



# *The Hedley Kow*

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English

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*Intermediate*  
*6 min read*

There was once an old woman, who earned a poor living by going errands and such like, for the farmers' wives round about the village where she lived. It wasn't much she earned by it; but with a plate of meat at one house, and a cup of tea at another, she made shift to get on somehow, and always looked as cheerful as if she hadn't a want in the world.

Well, one summer evening as she was trotting away homewards, she came upon a big black pot lying at the side of the road.

"Now that," said she, stopping to look at it, "would be just the very thing for me if I had anything to put into it! But who can have left it here?" and she looked round about, as if the person it belonged to must be not far off. But she could see no one.

"Maybe it'll have a hole in it," she said thoughtfully:—

"Ay, that'll be how they've left it lying, hinny. But then it 'd do fine to put a flower in for the window; I'm thinking I'll just take it home, anyways." And she bent her stiff old back, and lifted the lid to look inside.

"Mercy me!" she cried, and jumped back to the other side of the road; "if it is fit brim full o' gold PIECES!!"

For a while she could do nothing but walk round and round her treasure, admiring the yellow gold and wondering at her good luck, and saying to herself about every two minutes, "Well, I do be feeling rich and grand!" But presently she began to think how she could best take it home with her; and she couldn't see any other way than by fastening one end of her shawl to it, and so dragging it after her along the road.

"It'll certainly be soon dark," she said to herself, "and folk'll not see what I'm bringing home with me, and so I'll have all the night to myself to think what I'll do with it. I could buy a grand house and all, and live like the Queen herself, and not do a stroke of work all day, but just sit by the fire with a cup of tea; or maybe I'll give it to the priest to keep for me, and get a piece as I'm wanting; or maybe I'll just bury it in a hole at the garden-foot, and put a bit on the chimney, between the chiney teapot and the spoons—for ornament like. Ah! I feel so grand, I don't know myself rightly!"

And by this time, being already rather tired with dragging such a heavy weight after her, she stopped to rest for a minute, turning to make sure that her treasure was safe.

But when she looked at it, it wasn't a pot of gold at all, but a great lump of shining silver!

She stared at it, and rubbed her eyes and stared at it again; but she couldn't make it look like anything but a great lump of silver. "I'd have sworn it was a pot of gold," she said at last, "but I reckon I must have been dreaming. Ay, now, that's a change for the better; it'll be far less trouble to look after, and none so easy stolen; yon gold pieces would have been a sight of bother to keep 'em safe. Ay, I'm well quit of them; and with my bonny lump I'm as rich as rich—!"

And she set off homewards again, cheerfully planning all the grand things she was going to do with her money. It wasn't very long, however, before she got tired again and stopped once more to rest for a minute or two.

Again she turned to look at her treasure, and as soon as she set eyes on it she cried out in astonishment. “Oh, my!” said she; “now it’s a lump o’ iron! Well, that beats all; and it’s just real convenient! I can sell it as easy as easy, and get a lot o’ penny pieces for it. Ay, hinny, an’ it’s much handier than a lot o’ yer gold and silver as ‘d have kept me from sleeping o’ nights thinking the neighbours were robbing me—an’ it’s a real good thing to have by you in a house, ye niver can tell what ye mightn’t use it for, an’ it’ll sell—ay, for a real lot. Rich? I’ll be just rolling!”

And on she trotted again chuckling to herself on her good luck, till presently she glanced over her shoulder, “just to make sure it was there still,” as she said to herself.

“Eh, my!” she cried as soon as she saw it; “if it hasn’t gone and turned itself into a great stone this time! Now, how could it have known that I was just terrible wanting something to hold my door open with? Ay, if that isn’t a good change! Hinny, it’s a fine thing to have such good luck.”

And, all in a hurry to see how the stone would look in its corner by her door, she trotted off down the hill, and stopped at the foot, beside her own little gate.

When she had unlatched it, she turned to unfasten her shawl from the stone, which this time seemed to lie unchanged and peaceably on the path beside her, There was still plenty of light, and she could see the stone quite plainly as she bent her stiff back over it, to untie the shawl end; when, all of a sudden, it seemed to give a jump and a squeal, and grew in a moment as big as a great horse; then it threw down four lanky legs, and shook out two long ears, flourished a tail, and went off kicking its feet into the and laughing like a naughty mocking boy.

The old woman stared after it, till it was fairly out of sight.

“WELL!” she said at last, “I do be the luckiest body hereabouts! Fancy me seeing the Hedley Kow all to myself, and making so free with it too! I can tell you, I do feel that GRAND—”

And she went into her cottage, and sat down by the fire to think over her good luck.

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