



The Brothers Grimm

Clever Elsie



Once Upon a Time

There was once a man who had a daughter who was known as Clever Elsie.



A young man heard about her, and thought, I don't have much in the way of brains myself, so she's the girl for me. His name was Hans.



He said to Elsie's dad, "I want to marry her, but only if she's really smart. Common or garden bright won't do. I want a real clever-clogs."

"Never you worry," said Dad. "My Elsie is so clever it makes my brain hurt just to think of it. She can see the wind coming up the street and hear flies cough."



So they sat down to discuss the match over a meal. But the drink ran out. “Elsie,” said Dad, “pop down to the cellar and fetch some more beer.”



So Elsie took a jug and went down to the cellar. Well, that was a bit boring, so she amused herself by flipping up the lid and banging it down as she walked.



When she got to the barrel, the barrel was too high, so she stood on a chair to avoid hurting her back. You can't be too careful about these things.



Standing on the chair, she saw that there was an old pickaxe hanging on the wall right above the barrel. And she started to think.

What if I marry Hans, and we have a son, and he grows up, and we send him down to the cellar to draw beer, and a pickaxe falls on his head? It would kill him for sure! and she started to weep at the cruelty of it all.



She got off the chair, lay down on the floor, and howled.



Well, upstairs they were worried so they sent the maid to see what was up.



The maid said, "What's to-do? Why are you crying?"

"Why am I crying?" said Elsie. "Who wouldn't cry, with my terrible luck? If I marry Hans, and we have a son an send him down to the cellar to draw beer, a pickaxe may fall on his head and kill him! Boo-hoo!"



And the maid thought, *How clever Elsie is!* And she started to cry too.



Then the manservant went down to see what was up, and when he heard Elsie's sad story, he started crying too.



Then Elsie's mother went down, and then Elsie's father,
and soon they were both in floods of tears too.



At last Hans himself went down. “Whatever’s the matter?”
he asked.

“Ah, my dear,” said Elsie, “life is hard. If we marry and have
a son and send him down to the cellar to draw beer, a
pickaxe may fall on his head and kill him.”



Hans had never heard of anyone who thought as deeply as that.
“I don’t need any more proof of your cleverness,” he said.

“I’ll marry you today!”



After they had been married a while, Hans said, "I must go out to work to earn money. While I am gone, you cut the corn so that we can have flour for our bread."



When Hans was gone, Elsie made herself some porridge to take out into the field, in case she felt hungry.



When she got to the field, she was hungry already. “What shall I do?” she asked herself. “Cut first or eat first?” And she decided to eat first.



When she had eaten, Elsie felt sleepy. “What shall I do?” she asked herself. “Cut first or sleep first?” And she decided to sleep first.

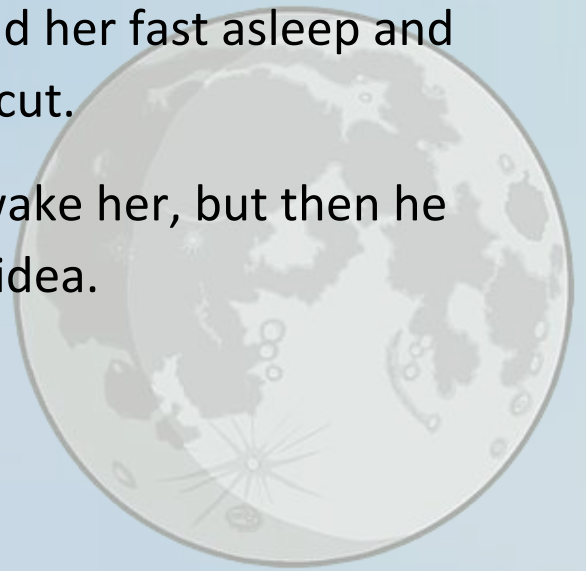


When Hans came home that evening, Elsie was still not back. How clever she is, he thought. She doesn't leave the field until the job is finished.

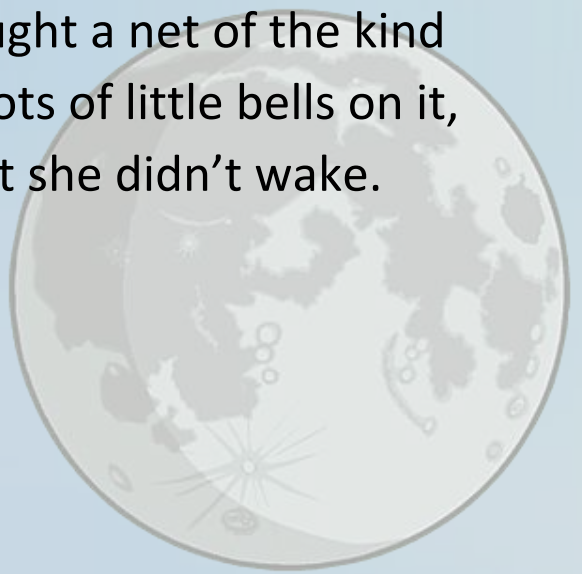


He went to join her, and found her fast asleep and
the corn uncut.

Hans couldn't think how to wake her, but then he
had a bright idea.



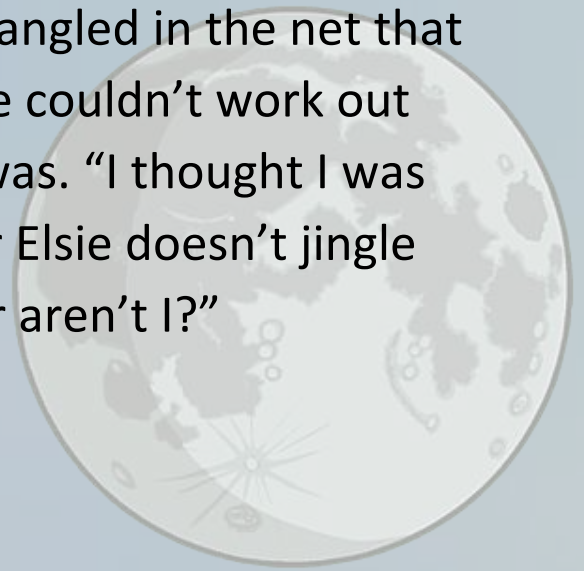
He went back home and brought a net of the kind they use to catch birds, with lots of little bells on it, and threw it over Elsie. But she didn't wake.



So he gave up and went home, locked the door, and sat down to his supper.



It was quite dark when Elsie woke, tangled in the net that chimed whenever she moved. She couldn't work out where she was, or even who she was. "I thought I was Clever Elsie," she said, "but Clever Elsie doesn't jingle when she moves. Am I or aren't I?"



There was only one way to find out. She went to Elsie and Hans' house and knocked at the door. "Hans," she shouted, "is Elsie in?"

"Yes," said Hans, not thinking. "She's here."

"Oh my fingers and toes!" she cried. "Then I'm not me!"



She ran off through the village, jingling and chiming as she went, and no one has seen her since.

The End



