

## **Winter Short Stories**

### **Mother Frost**

At the edge of a wood there was a great, clear, bubbling spring of cold water.

Near this spring lived a widow and her two daughters.

One of them was very beautiful and a great help about the house, while the other was ugly and idle.

The mother loved only the ugly one, for she was her own child.

She cared so little for the other daughter that she made her do all the hard work.

Every day the poor girl would sit beside the spring and spin and spin, until her fingers bled.

One day, while she was washing the blood from her hands, the spindle fell into the spring and sank to the bottom.

With tears in her eyes, she ran and told her stepmother what she had done.

The stepmother was angry and said, "You let the spindle fall into the spring. Now you must go and get it out."

The maiden went back to the spring to look for the spindle.

She leaned so far over the edge that her hand slipped, and down, down, she sank to the very bottom.

All at once she found that she was in a beautiful field where many wild flowers grew.

As she walked across the field, she came to a baker's oven full of new bread.

The loaves cried to her, "Oh, pull us out! pull us out, or we shall burn!"

"Indeed I will!" cried the maiden.

Stepping up, she pulled all the sweet brown loaves out of the oven.

As she walked along, she came to a tree full of apples.

The tree cried, "Shake me! shake me! my apples are all quite ripe!"

"Indeed I will!" cried the maiden.

So she shook the tree again and again, until there was not an apple left on its branches.

Then she picked up the apples, one by one, and piled them in a great heap.

When she had picked up all the apples, she walked on.

At last she came to a small house.

In the doorway sat an old woman who had such large teeth that the girl felt afraid of her and turned to run away.

Then the old woman cried, "What do you fear, my child? Come in and live here with me. If you will do the work about the house, I will be very kind to you. Only take care to make my bed well.

You must shake it and pound it so that the feathers will fly about. Then the children down on the earth will say that snowflakes are falling, for I am Mother Frost."

The old woman spoke so kindly that she won the maiden's heart.

"I will gladly work for you," she said.

The girl did her work well, and each day she shook up the bed until the feathers flew about like snowflakes.

She was very happy with Mother Frost, who never spoke an angry word.

After the girl had stayed a long time with the kind old woman, she began to feel homesick.

She could not help it, though her life with Mother Frost had been so happy.

At length she said, "Dear Mother Frost, you have been very kind to me, but I should like to go home to my friends."

"I am pleased to hear you say that you wish to go home," said Mother Frost. "You have worked for me so well that I will show you the way myself."

She took the maiden by the hand and led her to a broad gateway.

The gate was open, and as she went through a shower of gold fell over the maiden.

It clung to her clothes, so that she was dressed in gold from her head to her feet.

"That is your pay for having worked so hard," said the old woman. "And here is your spindle that fell into the spring."

Then the gate was closed, and the maiden found herself once more in the world.

She was not far from her own home, and as she came into the farmyard, a cock on the roof cried loudly:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!

Our golden lady has come home, too."

When the stepmother saw the girl with her golden dress, she was kind to her. Then the maiden told how the gold had fallen upon her.

The mother could hardly wait to have her own child try her luck in the same way.

This time she made the idle daughter go to the spring and spin.

The lazy girl did not spin fast enough to make her fingers bleed.

So she pricked her finger with a thorn until a few drops of blood stained the spindle.

At once she let it drop into the water, and sprang in after it herself.

The ugly girl found herself in a beautiful field, just as her sister had.

She walked along the same path until she came to the

baker's oven.

She heard the loaves cry, "Pull us out! pull us out, or we shall burn!"

But the lazy girl said to the brown loaves, "I will not. I do not want to soil my hands in your dirty oven."

Then she walked on until she came to the apple tree.

"Shake me! shake me!" it cried, "for my apples are quite ripe."

"I will not," said the girl, "for some of your apples might fall on my head."

As she spoke, she walked lazily on.

At last the girl stood before the door of Mother Frost's house.

She had no fear of Mother Frost's great teeth, but walked right up to the old woman and offered to be her servant.

For a whole day the girl was very busy, and did everything that she was told to do.

On the second day she began to be lazy, and on the third day she was still worse.

She would not get up in the morning.

The bed was never made, or shaken, so the feathers could fly about.

At last Mother Frost grew tired of her and told her that she

must go away.

This was what the lazy girl wanted, for she felt sure that now she would have the golden shower.

Mother Frost led her to the great gate, but she passed under it, a kettle full of black pitch was upset over her.

"That is what you get for your work," said the old woman, as she shut the gate.

The idle girl walked home, covered with pitch.

When she went into the farmyard the cock on the roof cried out:

"Cock-a-doodle-doo!

Our sticky lady has come home, too."

The pitch stuck so fast to the girl that, as long as she lived, it never came off.