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The Robber-Bridegroom

There was once a miller who had a pretty daughter; and when she was grown up, he thought to himself, "If a seemly man should come to ask her for his wife, I will give her to him that she may be taken care of." Now it so happened that one did come, who seemed to be very rich, and behaved very well; and as the miller saw no reason to find fault with him, he said he should have his daughter. Yet the maiden did not love him quite so well as a bride ought to love her bridegroom, but, on the other hand, soon began to feel a kind of inward shuddering whenever she saw or thought of him.

One day he said to her, "Why do you not come and see my home, since you are to be my bride?" "I do not know where your house is," said the girl. "'Tis out there," said her bridegroom, "yonder in the dark green wood." Then she began to try and avoid going, and said, "But I cannot find the way thither." "Well, but you must come and see me next Sunday," said the bridegroom; "I have asked some guests to meet you, and that you may find your way through the wood, I will strew ashes for you along the path."

When Sunday came and the maiden was to go out, she felt very much troubled, and took care to put on two pockets, and filled them with peas and beans. She soon came to the wood, and found her path strewn with ashes; so she followed the track, and at every step threw a pea on the right and a bean on the left side of the road; and thus she journeyed on the whole day till she came to a house which stood in the middle of the dark wood. She saw no one within, and all was quite still, till on a sudden she heard a voice cry,

"Turn again, bonny bride!
Turn again home!
Haste from the robber's den,
Haste away home!"

She looked around, and saw a little bird sitting in a cage that hung over the door; and he flapped his wings, and again she heard him cry,

"Turn again, bonny bride!
Turn again home!
Haste from the robber's den,
Haste away home!"

However, the bride went in, and roamed along from one room to another, and so over all the house; but it was quite empty, and not a soul could she see. At last she came to a room where a very very old woman was sitting. "Pray, can you tell me, my good woman," said she, "if my bridegroom lives here?" "Ah! my dear child!" said the old woman, "you are come to fall into the trap laid for you: your wedding can only be with Death, for the robber will surely take away your life; if I do not save you, you are lost!" So she hid the bride behind a large cask, and then said to her, "Do not stir or move yourself at all, lest some harm should befall you; and when the robbers are asleep we will run off; I have long wished to get away."

She had hardly done this when the robbers came in, and brought another young maiden with them that had been ensnared like the bride. Then they began to feast and drink, and were deaf to her shrieks and groans: and they gave her some wine to drink, three glasses, one of white, one of red, and one of yellow; upon which she fainted and fell down dead. Now the bride began to grow very uneasy behind the cask, and thought that she too must die in her turn. Then the one that was to be her bridegroom saw that there was a gold ring on the little finger of the maiden they had murdered; and as he tried to snatch it off, it flew up in the air and fell down again behind the cask just in the bride's lap. So he took a light and searched about all round the room for it, but could not find anything; and another of the robbers said, "Have you looked behind the large cask yet?" "Pshaw!" said the old woman, "Come, sit still and eat your supper now, and leave the ring alone till to-morrow; it won't run away, I'll warrant."

So the robbers gave up the search, and went on with their eating and drinking; but the old woman dropped a sleeping-draught into their wine, and they laid themselves down and slept, and snored roundly. And when the bride heard this, she

stepped out from behind the cask; and as she was forced to walk over the sleepers, who were lying about on the floor, she trembled lest she should awaken some of them. But heaven aided her, so that she soon got through her danger; and the old woman went upstairs with her, and they both ran away from this murderous den. The ashes that had been strewed were now all blown away, but the peas and beans had taken root and were springing up, and showed her the way by the light of the moon. So they walked the whole night, and in the morning reached the mill; when the bride told her father all that had happened to her.

As soon as the day arrived when the wedding was to take place, the bridegroom came; and the miller gave orders that all his friends and relations should be asked to the feast. And as they were all sitting at table, one of them proposed that each of the guests should tell some tale. Then the bridegroom said to the bride, when it came to her turn, "Well, my dear, do you know nothing? come, tell us some story." "Yes," answered she, "I can tell you a dream that I dreamt. I once thought I was going through a wood, and went on and on till I came to a house where there was not a soul to be seen, but a bird in a cage, that cried out twice,

"Turn again, bonny bride!
Turn again home!
Haste from the robber's den,
Haste away home!"

—I only dreamt that, my love. Then I went through all the rooms, which were quite empty, until I came to a room where there sat a very old woman; and I said to her, 'Does my bridegroom live here?' but she answered, 'Ah! my dear child! you have fallen into a murderer's snare; your bridegroom will surely kill you'—I only dreamt that, my love. But she hid me behind a large cask; and hardly had she done this, when the robbers came in, dragging a young woman along with them; then they gave her three kinds of wine to drink, white, red, and yellow, till she fell dead upon the ground—I only dreamt that, my love. After they had done this, one of the robbers saw that there was a gold ring on her little finger, and snatched at it; but it flew up to the ceiling, and then fell behind the great cask just where I was, and into my lap; and here is the ring!" At these words she brought out the ring and showed it to the guests.

When the robber saw all this, and heard what she said, he grew as pale as ashes with fright, and wanted to run off; but the guests held him fast and gave him up to justice, so that he and all his gang met with the due reward of their wickedness.

[The end of *Grimm's Fairy Tales; The Robber-Bridegroom* by the Brothers Grimm]