

Goosey Grizzel

by Sir George Webbe Dasent
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Once on a time there was a widower, who had a housekeeper named Grizzel, who set her mutch at him and teased him early and late to marry her. At last the man got so weary of her, he was at his wits' end to know how to get rid of her. So it fell on a day, between hay time and harvest, the two went out to pull hemp. Grizzel's head was full of her good looks and her handiness, and she worked away at the hemp till she grew giddy from the strong smell of the ripe seed, and at last down she fell flat, fast asleep among the hemp. While she slept, her master got a pair of scissors and cut her skirts short all round, and then he rubbed her all over, face and all, first with tallow and then with soot, till she looked worse than the Deil himself. So, when Grizzel woke and saw how ugly she was, she didn't know herself.

'Can this be me now?' said Grizzel. 'Nay, nay! it can never be me. So ugly have I never been; it's surely the Deil himself?'

Well! that she might really know the truth, she went off and knocked at her master's door, and asked,

'Is your Girzie at home the day, father?'

'Aye, aye, our Girzie is at home safe enough', said the man, who wanted to be rid of her.

'Well, well!' she said to herself, 'then I can't be his Grizzel,' and stole away; and right glad the man was, I can tell you.

So, when she had walked a bit she came to a great wood, where she met two thieves. 'The very men for my money, thought Grizzel, 'since I am the Deil, thieves are just fit fellows for me.'

But the thieves were not of the same mind, not they. As soon as they set eyes on her, they took to their heels as fast as they could, for they thought the Evil One was come to catch them. But it was no good, for Grizzel was long-legged and swift-footed, and she came up with them before they knew where they were.

'If you're going out to steal, I'll go with you and help,' said Grizzel, 'for I know the whole country round.' So, when the thieves heard that, they thought they had found a good mate, and were no longer afraid.

Then they said they were off to steal a sheep, only they didn't know where to lay hold of one.

'Oh!' said Grizzel, 'that's a small matter, for I was maid with a farmer ever so long out in the wood yonder, and I could find the sheepfold, though the night were dark as pitch.'

The thieves thought that grand; and when they came to the place, Grizzel was to go into the fold and turn out the sheep, and they were to lay hold on it. Now, the sheepfold lay close to the wall of the room where the farmer slept, so Grizzel crept quite softly and carefully into the fold; but, as soon as she got in, she began to scream out to the thieves, 'Will you have a wether or a ewe? here are lots to choose from.'

'Hush, hush!' said the thieves, 'only take one that is fine and fat.'

'Yes, yes! but will you have a wether or a ewe? will you have a wether or a ewe? for here are lots to choose from,' screeched Grizzel.

'Hush, hush!' said the thieves again, 'only take one that's fine and fat; it's all the same to us whether it's a wether or a ewe.'

'Yes!' screeched Grizzel, who stuck to her own; 'but will you have a wether or a ewe--a wether or a ewe? here are lots to choose from.'

'Hold your jaw!' said the thieves, 'and take a fine fat one, wether or ewe, its all one to us.'

But just then out came the farmer in his shirt, who had been waked by all this clatter, and wanted to see what was going on. So the thieves took to their heels, and Grizzel after them, upsetting the farmer in her flight.

'Stop, boys! stop, boys!' she screamed; but the farmer, who had only seen the black monster, grew so afraid that he could scarce stand, for he thought it was the Deil himself that had been in his sheepfold. The

only help he knew was, to go indoors and wake up the whole house; and they all sat down to read and pray, for he had heard that was the way to send the Deil about his business.

Now the next night the thieves said they must go and steal a fat goose, and Grizzel was to shew them the way. So when they came to the goosepen, Grizzel was to go in and turn one out, for she knew the ways of the place, and the thieves were to stand outside and catch it. But as soon as ever she got in she began to scream,

'Will you have goose or gander? you may pick and choose here.'

'Hush hush! choose only a fine fat one', said the thieves. 'Yes, yes! but will you have goose or gander--goose or gander? you may pick and choose', screamed Grizzel.

'Hush, hush! only choose one that's fine and fat, and it's all one to us whether it's goose or gander; but do hold your jaw', said they.

But while Grizzel and the thieves were settling this, one of the geese began to cackle, and then another cackled, and then the whole flock cackled and hissed, and out came the farmer to see what all the noise could mean, and away went the thieves, and Grizzel after them, at full speed, and the farmer thought again it was the black Deil flying away; for long-legged she was, and she had no skirts to hamper her.

'Stop a bit, boys!' she kept on screaming, 'you might as well have said whether you would have goose or gander?'

But they had no time to stop, they thought; and, as for the farmer, he began to read and pray with all his house, small and great, for they thought it was the Deil, and no mistake.

Now, the third day, when night came, the thieves and Grizzel were so hungry they did not know what to do; so they made up their minds to go to the larder of a rich farmer, who lived by the wood's side, and steal some food. Well, off they went, but the thieves did not dare to venture themselves, so Grizzel was to go up the steps which led to the larder, and hand the food out, and the others were to stand below and take it from her. So when Grizzel got inside, she saw the larder was full of all sorts of things, fresh meat and salt, and sausages and oat-cake. The thieves begged her to be still, and just throw out something

to eat, and to bear in mind how badly they had fared for two nights. But Grizzel stuck to her own, that she did.

'Will you have fresh meat, or salt, or sausages, or oat-cake? Just look, what a lovely oat-cake', she bawled out enough to split your head. 'You may have what you please, for here's plenty to choose from.'

But the farmer woke with all this noise, and ran out to see what it all meant. As for the thieves, off they ran as fast as they could; but while the farmer was looking after them, down came Grizzel so black and ugly.

'Stop a bit! stop a bit, boys!' she bellowed; 'you may have what you please, for there's plenty to choose from.'

And when the farmer saw that ugly monster, he, too, thought the Deil was loose, for he had heard what had happened to his neighbours the evenings before; so he began both to read and pray, and every one in the whole parish began to read and pray, for they knew that you could read the Deil away.

The next evening was Saturday evening, and the thieves wanted to steal a fat ram for their Sunday dinner; and well they might, for they had fasted many days. But they wouldn't have Grizzel with them at any price. She brought bad luck with her jaw, they said; so while Grizzel was walking about waiting for them on Sunday morning, she got so awfully hungry--for she had fasted for three days--that she went into a turnip-field and pulled up some turnips to eat. But when the farmer who owned the turnips rose, he felt uneasy in his mind, and thought he would just go and take a look at his turnips on the Sunday morning. So he pulled on his trousers and went across the moss which lay under the hill, where the turnip-field lay. But when he got to the bottom of the field, he saw something black walking about in the field and pulling up his turnips, and he soon made up his mind that it was the Deil. So away he ran home as fast as he could, and said the Deil was among the turnips. This frightened the whole house out of their wits, and they agreed they'd best send for the priest, and get him to bind the Deil.

'That won't do', said the goodwife, 'this is Sunday morning, you'll never get the priest to come; for either he'll be in bed; or if he's up, he'll be learning his sermon by heart.'

'Oh!' said the goodman, 'never fear; I'll promise him a fat loin of veal, and then he'll come fast enough.'

So off he went to the priest's house; but when he got there, sure enough, the priest was still in bed. The maid begged the farmer to walk into the parlour while she ran up to the priest, and said:

'Farmer So-and-So was downstairs, and wished to have a word with him.'

Well! when the priest heard that such a worthy man was downstairs, he got up at once, and came down just as he was, in his slippers and nightcap.

So the goodman told his errand; how the Deil was loose in his turnip-field; and if the priest would only come and bind him, he would send him a fat loin of veal. Yes! the priest was willing enough, and called out to his groom, to saddle his horse, while he dressed himself.

'Nay, nay, father!' said the man; 'the Deil won't wait for us long, and no one knows where we shall find him again if we miss him now. Your reverence must come at once, just as you are.'

So the priest followed him just as he was, with the clothes he stood in, and went off in his nightcap and slippers. But when they got to the moss, it was so moist the priest couldn't cross it in his slippers. So the goodman took him on his back to carry him over. On they went, the goodman picking his way from one clump to the other, till they got to the middle; then Grizzel caught sight of them, and thought it was the thieves bringing the ram.

'Is he fat?' she screamed; 'is he fat?' and made such a noise that the wood rang again.

'The Deil knows if he's fat or lean; I'm sure I don't', said the goodman, when he heard that; 'but, if you want to know, you had better come yourself and see.'

And then he got so afraid, he threw the priest head over heels into the soft wet moss, and took to his legs; and if the priest hasn't got out, why I dare say he's lying there still.

