

Rushen Coatie

An English Tale

There was once a king and a queen, as many a one has been; few have we seen, and as few may we see. But the queen died, leaving only one bonny girl, and she told her on her death-bed: "My dear, after I am gone, there will come to you a little red calf, and whenever you want anything, speak to it, and it will give it you."

Now, after a while, the king married again an ill-natured wife, with three ugly daughters of her own. And they hated the king's daughter because she was so bonny. So they took all her fine clothes away from her, and gave her only a coat made of rushes. So they called her Rushen Coatie, and made her sit in the kitchen nook, amid the ashes. And when dinner-time came, the nasty stepmother sent her out a thimbleful of broth, a grain of barley, a thread of meat, and a crumb of bread. But when she had eaten all this, she was just as hungry as before, so she said to herself: "Oh! how I wish I had something to eat." Just then, who should come in but a little red calf, and said to her: "Put your finger into my left ear." She did so, and found some nice bread. Then the calf told her to put her finger into its right ear, and she found there some cheese, and made a right good meal of the bread and cheese. And so it went on from day to day.

Now the king's wife thought Rushen Coatie would soon die from the scanty food she got, and she was surprised to see her as lively and healthy as ever. So she set one of her ugly daughters on the watch at meal times to find out how Rushen Coatie got enough to live on. The daughter soon found out that the red calf gave food to Rushen Coatie, and told her mother. So her mother went to the king and told him she was longing to have a sweetbread from a red calf. Then the king sent for his butcher, and had the little red calf killed. And when Rushen Coatie heard of it, she sate down and wept by its side, but the dead calf said:

"Take me up, bone by bone,
And put me beneath yon grey stone;
When there is aught you want
Tell it me, and that I'll grant."

So she did so, but could not find the shank-bone of the calf.

Now the very next Sunday was Yuletide, and all the folk were going to church in their best clothes, so Rushen Coatie said: "Oh! I should like to go to church, too," but the three ugly sisters said: "What would you do at the church, you nasty thing? You must bide at home and make the dinner." And the king's wife said: "And this is what you must make the soup of, a thimbleful of water, a grain of barley, and a crumb of bread."

When they all went to church, Rushen Coatie sat down and wept, but looking up, who should she see coming in limping, laming, with a shank wanting, but the dear red calf? And the red calf said to her: "Do not sit there weeping, but go, put on these clothes, and above all, put on this pair of glass slippers, and go your way to church."

"But what will become of the dinner?" said Rushen Coatie.

"Oh, do not fash about that," said the red calf, "all you have to do is to say to the fire:

"Every peat make t'other burn,

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Every spit make t'other turn,
Every pot make t'other play,
Till I come from church this good Yuleday,
and be off to church with you. But mind you come home first."

So Rushen Coatie said this, and went off to church, and she was the grandest and finest lady there. There happened to be a young prince there, and he fell at once in love with her. But she came away before service was over, and was home before the rest, and had off her fine clothes and on with her rushen coatie, and she found the calf had covered the table, and the dinner was ready, and everything was in good order when the rest came home. The three sisters said to Rushen Coatie: "Eh, lassie, if you had seen the bonny fine lady in church to-day, that the young prince fell in love with!" Then she said: "Oh! I wish you would let me go with you to the church to-morrow," for they used to go three days together to church at Yuletide.

But they said: "What should the like of you do at church, nasty thing? The kitchen nook is good enough for you."

So the next day they all went to church, and Rushen Coatie was left behind, to make dinner out of a thimbleful of water, a grain of barley, a crumb of bread, and a thread of meat. But the red calf came to her help again, gave her finer clothes than before, and she went to church, where all the world was looking at her, and wondering where such a grand lady came from, and the prince fell more in love with her than ever, and tried to find out where she went to. But she was too quick for him, and got home long before the rest, and the red calf had the dinner all ready.

The next day the calf dressed her in even grander clothes than before, and she went to the church. And the young prince was there again, and this time he put a guard at the door to keep her, but she took a hop and a run and jumped over their heads, and as she did so, down fell one of her glass slippers. She didn't wait to pick it up, you may be sure, but off she ran home, as fast as she could go, on with the rushen coatie, and the calf had all things ready.

Then the young prince put out a proclamation that whoever could put on the glass slipper should be his bride. All the ladies of his court went and tried to put on the slipper. And they tried and tried and tried, but it was too small for them all. Then he ordered one of his ambassadors to mount a fleet horse and ride through the kingdom and find an owner for the glass shoe. He rode and he rode to town and castle, and made all the ladies try to put on the shoe. Many a one tried to get it on that she might be the prince's bride. But no, it wouldn't do, and many a one wept, I warrant, because she couldn't get on the bonny glass shoe. The ambassador rode on and on till he came at the very last to the house where there were the three ugly sisters. The first two tried it and it wouldn't do, and the queen, mad with spite, hacked off the toes and heels of the third sister, and she could then put the slipper on, and the prince was brought to marry her, for he had to keep his promise. The ugly sister was dressed all in her best and was put up behind the prince on horseback, and off they rode in great gallantry. But ye all know, pride must have a fall, for as they rode along a raven sang out of a bush--

"Hackéd Heels and Pinchéd Toes
Behind the young prince rides,
But Pretty Feet and Little Feet

Behind the cauldron bides."

"What's that the birdie sings?" said the young prince.

"Nasty, lying thing," said the step-sister, "never mind what it says."

But the prince looked down and saw the slipper dripping with blood, so he rode back and put her down. Then he said, "There must be some one that the slipper has not been tried on."

"Oh, no," said they, "there's none but a dirty thing that sits in the kitchen nook and wears a rushen coatie."

But the prince was determined to try it on Rushen Coatie, but she ran away to the grey stone, where the red calf dressed her in her bravest dress, and she went to the prince and the slipper jumped out of his pocket on to her foot, fitting her without any chipping or paring. So the prince married her that very day, and they lived happy ever after.