

Sister Alyonushka and Brother Ivanushka

Once there lived an old man and his wife, and they had a daughter named Alyonushka and a son named Ivanushka.

The old man and the old woman died, and Alyonushka and Ivanushka were left all alone in the world.

Alyonushka set off to work and took her little brother with her. They had a long way to go, and a wide field to cross, and after they had been walking for a time, Ivanushka began to feel very thirsty. "Sister Alyonushka, I am thirsty," he said. "Be patient, little brother, we shall soon come to a well." They walked and they walked, and the sun was now high up in the sky, and so hot were the two that they felt very blue. They came upon a cow's hoof filled with water, and Ivanushka said: "May I drink out of the hoof, Sister Alyonushka?"

"No, little brother. If you do, you will turn into a calf." Ivanushka obeyed, and they walked on a bit farther. The sun was still high up in the sky, and the heat was so bad that they felt very sad. They came upon a horse's hoof filled with water, and Ivanushka said:

"May I drink out of the hoof, Sister Alyonushka?" "No, little brother. If you do, you will turn into a foal." Ivanushka sighed and they walked on again. They walked and they walked, but the sun was still high up in the sky, and the air was so dry that they felt they could die. They came upon a goat's hoof filled with water, and Ivanushka said:

"I am dying of thirst, Sister Alyonushka. May I drink out of the hoof?"

"No, little brother. If you do, you will turn into a kid." But Ivanushka did not heed his sister and drank out of the goat's hoof.

And the moment he did so he turned into a little white goat. Alyonushka called her brother, and instead of Ivanushka the goat came running up to her. Alyonushka burst into tears. She sat sobbing on the ground by a stack of hay while the little goat skipped round in play.

Just then a Merchant chanced to be riding by.

"What are you crying for, pretty maid?" asked he.

Alyonushka told him of her trouble.

Said the Merchant:

"Marry me, pretty maid. I will dress you in gold and silver, and the little goat will live with us."

Alyonushka thought it over and agreed to marry the Merchant.

They lived together happily, and the little goat lived with them and ate and drank with Alyonushka out of the same cup.

One day the Merchant went away from home and all of a sudden a Witch appeared out of nowhere. She stood under Alyonushka's window and begged her ever so sweetly to go and bathe in the river with her.

Alyonushka followed the Witch to the river, and when they got there the Witch fell upon Alyonushka and, tying a stone round her neck, threw her into the water and herself took on her shape. Then she put on Alyonushka's clothes and went to her house, and no one guessed she was not Alyonushka but a Witch. The Merchant came home, and even he did not guess.

Only the little goat knew what had happened. He went about with drooping head and did not touch food or drink. Morning and evening he never left the river bank and, standing at the water's edge, called:

*"Sister, dear Sister Alyonushka!
Swim out, swim out to me."*

The Witch learned of this, and she asked her husband to kill the little goat.

The Merchant was sorry for the little goat, for he had become very fond of him. But the Witch kept coaxing and wheedling so that there was nothing to be done, and he gave in at last.

"All right, you kill him then," he said.

The Witch had big fires kindled, big pots heated and big knives sharpened.

The little goat found out that he was going to be killed, so he said to the Merchant:

"Let me go to the river before I die and have a last little drink."

"Go," said the Merchant.

The little goat ran to the river, stood on the bank and cried piteously:

*"Sister, dear Sister Alyonushka!
Swim out, swim out to me.
Fires are burning high,
Pots are boiling,*

*Knives are ringing,
And I am going to die."*

And Alyonushka answered from out the river:

*"Brother, dear Brother Ivanushka!
A heavy stone lies on my shoulders,
Silken weeds entangle my legs,
Yellow sands press hard on my breast.'*

The Witch set out in search of the goat, but she could not find him, so she called a servant and said:

"Go and find the goat and bring him to me."

The servant went to the river, and what did he see but the little goat running up and down the bank, calling piteously:

*"Sister, dear Sister Alyonushka!
Swim out, swim out to me.
Fires are burning high,
Pots are boiling,
Knives are ringing,
And I am going to die."*

And from the river someone's voice called back:

*"Brother, dear Brother Ivanushka!
A heavy stone lies on my shoulders,
Silken weeds entangle my legs,
Yellow sands press hard on my breast."*

The servant ran home and told his master what he had heard and seen. The Merchant called some people together, they went down to the river and, casting a silken net, dragged Alyonushka out on to the bank. They untied the stone which was round her neck, dipped her in spring water and dressed her in bright clothes. And Alyonushka came back to life and was more beautiful than ever.

The little goat was wild with joy, he turned three somersaults, and lo and behold! He was changed into his proper shape again.

And the wicked Witch was tied to a horse's tail and the horse turned loose in an open field.