

The Farmer's

Daughter

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Russian Fairy Tales, Russian 0090

March 29, 2003

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In a certain kingdom, in a certain small town, a long or short time ago, there lived a widowed farmer and his young daughter. The farmer thought his daughter needed a mother and so he married a local widow with a young daughter the same age as his daughter. Shortly after the wedding though, the farmer took sick and died, leaving his young daughter in the care of his wife. The Stepmother was a vicious and hateful woman. She despised the farmer's young daughter. The young daughter was a beauty, even in her young age; while the Stepmother's daughter was extremely plain. For this, the Stepmother and her daughter hated the young daughter. As soon as the farmer died, the Stepmother took all of the young girl's fine things and gave her rags. All of the nice things the Stepmother gave to her daughter, who was still plain, even in the best of cloths. Fine silks, strings of pearls and brooches of gold could not cast pleasant light on this girl.

The Stepmother set the young daughter to impossible chores around the house, and took to beating the young girl when she failed. Even covered in dust, dirt and bruises, her beauty shined brightly. This enraged the Stepmother, who tried to think of the most impossible task so the girl would push herself to death; then she would no longer be in the way. See, the Stepmother had a plan to marry her daughter to the handsome prince of the kingdom. He was the same age as the girl and shortly would be looking to take a wife. The only two young girls of age were her own and the farmer's daughter. The Stepmother knew that if the prince saw the farmer's daughter before her own, that her own would never have a chance, so she set out to destroy the farmer's

daughter's beauty. When she failed to do that, and not for lack of trying mind you, she set out to destroy the girl completely.

One night, at midnight, she sent the girl deep in to the woods surrounding the house to find the mushrooms that grow under the tall birch trees. She gave the farmer's daughter no light, no cloak, no horse and no map; only a pail in which she was supposed to collect the mushrooms. The farmer's daughter set out into the woods, terrified of what she would find. She walked and walked and finally the sun began to rise. Still she had not found the mushrooms that she was sent to find. She walked all day and all night and all day again. Finally she came upon a hut set deep in the woods. The hut was surrounded by a fence of glowing skulls with fire in their eyes. The hut was up on chicken legs. The farmer's daughter began to back away, making no sound so as not to disturb the person who lived in the hut. A cackle filled the air. Flying low to the ground was the old witch riding in her mortar with pestle and broom in hand. She swept close to the farmer's daughter and then stopped.

“Who are you to disturb an old woman at her home?”

“If you please ma'am,” said the terrified girl, “I am lost. My stepmother sent me to find the mushrooms that grow under the tallest birch tree in the forest. I have been walking forever and I cannot find it.”

“So you came to me for help?”

“No ma'am.” said the girl, “I came upon your hut by mistake.”

“I see. And is that pail so you can kill me and then take my head back to the village?”

Surprise the farmer's daughter dropped the pail. "Oh no ma'am! I would never kill an elder. It was to hold the mushrooms I found."

Baba Yaga took a liking to the polite young beauty. "I will help you." She said. "I will not kill you if you serve me here for five years time. At the end of that time, if you have not angered me once, I will help you find the mushrooms you look for."

Grateful to be alive, the farmer's daughter took up her pail and followed Baba Yaga into her hut. Once inside, the old woman pointed to a pile of wood next to the hearth.

"Build a fire." She commanded. Quickly, the farmer's daughter dropped her pail by the door and rushed to the kindling pile. She quickly stacked the wood in the hearth and looked around for something to light the fire.

"Excuse me Grandmother, but do you have something I could use to light this fire?" She looked around but the old woman was gone. The farmer's daughter looked around the hut. Through the window she saw the skulls in the fence with the fire in their eyes. Quickly she took a piece of kindling out the door. As soon as she stepped out the door, a cackle filled the air.

"I should have killed you when I had the chance." Baba Yaga stepped out from the other side of the hut. "The minute I leave you alone, you try and escape. With a stick of MY kindling no less!" Baba Yaga stepped toward the terrified farmer's daughter.

"Oh No Grandmother!" the girl stammered. She held out the kindling. "I was simply trying to get a light from these skulls so I could light your fire. I'm sorry but I

could not find a match in your hut.” The farmer’s daughter looked down at her feet, ashamed that she had failed already.

“I guess I shall let this pass. But next time, beware! I will not be so lenient.”

“Oh thank you Grandmother!” the farmer’s daughter exclaimed. She quickly held the kindling to one of the skulls and lit it. Once inside she started the fire, cleaned the linens, cooked the meal, scrubbed the floors, doing everything she was asked.

The years passed quickly and the farmer’s daughter grew into a beautiful young woman. She worked and worked for the old woman, doing everything she asked. Never once, since the first night, did she anger the old woman. In fact, the old woman grew accustomed to having the young girl around and was charmed by her constant politeness and good humor. She regretted having to let the girl return to her home, but true to her word, when the five years had passed she woke the farmer’s daughter. When the daughter had dressed for the day, Baba Yaga handed her the pail filled with the elusive mushrooms. The farmer’s daughter was delighted to be allowed to return home, and took the pail. As she was about to leave Baba Yaga called her over to the hearth where she had performed her first chore.

“It has been the five years that I requested of you. You are now free to leave. In return for your obedience and labor I will bestow upon you a gift.” She held out a clay ball with a gold bracelet around it. “This bracelet will help you with your stepmother if she still troubles you. It will cloud her mind and obscure her sight. She will think you her own daughter and her daughter you.”

“Thank you Grandmother!” the farmer’s daughter replied, overjoyed. “Thank you kindly for the bracelet and the mushrooms and my freedom. I shall never forget you.” She curtsied to the old woman, and ran off toward her father’s home.

She ran up the steps up her father’s home after many days and many nights in the woods. Many things had changed since she was away. The stepmother had gotten her way, once the farmer’s daughter was out of the way. Her daughter was being courted by the prince of the land and they were due to be wed. The farmer’s daughter went in search of old servants and friends. The first person she found was her stepmother.

“What are YOU doing here?” she bellowed. “How dare you ever show your face in here after you ran away!” The farmer’s daughter held out the pail of mushrooms.

“I have done what you asked.” She said, “I found the mushrooms I was sent to find.”

“Well,” said the stepmother, “bring them to the kitchen and return to your daily chores. The Prince is coming over tonight to lay suit to my daughter and there is much work to be done.”

“Yes ma’am” the farmer’s daughter hurried to the kitchen where she was warmly met by all of her friends, the servants.

At the large feast prepare for the prince, the servants bustled around the prince and the stepmother’s daughter, who was clinging to the prince. The stepmother was

overseeing everything from her seat at the head table. When the farmer's daughter bent to place a plate in front of the stepmother, the stepmother grabbed her dainty wrist.

"What is this?" she demanded. She pointed to the gold bracelet Baba Yaga had given to the farmer's daughter. "From whom did you steal this pretty bauble? You don't deserve it. Give it to me." She slipped the bracelet off the farmer's daughter's wrist and onto her own. The farmer's daughter quickly slipped away as the spell took hold of the stepmother. She looked up at the Prince and her own daughter and saw in her place the farmer's daughter. Enraged she stood up and stormed over to them. She grabbed the girl by her hair and hauled her outside. Still thinking it was the farmer's daughter she struck the girl with a rock and killed her. Taking up a knife, she sliced the girl into a thousand tiny pieces and fed the pieces to a flock of crows in a nearby tree. While she did this, the gold bracelet slipped off her wrist and a crow swallowed it. She saw, just as a crow ate the last of the body, the true form of the girl she had killed, her daughter. Furious, she ran back into the banquet hall to find her daughter. All she found was the farmer's daughter who was serving the prince. Enraged she charged at the farmer's daughter with knife in hand. The Prince's guards, fearing his safety, struck her down as she ran past and killed her.

The Prince saw the farmer's daughter then for the first time, and instantly fell in love with her. He proposed to her that day and within the month they were married.

I was at the wedding. I drank beer; it trailed down my chin and onto my shirt but none got into my mouth.