

### **Synopsis of Fair, Brown & Trembling Folk Tale (as I Heard It Told)**

A king had three daughters: Fair, Brown and Trembling. For years, every Sunday, Fair and Brown would go to Church in very fine dresses while Trembling, who dressed in house clothes, stayed home and cooked and cleaned. Trembling was not allowed out of the house because, though the youngest, she was the most beautiful.

One Sunday, after the king had promised Fair's hand in marriage to the son of a neighboring king, an old henwife visited Trembling at the house and told her that she belonged at Church on Sundays. She offered to make the finest dress that anyone had ever seen for Trembling to wear. The henwife put on a cloak of darkness, clipped a piece of Trembling's work clothes, and transformed the piece into a beautiful white dress and a pair of green shoes. She placed a lovely bird<sup>1</sup> on Trembling's shoulder and produced a mare<sup>2</sup> with a golden saddle and bridle for Trembling to ride to Church. She instructed Trembling not to go inside the door of the Church, lest her sisters recognize her, and to leave as soon as people rose up at the end of the Mass. The Churchgoers caught only glimpses of her in the beautiful white dress at the back of Church, and she was away on her mare before she could be recognized. While Trembling was at Church, the henwife had made dinner and cleaned the house so that Trembling's absence would go unnoticed. Trembling changed into her old clothes and returned the white dress, green shoes and mare to the henwife. When the sisters returned from Church that day, they spoke on and on about the grand lady who visited the Church that day. The sisters wanted clothes and a bird exactly like those of the Grand Lady. While they were able to have white dresses and green shoes made before the next Sunday, the fabrics were inferior and no similar bird could be found anywhere.

The following Sunday, the henwife used her cloak of darkness to change a piece of Trembling's work clothes into the finest black satin dress and red shoes. She produced a glossy black mare and a silver saddle and bridle. The people at Church were more astonished than ever at their glimpses of the Grand Lady, and again, she was away before she could be recognized. The sisters, when they returned home after Church, spoke on and on about how every man in the Church wanted to meet the grand lady. Again, the sisters tried to copy the grand lady's dress and shoes, but could not find the same quality fabrics.

The third Sunday, the henwife transformed a piece of Trembling's work clothes into a dress that was as red as a rose from the waist down and as white as snow from the waist up, a green cape, a hat with feathers, and beautiful shoes. She produced a white mare with blue and gold diamond spots, and a golden saddle and bridle. By this time, word had spread throughout the land about the Grand Lady, and all the princes and men of substance came to Church hoping to meet her and to ask for her hand. The Church was very crowded. One prince, the son that was to wed Fair, remained outside the church to catch the lady before she could hurry away. When Trembling tried to ride away as the people rose at the end of Mass, the prince seized her foot. The mare did not stop, and he was left with only her shoe. He set out to find the Grand Lady, vowing to fight all the other men for her hand in marriage once he found her. Many young women tried to fit a foot into the shoe; one cut off part of her toe to shrink her foot and another stuffed her stocking to expand her foot; they hurt their feet to no avail.

When the prince visited Fair, Brown and Trembling's house, Fair and Brown locked Trembling in a closet. Neither Fair nor Brown could fit a foot into the shoe. Trembling called out from the closet, and the Prince insisted that she be freed to try on the shoe. The shoe, of course, fit her foot exactly. Trembling, wanting to offer further proof, asked the Prince to wait. She visited the henwife and rode through town dressed in one of her beautiful gowns and shoes on one of her beautiful mares back to the prince. She returned to the henwife two more times for the other gowns and shoes and mares, and there was no question in the town that she was the grand lady. The prince had to fight the other princes and men for her hand.

A year after they married, Trembling and the Prince traveled to his home. Trembling gave birth to a son. As was the custom, Fair, who was still unwed, came to help care for the child. She pushed Trembling into the sea, where a giant whale swallowed Trembling whole. Fair returned to the Prince and pretended to be Trembling; he was not fooled. When he learned that a whale had swallowed Trembling, he set out to slay the whale, which he did<sup>3</sup>. Trembling was set free. The prince and Trembling had fourteen kids and died of old age.

---

<sup>1</sup> In the original telling that I heard, the henwife places a special ring on Trembling's finger; the ring is not used to identify her later in the story.

<sup>2</sup> In my interpretation, the henwife transforms Trembling's broom into the mare.

<sup>3</sup> In the original telling that I heard, from her imprisonment inside the whale, Trembling seeks help from a young cow herder along the beach to get word to the prince, and the prince shoots the whale. In my interpretation, he slays the whale with a sword. Trembling and the prince adopt the boy, and raise him along with their own children.