

## Habetrot the Spinstress

In days bygaen, in an auld steidin bi the wattirsyde neirhaund Selkirk, thare bade a bonnie quyne cawed Mysie. Heich an strecht wes Mysie, weill set up wi growthie broun hair an blue een, an she wes the brawest lass in the haill glen. An she wes that winsum in hir weys, a bodie wad hae thocht she wad hae been the pryde o hir mither's hert.

But for aw, hir mither uised ti sech an shak hir heid whanever she luikit at hir. This wes kis in thae days, men war mair mensefu nor thay ir nou. Insteid o courtin bonnie lassies for ti be thair guidwyfes, thay war ay on the luikoot for steirin, eydent quynes that coud cuik an spin an be content wi tyauvin an dargin frae mornin til nicht.

Mysie's, mither hae been an eydent maid hirsell, but Ai, hir dochter didna tak eftir hir ava, an this gied hir monie a sair hert! The lassie lykit aye ti be ootby huntin butterflies an pouin wyld flouers, ferr better nor sittin kempin at hir spinnin wheel. Sae whan hir mither saw ane eftir anither o Mysie's fiers, that warnae sae bonnie as she wes, finndin an yokkin weill-daein, wycelyke men, she secht an said:

“Wae's me, bairn! Ah dout nae braw wooer wul ever cum chappin at oor hous dure, whan thay ken ye ir sae fekless.”

But Mysie juist leuch at siclyke remerks. In the hinner end, hir mither becam richt roused at hir, an ae bricht Spring mornin, she laid doun thrie heids o lint on the taibil heid an said, gey nippitlyke:

“Ah'l pit up wi this nae mair. Fowk wul say it's ma blame nae man ever cums seekin ye/ Ah cannae hae ye left on ma haunds ti be laucht at as a fekless limmer that nae man wad mairrie. Ah'l no aye he here ti serr yue, sae nou ye maun wurk, ye slouthfu cuttie! Ye hae juist the thrie days ti spin thir heids o lint inti seivin hanks o threid, an gin thay'r no duin in tyme, Ah'l gang owre, sae Ah wul, ti speak wi the Halie Mither at St. Mary's Convent, an thare ye wul gang for ti lairn ti be a nun.

Nou Mysie didna lyke the soun o this at aw. The lest thing she wantit wes ti be shut up in a nunnerie, sae she sat doun wi hir roke an tryit no ti think on the sunshein ootby.

But Ai, she wes sae littil uised wi darg that she never gat oot the bit, an for aw she sat at the wheel aw day, an never aince gaed owre the hous dure, she fand bi the forenicht, she haed spun nae mair not hauf a hank o yairn.

The neist day it wes a sicht waur, for hir airms war that sair tyauvin, she coud haulie wurk at aw. That nicht, she grat hirsell ti sleep at the thocht o hirsell as a nun cled in blek, mummlin awa til hirsell, an the neist mornin, kennin she hae nae chance o feinishin hir speil, she kuist awa the roke an ran ootby in wanhowp.

Neirhaund the houss, the war a cleuch wi a wee burn at the fuit, an Mysie haed aye loued this cleuch for the monie flouers that grew thare. Sae she ran doun ti the wattirsyde an plankit doun on a stane. It wes the graundest mornin; the hazel trees war new cuivert wi leafs an the fulyerie daunst owre hir heid agin the blue lift abuin. The Mey flouers an sweet-scentit violets, keikit oot frae among the gress, an a wee wattir-waggie cam an lichtit on a stane in the middil o the burn an babbitt up an doun at hir, as mukkil as ti say:

“Never you heed, Mysie, birk up!”

But the-day, the puir lassie wes in nae fettil ti enjoy the flouers an the birds. An insteid o watchin thaim, as she did forordnar, she dernt hir face in hir haunds an wunnert whit wad becum o hir. An she sat thare an sweyed back an forrit an thoct hou fearsom it wad be.gin hir mither did as she haed thraetent, an shut hir up in the Convent o St. Mary, alang wi the fauch-faced sisters, that aw luikit lyke thay hae never kent whit it wes lyke ti be yung among the Spring flouers.

“Ai, Ah coud never dae it, Ah coudna dae it!” she cryit oot. It wad be the daith o me ti be a nun.”

An whae the mischief ettils ti mak a wallie lass lyke ye intil a nun?” spiert an unco squekkie vyce nearhaund hir.”

Up Mysie banged, an stuid goavin afore hir, fair dumfounert, for juist owre the burn frae whaur she haed been sittin, the war this byordnar gret yukkie stane, wi a roun hole in the mids o it, no unlyke a mukkil aipil wi the runt taen oot. Mysie kent this stane weill. She hae aften suttin doun on it, but she haed never seen the hole afore an wunnert hou it cam ti be thare.

Smaw wunner that Mysie goaved, for sittin on this stane wes the drollest littil auld wumman she haed ever seen in aw hir days. Atweill, an it haedna been for hir siller hair an the whyte mutch wi the freil she wure on hir heid, Mysie wad hae taen hir for a wee bit lassie, she wure sic a droll cuttie skirt raxin nae ferrer nor hir knees.

Hir gizz, inby the freil o hir mutch, wes roun, an hir chowks war rosie, an she haed wee curnie een that skinkilt cantie lyke as she regairdtr the stertilt maid. About hir shouthers wes a blek-an-whyte, chekkit shawl, an on hir legs, hingin owre the syde the stane, she wure blek stockins an the naetest wee shuin, wi gret siller bukkils.

She haed a richt auld-farrant style aboot hir an she wad hae been a rael bonnie auld leddie, haed it no been for hir lips, that war verra lang an unco sonsie. This made hir gey ugsum, for aw hir rosie chowks an sheinin blek een. Mysie stuid an luikit at hir Athout aunserin hir for sic a lang whyle, the leddie spiert at hir again:

“An whae ettils ti mak a wallie lassie lyke ye intil a nun? Mair lyke sum braw callant wad want ti mak a bryde o ye.”

“Ai, Ah div wush that wes true,” aunsert Mysie. “But ma mither says nae wycelyke callant wad luik the road o me kis Ah canna spin.”

“Haivers!” said the wee wumman. “The spinnin is aw verra weill for auld bodies lyke masell---ma lips, as ye see, is lang an ugsum wi aw the spinnin Ah hae duin, for Ah aye weit ma fingirs wi thaim, the better ti draw the threid frae the roke. Na, Na, you tak care o yeir bewtie whyle it lests, bairn! Dinna you waste it owre the spinnin wheel for fear ye turn lang-lippit lyke masell, or in onie dreich nunnerie, for that maitter!”

“Gin ma mither onlie thocht lyke you,” aunsert the lassie, waelyke, an taen on wi the leddie’s innerlie face, she suin telt hir the haill thrain.

“Weill,” said the auld wyfe, “an the’r ae thing Ah cannae byde it is for ti see a bonnie lassie greit. Whit gin Ah wes ti help ye, an spin yeir lint for ye?”

Mysie thocht this offer wes owre guid ti be true, but hir new frein bad hir rin hame an fesh the lint, an Ah can tell ye, she didnae want onie saicont tellin.

It wesnae lang or she wes back haundin the heids o lint ti the wee wumman, an she wes juist about ti spier whaur she nicht tryst hir ti pick up the threid whan it wes spun, whan she haird a sudden dird ahint hir. She gliskit owre hir shouther, but the war naething thare, an whan she luikit back again, the wee wumman haed santit awa, lint an aw.

She luikit aw airts, but she wes naewhaur ti be seen. Mysie wes fair dumfounert, an wunnert whuther or no she haed been in a dwam. But thare on the grund war hir ain fuitmerks up the bank an doun the bank, whaur she’d gaen for the lint an brocht it back again.

Whit wes she ti dae nou? Whit wad hir crabbit mither say whan she haed ti tell hir that no onlie haed she no feinisht hir speil, but haed tint maist o the lint inti the bergain. She didnae daur think, sae she stourit up an doun huntin amang the busses bi the burnsyde an luikit awroads whaur the auld wumman nicht hae dernt hirsell. But it wes aw for naething, an hinnerlie, forfochen wi rinnin about, she sat doun on hir stane aince mair, an in a wee whyle, she dovert aff an fell sound asleep.

Whan she waukent, it wes the forenicht an Causlain, the gloamin stern, wes skinklin in the lift. The sun haed gaen doun an she watcht the yallae lowe in the wast dwyne in the siller licht o the heizin muin. She wes sittin thare hir lane, thinkin on whitna byordnar day it haed been, an goavin at the mukkil stane owre the burn, whan she fancied she haird the souchin o vyces cummin frae it.

Wi ae lowp she wes owre the burn an spraucht up onti the stane. Richt aneuch, sumbodie wes yammerin ablo the stane ferr doun anaith the grund. She laid hir lug til the stane an listent. An here did she no hear the vyce o the wee droll auld wumman cummin up throu the hole?

“Ai, littil dis ma bonnie wee lass on the braeheid ken, ma name is Habetrot.!”

Fou o wunner, Mysie pat hir ee ti the hole an keikit doun, an she saw the maist unco sicht she haed ever seen in aw hir leevin days. Doun ablo the grund it wes lyke the war a byuss wee glen. The trees thare war brichter an greener nor onie she haed seen afore, an the war a rowth o braw ootlin flouers, different awthegither frae the anes that grew in hir ain kintrie. The grund in this glen wes aw cuivert wi saft brounie-gray fog, an thare wes hir wee frein, eydent at hir spinnin.

But she wesnae hir lane nou, for she wes rinkit round wi ither wee auld weimen, ilkane sittin on a mukkil whyte colladie stane, aw spinnin awa for aw thay war wurth. Whyles, ane wad luik up, an syne Mysie coud see that thay aw haed the same lang, sonsie, ugsum lips as hir frein. An she felt rael vext for thaim, as thay aw seemed kyndlyke innerlie bodies, an nicht even hae been bonnie athout this sair smitch.

Ane o the spinstresses sat bi hirsell, an wes eydent rowin the threid that the ithers haed spun, inti hanks. Mysie thocht this wumman didnae luik sae couthie as the lave. She hae gray een lyke a gled, a mukkil cleik o a neb on hir an gret horn glesses. As she rowed she countit:

“Ae cribbie, twae cribbie, haith cribbie thou’s ane, ae cribbie, twae cribbie, haith cribbie thou’s twae.”

An sae she gaed on or she haed countit cut, hank an slip. Seeminlie, she wes cawed Scantlie Mab, for Mysie haird Hebetrot caw hir this, tellin hir ti hoy on an rowe up the threid, for the day wes weirin on, an it wes the tyme it wes reddie for the yung quyne ti cairrie hame til hir mither.

Mysie haurlie kent whit ti dae neist, or whit wey she wes ti git the threid, an she didnae lyke ti cry doun the hole for fear the unco, wee auld wumman wad be roused at be-in watcht. Houanever, Habetrot, as she haed cawed hirsell, kythed at aince on the pad asyde hir, wi the hanks o threid in hir haund.

“Ai, thank ye, thank ye!” cryit Mysie. “Whit can Ah dae ti shaw ye hou mukkil obliedged Ah im?”

“Naething ava,” aunsert the fairie, “for Ah wurk nae for siller, but nou that ye hae fund oot ma name, ye maunna tell yeir mither whae spun the threid for ye.”

It wes nou late on, an Mysie lost nae tyme in rinnin hame wi the praiCIUSS threid owre hir shouther. But whan she gaed intil the kitchen, she fand hir mither haed gaen til hir bed. Seeminlie she hae been gey thrang that day, for thare, hingin up in the lum ti dry, war seivin mukkil blek puddens.

The ingil wes doun, but bricht an clear, an the sicht o it an the blek puddens brocht it inti Mysie's heid that she wes richt hungirie, an that birselt blek puddens war rael guid. Sae she flang the threid doun on the taibil heid, poued aff hir shuin sae as no ti wauken hir mither, taen doun ane o the blek puddens frae the lum, fryit it in the skirlin pan an gollopt it up. Aye she wes hungirie, sae she taen anither pudden, syne anither, or thay war aw gaen doun the reid brae. Syne, fou o blek puddens, she crap up the stairs lyke a shy mouss til hir bed an fell soond asleep.

The neist mornin, hir mither cam doun the stair afore Mysie wes wauken. She haed pitten in a gey sleepless nicht thinkin aboot hir dochter's feckless weys, an haed been makkin up hir mynd no ti pit aff onie langir in speakin ti the Abbess o St Mary's, aboot hir slouter o a lassie.

Whitna fleg she gat ti see the seivin braw hanks o threid on the taibil heid an ti finnd oot that aw the blek puddens hingin at the lum haed been etten. She didna richt ken whuther ti lauch kis hir dochter haed been sae eydent, or ti greit that hir stowe o blek puddens, that she haed expekkit ti serr a fortnicht or mair, wes gaen. An she wes that dumfounert, that for a whyle, she stachert aboot singin:

“Ma dochter's spun seivin, seivin,  
an she's etten seivin, seivin, seivin  
an aw afore dawin.”

Nou no ferr frae whaur the auld ferm steidin stuid, the war a braw Castel, whaur bade a walthie yung laird. Forby haein rowth o sillar, he wes weill-daein an innerlie, an aw the mithers wi wycelyke dochters in thir pairts, uist ti grein that he wad cum seekin thaim. But he never luikit the road o onie o thaim, an awbodie said:

“Ah dout he is owre grund awthegither, ti mairrie a kintrie lass wi the wellington buits never aff hir feet. Ae day he'l up an awa til Edinburrie ti finnd sum mair genteil-lyke quyne.”

Weill this verra mornin, this laird's naig haed kuist a shae, an he stertit ti ryde it along the saft gress bi the syde o the caussie ti the smiddie. Juist as he wes gaun past Mysie's gairden yett, oot cam hir mither, liltin hir unco lynes:

“Ma dochter's spun seivin, seivin, seivin,  
an she's etten seivin, seivin seivin,  
an aw afore dawin.”

Sae he reined up his horse an said, “Guid day ti ye Mistress. Micht Ah spier whit gars ye sing sic a byordnar sang?”

Mysie's mither wes a thing blate at the sicht o the laird, sae she made nae aunser, but turnt an gaed back inti the hous. Houanever, the yung laird wes bentset on kennin whit the sang meant, sae he hung his reins owre the gairden yett an follaed hir inti the hous. She pyntit ti the seivin hanks o threid on the taibil heid an said:

“Ma dochter, Mysie, feinisht thir afore dawin this mornin.”

Syne the callant spiert ti meet the maid that wes sae eydent, an hir mither gaed an poued hir oot frae ahint the dure whaur she haed dernt hirsell whan the streinger cam in. She luikit sae bonnie in hir caller blue mornin gown, wi hir croun o broun hair buskin hir brou, that the laird fair tint his hert at the sicht o hir, an fell in luiv wi hir at aince.

He wesnae a man ti pit aff tyme an, “Ai”, said he, “ma mither aye telt me ti try ti finnd a wyfe that wes baith bonnie an uissfu, but yeir dochter is better as oniething Ah ever expekkit. Mistress, lat oor mairriage tak place as suin as ever ye lyke!”

Mysie’s mither wes fair owre the muin at this, an set tae, ti mak awthing reddie for the waddin, but Mysie heirsell wes fasht. She wes feart she wad be expekkit ti spin a lot eftir she wes mairrit an bydin at the Castel, for she kent hir man wad suin finnd oot she wesnae as guid a spinstress as he thocht she wes.

Vext in hir mynd, she gaed down the nicht afore hir waddin ti the mukkil stane bi the burn in the cleuch, laid hir heid agin the stane an cryit saftlie down the hole: “Habetrot, it ye thare?”

The wee auld wumman suin kythed, an wi skinklin een, spiert at hir whit ailed hir juist whan she soud hae been sae blyth. Sae Mysie telt hir whit wes fashin hir.

“Never you bather yeir bonnie heid aboot that!” aunsert the fairie, “but cum you here wi yeir man neist week, whan the muin is ful, an Ah’s warrant he wul never ask ye ti sit at a spinnin wheel again.”

Aweill, whan the waddin feast wes owre an the perr haed settilt down thegither at the Castel, as suin as the muin wes ful, Mysie telt hir man she wad lyke fyne gin thay wad hae a dander thegither in the muinlicht. She wes fain ti see whit the wee fairie wad dae for ti help hir, for that verra day, hir man haed gien hir a braw new spinnin-wheel wrocht in ebony, that haed been aucht his mither, an telt hir:

“The-morn, Guidwyfe, Ah sal fesh ye a hantil lint frae the toun, an syne the girzies wul aw see whit smert wee fingirs thair new mistress haes.”

Mysie haed flusht up an felt seik at hert whan she saw the wheel an haird thir wurd, an wunnert til hirsell whit she wad dae gin Habetrot didnae help hir. Sae eftir thay haed stertit thair dander, she said she haed a notion ti gang an see the burn bi the licht o the muin. Sae down ti the cleuch thay gaed. As suin as thay cam ti the mukkil stane, Mysis laid hir lug agin it an whuspert: “Habetrot, ir ye thare?” an in a glisk, the wee auld wumman stuid afore hir.

She boued in a genteil-lyke wey, lyke thay war streingers til hir, an said: “Walcum til the Spinsters’ howf!” Syne she chappit on the ruit o a mukkil aik tree wi a stick she heild in hir haund, an a green dure Mysie didnae mynd o seein afore, flew open, an thay follaed the fairies throu intil the ither glen that Mysie haed seen throu the hole in the mukkil stane.

Aw the wee auld weimen war hunkert down on thair whyte chuckie stanes eydent wurkin, but thay nou kythed ferr mair ugsum nor afore, an Mysie saw that instead o weirin reid skirts an whyte mutches lyke afore, thay war nou cled in bunnets an frocks o dreich gray. An nou, instead o luikin blyth, thay aw haed faces that wad soor milk, an seemed ti be tryin ti see wha coud luiik the maist meiserabil, an wha coud ledge oot thair lang swallen lips the furthest, an thay aw wat thair fingirs, the better ti draw the threid frae the roke.

“Serrs! Whitna gruesum clekkin o ugsum auld wutches! Ah never saw the lyke!” said Mysie’s man. Juist see thae mukkil lips! Whit coud this unco wee wumman mean bi bringin a bonnie lass lyke ye ti see sic a sicht.?

An he gaed up til ane o thaim an spiert whit wey hir mou haed turnt sae ugsum. She tryit ti tell him, but aw he coud hear wes a soond lyke lyke SPIN-N-N. He askit anither ane an hir aunser soondit lyke SPAN-N-N. Syne he spiert at a third ane an hirs soondit lyke SPUN-N-N.

“Spin, span, spun,” said the laird as he gruppit Mysie bi the haund an poued hir oot throu the green dure. “Eftir this, ma mither’s spinnin wheel wul can chyngie ti gowd or Ah lat ye gang near it, gin this is whit spinnin can dae til a quyne.”

An sae it cam aboot that Mysie wes never gart spin for the lave o hir days, an thay war monie. An she spent the fek o hir tyme ootby in the caller air wi hir man, lauchin an liltin til hir hert’s content. An whanever the war lint at the Castel ti be spun, she haed nae mair adae nor cairrie it down an leave it at the mukkil stane at the burn syde, an Habetrot an hir eydent fiers span it aw for hir.

