

The Song in the Heart

From the book "Children's Classics in Dramatic Form" by Augusta Stevenson
Suggested by Grimm's "The Three Spinners"

CHARACTERS:

The Dame

Isabel (her daughter)

Three Great Aunts: Flat-Foot

Hanging-Lip

Broad-Thumb

The Queen

The Prince

SCENE I

TIME: Once upon a time

PLACE: In the house of the poor Spinner

(The living-room in the Dame's cottage is seen. The Dame and the Three Great Aunts are spinning. Isabel sits at her spinning-wheel, but has stopped work and looks out of the open door.)

DAME: *(Sharply.)* Isabel! You gaze without!

ISABEL: *(Nodding.)* Upon those great trees, mother. How beautiful they are! How like sentinels they stand at our door guarding us!

FLAT-FOOT: *(Growling.)* What nonsense! You'd better be spinning.

ISABEL: *(Not heeding.)* Mother, see you that old oak! See how proudly it lifts its head up into the sky! 'T is the king of the forest!

HANGING-LIP: *(Growling.)* I never heard such foolish talk!

ISABEL: *(Not heeding.)* Mother, a song has come to me, —'t is a song to the beautiful trees. Let me stop to write it down, while my heart is full of it.

BROAD-THUMB: *(To the Dame.)* Do not permit it, sister! She should be working. She can scarcely spin at all.

DAME: (*Showing much feeling.*) Isabel! Isabel! Not a maid in the village thinks of anything but spinning.

ISABEL: Mother, let me stop! Soon the song will leave me. I may ne'er hear it again.

FLAT-FOOT: (*To the Dame.*) Sister, she will bring you to shame.

HANGING-LIP: Already the village folk laugh at her!

BROAD-THUMB: (*Nodding.*) Aye! They call her "the Dreamer." I myself have heard them.

ISABEL: I care not what they call me!

DAME: (*Raising her voice.*) Nay, but I care. I'll not have you different from other folk.

HANGING-LIP: *We were never seen gazing upon trees!*

BROAD-THUMB: (*Nodding.*) Aye! *We never heard songs within us!*

FLAT-FOOT: (*Nodding.*) Aye! *We think only of our work!*

ISABEL: What's your work may not be mine!

DAME: (*Decidedly.*) There's no other work for a maid than spinning.

ISABEL: (*Sighing.*) I like it not! Though every other maid in all the world did love to spin, I'd say the same—I like it not!

DAME: (*To Flat-Foot; showing alarm.*) Sister, close the door, that none without may hear such words.

(Flat-Foot rises, but is too late. The Queen enters from the street.)

QUEEN: (*Showing displeasure.*) How now! What's all this noise? I heard it from the street!

(All are frightened; Isabel weeps.)

DAME: (*Bowing.*) 'T will not happen again, your Majesty.

QUEEN: (*Looking at Isabel.*) Have they beaten you, my child?

ISABEL: (*Still sobbing.*) N—o—, your Majesty.

QUEEN: (*To the Dame.*) Tell me why your daughter weeps.

DAME: (*More frightened.*) She weeps because—because—*(She stops in confusion.)*

QUEEN: Well—well?

DAME: Because—because—I will not let her spin.

QUEEN: (*Showing surprise.*) Because you will not let her spin?

DAME: (*Nodding.*) Yes, your Majesty.

QUEEN: Why, this is most strange.

DAME: (*Nodding.*) Would I but let her, she'd spin from morn till night, and from then on till morn again.

QUEEN: I see how it can be so. There's nothing I like better than spinning.

DAME: She weeps whenever I make her leave off.

QUEEN: 'T is because she loves it! I am never more pleased than when the wheels are whirring.

DAME: But stop she must, for today at least. There is no more flax.

QUEEN: I have rooms full of flax. Let your daughter come to my castle. She may spin there as much as she pleases.

DAME: (*Now, most frightened.*) I—I fear she would be a trouble to you.

QUEEN: Why, no! In fact, I am so pleased with your daughter's industry I will have my son marry her.

DAME: (*So frightened she can scarcely breathe.*) O your Majesty—

QUEEN: (*Interrupting*) But first she must spin all my flax. There are three rooms full of it— from top to bottom.

ISABEL: (*Showing alarm.*) Three rooms full!

QUEEN: (*Nodding.*) Aye, my dear, and when you have spun it all, you shall become a princess! (*Turning to the Dame.*) Bring your daughter to my castle tomorrow.

DAME: (*Bowing.*) Yes, your Majesty.

QUEEN: (*Going.*) Tomorrow, mind you.

DAME: (*Bowing.*) Yes, your Majesty.

(All bow to the Queen, who goes.)

ISABEL: Mother, how could you tell the Queen I love to spin?

DAME: Think you I'd let the truth be known? I'd not shame myself so!

ISABEL: I could not spin three rooms of flax in three hundred years.

DAME: Alas! Alas! What shall we do?

FLAT-FOOT: *(To Hanging-Lip and Broad-Thumb.)* Sisters, let us speak together.

(The Three Great Aunts whisper together for a moment.)

HANGING-LIP: Isabel, we will help you—

FLAT-FOOT: *(Interrupting.)* On one condition!

BROAD-THUMB: *(Nodding.)* Aye, —on a certain condition!

ISABEL: What do you mean?

HANGING-LIP: We'll spin the flax for you—

FLAT-FOOT: *(Interrupting.)* On one condition.

BROAD-THUMB: *(Nodding.)* Aye, —on a certain condition!

DAME: You speak in riddles, sisters.

HANGING-LIP: 'T is this—if Isabel will invite us to her wedding, we'll spin the flax.

FLAT-FOOT: That's the condition.

BROAD-THUMB: *(Nodding.)* Aye, —that's the certain condition.

ISABEL: 'T will be deceiving the Queen and the Prince, both.

DAME: There's no other way to mend things. Go now! Since you are so soon to be a princess, I'll give you leave to write down your song.

ISABEL: *(Sadly.)* The song is no longer in my heart.

DAME: 'T is well. Now listen—you must never let the Prince know about your songs. He'd send you from the castle.

BROAD-THUMB: (*Nodding.*) Besides, 't would bring great shame upon us, for we are a family of spinners.

FLAT-FOOT: (*Nodding.*) Aye, aye!

HANGING-LIP: (*Nodding.*) Aye, aye!

SCENE II

TIME: One week later

PLACE: The Queen's castle

(The Three Great Aunts are working at the last heap of flax in the third room. Isabel watches them anxiously.)

ISABEL: Think you to finish before the Queen comes?

FLAT-FOOT: (*Nodding as she treads the wheel.*) Aye, if treading the wheel will do it!

HANGING-LIP: (*Nodding, as she moistens the thread over her lip.*) Aye, if moistening the thread will do it!

BROAD-THUMB: (*Nodding, as she presses the thread with her thumb.*) Aye, if pressing the thread will do it!

ISABEL: 'T is today she brings the Prince.

FLAT-FOOT: Another minute and we'll have finished.

ISABEL: Should they come suddenly, you know where to hide—behind those curtains there.

THREE GREAT AUNTS: (*Nodding.*) Aye, we know!

(A noise is heard in the distance.)

ISABEL: Someone comes! (*She runs to the door, opens it, and looks out.*) The Prince comes down the stairs! Quick, aunts, quick!

FLAT-FOOT: (*Rising.*) Well, 't is finished!

ISABEL: (*Looking into hall.*) Now comes the Queen! To the curtains, quick!

(The Three Great Aunts hide behind the curtains, just as the Queen and the Prince enter.)

QUEEN: Well, have you finished?

ISABEL: (*Pointing to a pile of thread.*) There's the last of it, your Majesty.

QUEEN: (*Looking at thread.*) Spun in the finest style, too! Prince, but a week ago these rooms were filled with flax. Now look at them.

PRINCE: (*Looking about.*) Empty, as if flax had never been here. 'T is wonderful how one maid could do so much!

QUEEN: 'T is most wonderful!

PRINCE: The wedding shall take place today. Isabel, come now with us.

ISABEL: (*Thoughtfully.*) No, no! I cannot!

PRINCE: You cannot?

QUEEN: You cannot! What do you mean?

ISABEL: (*To the Queen.*) Let me go home, your Majesty!

QUEEN: Go home!

ISABEL: I am not worthy—

PRINCE: (*Interrupting.*) Nonsense! That you are poor is nothing to me.

QUEEN: (*Going.*) Come, the wedding bells shall ring at once!

ISABEL: Your Majesty—I—I—did not spin the flax.

QUEEN: What! You did not spin the flax?

PRINCE: What is this?

ISABEL: I deceived you—I can scarcely spin at all.

QUEEN: But this pile of thread here—

ISABEL: 'T was spun by another.

PRINCE: Another?

ISABEL: Yes, Prince.

QUEEN: You shall marry that one then, my son! *(To Isabel.)* As for you, return to your hovel!

(Isabel turns to go.)

QUEEN: Stay!

(Isabel stops.)

QUEEN: Who is the wonderful spinner? Tell us where to find her.

ISABEL: Here, your Majesty.

QUEEN: Hidden away, I suppose?

ISABEL: *(Nodding.)* Yes, your Highness, behind those curtains.

QUEEN: Go, my son, and draw the curtains. You shall be the first to look upon your bride.

(The Prince draws the curtains and sees the Three Great Aunts, who sit in a row. They smile and smile upon the Prince, who stands looking at them in astonishment.)

FLAT-FOOT: You'd never be sorry to take me for your bride, my lord.

PRINCE: *(Not heeding.)* Why is your foot so flat?

FLAT-FOOT: From treading the wheel! From treading the wheel!

HANGING-LIP: You'd never be sorry to take me for your bride, my lord.

PRINCE: *(Not heeding.)* Why is your lip so long?

HANGING-LIP: From moistening the thread! From moistening the thread!

BROAD-THUMB: You'd never be sorry to take me for your bride, my lord.

PRINCE: *(Not heeding.)* Why is your thumb so broad?

BROAD-THUMB: From pressing the thread! From pressing the thread!

(The Prince turns to Isabel.)

FLAT-FOOT: *(Quickly.)* Isabel does naught but gaze and gaze, on flowers and trees and running brooks. Ha, ha, ha!

PRINCE: Is this true, Isabel?

ISABEL: (*Timidly.*) Yes, Prince.

HANGING-LIP: She says these flowers and trees and running brooks do sing her songs. Ha, ha, ha!

PRINCE: Is this true, Isabel?

ISABEL: (*As before.*) Yes, Prince.

BROAD-THUMB: And she begs leave to write down these songs. Ha, ha, ha!

PRINCE: Is this true, Isabel?

ISABEL: (*Hanging head.*) Yes, Prince.

PRINCE: Isabel, hang not your head. I'll give you time to write your songs.

QUEEN: My son—

PRINCE: (*Interrupting.*) Nay, nay, mother! The songs please me better than the flat-foot and the hanging-lip and the broad-thumb of the spinners. Come, Isabel, you shall be my princess! You shall sing me your songs! You shall teach me how to gaze upon flowers and trees and running brooks, for these things have ever been dear to my heart. Come, Isabel, come!