

## The Story of Clara and the Prince's Ball

A mixed up fairy tale

Once upon a time there lived a beautiful young girl called Clara. She was a very unhappy little girl because she lived with her evil stepmother and horrible, ugly stepsisters.

Clara's stepmother and stepsisters were extremely cruel to her. They made her clean the house from top to bottom everyday and made Clara cook all their meals for them. Her clothes used to get so dirty from cleaning the soot and cinders from the fireplace that everyone used to call her "Sooty".

One day Clara heard the news that the local prince was holding a great ball and that all the women in the kingdom were invited. Clara was very excited about this and she pleaded with her stepmother to let her attend.

"No way," said her stepmother. "You're far too young to be going out to balls. Anyway, you've got nothing to wear. You can hardly go dressed like that." The evil stepmother pointed at Clara's dirty and dusty work clothes.

"Well blow you!" said Clara. "I'm off to live with Granny! At least she lets me do what I like!"

Clara stormed out the house, pausing only to grab her scarlet cloak and a small basket of food.

"This basket of food should get me on Granny's good side at least," thought Clara.

Clara decided to take the short cut through the forest to get to Granny's cottage. She was walking along the path when she suddenly came upon a strange hairy looking man with very large ears, eyes and teeth.

"Good morning," said the Wolf.

"Hi!" said Clara.

The wolf asked Clara where she was going and Clara explained that she was off to stay with her granny.

"What have you got in your basket?" asked the wolf.

"Oh, just some food for Gran," replied Clara.

The wolf peered into the basket.

"Hmm," he said, "Lamb chops... Roast beef... French bread." He shook his head. "Oh dear."

"What's wrong?" asked Clara.

"Well... your poor old Gran won't be able to eat this. Not with her false teeth," said the wolf. "I tell you what. How about I swop you your basket of food for something more suitable for your gran?"

He held out his hand.

"Beans?!" said Clara.

"They're not just any beans! They're full of protein, you know," said the wolf, "and they're really easy to eat."

"I suppose so," said Clara as she swopped her basket for the handful of beans that the wolf had offered her.

Pausing only to wave goodbye to the wolf, Clara set off along the forest path once more.

As she walked towards her gran's cottage Clara noticed that on the floor were several slices of bread. They made a trail along the forest path. She stopped and picked up the bread. She was surprised to see that the pieces were quite fresh.

"Cool," said Clara. "Now Granny can have beans on toast!"

Clara eventually arrived at Granny's cottage. Her gran's cottage was quite unusual. Not many people lived in the forest and those that did tended to have more than one job. For example, the local woodcutter was also the postman. The butcher was also the local vet. And, more importantly, the local builder's second job was a baker.

Clara knocked on the gingerbread door and eventually the door was opened by her granny.

"Oh, it's you," said Granny peering out of the door and looking around. "You haven't seen anyone else around have you?"

"No," said Clara, "Only a hairy bloke."

"He was round earlier," answered Granny, "Trying to sell double glazing, I expect, but I wouldn't let him in. I told him I had all the triple frosting glazing I needed, thank you very much, and suggested he cleared off."

"That wasn't very friendly, Granny," said Clara.

"Well you can't be too careful, you know," explained Granny. "Anyway, I told him that the pigs on the other side of the forest had just put up three new houses and that they might need some double glazing."

Clara and her granny went inside the cottage and had a cup of tea.

"What great big cups you have!" declared Clara.

"All the better to drink tea with, my dear," said Granny.

Clara showed her granny the beans that the wolf had given her.

"Beans!" yelled Granny. "What do I want beans for? A nice tasty bit of meat is what I like!" And she flung the beans out of the window and into the garden.

Clara didn't dare ask her granny for some money to get a dress for the ball and decided it would be far better to go to bed early instead.

When Clara awoke the next morning she was surprised to see that there was hardly any light coming through her bedroom window. The light was being blocked by something outside.

She grabbed her scarlet dressing gown and ran outside. Parked in front of her bedroom window (for the cottage was a bungalow) was the post van.

"Morning," said the woodcutter who was, as you'll no doubt remember, also the postman.

"Morning Postie," said Clara. "Anything for us?"

"Only this package," said the woodcutter.

Clara took the package and said goodbye to the woodcutter. She wandered into the back garden.

"I wonder what's happened to those beans?" she asked herself and set about trying to find them.

She searched all around the garden but she couldn't see any sign of the beans. In the end she decided to try in her granny's stable. The door was, after all, wide open and her gran certainly had the strength to propel the beans that far.

In the stable, though, there was no sign of the beans at all. Clara tried moving all the hay about with a pitchfork in case the beans had gone underneath. In one corner of the

stable she noticed a curious device. It had a round wheel with some sort of pedal attached and a rather sharp thin pointed piece of metal sticking up at one end.

“Don’t touch that!” yelled a voice. From out of the hay jumped a little man. “Flippin’ Nora! You could’ve ended up asleep for hundreds of years!”

Clara looked at the strange little man. He was no bigger than a child and was dressed head to toe in some strange yellow material.

“Who are you?” asked Clara.

“Erm... I don’t tend to tell people my name,” said the strange little man.

“Doesn’t that make things rather difficult?” asked Clara.

“Well it does actually,” the little man admitted, “People tend to end up making their own names for me like ‘You Horrible Little Man’ or ‘Thieving Baby Snatcher’.”

“Oh right,” said a puzzle Clara.

“Anyway,” said You Horrible Little Man, “While I’m here can I help you with anything?”

Clara told the strange man about her desire to go to the ball. “But I haven’t got anything to wear.”

“I can help you there,” You Horrible Little Man said with an evil smile, “I have a particular talent when it comes to spinning.” He pointed at the spinning wheel that Clara had noticed earlier.

“Oh yeah?” said Clara.

“Yes,” said You Horrible Little Man. “I can take straw and spin it into...”

“Gold?” asked Clara.

You Horrible Little Man looked shocked. “No!” he said, “Don’t be so stupid. You can’t spin straw into gold. No, what I can do is spin straw into more straw.”

“More straw?” repeated Clara.

“Well, not more straw,” said You Horrible Little Man, “but into straw cloth.” He pointed at his own yellow straw suit. “I could make you a dress from straw cloth in no time!”

“Urgh!” said Clara. “That’s gross! I can’t have a dress made of straw. I’d have mice and rats nibbling at it! That’s almost as daft as making a coach out of a pumpkin.”

“Suit yourself!” said You Horrible Little Man and he stamped his foot on the floor and disappeared.

Clara decided to have one last look outside in the garden for the beans.

She searched high and low but there was still no sign of the beans. She decided to sit and rest on the small bench that was next to a huge beanstalk that her granny had growing in her garden.

Plop! There was a small splash.

“Oh drat!” said Clara. She’d sat on the bench and put down her granny’s parcel next to her. The parcel was spherical and it had rolled off the bench and into the pond that lay in the middle of her granny’s garden. The parcel sat, or rather floated, in the centre of the pond just out of her reach.

“Gran is going to kill me,” thought Clara.

“I can go and get it for you if you like,” a small voice said from somewhere beneath Clara.

Clara looked down and saw, to her astonishment, that a small frog was sitting there on the ground. Now Clara knew that frogs aren't actually able to talk but she thought that it would be impolite to mention this to the one looking up at her.

"I'd be really pleased if you would," said Clara. "Get the parcel, I mean."

"Okay," said the frog, "Here's the deal. If I get the parcel then you give me a kiss."

"Urrgh! Yuck!" said Clara.

"Hey, calm down," said the frog. "It's not as bad as all that. I'm not actually a frog, you know."

"You're not?" said Clara sceptically. "I think you'll find the green flippers and croaky voice sort of imply that you are."

"Well. I know that I look like one," said the frog, "But many years ago I was turned into a frog by an evil witch who was angry because I wouldn't go out with her."

"So you're really.....?"

"A prince," said the frog. "A handsome prince, of course. Only type there is."

"And you have a castle?" asked Clara.

"Yeah, I used to. I bet it's still there. Noone has been in it for years, though."

Clara grinned. She had an idea.

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"Are you sure that this is the right place?" said Ugly Stepsister #1 staring at the building ahead. "It doesn't half look deserted."

"It says 'The Old Palace' on the invite," said Ugly Stepsister #2 peering at the piece of card in her hand.

"Here, give us that!" said the evil stepmother grabbing the invite from the stepsister's hand. "Yep. *'You are invited to a Royal Ball at The Old Palace. Fancy Frocks Required. RSVP.'*"

"What's an are-ess-vee-pee?" asked Ugly Stepsister #1.

"It's a posh type of umbrella you walk around with at balls."

"Cool," said Ugly Stepsister #2. "Hey, I hope this bash is as good as that one we went to at Prince Charming's palace the other night."

The women walked up to the palace door and rang the bell. After a few seconds a butler appeared.

"Ah yes," he said when the evil stepmother showed him the invite, "We have been expecting you. This way..."

He showed the women into a large hall. The room was amazingly dusty and dirty with cobwebs hanging from the walls and rats scurrying across the floor.

"Ere what's this?" asked the evil stepmother.

The butler pointed to the three buckets of soapy water and scrubbing brushes that were in one corner of the room, "Their royal majesties Prince Kurmate and Princess Clara have a little task for you."

"Princess who??" cried the evil stepmother as several of the palace guards dragged her towards the buckets.

The butler just smiled, "The princess hopes that you don't get your fancy dresses too dirty. Remember that she expects dinner on the table by six o'clock."

From her balcony above the hall Clara grinned and waved. She knew exactly who would be living happily ever after.

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