

TOADS AND DIAMONDS

Charles Perrault

A bad tempered widow had two daughters. The eldest was like her mother, both in feature and disposition, while the youngest resembled her father. She was sweet-natured always, and as pretty as she was amiable.

The widow doted on the daughter who was so like herself, but had no love for the other, whom she compelled to work hard all day, and to live upon the leavings of her elder sister. Among her other hard tasks, she was obliged to carry water every day from a great distance.

One day when she had just filled her pitcher at the fountain, an old woman asked to drink from it. "With all my heart," replied the pretty girl. Glad to show a kindness to one old and infirm, she held the pitcher while the woman slaked her thirst.

Now, this was not a trembling old peasant, as she appeared, but a fairy who rewarded good deeds. "

Your face is pretty and your heart is gentle," said she. "For your kindness to a poor old woman, I will make you a gift. Every time you speak, from your mouth shall come a flower or a jewel."

When the girl reached home her mother scolded her for her long absence.

Pardon me for being away so long," she sweetly replied. As she spoke some pearls and diamonds issued from her lips.

"What is this I see, child?" asked the astonished widow.

The forlorn girl was so happy to be called child by her mother that she eagerly related her experience with the old woman at the fountain, while, with her words, dropped precious stones and roses. The widow immediately called her favorite daughter to her.

"Fanny, wouldst thou have the same gift as thy sister?" asked she. "Go thou to the fountain and fetch water. And if an old woman asks thee for a drink, mind' thou treat her civilly."

The girl refused to perform the menial task, until the widow lost patience and drove her to it. Finally, she took the silver tankard and sullenly obeyed. No sooner was she at the fountain than from the wood came a lady most handsomely attired, who asked the haughty girl for a drink from her pitcher.

"I have not come here to serve you," she rudely replied, "but take the pitcher and help yourself, for all I care I would have you know that I am as good as you."

The lady was the fairy, who had taken the appearance of a princess to see how far the girl's insolence would go.

"I will make you a gift," she said, "to equal your discourtesy and ill breeding. Every time you speak, there shall come from your mouth a snake or a toad."

The girl ran home to her mother, who met her at the door.

"Well, daughter," she said, impatient to hear her speak.

When she opened her mouth, to the mother's horror, two vipers and two toads sprang from it.

"This is the fault of your wretched sister," the unhappy mother cried. She ran to beat the poor younger sister, who fled to the forest to escape the cruel blows. When she was past pursuit, she threw herself upon the green grass and wept bitterly.

The King's son, returning from the hunt, found her thus, and asked the cause of her tears.

"My mother has driven me from my home," she told him.

She was so pretty that he fell in love with her at once, and pressed her to tell him more. She then related to him the whole story, while pearls and diamonds kept falling from her lips. Enraptured, he took her to the King, who gave his consent to their immediate marriage.

Meanwhile the ugly and selfish sister had made herself so disagreeable that even her own mother turned against her. She, too, was driven forth into the forest, where she died miserable and alone.