# Folk Tale No. 293

Once there was a nobleman; he had a kind wife and a beautiful daughter — her name was Masha. But the wife died, and he married again — a widow; she had two daughters of her own, and they were wicked, unkind! In every way they oppressed poor Masha, made her work for them, and when there was no work they made her sit by the stove and rake out the ashes; that is why Masha was always dirty and black, and they called her the girl Chernushka. Now once people began to talk that their prince wanted to marry, that there would be a great celebration, and that at that celebration he would choose a bride for himself. And so it was. The prince invited everyone; the stepmother and her daughters began to get ready, but she would not take Masha; no matter how much she begged — no and no! So the stepmother set off with her daughters for the prince's celebration, and left for her stepdaughter a whole measure of barley, flour, and soot, all mixed together, and ordered her before her return to sort it all out grain by grain, crumb by crumb.

Masha went out onto the porch and wept bitterly; two doves flew in, sorted the barley, the flour, and the soot for her, then sat on her shoulders — and suddenly a beautiful new dress appeared on the girl. "Go," said the doves, "to the celebration; only do not stay there past midnight." No sooner had Masha entered the palace than everyone stared at her; the prince himself liked her best of all, and the stepmother and her sisters did not recognize her at all. She strolled about and enjoyed herself with the other girls; she sees that midnight is near; she remembered what the doves had told her, and ran quickly home. The prince ran after her; he tried to find out who she was, but her trail had vanished!

The next day the prince had a celebration again; the stepmother's daughters fussed over their outfits and kept shouting and scolding at Masha: "Hey, girl Chernushka! Dress us, clean our dress, prepare dinner!" Masha did everything, enjoyed herself at the celebration in the evening, and went home before midnight; the prince ran after her — no, he did not catch her. On the third day he had another feast; in the evening the doves shod and dressed Masha better than before. She went to the palace, caroused, made merry, and forgot the time — suddenly midnight struck; Masha rushed to run home, and the prince had beforehand ordered the whole staircase smeared with pitch and tar. One of her shoes stuck to the pitch and remained on the staircase; the prince took it and the very next day ordered them to search for the one whose foot the shoe fit.

They went through the whole town — the shoe fit no one's foot; at last they came to the stepmother. She took the shoe and began trying it on the elder daughter — no,

it would not go on, the foot was too big! "Cut off your big toe!" the mother said to her daughter. "When you are a princess, you won't need to walk!" The daughter cut off her toe and put on the shoe; the prince's messengers wanted to take her to the palace, but the doves flew in and began to coo: "Blood on the foot! Blood on the foot!" The messengers looked — blood was flowing from the girl's shoe. "No," they said, "she won't do!" The stepmother went to try the shoe on the middle daughter, and with her it was the same.

The messengers saw Masha, told her to try it on; she put on the shoe — and at that very moment a beautiful shining dress appeared on her. The stepmother's daughters only gasped! So they brought Masha to the prince's chambers, and the next day was the wedding. When she went with the prince to the altar, two doves flew in and sat by her, one on one shoulder and the other on the other; and when they returned from the church, the doves fluttered up, rushed at the stepmother's daughters, and pecked out one eye from each. The wedding was a merry one, and I was there, I drank mead and beer, it ran down my mustache but never reached my mouth.