

The Dead Wife

From the Yellow Fairy Book, Edited by Andrew Lang

Once upon a time there were a man and his wife who lived in the forest, very far from the rest of the tribe. Very often they spent the day in hunting together, but after a while the wife found that she had so many things to do that she was obliged to stay at home; so he went alone, though he found that when his wife was not with him he never had any luck. One day, when he was away hunting, the woman fell ill, and in a few days she died. Her husband grieved bitterly, and buried her in the house where she had passed her life; but as the time went on he felt so lonely without her that he made a wooden doll about her height and size for company, and dressed it in her clothes. He seated it in front of the fire, and tried to think he had his wife back again. The next day he went out to hunt, and when he came home the first thing he did was to go up to the doll and brush off some of the ashes from the fire which had fallen on its face. But he was very busy now, for he had to cook and mend, besides getting food, for there was no one to help him. And so a whole year passed away.

At the end of that time he came back from hunting one night and found some wood by the door and a fire within. The next night there was not only wood and fire, but a piece of meat in the kettle, nearly ready for eating. He searched all about to see who could have done this, but could find no one. The next time he went to hunt he took care not to go

far, and came in quite early. And while he was still a long way off he saw a woman going into the house with wood on her shoulders.

So he made haste, and opened the door quickly, and instead of the wooden doll, his wife sat in front of the fire. Then she spoke to him and said, 'The Great Spirit felt sorry for you, because you would not be comforted, so he let me come back to you, but you must not stretch out your hand to touch me till we have seen the rest of our people. If you do, I shall die.' So the man listened to her words, and the woman dwelt there, and brought the wood and kindled the fire, till one day her husband said to her, 'It is now two years since you died. Let us now go back to our tribe. Then you will be well, and I can touch you.'

And with that he prepared food for the journey, a string of deer's flesh for her to carry, and one for himself; and so they started. Now the camp of the tribe was distant six days' jour-



ney, and when they were yet one day's journey off it began to snow, and they felt weary and longed for rest. Therefore they made a fire, cooked some food, and spread out their skins to sleep.

Then the heart of the man was greatly stirred, and he stretched out his arms to his wife, but she waved her hands and said, 'We have seen no one yet; it is too soon.' But he would not listen to her, and caught her to him, and behold! he was clasping the wooden doll. And when he saw it was the doll he pushed it from him in his misery and rushed away to the

camp, and told them all his story. And some doubted, and they went back with him to the place where he and his wife had stopped to rest, and there lay the doll, and besides, they saw in the snow the steps of two people, and the foot of one was like the foot of the doll. And the man grieved sore all the days of his life.