



ELBOWBEARD

Once upon a time, there was a humble cottage, and in it lived a husband and wife and their only daughter Hannah. They had no money, no possessions, but they loved one another and helped one another. Their little daughter was growing up to be a beautiful young woman, but she was also a hard worker with a good heart.

One day, the wife got very ill and died soon after. They buried her, they mourned her, but life went on. As time went slowly by, the man found a new wife, who brought along her daughter Marfa. Soon, there was a wedding.

Marfa was also very pretty, but her heart was in the wrong place. She was lazy and mean, but the stepmother kept praising her and always blamed Hannah for everything.

One day the two daughters went together to weave carpets. The weaving mill was nearby, but the banging of the weaving looms could be heard far and wide. It wasn't easy work at all. Hannah always worked for the both of them, while Marfa laughed at her for being silly and working too hard. At home, she boasted about the work that Hannah had done as if it was hers, and never admitted that she was only sitting around, eating all the food from the basket they brought. Once, they were weaving carpets, and the lazy girl disappeared from the workshop with all the finished carpets on a cart and ran home with them. Then,

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she told her parents proudly how she made such pretty carpets all by herself. Hannah had no option but to come home empty-handed.

“See what a lazy girl you brought up?” shouted the stepmother, “she just lies around and never does any work at all. I will not have that, she cannot stay in my house. I will pack her things and she has to leave. Let her learn how to earn a living somewhere else.”

Early in the morning, when the birds were still singing, the stepmother started packing Hanna’s bags. But instead of bacon, she gave her a piece of wood, instead of bread, she gave her rocks, and instead of salt, she gave her some ashes. And she told her husband: “Here, I prepared some food for the road for your daughter. Take her anywhere, I don’t want to see her in this house ever again.”

The father cried, but he knew there was nothing he could do. He picked up his axe and took his daughter into the woods. He chopped down some trees and built her at least a tiny hut so she could have a place to sleep. They said their goodbyes and he went back home. Soon, it was dark, and the poor girl got quite hungry. She opened the bags her stepmother had packed, to eat a bit of food. But instead of bacon, she only found a block of wood, instead of bread, she only pulled out some rocks and instead of salt, she only found some ashes. Her eyes filled with tears when she saw what her evil stepmother had packed for her. And as she was weeping and sobbing, there was a huge racket behind her door. The frightened girl opened the door and there was a beggar standing in front of her with a beard that went down to his elbows. His clothes were ragged and dirty and he was incredibly poor.

“God bless you, girl,” the beggar greeted her.

“And you,” replied Hannah.

“Could you make me a spot of dinner?” asked the poor old man, “I would just like to wash and rest a little.”

“I would love to help you, but I have no water and my stepmother only gave me rocks, wood and ashes instead of food,” sighed the girl.

“No matter, my dear. Just go see outside your little hut. There is a spring with fresh water,” said the old man.

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So, she walked out and saw a spring bubbling there and there was even a clay jug right next to it. She filled the jug and went back into the hut. And what did she see? There were suddenly shelves on the walls with plates and bowls. In the corner, there was an oven and the old man was kindling a fire in it. The table was covered with delicious food. She took another look in her bag, and suddenly there was bacon, fresh bread and even the ashes had turned into salt. Delighted, she brought more water to do the dishes, and then she prepared a meal for both of them. After dinner, she was so overcome by the adventures of the day that she immediately fell asleep.

At midnight, she woke up again, because there were more bangs on her door. When she opened the door, that very same old man was standing there, only this time he had new clothes, he was clean and neat. He entered and brought in a satchel full of money.

“My name is Elbowbeard. I brought you this, because you were nice to me and you helped me, even though I was dirty and ragged,” said Elbowbeard and then, out of nowhere, he disappeared again.

The next day, the father went to see his daughter to see whether she was alright, and no forest animals had harmed her. He came to the hut and saw the girl singing, bringing water from the spring and there was also some soup bubbling in the oven.

“How are you doing, daughter of mine?” asked the father.

“I am very well indeed,” answered the girl and she sat him by the table and gave him some food. They ate together and had a nice chat, until it was time for him to go. Hannah gave him three little satchels of gold coins.

When the father was coming back, the stepmother was already looking outside the window. She was hoping that he was only bringing his daughter’s bones to bury. But as he came in, he started pouring out coins from the satchel on the table.

The stepmother went to fetch Marfa and told her husband: “Why don’t you also send out my girl to the woods, if yours was so lucky mine will be even luckier!” She packed bags full of food and started preparing her for the journey. She gave

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her so much to eat and drink that she could barely carry it, and also a lot of clothes. Then the father took her into the woods. He chopped down more trees and built a hut again. Then he brought all the food and clothes inside and left her there.

As Marfa was sitting and thinking about what to make for dinner, she heard that very same banging.

She opened the door and saw an old beggar with a beard down to his elbows. His clothes were ragged and dirty and he was incredibly poor.

“God bless you, girl,” the beggar greeted her.

But this mean and badly behaved girl didn’t even say hello, only rolled her eyes.

“Could you make me a spot of dinner?” asked the poor old man carefully, “I would just like to wash and rest a little.”

But she took a broom and she chased him out screaming that he should leave her alone.

“Well, it doesn’t matter, no need to be so angry, girl,” said the beggar and he was gone.

The girl slammed the door, ate some food and went to sleep. At midnight, she heard banging on her door.

She looked through the window, saw that same beggar and didn’t even open the door. When Elbowbeard saw that, he took a deep breath and summoned a magical storm until the hut broke down and shattered into pieces. And then he was gone.

Marfa stayed alone in the dark forest. She had nowhere to hide, and so the wild forest animals ate her.

The next day, the stepmother sent the father to bring some food and clean clothes to her lovely daughter. He went back to the woods and what did he find? There was no trace of the hut, just the lifeless body of his stepdaughter on the ground. Sadly, he picked her up and went home. The stepmother was looking out of the window, waiting impatiently for her satchels of gold. But instead of golden coins, she only got her mean daughter’s bones.