

LAZY KATY

A lot of water has flowed under the bridge since little Katy went away. She was the youngest and, by far the laziest, Innkeeper's three daughters. Her two older sisters were hardworking and helped around the house and in the fields, but not little Katy. She stayed in bed every morning, until the sun was high in the sky, and never lifted a finger to clean up after herself.

One day, her parents sent Katy out to help in the fields, but lazy Katy had other ideas. She found herself a comfortable place, in the shade of a cherry tree, and lay down to sleep. But, her nap was soon disturbed when — a great big, warty toad crawled over her face. She soon woke up, and then the toad said to her "Quick, quark! Katy, come with me! Quick, quark!"

The lazy little girl thought to herself that there wouldn't be much hard work to do with this creature, so she agreed. She followed the toad across the pasture, yawning as she went, and into the woods at the edge of her family's land. The toad jumped and crawled between the trees, and Katy followed it, still yawning. When they stopped, she rubbed her eyes, again and again. They were standing in front of a great castle, which she had never, ever seen before. The toad climbed and waddled up the front steps, through the door, and into the house. Katy followed, thinking "This is much better than my father's inn, where all the guests give us a lot of work to do."

When they were inside, the toad, which had fallen silent on their long walk, started to speak again. It said "Quick, quark! Katy, no you have to stay here for seven years. Quick, quark, for seven years you can't wash, can't comb your hair, and can't cook."

"Hmm!" thought Katy, "That's not too bad. I can easily do that." In fact, she did so happily. She stayed in bed, almost all day, and only got up when she was hungry. Then, when she did, she only ate dry bread and drank cold water. She never took a bath, or washed her face, and never, ever combed her hair. Before she knew it, the seven years had passed.

Seven years, to the day, after little Katy had entered the house, was a dark and stormy evening. Lightning shot across the sky, thunder shook the windows, and the rain fell hard on the ground. The toad came into the room, and said to her "Quick, quark! Tonight, you have to stay wide awake. You must keep your eyes open!"

Saying to herself "Well, after seven years sleeping all day and night, I suppose you should be prepared to stay up all night", Kate got up from her bed, and settled herself, upright, in an armchair. She waited with the toad, as the storm got worse, and neither slept.

It was very late, when they heard, over the noise of the rain and the thunder, a banging at the gate. The toad said “Quick, quark! Kate, open the gate”. Kate did as she was told. Taking a lamp, she went out into the rain, across the courtyard, and opened the gate. When she did, she saw a, rather wet, but handsome young gentleman, who thanked her for her hospitality. She closed the gate and he followed her inside.

When the toad saw the young man, it jumped up and croaked “Quick, quark! Make him something hot, and take some yourself! But before you sit down, wash your face, comb your hair, and change your dress!” As it said this, the toad opened a chest, to show the most beautiful dress Kate had ever seen.

Kate took the dress and went into the kitchen, telling herself “Well young lady, after seven years doing nothing, you can at least cook a hot meal and clean yourself up. Especially, if you want to wear this beautiful dress.” She set a fire in the stove, dressed a rabbit she found on the table, and put it to roast. Then, while it was cooking, she washed herself, combed her hair, and put on her beautiful new dress.

When she carried the meal into the dining room, the handsome young man was there, but the toad wasn't. Instead, sitting next to him, smiling, was a graceful lady in a snow white gown. In a soft voice, very unlike the toad's harsh croaking, she said to Kate “My dear, dear girl, you have freed me from my enchantment. As a reward, I would like you to have this key to all the treasures in my castle, and to take my son as your husband.” She then gave Kate a huge golden key, and took her son's right hand and placed it in Catherine's.

By the next morning, the gracious lady had departed, never to return, and it is said that Catherine lived many happy years in the castle with her husband. But, whether they still live there, I don't know, because nobody has ever seen the castle since that time.

THE SKULL

There was once a kind young girl whose widowed father remarried a cruel, selfish woman. One day, the stepmother threw the girl out of the house saying "If I ever see you again, I will beat you black and blue."

The poor girl ran far, far away, out of the village and into the woods. She walked all day, until night came and it started to get very dark. She was now very tired and hungry, and afraid that she would have to sleep under the stars with all the wild animals. But then, in the distance she saw a light, and made her way towards it. It was a magnificent palace, but all the doors were locked and the downstairs windows shuttered. She rang the bell, and a white face appeared at an upstairs window. A voice asked what she wanted, and she replied "Please, can you let me in? I need shelter for the night, away from all the wild animals in the woods."

The voice answered "I can come down with a key, but you will have to unlock the door yourself and carry me back inside". The little girl promised to do so, and a skull rolled out of the window, and fell to the ground. She gently picked up the skull, placed it in her apron and, after unlocking the door, carried it inside and back upstairs. Then, the skull asked her if she was hungry, which she was. So it told her "Set me down on the dining table, and go into the kitchen and make a batter pudding. There should be plenty of eggs and flour."

The little girl did as she was told, and set about preparing a meal for them both. But when she set the fire, human bones and other terrible remains fell down out of the chimney. She moved them to the side, out of the way of the flames, and carried on frying the pudding. When it was ready, she carried two portions into the dining room and set them on the table. The portion she gave the skull immediately turned black and rotten, but her portion remained yellow, fresh, and sweet.

After dinner, the skull said to her "If you are tired, you can go to bed to sleep. Don't be afraid, but at midnight, you will be woken up by a skeleton who will try to pull you out of bed. As long as you are not frightened, it can't get harm you." The girl then found a comfortable bedroom and went to sleep, and just as she had been told, at twelve o'clock a skeleton came to her bedside and pulled at her with all its might. But, although she was only little, it wasn't strong enough and, after a while, it gave up and went away.

The next morning, when the little girl woke up, the skull had turned into the glowing white ghost of a beautiful lady. Standing at the girl's bedside, she said "God bless you for releasing me from this existence. With my thanks, I give you this house and everything you will find in it." Then, she turned into a snow white dove, and flew up into the heavens, leaving the little girl rich beyond measure for the rest of her long life.

CLEVER HANSEL

Many years ago there was a poor old woman who had two sons: one clever, and one not quite so. One day she fell sick, and the cleverest one said to his foolish brother, Hansel, "I will stay home and look after our mother, and you must go out and beg for alms. Then we can buy a little meat to prepare a wholesome broth to help her recover. But do it properly and politely. Take your hat off and hold it out, so that the people can drop a little something into it." Hansel promised to do his best and went out, cap in hand, to beg.

But, the only person he met that was a poor seamstress, who had no money with her. All she had was thread and a few needles. So she put one of them into Hansel's hat, and went on her way. Hansel took his hat, with the needle, and made his own way back home. Halfway up a steep hill, he met a farmer struggling to push a hay wagon which was too heavy for his horses to pull. Hansel stopped to help, and with both him and the farmer pushing, and the horses pulling, the cart moved slowly forward. But, when they got to the top of the hill, Hansel's hat was empty. He had lost the needle!

When he finally arrived home, Hansel told his brother, who said to him "But, who would even think of carrying a needle in their cap, especially when trying to push a cart full of hay? You should have stuck it into the hat, and put it on your head!" Keeping this in mind, Hansel went out to try again.

This time, the only person he met was a shepherd, who also had no money with him. But he was a kindhearted man, and he gave Hansel a newborn lamb. Hansel thanked the shepherd, and thought carefully. He said to himself "I can't stick the little lamb into my hat, that would be stupid — I'll let it wear the hat." So he took his hat, and rammed it down onto the little creature's head, and scared it so much that it ran away.

Hansel, now without a hat to collect alms, sadly walked home and told his brother what had happened. His brother angrily told him "You really are a fool! You should have tied a cord around its neck, and led it home." Keeping this in mind, Hansel went out, with his brother's hat, to try again. This time, a kind person gave him a buttered roll. Hansel then took out a string, which he had specially put in his pocket, and tied it around the bread roll, which he then dragged behind him, all the way home. But, somewhere along the way, it caught in the undergrowth, and he lost it. When he heard this, his brother snapped "How stupid can you be! You should have tied it in a cloth, and carried it home." Keeping this in mind, Hansel went out — again.

This time he met a farmer's wife, who gave him a little milk. Really wanting to do his best, Hansel decided, after much thought, to do as his brother had told him. He took out his handkerchief, pulled the corners together, poured in the milk, and tied it closed, and proudly carried it home. When he got home, he untied the bundle, and found it to be empty. When his brother saw the wet

cloth he said “If this goes on any longer, our mother will die of hunger. So, *I* will go out to beg for alms, and *you* will stay to look after mother. Prepare bath for her. Make sure it isn’t too hot, and, in the meantime make some noodles for her.”

After his brother had gone out, Hansel set a large pot of water on the fire. When it was boiling, he poured it into the bathtub, sat his mother in it, and went into the kitchen. She, badly scalded, soon gave up the ghost.

When Hansel came out of the kitchen with her meal, he couldn’t fathom why she didn’t eat, or even move at all. So, he took a spoon, and fed her himself, one noodle after another, until her mouth was full. Just after he had finished, his brother came back home. Hansel whispered to him “Pst, pst! Be quiet, mother is asleep in the bath, don’t wake her.”

His brother crept forward, and soon saw that she was dead. At first he was too shocked to speak, but finally he said to Hansel “What have you done? We need to get rid of the body, if we don’t want to be hanged. Put mother’s body on a board and drag it out into the forest. I’ll bring a pick and shovel, so we can bury her where nobody can find her.” And, that is what they did, but — after they had dug the grave, they couldn’t find their mother. While Hansel was pulling it, her body had slipped off the board without him noticing. When his angry brother told him to go back and fetch the body, Hansel sadly admitted that he couldn’t remember which way they had come. So they both set out in different directions to search.

While searching for his mother, Hansel came to a spring where he saw an old woman washing her yarn. He shouted out happily “I’ve found you, you old witch! I won’t let you get away again.” Looking around, he found a pitchfork, which he used that to pick up the old woman, and carry her back into the forest.

When the two brothers met again at the grave, they both had a dead body with them. “What have you done?” cried Hansel’s brother, “Have you gone and killed somebody else? Now we are really in trouble. If we go back to the village, they will hang us for sure!”

After burying both bodies, they went off together, deep into the forest. But, they hadn’t really got very far when they heard a band of robbers approaching. One brother climbed the nearest tree and escaped, the other just stood there. It was Hansel. He was soon taken prisoner, but the robber captain decided to make him useful. Pointing to a gate across the path, he told his men “Make him stand there, and on pain of death, keep that gate open. He must only let it fall shut, if he sees the watchmen coming.” So Hansel had to stand there, while the robbers sat under a tree counting out their booty.

But the work was boring and the gate was heavy, so Hansel soon became tired and distracted. Suddenly, the gate fell shut with a crash. The robbers all jumped up and, thinking that they were being pursued, ran off leaving all their gold behind. As soon as they were out of sight, Hansel’s brother climbed down

that tree, and the two brothers collected everything together. They were now very rich, and moved to a distant land where they lived without any further trouble. It would be nice to say that in time, Hansel did indeed become clever, but then, if he did, he wouldn't be Hansel.