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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

Kate Crackernuts

Once upon a time there was a king and a queen, as in many lands have been. The king had a daughter, Anne, and the queen had a daughter named Kate, but Anne was far prettier than the queen's daughter, though they loved one another like real sisters. The queen was jealous of the king's daughter being prettier than her own, and wanted about to ruin her beauty. So the queen went to the henwife for advice. The henwife told her to send the girl to her the next morning to gather eggs, but it was important that the girl did not eat anything.

So the next morning early, the queen said to Anne, "Go, my dear, to the henwife, and ask her for some eggs." So Anne set out, but as she passed through the kitchen she saw a crust of bread, and she took and munched it as she went along.

When she came to the henwife's she asked for eggs, as she had been told to do; the henwife said to her, "Lift the lid off that pot there and see." The girl did so, but nothing happened. "Go home to your stepmother and tell her to keep her kitchen door locked," said the henwife. She went home to the queen and told her what the henwife had said. The queen realized that Anne had something to eat, so locked the kitchen the next morning and sent her away without breakfast; but the princess saw some country-folk picking peas by the

roadside, and being very kind she spoke to them and took a handful of the peas, which she ate on her way. When she came to the henwife's, she said, "Lift the lid off the pot and you'll see." So Anne lifted the lid but nothing happened. Then the henwife got angry and said to Anne, "Tell your stepmother the pot won't boil if the fire's away." Anne went home and told the queen the strange message.

The third day the queen decided to go with the girl to the henwife to make sure she doesn't eat anything on the way. Now, this time, when Anne lifted the lid off the pot, off falls her own pretty head, and on jumps a sheep's head!

The queen was satisfied, and went back home.

But her own daughter, Kate, got angry when she saw what happened to her beloved stepsister and took a fine linen cloth and wrapped it around her sister's head and took her by the hand and they both left to seek their fortune. They went on, and they went on, and they went on, until they came to a castle. Kate knocked on the door and asked for a night's lodging for herself and a sick sister. They went in and found out it was a king's castle, who had two sons, and one of them was so sick he was nearly dying and no one could find out what was wrong with him. Many tried to sit with him and figure out what was made him sick, but the curious thing was that whoever watched him at night was never seen again. So the king had offered a bag of silver to anyone who would sit with him at night. Now Katie was a very brave girl, so she offered sit with him.

Until midnight all goes well. As twelve o'clock rings, however, the sick prince rises, dresses himself, and slips downstairs. Kate followed, but he didn't seem to notice her. The prince went to the stable, saddled his horse, called his dog, jumped into the saddle, and Kate leapt lightly up behind him. Away rode the prince and Kate through the woods. Kate, as they were riding, was plucking nuts from the trees and filling her apron with them. They rode on and on until they came to a green hill. The prince here stopped and spoke, "Open, open, green hill, and let the young prince in with his horse and his dog," and Kate added, "and his lady." Immediately the green hill opened and they went in. The prince entered a magnificent hall, brightly lighted up, and many beautiful fairies surrounded the prince and led him off to the dance. Meanwhile, Kate, without being noticed, hid herself behind the door. There she sees the prince dancing, and dancing, and dancing, until he could dance no longer and fell on a couch. Then the fairies would fan him until he could rise again and go on dancing.



At last the cock crew in the early morning, and the prince hurried to get on his horse; Kate jumped up behind, and home they rode. When the morning sun rose the king came in and found Kate sitting down by the fire and cracking her nuts. Kate said the prince had a good night; but she would not sit with him another night unless she was to get a bag of gold. The second night passed as the first had done. The prince got up at midnight and rode away to the green hill and the fairy ball, and Kate went with him, gathering nuts as they rode through the forest. This time she did not watch the prince, for she knew he would dance and dance, and dance. But she sees a fairy baby playing with a wand, and overhears one of the fairies say: "Three strokes of that wand would make Kate's sick sister as pretty as she was." So Kate rolled nuts to the fairy baby, and rolled nuts until the baby toddled after the nuts and let the wand fall, and Kate took it the wand and put it in her apron. And at cockcrow they rode home as before, and the moment Kate got home to her room she rushed and touched Anne three times with the wand, and the nasty sheep's head fell off and she was her own pretty self again. The third night Kate consented to watch, only if she could marry the sick prince. All went on as on the first two nights. This time the fairy baby was playing with a chicken; Kate heard one of the fairies say: "Three bites of that chicken would make the sick prince as well as he was." Kate rolled all the nuts she had to the fairy baby until the chicken was dropped, and Kate put it in her apron.

At cockcrow they set off again, but instead of cracking her nuts as she used to do, this time Kate plucked the feathers off and cooked the chicken. Soon there arose a very savoury smell. "Oh!" said the sick prince, "I wish I could have a bite of that chicken," so Kate gave him a bite, and he rose up on his elbow. Then he cried out again: "Oh, I want another bite of that chicken!" so Kate gave him another bite, and he sat up on his bed. Then he said again: "Oh! If I only I could have a third bite!" So Kate gave him a third bite, and he stood up, dressed himself, and sat down by the fire, and when the king came in the next morning he found Kate and the young prince cracking nuts together. Meanwhile his brother had seen Annie and had fallen in love with her, as everybody did who saw her sweet pretty face. So the sick son married the well sister, and the well son married the sick sister, and they all lived happy and died happy.