

The Silver Maiden

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Once there was a farmer's son. He was young and he was wild and often went roving away on his father's horse looking for adventure. Then one day he rode home and remained quiet. Hardly a word would he say and refused to eat. The boy's father grew concerned.

"What ails you, my son?" he asked. "Where has your life gone? I'd prefer your wild ways to this silence of yours."

But the boy didn't answer and turned his face to the wall.

Days passed. He grew thin and pale. At last the farmer called in the old woman who lived down the road. She looked at the boy and told the farmer to watch the boy at night.

That night the farmer stayed awake. He sat by his son's bedroom door and listened. Sure enough, just after midnight, he heard his son stir and climb out the window. The farmer followed.

Through the fields the boy went, following a horse path into a grove of trees. He knocked on a tree—knock! knock! knock! The tree trunk began to glow with a silvery light and out stepped a maiden. She was dressed in silver robes, with silver shoes and silver hair and, strangest of all, silver eyes. She took the boy by the hand and they wandered amongst the trees, talking quietly with each other.

The farmer saw at once that his child was entering manhood and that he'd fallen in love with this beautiful, unearthly maiden.

As the sky lightened and the stars grew dim the maiden and the boy returned to the tree. She knocked three times and stepped inside.

"What shall we do?" the farmer asked the old woman. "He is so much in love that he will die. That maiden, though beautiful, is not of this earth. He will never be able to marry her."

The old woman agreed. "Tie him to his bed," she said. "Tie him to his bed for three full nights one after the other. Then the maiden's spell will be broken and your son cured."

That night the farmer called his workmen to the house and they strapped the lad to his bed. They did this as kindly as they could, but the young man fought and wailed in despair. All night they sat at this bed and kept him company, though always he struggled and begged to be let free. As the sky grew lighter and the stars dimmed the young man stopped struggling and wept. Then he slept.

And so it was the second night.

On the third night the son again wept pitifully and begged to be freed. But when he saw that they would not unbind him he turned his pale face to the wall and died. So quietly did he die that at first they thought he had fallen asleep. Then the farmer wailed and cursed the old woman for her ill advice.

At the funeral an unknown maiden came into the church. Her head was covered with a silver veil and no one could see her face. She walked up the aisle to the coffin and laid a kiss on the boy's lips. Everyone was so astonished, and her presence so remarkable, that no one stopped her. The young man rose from the coffin looking well and radiantly happy. He took the maiden by the hand and together they left the church. No matter how hard his father searched they were never seen again.