

## The Old Woman and Her Servants

by Jean de La Fontaine

A beldam kept two spinning maids,  
Who plied so handily their trades,  
Those spinning sisters down below  
Were bunglers when compared with these.  
No care did this old woman know  
But giving tasks as she might please.  
No sooner did the god of day  
His glorious locks enkindle,  
Than both the wheels began to play,  
And from each whirling spindle  
Forth danced the thread right merrily,  
And back was coil'd unceasingly.  
Soon as the dawn, I say, its tresses show'd,  
A graceless cock most punctual crow'd.  
The beldam roused, more graceless yet,  
In greasy petticoat bedight,  
Struck up her farthing light,  
And then forthwith the bed beset,  
Where deeply, blessedly did snore  
Those two maid-servants tired and poor.  
One oped an eye, an arm one stretch'd,  
And both their breath most sadly fetch'd,  
This threat concealing in the sigh--  
"That cursed cock shall surely die!"  
And so he did:--they cut his throat,  
And put to sleep his rousing note.  
And yet this murder mended not  
The cruel hardship of their lot;  
For now the twain were scarce in bed  
Before they heard the summons dread.  
The beldam, full of apprehension  
Lest oversleep should cause detention,  
Ran like a goblin through her mansion.

*Thus often, when one thinks  
To clear himself from ill,*

*His effort only sinks  
Him in the deeper still.  
The beldam acting for the cock,  
Was Scylla for Charybdis' rock.*