

Búkolla and the Boy

A story from Iceland Translated in English by Hofstaðaskóli,
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Once there was a man who lived with his wife in a cottage. They had one son, but they weren't very fond of him. There were only the three of them in the cottage. The couple also had a cow, which was all their livestock. The cow was called Búkolla. One day the cow had a calf, and the woman herself sat with her while she was delivering. When the cow had calved and had recovered, the woman dashed into the house. A little later she returned to see how the cow was doing, but by then, Búkolla had disappeared. The man and his wife went out to look for the cow, and they searched for it both far and wide but to no avail. On their return, they were in a foul mood and told the boy to get out and not come within their sight again until he brought back the cow. They packed him some food for the road and gave him new shoes, and with that he set off.

He walked for a long time until he became hungry and sat down to eat. In his desperation, he said out loud, „Moo now, my dearest Búkolla, if you are alive anywhere.“ From far, far away, he heard the cow's response. Again, the boy walked for a long time before he sat down to have another bite. Then he repeated, „Moo now, my dearest Búkolla, if you are alive anywhere.“ This time he heard the cow somewhat closer than before. Once more the boy walked for a long time until he reached the brink of an enormously high precipice. Having walked up an appetite, he sat down to eat, again saying as before, „Moo now, my dearest Búkolla, if you are alive somewhere.“

The cow's response now came from right under his feet. Somehow the boy clambered down the precipice, and reaching the bottom, he saw a large cave carved out of it. He went in, and there, bound to a low partition, he found Búkolla. He untied the cow immediately, led her out, and set off back home.

The boy had gone only a small part of the way when he saw that a huge ogress was coming after him, accompanied by another smaller one. He realized at once that the big ogress, with her long strides, would catch up with him in no time, and he said, “What are we to do now, my dearest Búkolla?“. “Pick a hair from my tail, and put it on the ground,“ said the cow. He did. The the cow said to the hair, “By these words I lay the spell that you become a stream so large that no one can cross it but the bird on it's wing.“ At the very instant, the hair turned into a tremendous stream. When the ogress reached the bank of the stream, she said, “you won't get away with that, my boy.“ And she told the little ogress, “run, run home girl and get your father's big bull.“ The young one ran off and soon returned with an enormous bull, which instantly drank the whole stream.

Again, the boy feared that the ogress would overtake him very quickly because of her long strides, and he said, „What are we to do now, my dearest Búkolla?“ “Pick a hair from my tail, and put it on the ground.“ Then Búkolla said to the hair “By these words I lay the spell that you become a blaze (fire) so hot that no one can cross it but the bird on it’s wing.“ As soon as she had spoken, the hair turned into a big fire. When the ogress reached the blazing wall, she shouted, “You won’t get away with that, my boy.“ And to the smaller ogress she said, “Go get your father’s big bull, girl.“ The girl did and returned with the bull, which then urinated all the water it had drunk from the stream and thus put out the fire.

Once more, the boy saw that the ogress would catch up with him very soon because of the length of her strides, and he said, „What are we to do now, my dearest Búkolla?“ “Pick a hair from my tail, and put it in the ground,“ she said. Then, to the hair, “By these words I lay the spell that you become a mountain so big that no one can surmount it but the bird on its wing.“ The hair immediately turned into such a huge mountain that the boy could see only straight up into the sky. When the ogress came to the mountain, she roared, “You won’t get away with that, my boy.“ To the smaller ogress she said, “Go get me your father’s big drill, my girl.“ Off went the young one, returning with the drill. The ogress then bored a hole straight through the mountain. But then when she could see through it, she became a bit too rash (hasty, impulsive). She squeezed herself into the hole, which was too narrow for her, and got stuck. Finally, she turned into stone right there in the hole. And that’s where she remains to this day.

As for the boy, he reached the cottage safe and sound with his Búkolla, and the couple were quite relieved to have them both back.