Clever Grethel

There was a cook named Grethel who wore shoes with red heels, and when she went out in them, she turned this way and that, was quite cheerful, and thought, "you really are a pretty girl." And when she came home, she would drink a sip of wine out of cheerfulness, and because wine also gives an appetite for eating, she would taste the best of what she cooked until she was full, and say, "a cook must know how the food tastes."

It happened that the master once said to her, "Grethel, a guest is coming this evening; prepare two chickens nicely for me." "I'll do it, master," answered Grethel. Now she killed the chickens, scalded them, plucked them, put them on the spit, and brought them to the fire as evening approached, so that they should roast. The chickens began to turn brown and well done, but the guest had not yet come. So Grethel called to the master, "If the guest doesn't come, I'll have to take the chickens off the fire, but it's a pity and a shame if they aren't eaten soon, when they are at their best in their juices." The master said, "Then I'll just run myself and fetch the guest." When the master had turned his back, Grethel set the spit with the chickens aside and thought, "standing by the fire so long makes one sweat and thirsty; who knows when they'll come! meanwhile I'll hop down to the cellar and take a sip." She ran down, set a jug to her lips, said, "God bless you, Grethel," and took a good drink. "The wine hangs together," she said further, "and it's not good to break off," and took another serious drink. Then she went and put the chickens back over the fire, basted them with butter, and turned the spit merrily around. But because the roast smelled so good, Grethel thought, "something might be missing; it must be tasted!" She licked her finger and said, "my, how good the chickens are! it's a sin and a shame not to eat them at once!" She ran to the window to see if the master and the guest weren't coming yet, but no one was to be seen: she stood back by the chickens, thought, "one wing is burning; better I eat it off." So she cut it off and ate it, and it tasted good to her: and when she was done with that, she thought, "the other must come off too, or the master will notice something is missing." When the two wings were eaten, she went again and looked for the master, and did not see him. "Who knows," it occurred to her, "perhaps they aren't coming at all, and have stopped somewhere." So she said, "hey, Grethel, be of good cheer; one is already started, take another fresh drink, and eat it up completely; when it's all gone, you'll have peace: why should God's good gift perish?" So she ran once more to the cellar, took an honorable drink, and ate the one chicken in all joyfulness. When the one chicken was gone down, and the master still hadn't come, Grethel looked at the other and said, "where the one is,

the other must be too; the two belong together: what is right for one is fair for the other; I think if I take one more drink, it shouldn't hurt me." So she took another hearty drink, and let the second chicken follow the other.

While she was in the middle of eating, the master came walking in and called, "Hurry up, Grethel, the guest is coming right behind." "Yes, master, I'll get it ready," answered Grethel. Meanwhile the master was checking whether the table was properly set, took the big knife with which he wanted to carve the chickens, and whetted it in the hallway. Just then the guest arrived and knocked politely at the front door. Grethel ran and looked to see who it was, and when she saw the guest, she held her finger to her mouth and said, "Hush! hush! make haste that you get away again; if my master catches you, you'll be unhappy; he has indeed invited you to supper, but he has nothing else in mind than to cut off both your ears. Just listen how he is whetting the knife for that." The guest heard the whetting and hurried down the stairs as fast as he could. Grethel was not slow, ran shouting to the master and cried, "There's a fine guest you invited!" "Eh, why, Grethel? what do you mean by that?" "Well," she said, "he took both chickens, which I was just about to serve, off the dish and ran away with them." "That's fine manners!" said the master, and he was sorry for the beautiful chickens, "if only he had left me at least one, so that I would have had something to eat." He called after him that he should stay, but the guest pretended not to hear it. So he ran after him, the knife still in his hand, and shouted "just one! just one!" meaning the guest should leave him just one chicken and not take both: but the guest thought nothing else than that he should give up one of his ears, and ran as if there were fire under him, so that he might bring both home.