated worse than badly; both her stepmother and stepsister were always at her, and wherever she went, and whatever she did, they scolded and snarled so, the poor lassie hadn't an hour's peace. All the hard work she was forced to do, and early and late she got nothing but bad words, and little food besides.

So one day they had sent her to the burn to fetch water: and what do you think? up popped an ugly, ugly head out of the pool, and said:

'Wash me, you lassie.'

'Yes, with all my heart I'll wash you', said the lassie. So she began to wash and scrub the ugly head; but truth to say, she thought it nasty work.

Well, as soon as she had done washing it, up popped another head out of the pool, and this was uglier still.

'Brush me, you lassie', said the head.

'Yes, with all my heart I'll brush you.'

And with that she took in hand the matted locks, and you may fancy she hadn't very pleasant work with them. But when she had got over

that, if a third head didn't pop up out of the pool, and this was far more ugly and loathsome than both the others put together.

'Kiss me, you lassie!'

'Yes, I'll kiss you', said the lassie, and she did it too, though she thought it the worst work she had ever had to do in her life.

Then the heads began to chatter together, and each asked what they should do for the lassie who was so kind and gentle.

'That she be the prettiest lassie in the world, and as fair as the bright day', said the first head.

'That gold shall drop from her hair, every time she brushes it', said the second head.

'That gold shall fall from her mouth every time she speaks', said the third head.

So when the lassie came home looking so lovely, and beaming as the bright day itself, her stepmother and her stepsister got more and more cross, and they got worse still when she began to talk, and they saw how golden guineas fell from her mouth. As for the stepmother, she got so mad with rage, she chased the lassie into the pigsty. That was the right place for all her gold stuff, but as for coming into the house, she wouldn't hear of it.

Well, it wasn't long before the stepmother wished her own daughter to go to the burn to fetch water. So when she came to the water's edge with her buckets, up popped the first head.

'Wash me, you lassie', it said.

'The Deil wash you', said the stepdaughter.

So the second head popped up.

'Brush me, you lassie', it said.

'The Deil brush you', said the stepdaughter.

So down it went to the bottom, and the third head popped up.

'Kiss me, you lassie', said the head.

'The Deil kiss you, you pig's-snout', said the girl.

Then the heads chattered together again, and asked what they should do to the girl who was so spiteful and cross-grained; and they all agreed she should have a nose four ells long, and a snout three ells long, and a pine bush right in the midst of her forehead, and every time she spoke, ashes were to fall out of her mouth.

So when she got home with her buckets, she bawled out to her mother:

'Open the door.'

'Open it yourself, my darling child', said the mother.

'I can't reach it because of my nose', said the daughter.

So, when the mother came out and saw her, you may fancy what a way she was in, and how she screamed and groaned; but, for all that, there were the nose and the snout and the pine bush, and they got no smaller for all her grief.

Now the brother, who had got the place in the King's stable, had taken a little sketch of his sister, which he carried away with him, and every morning and every evening he knelt down before the picture and prayed to Our Lord for his sister, whom he loved so dearly. The other grooms had heard him praying, so they peeped through the key-hole of his room, and there they saw him on his knees before the picture. So they went about saying how the lad every morning and every evening knelt down and prayed to an idol which he had, and at last they went to the king himself and begged him only to peep through the key-hole, and then His Majesty would see the lad, and what things he did. At first the King wouldn't believe it, but at last they talked him over, and he crept on tiptoe to the door and peeped in. Yes, there was the lad on his knees before the picture, which hung on the wall, praying with clasped hands.

'Open the door!' called out the King; but the lad didn't hear him.

So the King called out in a louder voice, but the lad was so deep in his prayers he couldn't hear him this time either. 'OPEN THE DOOR, I SAY!' roared out the King; 'It's I, the King, who want to come in.'

Well, up jumped the lad and ran to the door, and unlocked it, but in his hurry he forgot to hide the picture. But when the King came in and saw the picture, he stood there as if he were fettered, and couldn't stir from the spot, so lovely he thought the picture.

'So lovely a woman there isn't in all the wide world', said the King.

But the lad told him she was his sister whom he had drawn, and if she wasn't prettier than that, at least she wasn't uglier.

'Well, if she's so lovely', said the King, 'I'll have her for my queen'; and then he ordered the lad to set off home that minute, and not be long on the road either. So the lad promised to make as much haste as he could, and started off from the King's palace.

When the brother came home to fetch his sister, the step-mother and stepsister said they must go too. So they all set out, and the good lassie had a casket in which she kept her gold, and a little dog, whose name was 'Little Flo'; those two things were all her mother left her. And when they had gone a while, they came to a lake which they had to cross; so the brother sat down at the helm, and the stepmother and the two girls sat in the bow forward, and so they sailed a long, long way.

At last they caught sight of land.

'There', said the brother, 'where you see the white strand yonder, there's where we're to land'; and as he said this he pointed across the water.

'What is it my brother says?' asked the good lassie.

'He says you must throw your casket overboard', said the stepmother.

'Well, when my brother says it, I must do it', said the lassie, and overboard went the casket.

When they had sailed a bit farther, the brother pointed again across the lake.

'There you see the castle we're going to.'

'What is it my brother says?' asked the lassie.

'He says now you must throw your little dog overboard', said the stepmother.

Then the lassie wept and was sore grieved, for Little Flo was the dearest thing she had in the world, but at last she threw him overboard.

'When my brother says it, I must do it, but heaven knows how it hurts me to throw you over, Little Flo', she said.

So they sailed on a good bit still.

'There you see the King coming down to meet us', said the brother, and pointed towards the strand.

'What is it my brother says', asked the lassie.

'Now he says you must make haste and throw yourself overboard', said the stepmother.

Well, the lassie wept and moaned; but when her brother told her to do that, she thought she ought to do it, and so she leapt down into the lake.

But when they came to the palace, and the King saw the loathly bride, with a nose four ells long, and a snout three ells long, and a pine-bush in the midst of her forehead, he was quite scared out of his wits; but the wedding was all ready, both in brewing and baking, and there sat all the wedding guests, waiting for the bride; and so the King couldn't help himself, but was forced to take her for better for worse. But angry he was, that any one can forgive him, and so he had the brother thrown into a pit full of snakes.

Well, the first Thursday evening after the wedding, about midnight, in came a lovely lady into the palace-kitchen, and begged the kitchen-

maid, who slept there, so prettily, to lend her a brush. That she got, and then she brushed her hair, and as she brushed, down dropped gold, A little dog was at her heel, and to him she said:

'Run out, Little Flo, and see if it will soon be day.'

This she said three times, and the third time she sent the dog it was just about the time the dawn begins to peep. Then she had to go, but as she went she sung:

Out on you, ugly Bushy Bride, Lying so warm by the King's left side;
While I on sand and gravel sleep, And over my brother adders creep,
And all without a tear.

'Now I come twice more, and then never again.'

So next morning the kitchen-maid told what she had seen and heard, and the King said he'd watch himself next Thursday night in the kitchen, and see if it were true, and as soon as it got dark, out he went into the kitchen to the kitchen-maid. But all he could do, and however much he rubbed his eyes and tried to keep himself awake, it was no good; for the Bushy Bride chaunted and sang till his eyes closed, and so when the lovely lady came, there he slept and snored. This time, too, as before, she borrowed a brush, and brushed her hair till the gold dropped, and sent her dog out three times, and as soon as it was gray dawn, away she went singing the same words, and adding:

'Now I come once more, and then never again.'

The third Thursday evening the King said he would watch again; and he set two men to hold him, one under each arm, who were to shake and jog him every time he wanted to fall asleep; and two men he set to watch his Bushy Bride. But when the night wore on, the Bushy Bride began to chaunt and sing, so that his eyes began to wink, and his head hung down on his shoulders. Then in came the lovely lady, and got the brush and brushed her hair, till the gold dropped from it; after that she sent Little Flo out again to see if it would soon be day, and this she did three times. The third time it began, to get gray in the east; then she sang,

Out on you, ugly Bushy Bride, Lying so warm by the King's left side;
While I on sand and gravel sleep, And over my brother adders creep,
And all without a tear.

'Now I come back never more', she said, and went towards the door.
But the two men who held the King under the arms, clenched his
hands together, and put a knife into his grasp; and so, somehow or
other, they got him to cut her in her little finger, and drew blood. Then
the true bride was freed, and the King woke up, and she told him now
the whole story, and how her stepmother and sister had deceived her.
So the King sent at once and took her brother out of the pit of snakes,
and the adders hadn't done him the least harm, but the stepmother and
her daughter were thrown into it in his stead.

And now no one can tell how glad the King was to be rid of that ugly
Bushy Bride, and to get a Queen who was as lovely and bright as the
day itself. So the true wedding was held, and every one talked of it
over seven kingdoms; and then the King and Queen drove to church in
their coach, and Little Flo went inside with them too, and when the
blessing was given they drove back again, and after that I saw nothing
more of them.