**The Feather of Finist the Falcon**

Once, in olden times, there was a merchant whose wife had died, leaving him three daughters. The eldest two were plain of face and hard of heart and cared for nothing but finery, while the youngest was a good housekeeper, kind-hearted, and so beautiful that it could neither be told in a tale nor written down with a pen.

One day, when the merchant set out for the Fair, he called his three daughters and asked: "My dear daughters, what do ye most desire me to buy for you ?" The eldest answered: "Bring me a piece of rich brocade for a gown."The second said: "Bring me a fine scarf for a shawl."But the youngest replied: "Little father, bring me only a scarlet flower to set in my window."

The two sisters laughed at her request. "Little fool, "they said, "what dost thou want of a scarlet flower ? Thou wouldst better ask for a new apron."But she paid no heed and when the merchant asked her again, she said: "Little father, buy for me only the scarlet blossom."

The merchant bade them good-bye and drove to the Fair, and whether in a short while or a long while, he came again to his house. He brought the rich brocade for the eldest daughter and the fine scarf for the second, but he quite forgot to bring the little scarlet flower. The eldest daughters were so rejoiced at their gifts that he felt sorry for his forgetfulness, and to comfort her, said to the youngest: "Never mind, I shall soon go again to the Fair, and shall bring thee a gift also. "And she answered: "It is no matter, little father; another time thou wilt remember."And while her sisters, cutting and sewing their fine stuffs, laughed at her, she was silent.

Time passed, and again the merchant made ready to go to the Fair, and calling his daughters, he asked: "Well, my daughters, what shall I buy for you ?" The eldest answered, "bring me a gold chain," and the second, "Buy me a pair of golden ear-rings;" but the third said, "Little father, I want nothing but a scarlet flower to set in my window."

The merchant went to the Fair and he bought for the eldest daughter the chain and for the second the ear-rings, but again he forgot the scarlet flower. When he resumed and the eldest two daughters took joy in their golden jewellery, he comforted the youngest as before, saying: "A simple flower is no great thing. Never mind. When I go again I shall bring thee a gift."And again she answered: "It is no matter, little father; another time perhaps I shall be luckier."

A third time the merchant made ready to go to the Fair, and called his three daughters and asked them what they most desired. The first answered, "Bring me a pair of satin shoes,"the second said, "Buy me a silken petticoat ;" but the youngest said as before, "Little father, all my desire is for the scarlet flower to set in my window."

The merchant set out to the Fair, and he purchased the pair of satin shoes and the silken petticoat, and then he bethought himself of the scarlet flower and went all about inquiring for one. But search as he might, he could find not a single blossom of that colour in the whole town, and drove home sorrowful that he must disappoint his youngest daughter for the third time.

And as he rode along wondering where he might find the flower, he met by the roadside in the forest a little old man whom he had never seen, with a hooked nose, one eye, and a face covered with a golden beard-like moss, who carried on his back a box.

"What dost thou carry, old man ?"he asked.

"In my box,"answered the old man, "is a little scarlet flower which I am keeping for a present to the maiden who is to marry my son, Finist the Falcon."

"I do not know thy son, old man,"said the merchant, "nor yet the maiden whom he is to marry. But a scarlet blossom is no great thing. Come, sell it to me, and with the money thou mayest buy a more suitable gift for the bridal."

"Nay," replied the little old man. "It has no price, for wherever it goeth there goeth the love of my son, and I have sworn it shall be his wife's."

The merchant argued and persuaded, for now that he had found the flower he was loath to go home without it, and ended by ofFering in exchange for it both the satin shoes and the silken petticoat, till at length the little old man said: "Thou canst have the scarlet flower for thy daughter only on condition that she weds my son, Finist the Falcon."

The merchant thought a moment. Not to bring the flower would grieve his daughter, yet as the price of it he must promise to wed her to a stranger.

"Well, old man,"he said, "give me the flower, and if my daughter will take thy son, he shall have her."

"Have no fear," said the little old man. "Whom my son woos, her will he wed!"and giving the box to the other, he instantly vanished.

The merchant, greatly disturbed at his sudden disappearance, hurried home, where his three daughters came out to greet him. He gave to the eldest the satin shoes and to the second the silken petticoat, and to see them they clapped their hands for delight. Then he gave to his youngest daughter the little box and said: "Here is thy scarlet flower, my daughter, but as for me, I take no joy of it, for I had it of a stranger, though it was not for sale, and in return for it I have promised that thou shalt wed his son, Finist the Falcon."

"Sorrow not, little father,"said she. "Thou hast done my desire, and if Finist the Falcon will woo me then will I wed him."And she took out the scarlet flower and caressed it, and held it close to her heart.

When night came the merchant kissed his daughters, made over them the sign of the cross and sent them each to her bed. The youngest locked herself in her room in the attic, took the little flower from its box, and setting it on the window-sill, began to smell it and kiss it and look into the dark blue sky, when suddenly in through the window came flying a swift, beautiful falcon with coloured feathers. It lit upon the floor and immediately was transformed into a young Prince, so handsome that it could not be told in speech nor written in a tale.

The Prince soothed her fright and caressed her with sweet and tender words so that she began to love him with such a joyful heart that one knows not how to tell it. They talked‹ - who can tell of what ? - and the whole night passed as swiftly as an hour in the daytime. When the day began to break, Finist the Falcon said to her: "Each evening when thou cost set the scarlet flower in the window I will come flying to thee. To-night, ere I fly away as a falcon, take one feather from my wing. If thou hast need of anything, go to the steps under the porch and wave it on thy right side, and whatsoever things thy soul desireth, they shall be thine. And when thou hast no longer need of them, wave the feather on thy left side."Then he kissed her and bade her farewell, and turned into a falcon with coloured feathers. She plucked a single bright feather from his wing and the bird flew out of the window and was gone.

The next day was Sunday and the elder sisters began to dress in their finery to go to church. '. What wilt thou wear, little fool ? "they said to the other. "But for thy scarlet flower thou mightst have had a new gown, instead of disgracing us by thy appearance."

"Never mind,"she said; "I can pray also here at home."And after they were gone she sat down at her attic window watching the finely-dressed people going to Mass. When the street was empty, she went to the steps under the porch and waved the bright feather to the right side, and instantly there appeared a crystal carriage with high-bred horses harnessed to it, coachmen and footmen in gold livery, and a gown embroidered in all kinds of precious stones. She dressed herself in a moment, sat down in the carriage, and away it went, swift as the wind, to the church.

When she entered, so beautiful she was that all the people turned to look at her. "Some high-born Princess has come !" they whispered to each other; and in her splendid gown and head-dress even her two sisters did not recognize her as the one they had left in her little attic room. As soon as the choir began to sing the Magnificat she left the church, entered the crystal carriage and drove off so swiftly that when the people flocked out to stare there was no trace of her to be seen. As soon as she reached home she took off the splendid gown and put on her own, went to the porch, waved the bright feather to the left side and the carriage and horses, the coachmen in livery and the splendid gown disappeared, and she sat down again at her attic window.

When the elder sisters returned, they said:

"What a beauty came to-day to church ! No one could gaze enough at her. Thou, little slattern, shouldst have seen her rich gown ! Surely she must have been a Princess from some other Province !"

Now so hastily had she changed her clothes that she had forgotten to take out of her hair a diamond pin, and as they talked her sisters caught sight of it. "What a lovely jewel !" they cried enviously. "Where didst thou get it ?" And they would have taken it from her. But she ran to her attic room and hid it in the heart of the scarlet flower, so that though they searched everywhere they could not find it. Then, filled with envy, they went to their father and said: "Sir, our sister hath a secret lover who has given her a diamond ornament, and we doubt not that she will bring shame upon us." But he would not hear them and bade them look to themselves.

That evening when all went to bed, the girl set the flower on the window-sill, and in a moment Finist the Falcon came flying in and was transformed into the handsome Prince, and they caressed one another and talked together till the dawn began to break.

Now the elder sisters were filled with malice and spite and they listened at the attic door hoping to find where she had hidden the diamond pin, and so heard the voices. They knocked at the door, crying: "With whom cost thou converse, little sister ?"

"It is I talking to myself,"she answered.

"If that is true, unlock thy door,"they said.

Then Finist the Falcon kissed her and bade her farewell, and turning into a falcon, flew out of the window and she unlocked the door.

Her sisters entered and looked all about the room, but there was no one to be seen. They went, however, to their father and said: "Sir, our sister hath a shameless lover who comes at night into her room. Only just now we listened and heard them conversing."He paid no heed, however, but chided them and bade them better their own manners.

Each night thereafter the spiteful pair stole from their beds to creep to the attic and listen at the door, and each time they heard the sound of the loving talk between their sister and Finist the Falcon. Yet each morning they saw that no stranger was in the room, and at length, certain that whoever entered must do so by the window, they made a cunning plan. One evening they prepared a sweet drink of wine and in it they put a sleeping powder and prevailed on their sister to drink it. As soon as she did so she fell into a deep sleep, and when they had laid her on her bed, they fastened open knives and sharp needles upright on her window-sill and bolted the window.

When the dark fell, Finist the Falcon same flying to his love, and the needles pierced his breast and the knives cut his brilliant wings, and although he struggled and beat against it, the window remained closed. "My beautiful dearest," he cried, "hast thou ceased so soon to love me". Never shalt thou see me again unless thou searches"through three times nine countries, to the thirtieth Tzardom, and thou shalt first wear through three pair of iron shoes. and break in pieces three iron staves, and gnaw away three holy church-loaves of stone. Only then shalt thou find thy lover, Finist the falcon !" But though through her sleep she heard tbese bitter words, still she could not awaken and at last the wounded Falcon, hearing no reply, shot up angrily into the dark sky and flew away.

In the morning, when she awoke, she saw how the window had been barred with knives set cross-wise, and with needles, and how great drops of crimson blood were falling from them, and she began to wring her hands and to weep salt tears. "Surely," she thought, "my cruel sisters have made my dear love perish !' When she had wept a long time she thought of the bright feather, and ran to the porch and waved it to the right, crying: "Come to me, my own Finist the Falcon !" But he did not appear, and she knew that the charm was broken.

Then she remembered the words she had heard through her sleep, and telling no one, she went to a smithy and bade the smith make her three pair of iron shoes, and three iron staves, and with these and three church - loaves of stone, she set out across three times nine countries to the thirtieth Tzardom.

She walked and walked, whether for a short time or a long time the telling is easy but the journey is not soon done. She wandered for a day and a night, for a week, for two months and for three. She wore through one pair of the iron shoes, and broke to pieces one of the iron, staves, and gnawed away one of the stone church-loaves, when, in the midst of a wood which grew always thicker and darker, she came to a lawn. On the lawn was a little hut on whose door-step sat a sour-faced old woman.

"Whither cost thou hold thy way, beautiful maiden ?"asked the old woman.

"O grandmother,"answered the girl, "I beg for thy kindness ! Be my hostess and cover me from the dark night I am searching for Finist the bright Falcon, who was my friend."

"Well," said the dame, "he is a relative of mine; but thou wilt have to cross many lands still to find him. Come in and rest for the night. The morning is wiser than the evening."

The old woman gave the girl to eat and drink, a portion of all God had given her, and a bed to sleep on, and in the morning when the dawn began to break, she awoke her. "Finist, who flies as the falcon with coloured feathers,"she said, "is now in the fiftieth Tzardom of the eightieth land from here. He has recently proposed marriage to a Tzar's daughter. Thou mayest, perhaps, reach there in time for the wedding-feast. Take thou this silver spindle; when thou usest it, it will spin thee a thread of pure gold. Thou mayest give it to his wife for a wedding gift. Go now with God across three times nine lands to the house of my second cousin. I am bad-tempered but she is worse than I. However, speak her fair and she may direct thee further."

The girl thanked the old woman and bidding her farewell, set out again, though with a heavier heart, on her journey. She walked and walked, whether for a short time or a long time, across green steppe and barren wilderness, until at length, when a second pair of iron shoes were worn through, a second staff broken to pieces and a second stone church-loaf gnawed away, she came one evening, on the edge of a swamp, to a little hut on whose doorstep sat a second old woman, sourer than the first.

"Whither goest thou, lovely girl?"asked the dame.

"O grandmother,"she answered, "grant me thy kindness. Be my hostess and protect me from the dark night. I seek my dear friend, who is called Finist the Falcon, whom my cruel sisters wounded and drove from me."

"He is a relative of mine,"said the old woman, "but thou wilt have to walk many versts further to find him. He is to marry a Tzar's daughter and to-day is her last maiden feast. But enter and rest. The morning is wiser than then evening."

The old woman put food and drink before her and gave her a place to sleep. Early on the morrow she woke her. "Finist the Falcon,"she said, "lives in the fiftieth land fro~n here. Take with thee this golden hammer and these ten little diamond nails. When thou usest them, the hammer will drive the nails of itself. If thou chooses"thou mayest give them to his wife for a wedding-gift. Go now with God to the house of my fourth cousin. I am crabbed but she is more ill-tempered than I. However, greet her with politeness and perhaps she will direct thee further. She lives across three times nine lands, beside a deep river."

The girl took the golden hammer and the ten little diamond nails, thanked the old woman and went on her way. She walked a long way and she walked a short way, and at last, when the third pair of iron shoes were worn through, and the third iron staff broken to pieces, and the third stone church-loaf gnawed away, she came, in a dark wood where the tops of the trees touched the sky, to a deep river and on its bank stood a little hut, on whose door-step sat a third old woman, uglier and sourer than the other two put together

"Whither art thou bound, beautiful girl ?"asked the dame.

"O grandmother,"she answered, "grant me a kindness. Be my hostess and shield me from the dark night! I go to find Finist the Falcon, my dearest friend, whom my sisters pierced with cruel needles and knife-blades, and drove away bleeding."

"He is a relative of mine,"said the old woman, "and his home is not very far from here. But come in and rest this night; the morning is wiser than the evening."

So the girl entered and ate and drank what the old woman gave her, and slept till daybreak, when the other woke her and said: "Finist the Falcon with coloured feathers is now in the next Tzardom from here, beside the blue sea-ocean, where he stays - at the Palace, for in three days he is to marry the Tzar's daughter. Go now with God and take with thee this golden saucer and this little diamond ball. Set the ball on the plate and it will roll of itself. Mayhap thou wilt wish to give them as a wedding-gift to his bride."

She thanked the old woman and started again on her way, and in the afternoon she came to the blue sea-ocean spreading wide and free before her, and beside it she saw a Palace with high towers of white stone whose golden tops were glowing like fire. Near the Palace a black serving-wench was washing a piece of cloth in the sea, whose waves it tinged with red, and the girl said: "What is it thou dost cleanse ?"

The servant answered: "It is a shirt of Finist the Falcon, who in three days will wed my mistress, but it is so stained with blood that I can by no means make it clean." The girl thought, "It is a garment my beloved wore after he was so cruelly wounded by the knives in my window!" And taking it from the other's hands, she began to weep over it, so that the tears washed away every stain and the shirt was as white as snow.

The black serving-woman took the shirt back to the Tzar's daughter, who asked her how she had so easily cleansed it, and the woman answered that a beautiful maiden, alone on the sea-sand, had wept over it till her tears had made it white. "This is, in truth, a remarkable thing," said the Tzar's daughter; " I would see this girl whose tears can wash away such stains." And summoning her maids and nurses and attendants, she went walking along the shore.

Presently she came where the merchant's daughter sat alone on the soft sand gazing sorrowfully out over the blue sea-ocean, and she accosted her and said: "What grief hast thou that thy tears can wash away blood ?"

"I grieve,"answered the girl, "because I so long to see the beautiful Finist the Falcon."

Then the Tzar's daughter, being very prideful, tossed her head, saying: "Is that all ? Go to the Palace kitchen, and I will let thee serve there; perchance as payment thou mayest catch a glimpse of him as he dines."

So the merchant's daughter entered the Palace and was given a humble place among the servants, and when Finist the Falcon sat him down to dine, she put the food before him with her own hands. But he, moody and longing for his lost love, sat without raising his eyes and never so much as saw her or guessed her presence.

After dinner, sad and lonely, she went out to the sea-beach and sitting down on the soft sand, took her little silver spindle and began to draw out a thread. And in the cool of the evening the Tzar's daughter, with her attendants, came walking there and seeing that the thread that came from the spindle was of pure gold, said to her: "Maiden, wilt thou sell me that plaything ?"

"If thou wilt buy it at my price,"answered the girl.

"And what is thy price?"asked the Tzar's daughter.

"Let me sit through one night by the side of thy promised husband."said the girl.

Now the Tzar's daughter was cold and deceitful, and desired Finist the Falcon, not because she loved him, but because of his beauty and her own pride. "There can be no harm in that,"she thought, "for I will put in his hair an enchanted pin, by reason of which he will not waken, and with the spindle I can cover myself and my little mother with gold." So she agreed, and that night when Finist the Falcon was asleep, she put in his hair the enchanted pin, brought the girl to his room, and said: "Give me now the spindle, and in return thou mayest sit here til1 daybreak and keep the flies from him."

All night the girl bent over the bed where the handsome youth lay sleeping, and wept bitter tears. "Awake and rise, Finist, my bright Falcon,"she cried. "I have come at last to thee. I have left my little father and my cruel sisters, and I have searched through three times nine lands and a hundred Tzardoms for thee, my beloved!" But Finist slept on and heard nothing, and so the whole long night passed away.

And with the dawn came the Tzar's daughter and sent the girl back to the kitchen, and she took away the enchanted pin so that Finist the Falcon should awaken.

When he came from his chamber, the Tzar's daughter said to him: "Hast thou rested well, and art thou refreshed ?"

He answered: "I slept, but it seemed to me that someone was beside me all night, weeping and lamenting and beseeching me to awaken, yet I could not arouse myself, and because of that my head is heavy."

And she said: "Thou wert but dreaming ! No one has been beside thee !" So Finist the Falcon called for his horse and betook himself to the open steppe a-hunting.

As it happened before, so it befell that day also. Finist the Falcon had no eyes for the girl who waited on him at table, and in the evening, sad and sorrowful, she went out to the blue sea-ocean, and sitting down on the soft sand, took out the golden hammer and the ten diamond nails and began to play with them. A little later the Tzar's daughter, with her maids and attendants, came walking along the beach, and seeing how the hammer drove the nails by itself, coveted the plaything and desired to buy it.

"It shall be thine,"said the girl, "if thou wilt pay me my price."

"And what is the price ?" asked the Tzar's daughter.

"Let me watch a second night beside the bed of thy promised husband."

"So be it,"said the Tzar's daughter; and that night, after Finist the Falcon had fallen asleep, she put into his hair the enchanted pin, so that he could not waken, and brought the girl to his room. "Give me, now, the golden hammer and the diamond nails," she said, "and thou mayest keep the flies from him till day-dawn."

So that night too the merchant's daughter leaned over her beloved through the long dark hours, weeping and crying to him: "Finist my love, my bright Falcon, awake and speak to me ! I have come at last to thee ! I have journeyed to the fiftieth Tzardom of the eightieth land, and have washed the blood from thy shirt with my tears !" But because of the enchanted pin Finist could not waken, and at daybreak the girl was sent back to her place in the kitchen.

When Finist came from his chamber, the Tzar's daughter said: "Hast thou slept soundly, and art thou refreshed ?"

He replied: "I slept, but it seemed to me that one I loved well bent over me, shedding bitter tears and begging me to arise, yet I could not wake. And because of this my own heart is heavy."

And she said: "It was but a dream that today's hunting will make thee speedily forget. No one was near thee while thou didst sleep." So Finist the Falcon called for his horse and rode to the open steppe.

That day the merchant's daughter wept and was exceeding sorrowful, for on the morrow Finist the Falcon was to be wed. "Never again shall I have the love of my bright falcon,"she thought. "Never more, because of my cruel sisters, may I call him to me with the little scarlet flower in my window !"When evening came, however, she dried her tears, sat down for a third time on the soft sand by the blue sea-ocean, and taking out the golden plate, set the diamond ball upon it. That evening also the Tzar's daughter, with her serving-women, came walking on the beach, and as soon as she saw how the little diamond ball was rolling, rolling of itself, she coveted it and said: "Wilt thou sell these also for the same price thou didst ask for thy other playthings ?"

"Thou shalt have them,"answered the merchant's daughter, "for the same price. Let me only sit through this third night by the side of thy promised husband."

"What a fool is this girl !" thought the Tzar's daughter. "Presently I shall have al1 her possessions and Finist the Falcon for my husband into the bargain !" So she assented gladly and when Finist the Falcon fell asleep that night, for the third time she put into his hair the enchanted pin and brought the girl into his room, bidding her give over the golden plate and the diamond ball, and keep the flies from him till daybreak.

Through that long night also the merchant's daughter bent over her loved one, weeping and crying: "Finist, my own dear, my bright falcon with coloured feathers, awake and know me! I have worn through the three pairs of iron shoes, I have broken to pieces the three iron staves, I have gnawed away the three stone church-loaves, all the while searching for thee, my love!" But by reason of the enchanted pin, although he heard through his sleep her crying and lamenting, and his heart grieved because of it, Finist the Falcon could not waken. So at length, when day-dawn was near, the girl said to herself: "though he shall never be mine, yet in the past he loved me, and for that I shall kiss him once before I go away," and she put her arms about his head to kiss him. As she did so, her hand touched the pin in his hair and she drew it out, lest by chance it harm him. Thus the spell of its enchantment was broken, and one of her tears, falling on his face, woke him.

And instantly, as he awoke, he recognized her, and knew that it was her lamenting he had heard through his sleep. She related to him all that had occurred, how her sisters had plotted, how she had journeyed in search of him, and how she had bought of the Tzar's deceitful daughter the three nights by his side in exchange for the silver spindle, the golden hammer and nails, and the diamond ball that rolled of itself. Hearing, Finist the Falcon was angered against the Tzar's daughter whom he had so nearly wed, but the merchant's daughter he kissed on the mouth, and turning into the falcon, set her on his coloured wings and flew to his own Tzardom.

Then he summoned all his princes and nobles and his officers of all ranks and told them the story, asking: "Which of these two am I to wed ? With which can I spend a long life so happily that it will seem a short one: with her who would deceitfully sell my hours for playthings, or with her who sought me over three times nine lands ? Do ye now discuss and decide."

And all cried with one voice: "Thou shouldst leave the seller of thy rest and wed her who did follow thee !"

And so did Finist, the bright falcon with coloured wings.