

MOTHER SNOWBED

A widow had two daughters, one of them beautiful and hard-working, the other ugly and lazy. But she much preferred the ugly and lazy one, because she was her real daughter, and the other one had to do all the work and be the kitchen drudge of the family. She forced the poor girl to sit down every day at a well by the roadside and spin till her fingers bled. Now it happened one day that the bobbin got quite covered with blood, so she stooped down with it over the well and tried to wash it, but it slipped out of her hand and fell to the bottom. She cried, ran back to her stepmother and told her about the mishap. Her stepmother gave her a terrible scolding and was so hard-hearted as to say: 'Since you let the bobbin fall down the well, you can jump in yourself and fetch it up again.' The girl went back to the well and had no idea what to do, and in her terror she jumped in to fetch the bobbin. She lost consciousness, and when she woke up and came to herself again she was in a beautiful sunlit meadow covered with thousands and thousands of flowers. She walked on through this meadow and came to an oven full of bread; and the bread was calling out to her: 'Oh, pull me out, pull me out, or I'll burn - I'm baked to a turn already.' So she went up to it and took the bread shovel and lifted all the loaves out one after another. Then she walked on and came to a tree, and it was covered with apples and called out to her: 'Oh, shake me, shake me - we apples are all ripe and ready.' So she shook the tree, and the apples fell down like rain, and she shook it until there was not one left on the branches; and when she had put them all together in a pile, she walked on again. Finally she came to a little house with an old woman looking out of it; but she had such big teeth that the girl was scared and turned to run away. But the old woman called after her: 'Why are you afraid, my dear child? Stay with me, and if you do all the housework nicely it shall go well with you. You must just be careful to make my bed properly and give it a good shake to make the feathers fly, because that's when it snows in the world; I am Mother Snowbed.' Hearing the old woman speak to her so kindly, the girl plucked up courage, consented to serve her and set to work. And she did indeed look after everything to the old woman's satisfaction and always gave her bed a mighty great shake, making the feathers fly around like snowflakes. In return she was very well cared for, never given a harsh word and fed every day on roasts and stews. When she had been with Mother Snowbed for quite a time she began to feel sad, and at first even she herself didn't know what the matter was; finally she realized that it was homesickness. Although she was ever so many times better off here than she was at home, nevertheless she felt a longing to go back. Finally she said to the old woman: 'I've got sick for home, and although it's ever so nice down here I can't stay any longer, I must go back up to my family.' Mother Snowbed said: 'You are a good girl to want to go home again, and because you have served me so faithfully I will take you back myself.' Then she took her by the hand and led her to a huge gate. The gate was opened, and just as the girl was standing under it a great shower of gold poured down, and all the gold stuck to her so that she was completely covered with it. 'This shall be yours, because you have worked

so hard,' said Mother Snowbed, and she also gave her back the bobbin that she had dropped into the well. Then the gate was closed, and the girl found herself up in the world, not far from her mother's house. And when she entered the courtyard, the cock was roosting on the well there, and he sang:

'Cock-a-doodle-do, doodle-do,
Our golden lady is back, doodle-do.'

Then she went into the house, and seeing her arrive all covered with gold her mother and sister gave her quite a welcome.

The girl told them all that had happened to her, and when her mother heard how she had got so rich she wanted to see the same good fortune come to her other daughter, the ugly and lazy one. So she told her to sit by the well and spin; and so that there would be blood on her bobbin, she pricked herself in the

finger and stuck her hand into the thorn hedge. Then she threw the bobbin into the well and jumped in after it. She landed, like her sister, on the beautiful meadow and walked along the same path. When she got to the oven, the bread again called out: 'Oh, pull me out, pull me out, or I'll burn - I'm baked to a turn already.' But the lazy girl replied: 'And get myself all dirty? I should think not!' And she walked on. Soon she came to the apple tree and it called out: 'Oh, shake me, shake me - we apples are all ripe and ready.' But she answered: 'The very idea! One of you might fall on my head,' and with that she walked on. When she came to Mother Snowbed's house she wasn't scared, because she'd been told about her big teeth already, and she entered service with her right away. On the first day she forced herself to work hard, obeying Mother Snowbed and doing everything she told her, thinking of all the gold she would be given. But on the second day she had already begun skimping her work, and on the third she grew idler still, even refusing to get up in the morning. Also she didn't make the snowbed properly or shake it to make the feathers fly. Mother Snowbed soon got tired of this and dismissed her from her service. That was well to the sloven's liking, for now, she thought, the shower of gold will fall; and sure enough, Mother Snowbed took her to the gate, but as she was standing under it a great cauldron full of pitch was poured over her instead of the gold. 'That's your wages,' said Mother Snowbed, and shut the gate. So the idle sister got home, but she was covered all over with pitch, and when the cock that perched on the well saw her, he sang:

'Cock-a-doodle-do, doodle-do,
Our dirty black slut is back, boo-hoo.'

And the pitch stuck fast to her, so that she was never able to rub it off for the rest of her life.