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MOTHER HOLLE

Once upon a time, there was a widow who had two daughters. One of them was beautiful, kind, and hardworking. The other was lazy, spoiled, and did not want to do almost anything. But the mother loved the lazy daughter more, because she was her own true daughter, and she treated the other one very harshly.

The good girl had to do all the work in the house. She swept, cooked, washed, cleaned, and also spun thread beside the well for long hours. Her hands grew tired, and sometimes they were even hurt, but she kept working in silence and with patience.

One day, while she was spinning as usual, the spindle became stained with blood. The girl leaned over the well to wash it, but the spindle slipped from her hands and fell to the bottom.

Frightened, she ran to tell her stepmother what had happened.

—The spindle fell into the well —she said sadly—. It was an accident.

But the woman looked at her harshly.

—If you let it fall, then you must go after it —she answered—. Do not come back without it.

The girl did not know what to do. She looked at the well once more, felt afraid, but since she did not want to return without the spindle, she gathered her courage and jumped in.

When she opened her eyes, she was no longer in the well. She was in a beautiful and strange place, full of flowers, green meadows, and a bright sky. The girl looked around in amazement and began to walk.

After a while, she came to a bread oven. Then she heard a voice saying:

—Take me out, take me out, I am ready!

The girl looked and saw that it was the bread inside the oven.

—Of course —she said kindly—. I do not want you to burn.

Then she took a paddle and carefully took out all the loaves.

Then she kept walking and came to an apple tree full of ripe fruit.

Then the tree said:

—Shake me, shake me, my apples are ripe!

The girl smiled and answered:

—With pleasure.

She shook the tree strongly until all the ripe apples fell to the ground. Then she gathered them neatly into a pile so they would not be scattered around.

After that, she continued her way until she came to a little house. In the doorway appeared an old woman with large teeth and a look that seemed a little frightening at first. The girl wanted to step away, but the old woman spoke in a calm voice.

—Do not be afraid —she said—. If you stay with me and work carefully, you will be well. You must only do one very important thing: shake my bed well, so that the feathers fly. Then, in the world above, snow will fall.

The girl understood that this old woman was Mother Holle, and she agreed to stay with her.

From that day on, she lived in the house and did her work well. She helped gladly, kept everything clean, and above all, she shook Mother Holle's bed with such care that the feathers flew through the air like white snowflakes. And so, on earth, it snowed.

Mother Holle was pleased with her, because the girl was obedient, kind, and hardworking. There she lacked neither food nor rest, and for the first time in a long while, she felt that she was being treated with affection.

A good amount of time passed until one day the girl began to feel sad.

—What is the matter? —asked Mother Holle.

—I am well here —the girl answered—, and you have been very good to me. But I miss my home and the world above. Even though I worked hard there, I want to go back.

Mother Holle looked at her kindly.

—Since you wish to return, I will take you myself.

She led her to a great door. When the girl passed beneath it, a shower of gold fell over her. The gold covered her hair, her dress, and her whole body.

—That is your reward —said Mother Holle—, because you have been good and hardworking.

She also gave back the spindle that had fallen into the well.

When the door closed, the girl was once again in the world above, near her home. A rooster sitting on the roof saw her return and crowed:

—Cock-a-doodle-doo! Our golden maiden is here again!

The girl entered the house, and when her stepmother saw all the gold she was carrying, she opened her eyes wide in amazement.

She wanted to know how the girl had received such a reward, and the girl told her everything that had happened.

Then the woman thought only of the treasure. She wanted her lazy daughter to have the same good fortune.

The next day, she sat her daughter beside the well to spin. But since the girl did not want to work for real, she pricked her finger on purpose and stained the spindle with blood. Then she let it fall into the well and went to tell her mother that the same thing had happened.

The lazy girl also jumped into the well and arrived at the same beautiful place. She walked across the meadow and first came to the oven.

—Take me out, take me out, I am ready! —cried the loaves.

But she answered:

—I do not want to get myself dirty.

And she walked on.

Then she came to the apple tree.

—Shake me, shake me, my apples are ripe! —said the tree.

But the girl answered:

—No, because an apple might fall on my head.

And she kept walking.

When she reached Mother Holle's house, she was not very afraid, because she had already heard the story. She agreed to stay, thinking only about the reward of gold.

At first, she did her tasks carefully. She shook the bed and tried to seem hardworking, because she only thought about the prize she wanted to receive. But soon she grew tired. She began to get up late, do everything halfway, and shake the bed without any care.

Mother Holle noticed very quickly.

—You are no longer as careful as before —she said.

But the girl did not change. She remained lazy and careless, and every day she worked less.

Then Mother Holle said:

—It is time for you to return to your home.

The girl was very happy and thought:

—Now the shower of gold will fall over me.

Mother Holle led her to the great door. But when the girl passed beneath it, no gold fell. Instead, a great shower of black, sticky pitch fell over her.

—That is your payment —said Mother Holle—, for your laziness and carelessness.

The door closed, and the girl appeared once again at her house, covered completely in pitch. The rooster saw her coming and crowed:

—Cock-a-doodle-doo! Our dirty maiden is here again!

Her mother was deeply disappointed when she saw her like that. They tried to clean her, but the pitch did not come off easily and remained stuck to her.

And so, everyone understood that kindness and work done with care bring good rewards, while laziness and deceit lead to nothing good.

THE END

