

Jewish Fairy Tales and Legends  
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## The Red Slipper

Rosy-red was a sweet little girl, with beautiful blue eyes, soft pink cheeks and glorious ruddy-gold hair of the tinge that artists love to paint. Her mother died the day she was born, but her grandmother looked after her with such tender care that Rosy-red regarded her as her mother. She was very happy, was Rosy-red. All day long she sang, as she tripped gaily about the house or the woods that surrounded it, and so melodious was her voice that the birds gathered on the trees to listen to her and to encourage her to continue, by daintily chirruping whenever she ceased.

Merrily Rosy-red performed all the little duties her grandmother called upon her to do, and on festivals she was allowed to wear a delightful pair of red leather slippers, her father's gift to her on her first birthday. Now, although neither she nor her father knew it, they were magic slippers which grew larger as her feet grew. Rosy-red was only a child and so did not know that slippers don't usually grow. Her grandmother knew the secret of the slippers, but she did not tell, and her father had become too moody and too deeply absorbed in his own thoughts and affairs to notice anything.

One day--Rosy-red remembered it only too sadly--she returned from the woods to find her grandmother gone and three strange women in the house. She stopped suddenly in the midst of her singing and her cheeks turned pale, for she did not like the appearance of the strangers.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I am your new mother," answered the eldest of the three, "and these are my daughters, your two new sisters."

Rosy-red trembled with fear. They were all three so ugly, and she began to cry.

Her new sisters scolded her for that and would have beaten her had not her father appeared. He spoke kindly, telling her he had married again, because he was lonely and that her step-mother and step-sisters would be good to her. But Rosy-red knew different. She hastened away to her own little room and hid her slippers of which she was very proud.

"They have turned my dear granny out of doors; they will take from me my beautiful slippers," she sobbed.

After that, Rosy-red sang no more. She became a somber girl and a drudge. The birds could not understand. They followed her through the woods, but she was silent, as if she had been stricken

dumb, and her eyes always seemed eager to be shedding tears. Also, she was too busy to notice her feathered friends.

She had to collect firewood for the home, to draw water from the well and struggle along with the heavy bucket whose weight made her arms and her back ache with pain. Sometimes, too, her white arms were scarred with bruises, for her cruel and selfish step-sisters did not hesitate to beat her. Often they went out to parties, or to dances, and on these occasions she had to act as their maid and help them to dress. Rosy-red did not mind; she was only happy when they were out of the house. Then only did she sing softly to herself, and the birds came to listen.

And thus many unhappy years passed away.

Once, when her father was away from home, her step-sisters went off to a wedding dance. They told her not to forget to draw water from the well, and warned her that if she forgot, as she did the last time, they would beat her without mercy when they returned.

So Rosy-red, tired though she was, went out in the darkness to draw water. She lowered the bucket, but the cord broke and the pail fell to the bottom of the well. She ran back home for a long stick with a hook at the end of it to recover the bucket, and as she put it into the water she sang:

Swing and sweep till all does cling  
And to the surface safely bring.

Now it so happened that a sleeping jinn dwelt at the bottom of the well. He could only be awakened by a spell, and although Rosy-red did not know it, the words she uttered, which she had once heard her granny use, were the spell.

The jinn awoke, and he was so delighted with the sweet voice that he promptly decided to help the girl whom he saw peering down into the water. He fastened the bucket to the stick and, taking some jewels from a treasure of which he was the guardian, he put them inside.

"Oh, how beautiful," cried Rosy-red when she saw the glittering gems. "They are ever so much nicer than those my sisters put on to go to the ball."

Then she sat thinking for a while and a bright idea came into her head.

"I will give these jewels to my sisters," she said. "Perhaps they will be kinder to me."

She waited impatiently until the sisters re-turned from the dance and immediately told them. For a moment they were too dazed to speak when they saw the sparkling precious stones. Then they looked meaningfully at one another and asked how she came by them. Rosy told them of the words she had sung.

"Ah, we thought so," said the sisters, to her horror. "The jewels are ours. We hid them in the well for safety. You have stolen them."

In vain Rosy-red protested. Her sisters would not listen. They beat her severely, told her to hurry off to bed, and then, snatching the bucket, they hurried off to the well. They lowered the bucket and sang the words that Rosy-red had sung. At least they thought they sang; but their voices were harsh. The sleeping jinn awoke again, but he did not like the croaking sound the sisters made.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed. "I will teach you to disturb my sleep with hideous noises and shall punish such pranks played on me. Here are some more croakers," and he filled the bucket with slimy toads and frogs.

The sisters were so enraged that they ran back home and dragged poor Rosy-red from her bed.

"You cat, you thief," screamed one.

"You cheat," exclaimed the other. "Off you go. Not another day can you remain in this house."

Rosy-red was too much taken by surprise to say anything. It was an outrage to turn her out of her father's house while he was away on a journey, but the thought came to her that she could hardly be less happy living alone in the woods.

She had only time to snatch her pretty red slippers, and as soon as she was out of sight of the house she put them on. It made her feel less miserable. The sun was now rising and when its rays shone on her she began to sing. With her old friends, the birds, twittering all about her, she felt quite happy.

On and on she walked, much farther into the woods than ever before. When she grew tired there was always a pleasant shady nook where she could rest; when she became hungry, there were fruit trees in abundance; and when she was thirsty she always came to a spring of clear, fresh water. The magic slippers guided her. All day long she wandered, and when toward evening she noticed her slippers were muddy she took them off to clean. And then darkness fell. It began to rain and she grew frightened. She crouched under a tree until she noticed a light some short distance away. She got up and walked toward it.

When quite close, she saw that the light came from a cave dwelling. An old woman came out to meet her. It was her grandmother, but so many years had passed that Rosy-red did not recognize her. Granny, however, at once knew her. "Come in, my child, and take shelter from the rain," she said kindly, and Rosy-red was only too glad to accept the invitation.

The inside of the cave was quite cosy, and Rosy-red, who was almost completely exhausted, quickly fell fast asleep. She awoke with a start.

"My pretty red slippers," she cried. "Where are they?"

She put her hand in the pocket of her tattered dress, but could only find one.

"I must have lost the other," she sobbed. "I must go out and look for it."

"No, no," said granny. "You cannot do that. A storm is raging."

Rosy-red peered out through the door of the cave and drew back in fear as she saw the lightning flash and heard the thunder rolling. She sobbed herself to sleep again, and this time was awakened by voices. She feared it might be her sisters who had discovered her hiding place and had come to drag her forcibly back home again. So she crept into a corner of the cave and listened intently.

A man was speaking.

"Know you to whom this red slipper belongs?" he was asking. "I found it in the woods."

Rosy-red was on the point of rushing out to regain her lost slipper when her granny's voice--very loud on purpose that she should hear--restrained her.

"No, no, I know not," she repeated again and again, and at length the man departed.

Granny came back into the cave and said, "I am sorry, Rosy-red, but for aught I knew, he might be a messenger from your cruel sisters; and, of course, I cannot let anyone take you back to them."

Next day, the man called again, this time with several attendants. Again, Rosy-red concealed herself.

"I am a chieftain's son, and wealthy," said the man. "I must find the wearer of this shoe. Only a graceful and beautiful girl can wear such a dainty slipper."

Rosy-red did not know whether to be more frightened or pleased, when her granny told her the man was very handsome and of noble bearing.

Day after day he came, each time with more retainers, and, finally, he arrived mounted on a richly caparisoned camel with a hundred and one followers, all mounted as he was.

"The girl I seek is here," he said. "Deny it no longer. My servants have scoured the woods and the whole neighborhood. One is prepared to swear he heard a young girl singing yesterday."

Rosy-red saw that concealment was no longer possible. She liked the man's voice, and she stepped out bravely, wearing her one slipper.

The stranger, bowing low before her, held out the other, and Rosy-red took it and put it on. It fitted perfectly.

"Many girls have tried to put on that shoe," said the young man. "but all have failed. And I have sworn to make the wearer my bride. I am a chieftain's son, and thou shalt be a princess."

So Rosy-red left the cave with her granny, and mounting a camel was led through the woods to her new home where she knew naught but happiness and the days of her sufferings were quite forgotten. And always she wore her magic red slippers.