

The Dead Mother

By Unknown

In a certain village there lived a husband and wife—lived happily, lovingly, peaceably. All their neighbours envied them; the sight of them gave pleasure to honest folks. Well the mistress bore a son, but directly after it was born she died. The poor moujik moaned and wept. Above all he was in despair about the babe. How was he to nourish it now? how to bring it up without its mother? He did what was best, and hired an old woman to look after it. Only here was a wonder! all day long the babe would take no food, and did nothing but cry; there was no soothing it anyhow. But during (a great part of) the night one could fancy it wasn't there at all, so silently and peacefully did it sleep.

'What's the meaning of this?' thinks the old woman; 'suppose I keep awake to-night; maybe I shall find out.'

Well, just at midnight she heard some one quietly open the door and go up to the cradle. The babe became still, just as if it was being suckled.

The next night the same thing took place, and the third night too. Then she told the moujik about it. He called his kinsfolk together, and held counsel with them. They determined on this: to keep awake on a certain night, and to spy out who it was that came to suckle the babe. So at eventide they all lay down on the floor, and beside them they set a lighted taper hidden in an earthen pot.

At midnight the cottage door opened. Some one stepped up to the cradle. The babe became still. At that moment one of the kinsfolk suddenly brought out the light. They looked, and saw the dead mother, in the very same clothes in which she had been buried, on her knees beside the cradle, over which she bent as she suckled the babe at her dead breast.

The moment the light shone in the cottage she stood up, gazed sadly on her little one, and then went out of the room without a sound, not saying a word to anyone. All those who saw her stood for a time terror-struck and then they found the babe was dead.'