

THE NIXIE IN THE POND

Once upon a time there was a miller and his wife. They were doing well with their business, but misfortune came overnight. Soon the miller barely owned his own mill. He was so worried, he could not even sleep at night.

He woke up one morning before sunrise, hoping fresh air would help. As he walked he heard a noise from the pond. When he turned to look he was a beautiful woman with white skin and long hair flowing down both sides. He was not sure if he should run away or stay and watch. The nixie whispered to him by name to come closer. She asked why he was so upset. The miller told

"Do not worry," answered the nixie. "I will make you richer and happier than you have ever been before in exchange for something that has just been born in your house."

The miller smiled and agreed. He knew all that could be was a puppy or kitten. The nixie descended into the water again. The miller was approaching his home when the maid came out of the front door and called out to him that he should hurry inside, for his wife had given birth to a little boy. The miller stood there as though he had been struck by lightning. He knew that nixie had known this and cheated him.

"Why are you not happy with the beautiful boy?" She asked. And so he told her what had happened to him, and what kind of a promise he had given to the nixie. Even the relatives who had come to congratulate them did not have any advice for him.

Good fortune returned to the miller's house. He succeeded in everything. It was as though money in his chests multiplied overnight. Before long his wealth was greater than it had ever been before. However, his agreement with the nixie tormented his heart every time he passed the pond. He worried she would appear and demand his child.

He never allowed the boy himself to go near the water and warned the boy, "If you touch the water a hand will appear, take hold of you, and pull you under." Year after year passed, and the nixie did not appear, so the miller began to feel at ease.

The boy grew up to be a young man and was apprenticed to a huntsman. Once he had become a skilled huntsman, the lord of the village took him into his service. In the village lived a beautiful maiden whom the huntsman liked, and when his master noticed this, he gave him a little house. Soon the two were married, and lived peacefully and happily.

One day the huntsman was pursuing a deer and it ran into an open field. He followed it and finally brought it down with a single shot, but he did not notice that he was in the vicinity of the dangerous millpond. After he had dressed out the deer he went to the water in order to wash his blood-stained hands. He had just dipped his hands into the water when the nixie emerged. Laughing, she wrapped her wet arms around him and pulled him under so quickly that waves splashed over him.

When the huntsman did not return home that night his wife was worried and she went out to look for him. He had warned her about the nixie and her pond before, so she knew this was a good place to begin her search. Upon arriving at the pond she found his hunting gear laying on the ground. She cried out her husband's name but got no response. She ran to the other side of the pond and called again. No answer. The water on the pond remained still. The entire night she paced around the pond, calling for her husband. Finally, her strength gave out and she fell to the ground, immersed in a deep dream...

She was fearfully climbing upwards between large rocky cliffs. Thorns and briars cutting her feet. Rain was beating into her face. The wind was blowing her long hair about. When she reached the top the weather was completely different. The sky was blue, a soft breeze was blowing, the ground sloped gently downwards, and in a green meadow, dotted with colorful flowers, stood a neat cottage. She walked up to it and opened the door. There sat an old woman with white hair, who beckoned to her kindly.

At that moment, the poor woman awoke. It was already daylight, and she decided at once to follow her dream. With difficulty she climbed the mountain, and everything was just as she had seen it during her dream. The old woman received her kindly, showing her a chair where she was to sit.

"You must have met with misfortune," she said, "having sought out my lonely cottage."

The woman related with tears what had happened to her.

"Be comforted," said the old woman. "I will help you. Here is a golden comb for you. Wait until the full moon has risen, then go to the millpond, sit down on the bank and comb your long black hair with this comb. When you are finished, set it down on the bank, and you will see what will happen."

The woman returned home, but the time passed slowly for her until the full moon came. Finally the shining disk appeared in the heavens, and she went out to the millpond, sat down, and combed her long black hair with the golden comb. When she was finished she set it down at the water's edge. Before long there came a motion from beneath the water. A wave arose, rolled onto the bank, and carried the

comb away with it. The surface of the water parted, and the huntsman's head emerged. He said nothing, only looking at his wife with sorrowful glances. That same instant a second wave rushed up and covered her husband's head. Then everything vanished. The millpond lay as peaceful as before, with only the full moon shining on it.

The next morning she went and told her sorrows to the wise woman again. The old woman gave her a golden flute, and said, "Wait until the full moon comes again. Sit on the bank and play a beautiful tune on it. When you are finished, set it in the sand. Then you will see what will happen."

The woman did what the old woman had told her to do. No sooner was the flute lying in the sand than there was a motion from beneath the water, and a wave rushed up and carried the flute away with it. Immediately afterwards the water parted, and not only her husband's head, but half of his body emerged as well. He stretched out his arms longingly towards her, but a second wave rushed up, covered him, and pulled him down again.

"Oh, how does it help me," said the unhappy woman, "to see my beloved and then to lose him again beneath the water?"

Despair filled her heart anew, but a dream led her to the old woman's house a third time. The wise woman gave her a golden spinning wheel, comforted her, and said, "Everything is not yet fulfilled. Wait until the full moon comes, then take the spinning wheel, sit on the bank, and spin the spool full. When you have done this, place the spinning wheel at the water's edge, and you will see what will happen."

The woman did everything exactly as she had been told. As soon as the full moon appeared she carried the golden spinning wheel to the bank, and spun diligently until she was out of flax, and the spool was completely filled with thread. She had scarcely placed the wheel on the bank when there was a more violent motion than before from the water's depth. Then a powerful wave rushed up and carried the wheel away with it.

Immediately the whole body of her husband emerged in a waterspout. He quickly jumped to the bank, caught his wife by the hand, and fled. They had gone only a little distance when the entire millpond arose with a terrible roar, then with terrible force spread out across the countryside. The wife in her terror called out for the old woman to help them, and they were instantly transformed - she into a toad, he into a frog.

The flood which had overtaken them could not destroy them, but it separated them and carried them far away. When the water receded and they both reached dry land again, they returned to human form, but neither knew where the other one was. They found themselves among strange people who did not

know their native land. High mountains and deep valleys lay between them. In order to earn a living, they both had to herd sheep. For long years they drove their flocks through fields and woods, and were filled with sorrow and longing.

One day when spring arrived they both went out with their flocks. He saw a herd on a distant mountainside and drove his sheep toward it. They met in a valley but did not recognize one another, but they were happy that they were no longer so alone. From then on every day they drove their flocks next to each other. They did not speak much, but they did feel comforted.

One evening when the full moon was shining in the sky and the sheep were already at rest, the shepherd took his flute out of his pocket and played on it a beautiful but sorrowful tune. When he had finished he saw that the shepherdess was crying bitterly.

"Why are you crying?" he asked.

"Oh," she answered, "the full moon was shining like this when I played that tune on the flute for the last time, and my beloved's head emerged out of the water."

He looked at her, and it was as though a veil fell from his eyes. He recognized his beloved wife, and when she looked at him, with the moon shining on his face, she recognized him as well. They embraced and kissed one another.