

The Werewolf

by Clara Stroebe

Once upon a time there was a king, who reigned over a great kingdom. He had a queen, but only a single daughter, a girl. In consequence the little girl was the apple of her parents' eyes; they loved her above everything else in the world, and their dearest thought was the pleasure they would take in her when she was older. But the unexpected often happens; for before the king's daughter began to grow up, the queen her mother fell ill and died. It is not hard to imagine the grief that reigned, not alone in the royal castle, but throughout the land; for the queen had been beloved of all. The king grieved so that he would not marry again, and his one joy was the little princess.

A long time passed, and with each succeeding day the king's daughter grew taller and more beautiful, and her father granted her every wish. Now there were a number of women who had nothing to do but wait on the princess and carry out her commands. Among them was a woman who had formerly married and had two daughters. She had an engaging appearance, a smooth tongue and a winning way of talking, and she was as soft and pliable as silk; but at heart she was full of machinations and falseness. Now when the queen died, she at once began to plan how she might marry the king, so that her daughters might be kept like royal princesses. With this end in view, she drew the young princess to her, paid her the most fulsome compliments on everything she said and did, and was forever bringing the conversation around to how happy she would be were the king to take another wife. There was much said on this head, early and late, and before very long the princess came to believe that the woman knew all there was to know about everything. So she asked her what sort of a woman the king ought to choose for a wife. The woman answered as sweet as honey: "It is not my affair to give advice in this matter; yet he should choose for queen some one who is kind to the little princess. For one thing I know, and that is, were I fortunate enough to be chosen, my one thought would be to do all I could for the little princess, and if she wished to wash her hands, one of my daughters would have to hold the wash-bowl and the other hand her the towel." This and much more she told the king's daughter, and the princess believed it, as children will.

From that day forward the princess gave her father no peace, and begged him again and again to marry the good court lady. Yet he did not want to marry her. But the king's daughter gave him no rest; but urged him again and again, as the false court lady had persuaded her to do. Finally, one day, when she again brought up the matter, the king cried: "I can see you will end by having your own way about this, even though it be entirely against my will. But I will do so only on one condition." "What is the condition?" asked the princess. "If I marry again," said the king, "it is only because of your ceaseless pleading. Therefore you must promise that, if in the future you are not satisfied with your step-mother or your step-sisters, not a single lament or complaint on your part reaches my ears." This she promised the king, and it was agreed that he should marry the court lady and make her queen of the whole country.

As time passed on, the king's daughter had grown to be the most beautiful maiden to be found far and wide; the queen's daughters, on the other hand, were homely, evil of disposition, and no one knew any good of them. Hence it was not surprising that many youths came from East and West to sue for the princess's hand; but that none of them took any interest in the queen's daughters. This made the step-mother very angry; but she concealed her rage, and was as sweet and friendly as ever. Among the wooers was a king's son from another country. He was young and brave, and since he loved the princess dearly, she accepted his proposal and they plighted their troth. The queen observed this with an

angry eye, for it would have pleased her had the prince chosen one of her own daughters. She therefore made up her mind that the young pair should never be happy together, and from that time on thought only of how she might part them from each other.

An opportunity soon offered itself. News came that the enemy had entered the land, and the king was compelled to go to war. Now the princess began to find out the kind of step-mother she had. For no sooner had the king departed than the queen showed her true nature, and was just as harsh and unkind as she formerly had pretended to be friendly and obliging. Not a day went by without her scolding and threatening the princess; and the queen's daughters were every bit as malicious as their mother. But the king's son, the lover of the princess, found himself in even worse position. He had gone hunting one day, had lost his way, and could not find his people. Then the queen used her black arts and turned him into a werewolf, to wander through the forest for the remainder of his life in that shape. When evening came and there was no sign of the prince, his people returned home, and one can imagine what sorrow they caused when the princess learned how the hunt had ended. She grieved, wept day and night, and was not to be consoled. But the queen laughed at her grief, and her heart was filled with joy to think that all had turned out exactly as she wished.

Now it chanced one day, as the king's daughter was sitting alone in her room, that she thought she would go herself into the forest where the prince had disappeared. She went to her step-mother and begged permission to go out into the forest, in order to forget her surpassing grief. The queen did not want to grant her request, for she always preferred saying no to yes. But the princess begged her so winningly that at last she was unable to say no, and she ordered one of her daughters to go along with her and watch her. That caused a great deal of discussion, for neither of the step-daughters wanted to go with her; each made all sorts of excuses, and asked what pleasures were there in going with the king's daughter, who did nothing but cry. But the queen had the last word in the end, and ordered that one of her daughters must accompany the princess, even though it be against her will. So the girls wandered out of the castle into the forest. The king's daughter walked among the trees, and listened to the song of the birds, and thought of her lover, for whom she longed, and who was now no longer there. And the queen's daughter followed her, vexed, in her malice, with the king's daughter and her sorrow.

After they had walked a while, they came to a little hut, lying deep in the dark forest. By then the king's daughter was very thirsty, and wanted to go into the little hut with her step-sister, in order to get a drink of water. But the queen's daughter was much annoyed and said: "Is it not enough for me to be running around here in the wilderness with you? Now you even want me, who am a princess, to enter that wretched little hut. No, I will not step a foot over the threshold! If you want to go in, why go in alone!" The king's daughter lost no time; but did as her step-sister advised, and stepped into the little hut. When she entered she saw an old woman sitting there on a bench, so enfeebled by age that her head shook. The princess spoke to her in her usual friendly way: "Good evening, motherkin. May I ask you for a drink of water?" "You are heartily welcome to it," said the old woman. "Who may you be, that step beneath my lowly roof and greet me in so winning a way?" The king's daughter told her who she was, and that she had gone out to relieve her heart, in order to forget her great grief. "And what may your great grief be?" asked the old woman. "No doubt it is my fate to grieve," said the princess, "and I can never be happy again. I have lost my only love, and God alone knows whether I shall ever see him again." And she also told her why it was, and the tears ran down her cheeks in streams, so that any one would have felt sorry for her. When she had ended the old woman said: "You did well in confiding your sorrow to me. I have lived long and may be able to give you a bit of good advice. When you leave here you will see a lily growing from the ground. This lily is not like other lilies, however, but has many strange virtues. Run quickly over to it, and pick it. If you can do that then you need not worry, for then one will appear who will tell you what to do." Then they parted and the king's daughter

thanked her and went her way; while the old woman sat on the bench and wagged her head. But the queen's daughter had been standing without the hut the entire time, vexing herself, and grumbling because the king's daughter had taken so long.

So when the latter stepped out, she had to listen to all sorts of abuse from her step-sister, as was to be expected. Yet she paid no attention to her, and thought only of how she might find the flower of which the old woman had spoken. They went through the forest, and suddenly she saw a beautiful white lily growing in their very path. She was much pleased and ran up at once to pick it; but that very moment it disappeared and reappeared somewhat further away.

The king's daughter was now filled with eagerness, no longer listened to her step-sister's calls, and kept right on running; yet each time when she stooped to pick the lily, it suddenly disappeared and reappeared somewhat further away. Thus it went for some time, and the princess was drawn further and further into the deep forest. But the lily continued to stand, and disappear and move further away, and each time the flower seemed larger and more beautiful than before. At length the princess came to a high hill, and as she looked toward its summit, there stood the lily high on the naked rock, glittering as white and radiant as the brightest star. The king's daughter now began to climb the hill, and in her eagerness she paid no attention to stones nor steepness. And when at last she reached the summit of the hill, lo and behold! the lily no longer evaded her grasp; but remained where it was, and the princess stooped and picked it and hid it in her bosom, and so heartfelt was her happiness that she forgot her step-sisters and everything else in the world.

For a long time she did not tire of looking at the beautiful flower. Then she suddenly began to wonder what her step-mother would say when she came home after having remained out so long. And she looked around, in order to find the way back to the castle. But as she looked around, behold, the sun had set and no more than a little strip of daylight rested on the summit of the hill. Below her lay the forest, so dark and shadowed that she had no faith in her ability to find the homeward path. And now she grew very sad, for she could think of nothing better to do than to spend the night on the hill-top. She seated herself on the rock, put her hand to her cheek, cried, and thought of her unkind step-mother and step-sisters, and of all the harsh words she would have to endure when she returned. And she thought of her father, the king, who was away at war, and of the love of her heart, whom she would never see again; and she grieved so bitterly that she did not even know she wept. Night came and darkness, and the stars rose, and still the princess sat in the same spot and wept. And while she sat there, lost in her thoughts, she heard a voice say: "Good evening, lovely maiden! Why do you sit here so sad and lonely?" She stood up hastily, and felt much embarrassed, which was not surprising. When she looked around there was nothing to be seen but a tiny old man, who nodded to her and seemed to be very humble. She answered: "Yes, it is no doubt my fate to grieve, and never be happy again. I have lost my dearest love, and now I have lost my way in the forest, and am afraid of being devoured by wild beasts." "As to that," said the old man, "you need have no fear. If you will do exactly as I say, I will help you." This made the princess happy; for she felt that all the rest of the world had abandoned her. Then the old man drew out flint and steel and said: "Lovely maiden, you must first build a fire." She did as he told her, gathered moss, brush and dry sticks, struck sparks and lit such a fire on the hill-top that the flame blazed up to the skies. That done the old man said: "Go on a bit and you will find a kettle of tar, and bring the kettle to me." This the king's daughter did. The old man continued: "Now put the kettle on the fire." And the princess did that as well. When the tar began to boil, the old man said: "Now throw your white lily into the kettle." The princess thought this a harsh command, and earnestly begged to be allowed to keep the lily. But the old man said: "Did you not promise to obey my every command? Do as I tell you or you will regret it." The king's daughter turned away her eyes, and threw the lily into the boiling tar; but it was altogether against her will, so fond had she grown of the beautiful

flower.

The moment she did so a hollow roar, like that of some wild beast, sounded from the forest. It came nearer, and turned into such a terrible howling that all the surrounding hills reëchoed it. Finally there was a cracking and breaking among the trees, the bushes were thrust aside, and the princess saw a great grey wolf come running out of the forest and straight up the hill. She was much frightened and would gladly have run away, had she been able. But the old man said: "Make haste, run to the edge of the hill and the moment the wolf comes along, upset the kettle on him!" The princess was terrified, and hardly knew what she was about; yet she did as the old man said, took the kettle, ran to the edge of the hill, and poured its contents over the wolf just as he was about to run up. And then a strange thing happened: no sooner had she done so, than the wolf was transformed, cast off his thick grey pelt, and in place of the horrible wild beast, there stood a handsome young man, looking up to the hill. And when the king's daughter collected herself and looked at him, she saw that it was really and truly her lover, who had been turned into a werewolf.

It is easy to imagine how the princess felt. She opened her arms, and could neither ask questions nor reply to them, so moved and delighted was she. But the prince ran hastily up the hill, embraced her tenderly, and thanked her for delivering him. Nor did he forget the little old man, but thanked him with many civil expressions for his powerful aid. Then they sat down together on the hill-top, and had a pleasant talk. The prince told how he had been turned into a wolf, and of all he had suffered while running about in the forest; and the princess told of her grief, and the many tears she had shed while he had been gone. So they sat the whole night through, and never noticed it until the stars grew pale and it was light enough to see. When the sun rose, they saw that a broad path led from the hill-top straight to the royal castle; for they had a view of the whole surrounding country from the hill-top. Then the old man said: "Lovely maiden, turn around! Do you see anything out yonder?" "Yes," said the princess, "I see a horseman on a foaming horse, riding as fast as he can." Then the old man said: "He is a messenger sent on ahead by the king your father. And your father with all his army is following him." That pleased the princess above all things, and she wanted to descend the hill at once to meet her father. But the old man detained her and said: "Wait a while, it is too early yet. Let us wait and see how everything turns out."

Time passed and the sun was shining brightly, and its rays fell straight on the royal castle down below. Then the old man said: "Lovely maiden, turn around! Do you see anything down below?" "Yes," replied the princess, "I see a number of people coming out of my father's castle, and some are going along the road, and others into the forest." The old man said: "Those are your step-mother's servants. She has sent some to meet the king and welcome him; but she has sent others to the forest to look for you." At these words the princess grew uneasy, and wished to go down to the queen's servants. But the old man withheld her and said: "Wait a while, and let us first see how everything turns out."

More time passed, and the king's daughter was still looking down the road from which the king would appear, when the old man said: "Lovely maiden, turn around! Do you see anything down below?" "Yes," answered the princess, "there is a great commotion in my father's castle, and they are hanging it with black." The old man said: "That is your step-mother and her people. They will assure your father that you are dead." Then the king's daughter felt bitter anguish, and she implored from the depths of her heart: "Let me go, let me go, so that I may spare my father this anguish!" But the old man detained her and said: "No, wait, it is still too early. Let us first see how everything turns out."

Again time passed, the sun lay high above the fields, and the warm air blew over meadow and forest. The royal maid and youth still sat on the hill-top with the old man, where we had left them. Then

they saw a little cloud rise against the horizon, far away in the distance, and the little cloud grew larger and larger, and came nearer and nearer along the road, and as it moved one could see it was agleam with weapons, and nodding helmets, and waving flags, one could hear the rattle of swords, and the neighing of horses, and finally recognize the banner of the king. It is not hard to imagine how pleased the king's daughter was, and how she insisted on going down and greeting her father. But the old man held her back and said: "Lovely maiden, turn around! Do you see anything happening at the castle?" "Yes," answered the princess, "I can see my step-mother and step-sisters coming out, dressed in mourning, holding white kerchiefs to their faces, and weeping bitterly." The old man answered: "Now they are pretending to weep because of your death. Wait just a little while longer. We have not yet seen how everything will turn out."

After a time the old man said again: "Lovely maiden, turn around! Do you see anything down below?" "Yes," said the princess, "I see people bringing a black coffin—now my father is having it opened. Look, the queen and her daughters are down on their knees, and my father is threatening them with his sword!" Then the old man said: "Your father wished to see your body, and so your evil step-mother had to confess the truth." When the princess heard that she said earnestly: "Let me go, let me go, so that I may comfort my father in his great sorrow!" But the old man held her back and said: "Take my advice and stay here a little while longer. We have not yet seen how everything will turn out."

Again time went by, and the king's daughter and the prince and the old man were still sitting on the hill-top. Then the old man said: "Lovely maiden, turn around! Do you see anything down below?" "Yes," answered the princess, "I see my father and my step-sisters and my step-mother with all their following moving this way." The old man said: "Now they have started out to look for you. Go down and bring up the wolf's pelt in the gorge." The king's daughter did as he told her. The old man continued: "Now stand at the edge of the hill." And the princess did that, too. Now one could see the queen and her daughters coming along the way, and stopping just below the hill. Then the old man said: "Now throw down the wolf's pelt!" The princess obeyed him, and threw down the wolf's pelt according to his command. It fell directly on the evil queen and her daughters. And then a most wonderful thing happened: no sooner had the pelt touched the three evil women than they immediately changed shape, and turning into three horrible werewolves, they ran away as fast as they could into the forest, howling dreadfully.

No more had this happened than the king himself arrived at the foot of the hill with his whole retinue. When he looked up and recognized the princess, he could not at first believe his eyes; but stood motionless, thinking her a vision. Then the old man cried: "Lovely maiden, now hasten, run down and make your father happy!" There was no need to tell the princess twice. She took her lover by the hand and they ran down the hill. When they came to the king, the princess ran on ahead, fell on her father's neck, and wept with joy. And the young prince wept as well, and the king himself wept; and their meeting was a pleasant sight for every one. There was great joy and many embraces, and the princess told of her evil step-mother and step-sisters and of her lover, and all that she had suffered, and of the old man who had helped them in such a wonderful way. But when the king turned around to thank the old man he had completely vanished, and from that day on no one could say who he had been or what had become of him.

The king and his whole retinue now returned to the castle, where the king had a splendid banquet prepared, to which he invited all the able and distinguished people throughout the kingdom, and bestowed his daughter on the young prince. And the wedding was celebrated with gladness and music and amusements of every kind for many days. I was there, too, and when I rode through the forest I met a wolf with two young wolves, and they showed me their teeth and seemed very angry.

And I was told they were none other than the evil step-mother and her two daughters.

Source:

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