

The Well at the World's End

As told by Bea Ferguson

Once upon a time there was a King and a Queen. They each had daughters, but their daughters were very different indeed. The Queen's daughter was a big grump – always complaining and being rude to everybody. The King's daughter was quite the opposite – sweet, kind and gentle. The Queen wasn't happy about the King's daughter being so much nicer than her own, so she sent the King's daughter away to the Well at the World's End to fetch some water. She hoped that she would never return.

So the King's daughter got a bottle to put the water in, and off she went on her journey. She began to walk, and after a while she came to a pony tied to a tree. To her surprise, the pony started to talk! It said:

*'Free me, free me,
My bonny princess,
For I've not been free
Seven years and a day!'*

'Ok, I'll free you,' said the princess, and she untied the pony from the tree.

'Hop on my back,' said the pony, 'And in return for freeing me, I shall take you across the moor of sharp thorns so that your feet don't get pricked.'

Up hopped the princess onto the pony's back, and she was carried right across the moor of the sharp thorns. After that they parted, as the princess still had a long, long journey ahead of her to get to the Well at the World's End. So she walked and she walked, and finally came to the Well.

The Well was so deep that she couldn't reach down to dip her bottle in the water, and she didn't know what to do as she would hate to disappoint the Queen. All of a sudden three scaly men's heads popped up from the bottom of the Well. Looking up at the princess, they said:

*'Wash me, wash me,
My bonny princess,
And dry me with
Your clean linen apron!'*

'Very well then' said the princess, and she washed the three scaly heads and dried them with her apron. In return they took her empty bottle, dipped it and filled it with water from the well.

Then the three scaly men's heads said to each other:

'Wish, Brother, wish! What will you wish?'

'I wish if she was nice before, she'll be ten times nicer now,' said the first.

'I wish that every time she speaks there will drop a ruby, a diamond and a pearl from her mouth,' said the second.

'I wish that every time she combs her hair she'll comb a peck of gold and a peck of silver from it,' said the third.

The King's daughter went home, and if she was nice before, she was ten times nicer now. Each time she spoke, a ruby, a diamond, and a pearl dropped from her mouth. Each time she combed her hair she combed a peck of gold and a peck of silver out of it.

The Queen was furious that the King's daughter had returned like this – and she didn't know what to do about it. Then she thought that maybe she should send her own daughter to the Well at the World's End and she would also return like the King's daughter. So she gave her daughter a bottle to fill with water from the Well at the World's End and sent her on her way.

As she walked, the Queen's daughter also came across the pony tied to the tree. Just like before, the pony said:

*'Free me, free me,
My bonny princess,
For I've not been free
Seven years and a day!'*

'Free you? Why on earth would I do that?' she replied, 'I am the Queen's daughter!'

'Very well, I won't carry you over the moor of sharp thorns then,' said the pony.

So the Queen's daughter had to make her way across the moor on her bare feet, which got pricked and pricked by the thorns until she could barely walk.

When she finally reached the Well at the World's End she found, like the King's daughter, that the Well was so deep she couldn't reach the water with her bottle. And then the same three scaly men's heads looked up at her, and said:

*'Wash me, wash me,
My bonny princess,
And dry me with
Your clean linen apron!'*

'Wash you? Why on earth would I do that, you horrible creatures!' she exclaimed. 'I am the Queen's daughter!'

She did not wash their heads and so they did not dip her bottle and fill it for her. They said one to the other:

'Wish, brother, wish! What will you wish?'

'I wish that if she was mean before, she'll be ten times meaner now,' said the first.

'I wish that every time she speaks there will drop a frog and a toad from her mouth,' said the second.

'I wish that every time she combs her hair she'll comb a peck of lice and a peck of fleas out of it,' said the third.

So off she went home with no water in the bottle. When the Queen saw her she was furious, for if her daughter had been mean before she was ten times meaner now, and each time she spoke a frog and a toad dropped from her mouth. Each time she combed her hair, she combed a peck of lice and fleas out of it. It was so bad that she was sent away from Court, as she was incapable of being nice to anyone.

So the Queen's daughter had to move to a small, cold castle on a cliff and look after her grumpy aunt and cat. She didn't meet many nice people, as she was always so mean to them. But the King's daughter always found that when she was nice to others, they were nice back. She made lots of friends in the Palace, and had many horses and pets who loved her very much.

GIFTING EVERY CHILD

A' TOIRT TÌODHLAC DO GACH LEANABH

A HANDSEL FOR EVERY BAIRN



TRACS TRADITIONAL
ARTS + CULTURE
SCOTLAND