

SAMPLE
TRANSLATION

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THE TENTH DAUGHTER

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Fran Milčinski: The Tenth Daughter

There once lived a lord and his lady, both of whom were young, comely and rich. They had nine children, all of them girls, and they were the joy of their lives.

One day they were strolling through the grounds of their lofty castle as usual, when the lord looked in his lady's dusky eyes and said, "God grant us a tenth child," and his wife replied, "God grant us one, but this time a son instead of a daughter, because if we have a tenth daughter, ancient law says she'll have to leave home and wander the world with no hope of fortune or peace."

And indeed, it happened that she bore a tenth child, but instead of the son she had hoped for it was a daughter, their tenth daughter. They named her Alenčica.

Alenčica grew and filled out, but she was frail of body and quiet though strong-minded by nature, she didn't speak much and instead kept her thoughts to herself. On account of the misfortune that fate held in store the lord and lady felt sorry for her and loved her more than the others.

Her mother would gently cry whenever she gave her some bread. Alenčica noticed this and would ask her perplexed, "Dear mother, what is the matter? Whenever you slice bread for the others, you smile at them, but when you give it to me, you always cry softly like this?"

For a long time her mother concealed the cause of her sorrow, but when Alenčica turned fourteen she could no longer keep quiet. She burst out in tears and said to her daughter, "Why shouldn't I cry, since you're our tenth, our tenth daughter, and ancient law says you must leave home and wander the world with no hope of fortune or peace! But I won't let the world have you, my frail little girl, and if one of you has to leave home, then let it be my older daughter Marjetica instead of you. She's older, she's stronger, she'll be better able to stay on her feet all day long, and she can fend off the dogs that stray onto distant roads."

But Alenčica kept calm and was not frightened at hearing her mother's words. "If that's my fate, so be it!" she said.

Quietly she went out into the walled garden, the flowers inclining toward her as she passed, and while she was out talking to them, a tiny little bird alighted carrying a golden ring in its beak, and it dropped the ring onto Alenčica's white palm and sang, "Alenčica, tenth daughter, have your mother bake you a traveler's loaf and knead this golden ring into the dough, and when the traveler's loaf is baked golden brown, have her slice it into ten pieces,

one for each daughter, and whichever daughter gets the ring will be the tenth daughter and wander the world.”

Alenčica tried on the ring, which she liked and which fit her, she took it to her mother and faithfully relayed what the tiny little bird had told her to do. “Don’t be sad, mother,” she said. “If I’m truly meant to wander the world, I couldn’t be happy at home.”

Her mother did as instructed. She baked the traveler’s loaf, but she marked the part of it where she kneaded the ring into the dough. In her heart she was determined to give it to her older daughter Marjetica, since she was older, she was stronger, she would be better able to stay on her feet all day long, and she could fend off the dogs that stray onto distant roads. And when the traveler’s loaf was baked golden brown, she sliced it into ten pieces and gave one to each of her daughters. No sooner did Alenčica bite into her piece than she felt the gold ring.

Their mother asked, “Which one of you got the ring?” and she looked at Marjetica, thinking she must have got it.

But all of them said, “Not me!” Only Alenčica kept quiet, holding the ring in one hand.

She put it on her finger, smiled sweetly and then said, “May God watch over you, dear mother. God watch over you, too, dear father. And God watch over you, my nine sisters. I must go wander the world.”

She fetched her bundle and got ready to leave.

Her mother burst into tears, “Oh, bitterest day of my life! If you’re determined to leave, at least tell me this: will you ever come back to visit?”

The tenth daughter replied, “Oh, this is a bitter day for me, too. My path will be long, my path will be foreign, perhaps I’ll only come back to visit when I’ve traversed the world three times, when seven complete cycles of holidays have been observed and two Sundays are celebrated at once!”

The mother choked on her tears and said, sobbing, “This is too much bitterness for me to swallow. Now I know, you will never come back to visit!”

The tenth daughter kissed her sorrowfully and replied, “If my path brings me back by here, God alone knows if you’ll still recognize me.”

She took off her silken dress, put on a ragged one and set out on her way. Her sisters called for her to come back, “Alenčica, stay here a while, see how our parents have fainted!”

and they pleaded with her, "Alenčica, look back just once so we can see your face one last time."

But she said, "Why should I look back and break your hearts? We should let happen whatever is meant to be." And she walked on.

She walked without knowing where she was going to dine, where she was going have supper or where she would spend the night. But this caused her no worry, for the whole world was her laden table, the whole world was her home. Birds and fish, dogs and deer, cliff and spring, flowers and trees were her brothers and sisters who kept her company, entertained her, protected her and kept her fed.

Once her path took her into a dark forest. Night crept up on her while she was there and Alenčica sat down tired under a leafy oak and said, "Dear oak, brother in God, tonight I'm going to spend the night under you."

But the oak shook its branches and warned her. "Get out from under me, tenth daughter, sister in God, tonight there's going to be a terrible storm, and when it starts to thunder, a lot of the lightning is going to hit me."

The tenth daughter thanked the oak kindly and went on, and when she came to a tall pine, she lay down beneath it, exhausted.

But the tall pine rustled its branches and said, "Get out from under me, sister in God, tonight there's going to be a terrible storm, and when it starts to thunder, a lot of the lightning is going to hit me."

Again the tenth daughter offered her thanks and went on until she came to a green hornbeam, which welcomed her heartily and said, "Go right to sleep, little tenth daughter, sister in God, don't be afraid of the storm, for it never strikes me, because in her day the Virgin Mary rested under a hornbeam."

That night lightning struck the oak and the pine, and the next morning the tenth daughter left her green berth under the welcoming hornbeam unscathed and set off for wherever her unfamiliar path was to take her, from one land to the next, boundless and restless.

People could tell from her words and behavior that she was a tenth sister, and there wasn't a house that let her go past without offering some gift or other. But she couldn't settle down anywhere, no matter how well she was served. She kept being driven on.

In this way she walked for seven years, traversing countries from morning till sunset, until one evening she arrived at a manor inside of which some musicians were noisily playing their instruments. There was a lord standing at the threshold and welcoming wedding guests. She recognized him as her father.

She bowed deeply to him and asked if they could put her up for the night. The lord didn't recognize her. "You ragged orphan," he said, "come inside, go into the high-ceilinged kitchen and ask my wife to put you up for the night!"

Inside the high-ceilinged kitchen, next to the hearth, a lady was sitting, her mother, and heaving deep sighs. "Today is a joyous day that we celebrate, but it would be a lot more joyous if our youngest daughter were with us at home, our daughter Alenčica, but God alone knows if she's still alive and what road she's on."

The tenth daughter made a deep bow and asked politely if she could stay in the castle overnight. The lady didn't recognize her and refused, "You're dirty, you're skinny, and we have no place to put you. We're marrying our oldest daughter Marjetica today and the house is full of guests from afar. Go on with you, orphan, and sleep wherever else you can find, my own youngest daughter, my dearest Alenčica also spends each night with no roof over her head, God only knows where. Go on, get out in God's name, we can't have you staying here."

The tenth daughter turned away, shedding a bitter tear that she wiped away with her tiny hand, and just then the gold ring glinted on her finger. Her mother looked at it in disbelief, she fixed her eyes on the girl and recognized her. She called, spread her arms wide and tried to get up, but fainted. The tenth daughter looked back at her sadly, then left the castle as the dark night enfolded her. The castle folk called out to her, but it was too late, she didn't hear them. A patch of green grass served as her pillow, and she used a green branch for a blanket.

Once again her path led her from one land to the next, as was fated to happen. Colorful groves and quiet woods revealed many a secret power to her and she came to know more than ordinary people do and was able to help many of them. But nowhere did she have a place to call home as fate drove her all through the wide world from dusk to daybreak and back.

Once again seven years passed. The tenth daughter came walking across a green hillside and heard the sweet ringing of bells. She stopped at the first house she came to and asked what was ringing so sweetly.

And they told her, "The lady of the castle has been dying for the past month but can't seem to die. Her nine daughters are kneeling at her bedside, praying for deliverance and a gentle death, but the lady keeps sighing gently and shedding tears, with no strength to die. Now they've even set the bells to singing to ease her death."

The tenth daughter ran up to the castle. There, in a white chamber, lay the lady of the castle, her own mother, on a white bed, moaning softly, her eyes soaked in tears. All around the nine daughters were kneeling, dressed in black and praying out loud.

The tenth daughter approached the head of the bed and stroked her mother's cold forehead and feverish eyes with her little hand. Her mother felt this and caught sight of the gold ring on the little hand. She calmed down and, smiling happily, breathed out her soul.

But as quietly as she had come, the tenth daughter slipped out of the white chamber and the lofty castle without anyone having recognized her. She continued to go her own way, the earth soaking up her bitter tears, the breezes cooling her hot cheeks, and a tiny bird soothing her heart. She went on, never again to return to the place of her birth. Perhaps she's still alive somewhere, or perhaps she's died out in a field or on some road, God only knows where.