

pretty, but the mirror said, "You're much more than pretty, you're lovely!"

Once the queen journeyed through the land, and she took with her, her little daughter, who was a princess. People streamed to the castle, and Karen was there too. And the little princess stood at a window, dressed in white, and showed herself; she wore neither a train nor a golden crown, but she had on lovely red morocco-leather shoes. To be sure, they were prettier by far than the ones old Mother Shoemaker had made for little Karen. After all, there was nothing in the world like red shoes!

Now Karen was old enough to be confirmed. She was given new clothes, and she was to have new shoes too. The rich shoemaker in the city measured her little foot at home in his own parlor, and there stood big glass cases full of lovely shoes and shiny boots. It was a pretty sight, but the old lady couldn't see very well, and so it gave her no pleasure. In the middle of all the shoes stood a pair of red ones, just like the shoes the princess had worn. How beautiful they were! The shoemaker said that they had been made for the daughter of an earl, but they didn't fit.

"I daresay they're of patent leather!" said the old lady. "They shine!"

"Yes, they shine!" said Karen. And they fit and they were bought, but the old lady had no idea that they were red, for she would never have permitted Karen to go to confirmation in red shoes. But that is exactly what she did.

Everybody looked at her feet, and as she walked up the aisle to the chancel it seemed to her that even the old pictures on the tombs—the portraits of parsons and parsons' wives, in stiff ruff collars and long black robes—fixed their eyes on her red shoes. And she thought only of these when the parson laid his hand upon her head and spoke of the holy baptism, of the covenant with God, and said that now she was to be a grown-up Christian. And the organ played so solemnly, and the beautiful voices of children

sang, and the old choirmaster sang. But Karen thought only of the red shoes.

By afternoon the old lady had been informed by everyone that the shoes had been red, and she said it was shameful! It wasn't done! And after this, when Karen went to church, she was always to wear black shoes, even if they were old.

Next Sunday was communion, and Karen looked at the black shoes and she looked at the red ones—and then she looked at the red ones again and put the red ones on. It was beautiful sunny weather. Karen and the old lady took the path through the cornfield, and it was a bit dusty there.

By the door of the church stood an old soldier with a crutch and a curious long beard. It was more red than white, for it was red. And he bent all the way down to the ground and asked the old lady if he might wipe off her shoes. And Karen stretched out her little foot too. "See what lovely dancing shoes!" said the soldier. "Stay put when you dance!" And then he struck the soles with his hand.

The old lady gave the soldier a shilling, and then she went into the church with Karen.

And all the people inside looked at Karen's red shoes, and all the portraits looked at them, and when Karen knelt before the altar and lifted the golden chalice to her lips, she thought of nothing but the red shoes; and it seemed to her that they were swimming about in the chalice, and she forgot to sing her hymn, forgot to say the Lord's Prayer.

Now everybody went out of the church, and the old lady climbed into her carriage. Karen lifted her foot to climb in behind her, when the old soldier, who was standing nearby, said: "See what lovely dancing shoes!" And Karen couldn't help it, she had to take a few dancing steps! And once she had started, her feet kept on dancing. It was just as if the shoes had gained control over them.



the field, over roads, over paths, and she had to keep on dancing.

One morning she danced past a door she knew well. The sound of a hymn came from inside, and they carried out a coffin decorated with flowers. Then she knew that the old lady was dead, and she felt that she had been abandoned by everyone and cursed by God's angel.

Dance she did and dance she must. Dance in the dark night. The shoes carried her off through thorns and stubble, and she scratched herself until the blood flowed; she

danced on, over the heath, to a lonely little house. She knew that the executioner lived here, and she knocked on the pane with her finger and said, "Come out! Come out! I can't come in because I'm dancing!"

And the executioner said, "You probably don't know who I am, do you? I chop the heads off wicked people, and I can feel my ax quivering!"

"Don't chop off my head," said Karen, "for then I can't repent my sin! But chop off my feet with the red shoes!"

And then she confessed all her sins, and the executioner chopped off her feet with the red shoes. But the shoes danced away with the tiny feet, over the field and into the deep forest.

And he carved wooden feet and crutches for her and taught her a hymn that sinners always sing; and she kissed the hand that had swung the ax, and went across the heath.

"Now I've suffered enough for the red shoes!" she said. "Now I'm going to church so they can see me!" And she walked fairly quickly toward the church door. But when she got there, the red shoes were dancing in front of her, and she grew terrified and turned back.

All week long she was in agony and cried many heavy tears. But when Sunday came she said: "That's that! Now I've suffered and struggled enough. I daresay I'm just as good as many of those who sit there in church putting on airs!" And then she went bravely enough, but she got no farther than the gate. Then she saw the red shoes dancing ahead of her, and she grew terrified and turned back, and deeply repented her sin.

And she went over to the parsonage and begged to be taken into service there; she would work hard and do anything she could. She didn't care about the wages, only that she might have a roof over her head and stay with good people. And the parson's wife felt sorry for her and took her into her service. And she was diligent and pen-



She danced around the corner of the church; she couldn't stop! The coachman had to run after her and grab hold of her, and he lifted her up into the carriage. But the feet kept on dancing, giving the old lady some terrible kicks. At last they got the shoes off, and the feet came to rest.

At home the shoes were put up in a cupboard, but Karen couldn't stop looking at them.

Now the old lady was ill in bed. They said she couldn't live. She had to be nursed and taken care of, and Karen was the proper person to do it. But over in the city there was a great ball. Karen had been invited. She looked at the old lady, who wasn't going to live after all, she looked

at the red shoes, and she didn't think there was anything sinful in that. She put the red shoes on, too; surely she could do that—but then she went to the ball, and then she started to dance.

But when she wanted to go to the right, the shoes danced to the left, and when she wanted to go up the floor, the shoes danced down the floor, down the stairs, through the street, and out of the city gate. Dance she did and dance she must—straight out into the gloomy forest.

Then something was shining up among the trees, and she thought it was the moon, for it was a face. But it was the old soldier with the red beard. He sat and nodded, and said, "See what lovely dancing shoes!"

Now she became terrified and wanted to throw away the red shoes, but they stayed put; and she ripped off her stockings, but the shoes had grown fast to her feet. And dance she did and dance she must, over field and meadow, in rain and sunshine, by night and by day. But the nighttime was the most horrible.

She danced into the graveyard, but the dead there didn't dance; they had something better to do than dance. She wanted to sit down on the pauper's grave where the bitter tansy grew, but there was no peace or rest for her. And when she danced over toward the open door of the church, she saw an angel there in a long white robe, with wings that reached from his shoulders down to the ground. His face was hard and grave, and in his hand he held a sword, so broad and shining.

"Dance you shall!" he said. "Dance in your red shoes until you turn pale and cold! Until your skin shrivels up like a skeleton! Dance you shall from door to door, and where there are proud and vain children, you shall knock so they will hear you and fear you! Dance you shall, dance!"

"Mercy!" cried Karen. But she didn't hear the angel's reply, for the shoes carried her through the gate, out in