

THE LITTLE LAME PRINCE



Clever Alice



Once upon a time there was a man who had a daughter who was called “Clever Alice,” and when she was grown up, her father said, “We must see about her marrying.”

“Yes,” replied her mother, “whenever a young man shall appear who is worthy of her.”

At last a certain youth, by name Hans, came from a distance to make a proposal of marriage; but he required one condition, that the clever Alice should be very prudent.

“Oh,” said her father, “no fear of that! she has got a head full of brains;” and the mother added, “ah, she can see the wind blow up the street, and hear the flies cough!”

“Very well,” replied Hans; “but remember, if she is not very prudent, I will not take her.” Soon afterward they sat down to dinner, and her mother said, “Alice, go down into the cellar and draw some beer.”

So Clever Alice took the jug down from the wall, and went into the cellar, jerking the lid up and down on her way, to pass away the time. As soon as she got downstairs she drew a stool and placed it before the cask, in order that she might not have to stoop, for she thought stooping might in some way injure her back and give it an undesirable bend. Then she placed the can before her and turned the tap, and while the beer was running, as she did not wish her eyes to be idle, she looked about upon the wall above and below. Presently she perceived, after much peeping into this corner and that corner, a hatchet, which the bricklayers had left behind? sticking out of the ceiling right above her head. At the sight of this Clever Alice began to cry, saying, “Oh! if I marry Hans, and we have a child, and he grows up, and we send him into the cellar to draw beer, the hatchet will fall upon his head and kill him,” and so she sat there weeping with all her might over the impending misfortune.

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Meanwhile the good folks upstairs were waiting for the beer, but as Clever Alice did not come, her mother told the maid to go and see what she was stopping for. The maid went down into the cellar and found Alice sitting before the cask crying heartily, and she asked, "Alice, what are you weeping about?"

"Ah," she replied, "have I not cause? If I marry Hans, and we have a child, and he grows up, and we send him here to draw beer, that hatchet will fall upon his head and kill him."

"Oh," said the maid, "what a clever Alice we have!" And sitting down, she began to weep, too, for the misfortune that was to happen.

After a while, when the servant did not return, the good folks above began to feel very thirsty; so the husband told the boy to go down into the cellar and see what had become of Alice and the maid. The boy went down, and there sat Clever Alice and the maid both crying, so he asked the reason; and Alice told him the same tale, of the hatchet that was to fall on her child, if she married Hans, and if they had a child. When she had finished, the boy exclaimed, "What a clever Alice we have!" and fell weeping and howling with the others.

Upstairs they were still waiting, and the husband said, when the boy did not return, "Do you go down, wife, into the cellar and see why Alice stays so long." So she went down, and finding all three sitting there crying, asked the reason, and Alice told her about the hatchet which must inevitably fall upon the head of her son. Then the mother likewise exclaimed, "Oh, what a clever Alice we have!" and, sitting down, began to weep as much as any of the rest.

Meanwhile the husband waited for his wife's return; but at last he felt so very thirsty that he said, "I must go myself down into the cellar and see what is keeping our Alice." As soon as he entered the cellar, there he found the four sitting and crying together, and when he heard the reason, he also exclaimed, "Oh, what a clever Alice we have!" and sat down to cry with the whole strength of his lungs.

All this time the bridegroom above sat waiting, but when nobody returned, he thought they must be waiting for him, and so he went down to see what was the matter. When he entered, there sat the five crying and groaning, each one in a louder key than his neighbor.

"What misfortune has happened?" he asked.

"Ah, dear Hans!" cried Alice, "if you and I should marry one another, and have a child, and he grew up, and we, perhaps, send him down to this cellar to tap the beer, the hatchet

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which has been left sticking up there may fall on his head, and so kill him; and do you not think this is enough to weep about?"

"Now," said Hans, "more prudence than this is not necessary for my housekeeping; because you are such a clever Alice, I will have you for my wife." And, taking her hand, he led her home, and celebrated the wedding directly.

After they had been married a little while, Hans, said one morning, "Wife, I will go out to work and earn some money; do you go into the field and gather some corn wherewith to make bread."

"Yes," she answered, "I will do so, dear Hans." And when he was gone, she cooked herself a nice mess of pottage to take with her. As she came to the field, she said to herself, "What shall I do? Shall I cut first, or eat first? Aye, I will eat first!" Then she ate up the contents of her pot, and when it was finished, she thought to herself, "Now, shall I reap first or sleep first? Well, I think I will have a nap!" and so she laid herself down among the corn, and went to sleep.

Meanwhile Hans returned home, but Alice did not come, and so he said, "Oh, what a prudent Alice I have! She is so industrious that she does not even come home to eat anything." By and by, however, evening came on, and still she did not return; so Hans went out to see how much she had reaped; but, behold, nothing at all, and there lay Alice fast asleep among the corn! So home he ran very fast, and brought a net with little bells hanging on it, which he threw over her head while she still slept on. When he had done this, he went back again and shut to the house door, and, seating himself on his stool, began working very industriously.

At last, when it was nearly dark, the clever Alice awoke, and as soon as she stood up, the net fell all over her hair, and the bells jingled at every step she took. This quite frightened her, and she began to doubt whether she were really Clever Alice, and said to herself, "Am I she, or am I not?" This was a question she could not answer, and she stood still a long while considering about it. At last she thought she would go home and ask whether she was really herself—supposing somebody would be able to tell her.

When she came up to the house door it was shut; so she tapped at the window, and asked, "Hans, is Alice within?" "Yes," he replied, "she is." At which answer she became really terrified, and exclaiming, "Ah, heaven, then I am not Alice!" she ran up to another house, intending to ask the same question. But as soon as the folks within heard the jingling of the bells in her net, they refused to open their doors, and nobody would receive her. So she ran straight away from the village, and no one has ever seen her since.