



I ONCE THERE WAS a man whose wife died young. Since the man had a big farm and three small children, he sought to remarry. At the market, a girl he did not know, a maiden with hair like the sun, approached him and told him she'd heard of his needs and would like to become his bride. He accepted the beautiful stranger's offer without another thought, and their nuptial feast was unparalleled in the land. Other men warned the farmer that his new bride might be a ragana—a beautiful witch who was hideous in her soul and wildly jealous.



But the man did not believe his friends. Every night he kissed his family in order: first his oldest daughter, then his son, then his youngest daughter, and finally, his lovely wife. Every night he told them that the farm was profitable, his family was beautiful, and everything in his life was perfect. Then times grew hard. The man still kissed

his family every night, but now he told them that the farm was not profitable and that their beauty could be enhanced by work. Nothing helped. The fields did not produce. Finally one morning, the man told his wife to kill their last cow so they would have enough to feed the children. That night when the farmer returned home, he found her stirring a marvelous stew. The scent was exotic, the fat thick and yellow on the surface of the cauldron. His wife, lovelier than ever, greeted him as she stoked the fire. "One skinny old cow made so much meat?" the man replied happily, sipping the thick broth from a wooden spoon. "Well, actually, I require the cow's milk for my baths," the ragana laughed, and she reached for one of the three large lumps of meat in the center of the cauldron. The child's boiled leg came free of its joint with the ease of a small weed being pulled from freshly watered soil.