

The Juniper Tree

It is now long ago, quite two thousand years, since there was a rich man who had a beautiful and pious wife, and they loved each other dearly. They had, however, no children, though they wished for them very much, and the woman prayed for them day and night, but still they had none. Now there was a court-yard in front of their house in which was a juniper tree, and one day in winter the woman was standing beneath it, paring herself an apple, and while she was paring herself the apple she cut her finger, and the blood fell on the snow. Ah, said the woman, and sighed right heavily, and looked at the blood before her, and was most unhappy, ah, if I had but a child as red as blood and as white as snow. And while she thus spoke, she became quite happy in her mind, and felt just as if that were going to happen. Then she went into the house and a month went by and the snow was gone, and two months, and then everything was green, and three months, and then all the flowers came out of the earth, and four months, and then all the trees in the wood grew thicker, and the green branches were all closely entwined, and the birds sang until the wood resounded and the blossoms fell from the trees, then the fifth month passed away and she stood under the juniper tree, which smelt so sweetly that her heart leapt, and she fell on her knees and was beside herself with joy, and when the sixth month was over the fruit was large and fine, and then she was quite still, and the seventh month she snatched at the juniper-berries and ate them greedily, then she grew sick and sorrowful, then the eighth month passed, and she called her husband to her, and wept and said, if I die then bury me beneath the juniper tree. Then she was quite comforted and happy until the next month was over, and then she had a child as white as snow and as red as blood, and when she beheld it she was so delighted that she died. Then her husband buried her beneath the juniper tree, and he began to weep sore, after some time he was more at ease, and though he still wept he could bear it, and after some time longer he took another wife. By the second wife he had a daughter, but the first wife's child was a little son, and he was as red as blood and as white as snow. When the woman looked at her daughter she loved her very much, but then she looked at the little boy and it seemed to cut her to the heart, for the thought came into her mind that he would always stand in her way, and she was for ever thinking how she could get all the fortune for her daughter, and the evil one filled her mind with this till she was quite wroth with the little boy and she pushed him from one corner to the other and slapped him here and cuffed him there, until the poor child was in continual terror, for when he came out of school he had no peace in any place. One day the woman had gone upstairs to her room, and her little daughter went up too, and said, mother, give me an apple. Yes, my child, said the woman, and gave her a fine apple out of the chest, but the chest had a great heavy lid with a great sharp iron lock. Mother, said the little daughter, is brother not to have one too. This made the woman angry, but she said, yes, when he comes out of school. And when she saw from the window that he was coming, it was just as if the devil entered into her, and she snatched at the apple and took it away again from her daughter, and said, you shall not have one before your brother. Then she threw the apple into the chest, and shut it. Then the little boy came in at the door, and the devil made her say to him kindly, my son, will you have an apple. And she looked wickedly at him. Mother, said the little boy, how dreadful you look. Yes, give me an apple. Then it seemed to her as if she were forced to say to him, come with me, and she opened the lid of the chest and said, take out an apple for yourself, and while the little boy was stooping inside, the devil prompted her, and crash. She shut the lid down, and his head flew off and fell among the red apples. Then she was overwhelmed with terror, and thought,

if I could but make them think that it was not done by me. So she went upstairs to her room to her chest of drawers, and took a white handkerchief out of the top drawer, and set the head on the neck again, and folded the handkerchief so that nothing could be seen, and she set him on a chair in front of the door, and put the apple in his hand. After this Marlinchen came into the kitchen to her mother, who was standing by the fire with a pan of hot water before her which she was constantly stirring round. "Mother," said Marlinchen, "brother is sitting at the door, and he looks quite white and has an apple in his hand. I asked him to give me the apple, but he did not answer me, and I was quite frightened." "Go back to him," said her mother, "and if he will not answer you, give him a box on the ear." So Marlinchen went to him and said, "Brother, give me the apple." But he was silent, and she gave him a box on the ear, whereupon his head fell off. Marlinchen was terrified, and began crying and screaming, and ran to her mother, and said, "Alas, mother, I have knocked my brother's head off," and she wept and wept and could not be comforted. "Marlinchen," said the mother, what have you done, but be quiet and let no one know it, it cannot be helped now, we will make him into black-puddings." Then the mother took the little boy and chopped him in pieces, put him into the pan and made him into black puddings, but Marlinchen stood by weeping and weeping, and all her tears fell into the pan and there was no need of any salt. Then the father came home, and sat down to dinner and said, "But where is my son?" And the mother served up a great dish of black-puddings, and Marlinchen wept and could not leave off. Then the father again said, "But where is my son?" "Ah," said the mother, "he has gone across the country to his mother's great uncle, he will stay there awhile." "And what is he going to do there? He did not even say good-bye to me." "Oh, he wanted to go, and asked me if he might stay six weeks, he is well taken care of there." "Ah," said the man, "I feel so unhappy lest all should not be right. He ought to have said good-bye to me." With that he began to eat and said, "Marlinchen, why are you crying? Your brother will certainly come back." Then he said, "Ah, wife, how delicious this food is, give me some more." And the more he ate the more he wanted to have, and he said, "Give me some more, you shall have none of it. It seems to me as if it were all mine." And he ate and ate and threw all the bones under the table, until he had finished the whole. But Marlinchen went away to her chest of drawers, and took her best silk handkerchief out of the bottom draw, and got all the bones from beneath the table, and tied them up in her silk handkerchief, and carried them outside the door, weeping tears of blood. Then she lay down under the juniper tree on the green grass, and after she had lain down there, she suddenly felt light-hearted and did not cry any more. Then the juniper tree began to stir itself, and the branches parted asunder, and moved together again, just as if someone were rejoicing and clapping his hands. At the same time a mist seemed to arise from the tree, and in the center of this mist it burned like a fire, and a beautiful bird flew out of the fire singing magnificently, and he flew high up in the air, and when he was gone, the juniper tree was just as it had been before, and the handkerchief with the bones was no longer there. Marlinchen, however, was as gay and happy as if her brother were still alive. And she went merrily into the house, and sat down to dinner and ate. But the bird flew away and lighted on a goldsmith's house, and began to sing - my mother she killed me, my father he ate me, my sister, little marlinchen, gathered together all my bones, tied them in a silken handkerchief, laid them beneath the juniper tree, kywitt, kywitt, what a beautiful bird am I. The goldsmith was sitting in his workshop making a golden chain, when he heard the bird which was sitting singing on his roof, and very beautiful the song seemed to him. He stood up, but as he crossed the threshold he lost one of his slippers. But he went away right up the

middle of the street with one shoe on and one sock, he had his apron on, and in one hand he had the golden chain and in the other the pincers, and the sun was shining brightly on the street. Then he went right on and stood still, and said to the bird, "Bird," said he then, "how beautifully you can sing. Sing me that piece again." "No," said the bird, "I'll not sing it twice for nothing. Give me the golden chain, and then I will sing it again for you." "There," said the goldsmith, "there is the golden chain for you, now sing me that song again." Then the bird came and took the golden chain in his right claw, and went and sat in front of the goldsmith, and sang -

my mother she killed me, my father he ate me, my sister,
little marlinchen, gathered together all my bones, tied
them in a silken handkerchief, laid them beneath the juniper
tree, kywitt, kywitt, what a beautiful bird am I. Then the bird
flew away to a shoemaker, and lighted on his roof and sang - my
mother she killed me, my father he ate me, my sister,
little marlinchen, gathered together all my bones, tied
them in a silken handkerchief, laid them beneath the juniper
tree, kywitt, kywitt, what a beautiful bird am I. The shoemaker
heard that and ran out of doors in his shirt sleeves, and looked up
at his roof, and was forced to hold his hand before his eyes lest the
sun should blind him. "Bird," said he, "how beautifully you can
sing." Then he called in at his door, "Wife, just come outside,
there is a bird, look at that bird, he certainly can sing." Then he
called his daughter and children, and apprentices, boys and girls,
and they all came up the street and looked at the bird and saw how
beautiful he was, and what fine red and green feathers he had, and
how like real gold his neck was, and how the eyes in his head shone
like stars. "Bird," said the shoemaker, "now sing me that song
again." "Nay," said the bird, "I do not sing twice for nothing, you
must give me something." "Wife," said the man, "go to the garret,
upon the top shelf there stands a pair of red shoes, bring them
down." Then the wife went and brought the shoes. "There, bird,"
said the man, "now sing me that piece again." Then the bird came and
took the shoes in his left claw, and flew back on the roof, and sang -

my mother she killed me, my father he ate me, my
sister, little Marlinchen, gathered together all my bones,
tied them in a silken handkerchief, laid them beneath the
juniper tree, kywitt, kywitt, what a beautiful bird am I. and
when he had finished his song he flew away. In his right claw he had
the chain and in his left the shoes, and he flew far away to a mill,
and the mill went, klipp klapp, klipp klapp, klipp klapp, and in the
mill sat twenty miller's men hewing a stone, and cutting, hick hack,
hick hack, hick hack, and the mill went klipp klapp, klipp
klapp'klipp klapp. Then the bird went and sat on a lime-tree which
stood in front of the mill, and sang - my mother she killed me,
then one of them stopped working, my father he ate me, then two
more stopped working and listened to that, my sister, little
Marlinchen, then four more stopped, gathered together all my
bones, tied them in a silken handkerchief, now eight only were
hewing, laid them beneath, now only five, the juniper tree,
and now only one, kywitt, kywitt, what a beautiful bird am I.
Then the last stopped also, and heard the last words. "Bird," said
he, "how beautifully you sing. Let me, too, hear that. Sing that
once more for me." "Nay," said the bird, "I will not sing twice for
nothing. Give me the millstone, and then I will sing it again."
"Yes," said he, "if it belonged to me only, you should have it."
"Yes," said the others, "if he sings again he shall have it." Then
the bird came down, and the twenty millers all set to work with a
beam and raised the stone up. And the bird stuck his neck through
the hole, and put the stone on as if it were a collar, and flew on to
the tree again, and sang - my mother she killed me, my
father he ate me, my sister, little Marlinchen, gathered

together all my bones, tied them in a silken handkerchief, laid them beneath the juniper tree, kywitt, kywitt, what a beautiful bird am I. And when he had done singing, he spread his wings, and in his right claw he had the chain, and in his left the shoes, and round his neck the millstone, and he flew far away to his father's house. In the room sat the father, the mother, and Marlinchen at dinner, and the father said, "How light-hearted I feel, how happy I am." "Nay," said the mother, "I feel so uneasy, just as if a heavy storm were coming." Marlinchen, however, sat weeping and weeping, and then came the bird flying, and as it seated itself on the roof the father said, "Ah, I feel so truly happy, and the sun is shining so beautifully outside, I feel just as if I were about to see some old friend again." "Nay," said the woman, "I feel so anxious, my teeth chatter, and I seem to have fire in my veins." And she tore her stays open, but Marlinchen sat in a corner crying, and held her plate before her eyes and cried till it was quite wet. Then the bird sat on the juniper tree, and sang - my mother she killed me, then the mother stopped her ears, and shut her eyes, and would not see or hear, but there was a roaring in her ears like the most violent storm, and her eyes burnt and flashed like lightning - my father he ate me, "Ah, mother," says the man, "that is a beautiful bird. He sings so splendidly, and the sun shines so warm, and there is a smell just like cinnamon." My sister, little Marlinchen, then Marlinchen laid her head on her knees and wept without ceasing, but the man said, "I am going out, I must see the bird quite close." "Oh, don't go," said the woman, "I feel as if the whole house were shaking and on fire." But the man went out and looked at the bird. gathered together all my bones, tied them in a silken handkerchief, laid them beneath the juniper tree, kywitt, kywitt, what a beautiful bird am I on this the bird let the golden chain fall, and it fell exactly round the man's neck, and so exactly round it that it fitted beautifully. Then he went in and said, "just look what a fine bird that is, and what a handsome golden chain he has given me, and how pretty he is." But the woman was terrified, and fell down on the floor in the room, and her cap fell off her head. Then sang the bird once more - my mother she killed me. "Would that I were a thousand feet beneath the earth so as not to hear that." My father he ate me, then the woman fell down again as if dead. My sister, little marlinchen, "Ah," said Marlinchen, "I too will go out and see if the bird will give me anything," and she went out. Gathered together all my bones, tied them in a silken handkerchief, then he threw down the shoes to her. Laid them beneath the juniper tree, kywitt, kywitt, what a beautiful bird am I. Then she was light-hearted and joyous, and she put on the new red shoes, and danced and leaped into the house. "Ah," said she, "I was so sad when I went out and now I am so light-hearted, that is a splendid bird, he has given me a pair of red shoes." "Well," said the woman, and sprang to her feet and her hair stood up like flames of fire, "I feel as if the world were coming to an end. I too, will go out and see if my heart feels lighter." And as she went out at the door, crash. The bird threw down the millstone on her head, and she was entirely crushed by it. The father and Marlinchen heard what had happened and went out, and smoke, flames, and fire were rising from the place, and when that was over, there stood the little brother, and he took his father and Marlinchen by the hand, and all three were right glad, and they went into the house to dinner, and ate.