

Tatterhood

Source: Peter Christen Asbjørnsen and Jørgen Moe, Lurvehette, Norske Folkeeventyr (Christiania [Oslo, Norway], 1842-1852), translated by George Webb Dasent (1859).

Once upon a time there was a king and a queen who had no children, and that made the queen very sad. She seldom had a happy hour. She was always crying and complaining, and saying how dull and lonesome it was in the palace. "If we had children there would be life enough," she said. Wherever she went in all her realm she found God's blessing in children, even in the poorest hut. And wherever she went she heard women scolding their children, and saying how they had done this and that wrong. The queen heard all this, and thought it would be so nice to do as other women did. At last the king and queen took into their palace an adopted girl to raise, that they might always have her with them, to love her if she did well, and scold her if she did wrong, like their own child.

One day the little girl whom they had taken as their own, ran down into the palace yard, and was playing with a golden apple. Just then an old beggar woman came by, who had a little girl with her, and it wasn't long before the little girl and the beggar's child were great friends, and began to play together, and to toss the golden apple about between them. When the queen saw this, as she sat at a window in the palace, she tapped on the pane for her foster daughter to come up. She went at once, but the beggar girl went up too; and as they went into the queen's apartment, each held the other by the hand. Then the queen began to scold the little lady, and to say, "You ought to be above running about and playing with a tattered beggar's brat." And she started to drive the girl down the stairs.

"If the queen only knew my mother's power, she'd not drive me out," said the little girl; and when the queen asked what she meant more plainly, she told her how her mother could get her children if she chose. The queen wouldn't believe it, but the girl insisted, and said that every word of it was true, and asked the queen only to try and make her mother do it. So the queen sent the girl down to fetch up her mother.

"Do you know what your daughter says?" asked the queen of the old woman, as soon as ever she came into the room.

No, the beggar woman knew nothing about it.

"Well, she says you can get me children if you will," answered the queen.

"Queens shouldn't listen to beggar girls' silly stories," said the old woman, and walked out of the room.

Then the queen got angry, and wanted again to drive out the little girl; but she declared it was true every word that she had said.

"Let the queen only give my mother something to drink," said the girl; "when she gets tipsy she'll soon find out a way to help you."

The queen was ready to try this; so the beggar woman was fetched up again, and treated with as much wine and mead as she wanted; and so it was not long before her tongue began to wag. Then the queen came out again with the same question she had asked before.

"Perhaps I know one way to help you," said the beggar woman. "Your majesty must make them bring in two pails of water some evening before you go to bed. Wash yourself in each of them, and afterwards throw the water under your bed. When you look under your bed the next morning, two flowers will have sprung up, a beautiful one and an ugly one. Eat the beautiful one but leave the ugly alone. Be careful not to forget this last bit of advice." That was what the beggar woman said.

Yes, the queen did what the beggar woman advised her to do; she had the water brought up in two pails, washed herself in them, and emptied them under the bed; and when she looked under the bed the next morning, there stood two flowers; one was ugly and foul, and had black leaves; but the other was so bright, and fair, and lovely, she had never seen anything like it, so she ate it up at once. But the pretty flower tasted so sweet, that she couldn't help herself. She ate the other one too, for, she thought, "I'm sure that it can't hurt or help me much either way."

Well, sure enough, after a while the queen was brought to bed. First of all, she had a girl who had a wooden spoon in her hand, and rode upon a goat. She was disgusting and ugly, and the very moment she came into the world she bawled out "Mamma."

"If I'm your mamma," said the queen, "God give me grace to mend my ways."

"Oh, don't be sorry," said the girl on the goat, "for one will soon come after me who is better looking."

After a while, the queen had another girl, who was so beautiful and sweet that no one had ever set eyes on such a lovely child. You may be sure that the queen was very well pleased. The elder twin they called "Tatterhood," because she was always so ugly and ragged, and because she had a hood which hung about her ears in tatters. The queen could hardly bear to look at her. The nurses tried to shut her up in a room by herself, but it did no good. She always had to be where the younger twin was, and no one could ever keep them apart.

One Christmas eve, when they were half grown up, there arose a frightful noise and clatter in the hallway outside the queen's apartment. Tatterhood asked what it was that was making such a noise outside.

"Oh," said the queen, "it isn't worth asking about."

But Tatterhood wouldn't give in until she found out all about it; and so the queen told her it was a pack of trolls and witches who had come there to celebrate Christmas. So Tatterhood said that she would just go out and drive them away. In spite of all they could say, and however much they begged and asked her to leave the trolls alone, she just had to go out and drive the witches off. She begged the queen to be careful and keep all the doors shut tight, so that not one of them would open the least bit.

Having said this, off she went with her wooden spoon, and began to hunt out and drive away the hags. All the while there was such a commotion out in the gallery that the like of it had never before been heard. The whole palace creaked and groaned as if every joint and beam were going to be torn out of its place. Now I can't say exactly what happened; but somehow or other one door did open a little bit, and her twin sister just peeped out to see how things were going with Tatterhood, and put her head a tiny bit through the opening. But, pop! up came an old witch, and whipped off her head, and stuck a calf's head on her shoulders instead; and so the princess ran back into the room on all fours, and began to "moo" like a calf. When Tatterhood came back and saw her sister, she scolded them all, and was very angry because they hadn't kept better watch, and asked them what they thought of their carelessness now that her sister had been turned into a calf.

"But I'll see if I can't set her free," she said.

Then she asked the king for a ship with a full set of sails and good load of stores, but she would not have a captain or any sailors. No; she would sail away with her sister all alone. There was no holding her back, and at last they let her have her own way.

Tatterhood sailed off, and steered her ship right up to the land where the witches lived. When she came to the landing place, she told her sister to stay quite still on board the ship; but she herself rode on her goat up to the witches' castle. When she got there, one of the windows in the gallery was open, and there she saw her sister's head hung up on the window frame; so she jumped her goat through the window into the gallery, snapped up the head, and set off with it. The witches came after her to try to get the head back. They flocked around her as thick as a swarm of bees or a nest of ants. The goat snorted and puffed, and butted with his horns, and Tatterhood beat and banged them about with her wooden spoon; and so the pack of witches had to give up. So Tatterhood got back to her ship, took the calf's head off her sister, and put her own on again, and then she became a girl as she had been before. After that she sailed a long, long way, to a strange king's realm.

Now the king of this land was a widower, and had an only son. When he saw the strange sail, he sent messengers down to the beach to find out where it came from, and who owned it; but when the king's men came down there, the only person they saw on board was Tatterhood, and there she was, riding around and around the deck on her goat at full speed, until her strands of hair streamed in the wind. The men from the palace were all amazed at this sight, and asked if more people were not on board. Yes, there were; she had a sister with her, said Tatterhood. They wanted to see too, but Tatterhood said no.

"No one shall see her, unless the king comes himself," she said; and so she began to gallop about on her goat until the deck thundered again.

When the servants got back to the palace, and told what they had seen and heard down at the ship, the king wanted to set out at once to see the girl that rode on the goat. When he arrived there, Tatterhood brought out her sister, and she was so beautiful and gentle that the king immediately fell head over heels in love with her. He brought them both back with him to the palace, and wanted to have the sister for his queen; but Tatterhood said "No," the king couldn't have her in any way, unless the king's son would take Tatterhood. That, as you may guess, the prince did not want to do at all, because Tatterhood was such an ugly hussy. However, at last the king and all the others in the palace talked him into it, and he gave in, promising to take her for his queen; but it went sore against his grain, and he was a very sad man.

Now they began making preparations for the wedding, both with brewing and baking; and when all was ready, they went to church. The prince thought it the worst church service he had ever been to in all his life. The king left first with his bride, and she was so lovely and so grand, all the people stopped to look at her along the road, and they stared at her until she was out of sight. After them came the prince on horseback by the side of Tatterhood, who trotted along on her goat with her wooden spoon in her fist. To look at him, he was not going to a wedding, but to a burial, and his own at that. He seemed so sad, and did not speak a word.

"Why don't you talk?" asked Tatterhood, when they had ridden a bit.

"Why, what should I talk about?" answered the prince.

"Well, you might at least ask me why I ride upon this ugly goat," said Tatterhood.

"Why do you ride on that ugly goat?" asked the prince.

"Is it an ugly goat? Why, it's the most beautiful horse that a bride ever rode," answered Tatterhood; and in an instant the goat became a horse, the finest that the prince had ever seen.

They rode on a bit further, but the prince was just as sad as before, and couldn't say a word. So Tatterhood asked him again why he didn't talk, and when the prince answered, he didn't know what to talk about, she said, "Well, you can ask me why I ride with this ugly spoon in my fist."

"Why do you ride with that ugly spoon?" asked the prince.

"Is it an ugly spoon? Why, it's the loveliest silver fan that a bride ever carried," said Tatterhood; and in an instant it became a silver fan, so bright that it glistened.

They rode a little way further, but the prince was still just as sad, and did not say a word. In a little while Tatterhood asked him again why he didn't talk, and told him to ask why she wore the ugly gray hood on her head.

"Why do you wear that ugly gray hood on your head?" asked the prince.

"Is it an ugly hood? Why, it's the brightest golden crown that a bride ever wore," answered Tatterhood, and it became a crown at once.

Now they rode a long way further, and the prince was so sad, that he sat without making a sound or uttering a word, just as before. So his bride asked him again why he didn't talk, and told him to ask now why her face was so ugly and gray?

"Yes," asked the prince, "why is your face so ugly and gray?"

"Am I ugly? You think my sister beautiful, but I am ten times more beautiful," said the bride, and when the prince looked at her, she was so beautiful, he thought that she was the most beautiful woman in the world. After that it was no wonder that the prince found his tongue, and no longer rode along with his head hanging down.

So they drank the bridal cup both deep and long, and, after that, both prince and king set out with their brides to the princesses' palace, and there they had another bridal feast, and drank once more, both deep and long. There was no end to the celebration. Now run quickly to the king's palace, and there will still be a drop of the bridal ale left for you.