

The Hoodie-Crow.

by Andrew Lang
from *The Lilac Fairy Book*

Once there lived a farmer who had three daughters, and good useful girls they were, up with the sun, and doing all the work of the house. One morning they all ran down to the river to wash their clothes, when a hoodie came round and sat on a tree close by.

‘Wilt thou wed me, thou farmer’s daughter?’ he said to the eldest.

‘Indeed I won’t wed thee,’ she answered, ‘an ugly brute is the hoodie.’ And the bird, much offended, spread his wings and flew away. But the following day he came back again, and said to the second girl:

‘Wilt thou wed me, farmer’s daughter?’

‘Indeed I will not,’ answered she, ‘an ugly brute is the hoodie.’ And the hoodie was more angry than before, and went away in a rage. However, after a night’s rest he was in a better temper, and thought that he might be more lucky the third time, so back he went to the old place.

‘Wilt thou wed me, farmer’s daughter?’ he said to the youngest.

‘Indeed I will wed thee; a pretty creature is the hoodie,’ answered she, and on the morrow they were married.

‘I have something to ask thee,’ said the hoodie when they were far away in his own house. ‘Wouldst thou rather I should be a hoodie by day and a man by night, or a man by day and a hoodie by night?’

The girl was surprised at his words, for she did not know that he could be anything but a hoodie at all times.

Still she said nothing of this, and only replied, ‘I would rather thou wert a man by day and a hoodie by night,’ And so he was; and a handsomer man or a more beautiful hoodie never was seen. The girl loved them both, and never wished for things to be different.

By and bye they had a son, and very pleased they both were. But in the night soft music was heard stealing close towards the house, and every man slept, and the mother slept also. When they woke again it was morning, and the baby was gone. High and low they looked for it, but nowhere could they find it, and the farmer, who had come to see his daughter, was greatly grieved, as he feared it might be thought that he had stolen it, because he did not want the hoodie for a son-in-law.

The next year the hoodie's wife had another son, and this time a watch was set at every door. But it was no use. In vain they determined that, come what might, they would not close their eyes; at the first note of music they all fell asleep, and when the farmer arrived in the morning to see his grandson, he found them all weeping, for while they had slept the baby had vanished.

Well, the next year it all happened again, and the hoodie's wife was so unhappy that her husband resolved to take her away to another house he had, and her sisters with her for company. So they set out in a coach which was big enough to hold them, and had not gone very far when the hoodie suddenly said:

'You are sure you have not forgotten anything?'

'I have forgotten my coarse comb,' answered the wife, feeling in her pocket, and as she spoke the coach changed into a withered faggot, and the man became a hoodie again, and flew away.

The two sisters returned home, but the wife followed the hoodie. Sometimes she would see him on a hill-top, and then would hasten after him, hoping to catch him. But by the time she had got to the top of the hill, he would be in the valley on the other side. When night came, and she was tired, she looked about for some place to rest, and glad she was to see a little house full of light straight in front of her, and she hurried towards it as fast as she could.

At the door stood a little boy, and the sight of him filled her heart with pleasure, she did not know why. A woman came out, and bade her welcome, and set before her food, and gave her a soft bed to lie on. And the hoodie's wife lay down, and so tired was she, that it seemed to her but a moment before the sun rose, and she awoke again. From hill to hill she went after the hoodie, and sometimes she saw him on the top; but when she got to the top, he had flown into the valley, and

when she reached the valley he was on the top of another hill--and so it happened till night came round again. Then she looked round for some place to rest in, and she beheld a little house of light before her, and fast she hurried towards it. At the door stood a little boy, and her heart was filled with pleasure at the sight of him, she did not know why. After that a woman bade her enter, and set food before her, and gave her a soft bed to lie in. And when the sun rose she got up, and left the house, in search of the hoodie. This day everything befell as on the two other days, but when she reached the small house, the woman bade her keep awake, and if the hoodie flew into the room, to try to seize him.

But the wife had walked far, and was very tired, and strive as she would, she fell sound asleep.

Many hours she slept, and the hoodie entered through a window, and let fall a ring on her hand. The girl awoke with a start, and leant forward to grasp him, but he was already flying off, and she only seized a feather from his wing. And when dawn came, she got up and told the woman.

‘He has gone over the hill of poison,’ said she, ‘and there you cannot follow him without horse-shoes on your hands and feet. But I will help you. Put on this suit of men’s clothes, and go down this road till you come to the smithy, and there you can learn to make horse-shoes for yourself.’

The girl thanked her, and put on the cloths and went down the road to do her bidding. So hard did she work, that in a few days she was able to make the horse-shoes. Early one morning she set out for the hill of poison. On her hands and feet she went, but even with the horse-shoes on she had to be very careful not to stumble, lest some poisoned thorns should enter into her flesh, and she should die. But when at last she was over, it was only to hear that her husband was to be married that day to the daughter of a great lord.

Now there was to be a race in the town, and everyone meant to be there, except the stranger who had come over the hill of poison--everyone, that is, but the cook, who was to make the bridal supper. Greatly he loved races, and sore was his heart to think that one should be run without his seeing it, so when he beheld a woman whom he did not know coming along the street, hope sprang up in him.

‘Will you cook the wedding feast in place of me?’ he said, ‘and I will pay you well when I return from the race.’

Gladly she agreed, and cooked the feast in a kitchen that looked into the great hall, where the company were to eat it. After that she watched the seat where the bridegroom was sitting, and taking a plateful of the broth, she dropped the ring and the feather into it, and set it herself before him.

With the first spoonful he took up the ring, and a thrill ran through him; in the second he beheld the feather and rose from his chair.

‘Who has cooked this feast?’ asked he, and the real cook, who had come back from the race, was brought before him.

‘He may be the cook, but he did not cook this feast,’ said the bridegroom, and then inquiry was made, and the girl was summoned to the great hall.

‘That is my married wife,’ he declared, ‘and no one else will I have,’ and at that very moment the spells fell off him, and never more would he be a hoodie. Happy indeed were they to be together again, and little did they mind that the hill of poison took long to cross, for she had to go some way forwards, and then throw the horse-shoes back for him to put on. Still, at last they were over, and they went back the way she had come, and stopped at the three houses in order to take their little sons to their own home.

But the story never says who had stolen them, nor what the coarse comb had to do with it.

From ‘West Highland Tales.’