

THE ENDLESS YARN

In a distant village, high in the mountains, there once lived an old woman, who was very, very poor. Having no other means, she made the long journey down into the valley, to beg for alms. One day, as she passed the mountainside crags, where the fairy women lived, the air carried the delicious smell of freshly baked bread. She stopped, resting on her stick, and said to herself "Oh, I wish that I had a little piece of bread to quell my terrible hunger."

No sooner had she spoken her wish, than a fairy woman appeared in front of her. In her hands, she held an enormous loaf of freshly baked bread. As she held it out to the poor old woman, she said. "Here you are my dear, this will always keep you from hunger." The astonished old woman took the loaf from her, but before she could give a word of thanks, the other had already vanished.

After eating her fill, the old woman continued her journey with renewed strength, and soon reached the valley. But here, there were no alms to be given. The valley people were unfriendly and inhospitable to strangers, especially to beggars. At night, she had nowhere to sleep, except out in the fields, where the freezing cold kept her awake. As she lay there, she thought to herself "there is nothing for me here, I'll go home tomorrow". And, so she did.

But, it was even colder as she made her way out of the valley and into the mountains. Her thin clothes were not much more than tattered rags, and gave her no protection against the biting wind. The only comfort she had, was the bread, which was still fresh and warm, and never got any less. Eating it kept her strong, and without it she may not have survived.

When she came to the mountainside crags, where the fairy women lived, it was warmer. There, laid out in the sun to bleach, were many bolts of linen cloth lying on the rocks. Seeing them, the shivering old woman, said to herself "Oh, I wish that I had a piece of that linen. Then I could make myself clothes, and wouldn't suffer the cold so much."

No sooner had she spoken her wish, than the fairy woman again appeared in front of her. In her hand, she held a length of fine linen yarn. As she held it out to the poor old woman, she said. "Here you are my dear, as you wind it, this yarn will never end, until you wish it to. So, never say 'I wish that you would stop' when you are holding it." The astonished old woman took the thread from her, but before she could give a word of thanks, the other had already vanished.

When she arrived home, the tired old woman sat on her stool, and started to wind the yarn. She wound and wound, but never reached the end. Soon, she had more than enough for her own cloth, so she paid the weaver with the extra yarn. But, she then had more than enough woven cloth for herself, and so she sold the rest, As did the weaver. He was so busy weaving the old woman's yarn, and sold so much of his fine cloth, that he became quite rich, as did the old

woman. But, her neighbours were not so happy. Nobody knew where the linen, which made her so rich, came from, and it made them uneasy. One day, after a particularly nasty argument, a neighbour called her a witch, and told her “We all know that it is the Devil who brings you your yarn”.

The old woman returned to her house, in a bad mood, and again started winding her yarn. But she had no pleasure in it, and after some time, instead of thinking it, said out loud “will this winding never end. I wish that you would stop!”

No sooner had she spoken these words, than her wish was granted. Not only the yarn, but also the woven cloth, and the money it had earned, disappeared from her house. Even, the fine linen clothes she was wearing vanished, leaving the old woman sitting naked on her stool, and even poorer than ever before.

THE CLEVER COUPLE

There was once a tenant farmer and his clever wife who rented their home from a, not too bright, rich landlord for a substantial annual rent. Even though they both worked hard, and saved whatever they could, throughout the whole year, at the end of it they didn't have enough put by. On the day the landlord came to collect his dues, the wife set a large cauldron of water to boil in the kitchen. Their landlord arrived punctually, just after the water had started to boil. But, when they saw him coming, the husband carried the pot out to the front porch, and waited. When he arrived, the landlord asked him what he was doing.

"My wife wants to do the washing today, so we're heating the water." answered the farmer.

"You idiot!" exclaimed his landlord, "You can't boil water without a fire."

"Ah, but you can with this cauldron." replied the farmer, with a wink. "Put your hand in, and you'll see that it's hot."

The landlord plunged his hand into the water, and pulled it out again just as quickly. The water really was hot, and he nearly scalded himself. "That's fantastic!" he said, "Will you let me have this cauldron? How much do you want for it?"

At first the farmer refused, but when his landlord eventually offered to let him off the rent, he reluctantly agreed. After emptying out the water, the landlord carried the heavy cauldron all the way home. When he arrived he called out to his wife that he had brought her a pot which boiled water on its own, without setting a fire under it.

Curious, but not necessarily believing her incredulous husband, she had her maid fill the pot with water, and they waited to see what would happen. The answer was, of course, nothing. The water remained as ice cold as when it came out of the spring. The maid laughed as her mistress laid into her husband — "You stupid fool! This cauldron is just like any other! It needs a fire under it to boil water! Those two have cheated you out of a year's rent. Throw them out, now!"

Her husband, red in the face, muttered "Just you wait, I'll drive those two away like stray dogs —".

And, she did wait. She waited a full year, until it was time for him to collect the rent again. When he arrived at the tenants' farm, he only found the wife. The husband was nowhere to be seen. He asked her where he was.

"He's out in the fields," she told him, "but if you wait a few minutes, I'll send the rabbit out to fetch him."

“A rabbit?” queried the landlord, “Are you really going to send a rabbit with a message for him?”

“Yes, of course” she answered, picking up the rabbit, which had happily been munching on some green leaves, and setting it outside the door. Not too long afterwards, the farmer came into the house, carrying an identical rabbit.

The rich man really believed that it was the same rabbit, and that it had taken a message to the farmer in the fields. “That’s fantastic!” he said, “Will you let me have this clever creature? How much do you want for it?”

At first the farmer refused, but when his landlord eventually offered to let him off the rent, he reluctantly agreed. The rich man gently carried the wonderful little rabbit all the way home, and when he arrived he called out to his wife to see what he had brought.

“A rabbit?” she said, unimpressed.

“Not just a rabbit.” said her husband “This wonderful little creature will bring a message to me, whenever you need to find me.”

“That could be useful” said his wife, not really believing him.

The next morning, the rich man went out into the fields to check on his labourers. Before he left, he said to his wife “when lunch is ready, send the rabbit out to fetch me.” She did just that a few hours later, and the little rabbit hopped off into the distance. Out in the fields, the rich man was getting hungry, and he waited and waited. But, no rabbit came to tell him that his meal was ready. Eventually, he lost patience, and went home where he demanded of his wife “Why didn’t you send the rabbit out to fetch me?”

“*I did*, didn’t it come to you?” she replied, suspecting the answer he gave. When he did, she continued furiously ““You stupid fool! Those two have again cheated you out of a year’s rent. Throw them out, now!”

Her husband, red in the face, muttered “Just you wait, this time I really will throw them out —”.

And so, she waited again. She waited a full year, until it was time for him to collect the rent again. This time, as he climbed the steps to his tenants’ house, he saw the husband beat his wife so hard with a stick that she fell lifeless on the ground. The landlord was shocked! He managed to stammer out “Wha — what, ha — have you done. You — you’ve killed your wife!”

“No problem,” replied his tenant calmly, “I’ll make her get up again.” Then he went to his chest, opened it, and took out an old fiddle. When, he started playing, his wife jumped up, as lively as ever, and set to work in the kitchen.

The rich man was astonished, and catching his breath, said ““That’s a fantastic violin!”

“It is indeed,” said the farmer, “it’s worth more than its weight in gold. Whenever I play it, my wife has to dance to my tune.”

The rich man thought hard, and said “If I had such an instrument, I could make *my* wife listen to me. Will you let me have it? I’ll not only let you off the next year’s rent, but I’ll give you all the money I have on me.”

The poor man agreed, and for good measure also gave him the stick. The rich man then carried them both all the way home, and called out to his wife when he arrived. Seeing him carrying a fiddle, she started to complain loudly that he had been cheated again. But, she had hardly spoken two words, when he took the stick and struck her down dead.

The maid, and all the other servants, saw him do this, and cried out together “What have you done? You’ve killed her, you murderer!”

Smiling, he answered calmly “Don’t worry, I’ll make her get up again.” Then, taking the fiddle, he started to play. His wife, didn’t move.

He continued playing.

She still didn’t move.

And so it went on, until tired of playing, he said angrily “Just you wait, woman. When you rise again on the day of judgement, I’ll be there playing my fiddle, and then you’ll have to dance to my tune.”