

THE SEVEN RAVENS

There was once a man who had seven sons, and last of all one daughter. Although the little girl was very pretty, she was so weak and small that they thought she could not live; but they said she should at once be christened.

So the father sent one of his sons in haste to the spring to get some water, but the other six ran with him. Each wanted to be first at drawing the water, and so they were in such a hurry that all let their pitchers fall into the well, and they stood very foolishly looking at one another, and did not know what to do, for none dared go home. In the meantime the father was uneasy, and could not tell what made the young men stay so long. 'Surely,' said he, 'the whole seven must have forgotten themselves over some game of play'; and when he had waited still longer and they yet did not come, he flew into a rage and wished them all turned into ravens. Scarcely had he spoken these words when he heard a croaking over his head, and looked up and saw seven ravens as black as coal flying round and round. Sorry as he was to see his wish so fulfilled, he did not know how what was done could be undone, and comforted himself as well as he could for the loss of his seven sons with his dear little daughter, who soon became stronger and every day more beautiful.

For a long time she did not know that she had ever had any brothers; for her father and mother took care not to speak of them before her: but one

day by chance she heard the people about her speak of them. 'Yes,' said they, 'she is beautiful indeed, but still 'tis a pity that her brothers should have been lost for her sake.' Then she was much grieved, and went to her father and mother, and asked if she had any brothers, and what had become of them. So they dared no longer hide the truth from her, but said it was the will of Heaven, and that her birth was only the innocent cause of it; but the little girl mourned sadly about it every day, and thought herself bound to do all she could to bring her brothers back; and she had neither rest nor ease, till at length one day she stole away, and set out into the wide world to find her brothers, wherever they might be, and free them, whatever it might cost her.

She took nothing with her but a little ring which her father and mother had given her, a loaf of bread in case she should be hungry, a little pitcher of water in case she should be thirsty, and a little stool to rest upon when she should be weary. Thus she went on and on, and journeyed till she came to the world's end; then she came to the sun, but the sun looked much too hot and fiery; so she ran away quickly to the moon, but the moon was cold and chilly, and said, 'I smell flesh and blood this way!' so she took herself away in a hurry and came to the stars, and the stars were friendly and kind to her, and each star sat upon his own little stool; but the morning star rose up and gave her a little piece of wood, and said, 'If you have not this little piece of wood, you cannot unlock the castle that stands on the glass-mountain, and there your brothers live.' The little girl took the piece of wood, rolled it up in a little cloth, and went on again until she came to the

glass-mountain, and found the door shut. Then she felt for the little piece of wood; but when she unwrapped the cloth it was not there, and she saw she had lost the gift of the good stars. What was to be done? She wanted to save her brothers, and had no key of the castle of the glass-mountain; so this faithful little sister took a knife out of her pocket and cut off her little finger, that was just the size of the piece of wood she had lost, and put it in the door and opened it.

As she went in, a little dwarf came up to her, and said, 'What are you seeking for?' 'I seek for my brothers, the seven ravens,' answered she. Then the dwarf said, 'My masters are not at home; but if you will wait till they come, pray step in.' Now the little dwarf was getting their dinner ready, and he brought their food upon seven little plates, and their drink in seven little glasses, and set them upon the table, and out of each little plate their sister ate a small piece, and out of each little glass she drank a small drop; but she let the ring that she had brought with her fall into the last glass.

On a sudden she heard a fluttering and croaking in the air, and the dwarf said, 'Here come my masters.' When they came in, they wanted to eat and drink, and looked for their little plates and glasses. Then said one after the other,

'Who has eaten from my little plate? And who has been drinking out of my little glass?'

'Caw! Caw! well I ween
Mortal lips have this way been.'

When the seventh came to the bottom of his glass, and found there the ring, he looked at it, and knew that it was his father's and mother's, and said, 'O that our little sister would but come! then we should be free.' When the little girl heard this (for she stood behind the door all the time and listened), she ran forward, and in an instant all the ravens took their right form again; and all hugged and kissed each other, and went merrily home.

THE WEDDING OF MRS FOX

FIRST STORY

There was once upon a time an old fox with nine tails, who believed that his wife was not faithful to him, and wished to put her to the test. He stretched himself out under the bench, did not move a limb, and behaved as if he were stone dead. Mrs Fox went up to her room, shut herself in, and her maid, Miss Cat, sat by the fire, and did the cooking. When it became known that the old fox was dead, suitors presented themselves. The maid heard someone standing at the house-door, knocking. She went

and opened it, and it was a young fox, who said:

'What may you be about, Miss Cat?

Do you sleep or do you wake?'

She answered:

'I am not sleeping, I am waking,

Would you know what I am making?

I am boiling warm beer with butter,

Will you be my guest for supper?'

'No, thank you, miss,' said the fox, 'what is Mrs Fox doing?' The maid replied:

'She is sitting in her room,

Moaning in her gloom,

Weeping her little eyes quite red,

Because old Mr Fox is dead.'

'Do just tell her, miss, that a young fox is here, who would like to woo her.' 'Certainly, young sir.'

The cat goes up the stairs trip, trap,

The door she knocks at tap, tap, tap,

'Mistress Fox, are you inside?'

'Oh, yes, my little cat,' she cried.

'A wooer he stands at the door out there.'

'What does he look like, my dear?'

'Has he nine as beautiful tails as the late Mr Fox?' 'Oh, no,' answered the cat, 'he has only one.' 'Then I will not have him.'

Miss Cat went downstairs and sent the wooer away. Soon afterwards there was another knock, and another fox was at the door who wished to woo Mrs Fox. He had two tails, but he did not fare better than the first. After this still more came, each with one tail more than the other, but they were all turned away, until at last one came who had nine tails, like old Mr Fox. When the widow heard that, she said joyfully to the cat:

'Now open the gates and doors all wide,

And carry old Mr Fox outside.'

But just as the wedding was going to be solemnized, old Mr Fox stirred under the bench, and cudgelled all the rabble, and drove them and Mrs Fox out of the house.

SECOND STORY

When old Mr Fox was dead, the wolf came as a suitor, and knocked at the door, and the cat who was servant to Mrs Fox, opened it for him. The wolf greeted her, and said:

'Good day, Mrs Cat of Kehrewit,
How comes it that alone you sit?
What are you making good?'

The cat replied:

'In milk I'm breaking bread so sweet,
Will you be my guest, and eat?'

'No, thank you, Mrs Cat,' answered the wolf. 'Is Mrs Fox not at home?'

The cat said:

'She sits upstairs in her room,
Bewailing her sorrowful doom,
Bewailing her trouble so sore,
For old Mr Fox is no more.'

The wolf answered:

'If she's in want of a husband now,
Then will it please her to step below?'
The cat runs quickly up the stair,
And lets her tail fly here and there,
Until she comes to the parlour door.
With her five gold rings at the door she knocks:
'Are you within, good Mistress Fox?
If you're in want of a husband now,
Then will it please you to step below?'

Mrs Fox asked: 'Has the gentleman red stockings on, and has he a pointed mouth?' 'No,' answered the cat. 'Then he won't do for me.'

When the wolf was gone, came a dog, a stag, a hare, a bear, a lion, and all the beasts of the forest, one after the other. But one of the good qualities which old Mr Fox had possessed, was always lacking, and the cat had continually to send the suitors away. At length came a young fox. Then Mrs Fox said: 'Has the gentleman red stockings on, and has a little pointed mouth?' 'Yes,' said the cat, 'he has.' 'Then let him come upstairs,' said Mrs Fox, and ordered the servant to prepare the wedding feast.

'Sweep me the room as clean as you can,
Up with the window, fling out my old man!
For many a fine fat mouse he brought,
Yet of his wife he never thought,

But ate up every one he caught.'

Then the wedding was solemnized with young Mr Fox, and there was much rejoicing and dancing; and if they have not left off, they are dancing still.