

The Folk- and Fairy-Tales of Ludwig Bechstein: Of the Little Boy, the Little Girl, and the Wicked Stepmother

Once upon a time there were two children and they had a wicked stepmother who grudged them the air they breathed. One day while the woman was sitting spinning the boy came in and said: "Mother, give me an apple." Then the woman devised a malicious trick and said: "Go into the box room, you know the chest with the apples is in there, and take one for yourself." As the boy walks into the box room the wicked mother is after him, and when he lifts up the heavy lid of the apple-chest and reaches for a rosy-cheeked apple, the stepmother shoves the poor boy into the chest and slams the lid shut, and he must suffocate to death inside.

A little later the girl came and asked, like her brother: "Mother, give me an apple." Then the woman span the thread of her malice further, saying: "Go into the box room, you know the chest with the apples is in there, and take one for yourself." As the girl walks into the box room the stepmother is after her, and when she lifts up the heavy lid of the apple-chest and reaches for a shiny apple, the stepmother shoves the poor girl into the chest and slams the lid shut, and she must suffocate to death inside. Then she sat herself back down at her spinning-wheel. Late in the evening the father came in and asked: "Where are my dear children?" "They're sleeping, the urchins," said the stepmother. Then something rattled, something pecked at the window. The father looks over in amazement and sees two hail-white veil-white birds at the window, who sing:

Stepmother did us both to death;

She shut the lid of the apple-chest.

Then the woman is cut to the quick, and she falls from her stool with a single groan and is no more. In a flash she was turned into a black bird that darted wildly around in the room, and at last it flew through the window as if it wished to pursue the white birds.

There was a whirring in the father's head, and his heart broke for his dear children.