



# *Hearts with eyes!*

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Retold Fairy Tales

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## Hearts With Eyes

Every other Tuesday come rain or come shine the new mothers met in the Church Hall which for those few hours had become 'The Clinic'. It was a godsend and all the more so for those living lonely lives on the outskirts of the village. Babies were weighed and checked over by the district nurses and in due course saw to that vaccinations were given when needed. There was a doctor there too just in case one was needed but best of was the afternoon tea. The hot drink was the one thing provided but everyone brought a sample of their baking so there was plenty to eat be it sandwich or cake or both. Best of all was the chance to exchange gossip and all the women made the most of the chance to be sure their offspring wasn't in any way lagging behind the any of the others. When it was time to leave they went home well satisfied. They all knew perfectly well there was only one perfect baby and every mother was certain she had it. Of that there was no doubt.

As time went by the babies grew and almost before anyone could believe it possible small well-scrubbed children went off to school each weekday morning. Later in the day they went home by which time most looked quite grubby. They ate a hurried tea after which all who could went out to play with new found friends. It was a new and exciting time which promised to carry on until they were old enough to leave school. However not every child fitted easily into this new pattern. For instance one little girl who lived on the outskirts of the village soon found herself on the edge of everything. She lived too from other little girls with whom she longed to play with. She wasn't denied her play times but these were generally taken under the resentfully watchful eyes of her older brother and his friends.

“ Darren ! Take Joanne with you. ”

“ Do I have to ? ”

“ Either that or you stay in and watch over her. I’ve got work to do.”

That sealed both their fates. Joanne could be with the boys or play by herself and if that happened then Darren would be kept in keep her amused. He sighed deeply and went took the little girl by the hand knowing all too well what his friends were going to say. He felt very hard done by . It just wasn’t fair in his eyes for at the age of nine the last thing any boy wanted was to have his five year old sister hanging on to him. Still it was better to go while he could he’d miss out on being with his friends and he wasn’t about to do that. So off he went dragging Joanne with him. Of course there was a groan from the boys as soon as they saw the little girl which was hardly a good start. However they soon got used to her presence and took turns in staying with her so no one missed out on things such as tree-climbing or whatever else they wanted to do.

“ Darren. Wait for me. ”

The whining cry changed but that was all, or nearly all. Joanne lived too far away from the other little girls so she carried on under the sort of watchful eye of her elder brother and his friends The result was she got left out of most the girlie things in the playground which for quite a while just didn’t bother her. The boys of course groaned the second they saw her which made her feel unwanted but even that wasn’t too bad once she was old enough to see the reason for it. It was much the same once she’d learned not to tell her mother everything they said or did. Unluckily for her she hadn’t learned that lesson before she’d been given the nickname of Toadie Jo That made her feel ugly especially when she tried joining in with the other little girls so she stayed more and more on her own or with the boys. At least she knew where she stood with them and they never seemed to mind that she wasn’t pretty, or at least in her own mind she wasn’t.

The one thing the little girl hadn’t taken into account was how time changed people and she certainly didn’t see the same was happening to her. She puzzled over the changes but no way did she understand them. Why for pity’s sake was it suddenly so wrong for her to be climbing trees with the boys ? Why did her nickname Toadie hurt more than usual ? And maybe worst of all, why were the girls being nasty about her continued contact with the boys ? They were often saying unpleasant things about her now in her hearing but in ways which had her sure they wanted her to hear but nothing was ever that direct so she’d no way of knowing how to deal with it. Keeping her feelings to herself was a good way not to stir up problems for others. The trouble about that was Joanne could not ask anyone about her feelings. All she could do was to carry on as she always had and hope

that sooner or later something or someone would give her the help she needed. Week after week went by with more questions coming into her mind until Joanne felt she couldn't bear it any longer. She became convinced that sooner or later her tummy would explode much as a boiling pot blew off its lid. She was right about that too but never in a thousand years would she have dreamt of it happening the way it did let alone what happened afterwards. It hadn't been her who'd set the ball rolling either. She'd started off for school as usual and the nearer she got to the high wall surrounding one of the girls front garden the more sick she felt

“ There's something wrong with you Toadie ! ”

The voice seemed to come from nowhere but what at that moment no one knew, not even Joanne was that for once boys were sneaking up behind her instead of leaving her to in to school with the girls as they usually did.

“ There's something not nice about girls who always play with boys. All our families say the same so it must be something to do with just you and your lot... ”

At that point everything happened at once. There was a squeal from the culprits behind the wall as Darren pulled them out into the open and the boys all wanted to know why Joanne let them getting away with such spite. It was just too much for her to deal with and with a choking sob she ran off into the fields.

“ I'm for it now ” said Darren gloomily. He knew all too well it was always his fault if anything upset his little sister.

“ Doesn't have to be ” said Rob, one of the quietest among the group of boys. “ Just tell me where she's likely to be and I'll get her back. The rest of you get them into school and heaven help you ” he added looking at the girls, “ if you say or do anything to make a bigger mess. For now its only us knowing about your sneaky ways or do you want everyone to know about them ? ”

“ She'll be in the top field on her way to the woods ” Darren said and felt a little easier when he saw understanding on his friend's face, something that mercifully was not picked up by any of the others.

So it was that a dismal little group watched Rob set off at speed before making their way to school so that most should be where they should be when the bell rang.

Getting to the top field Rob stood and stared at the barely recognisable ball of misery huddled in the middle.

No one had ever seen this side of Toadie before and he wasn't sure how to deal with her. He couldn't understand why she should be at that particular spot either until he got nearer and she spoke.

“ I'm in the middle of a fairy ring ” she warned, “ so you'd better not get any closer. ”

“ Do you still believe in fairies ? ” Rob did his best not to sound incredulous.

“ I must do or I wouldn't be here would I ? Anyway you're the only person who knows about this so you'd d better promise not to tell anyone on your life and you'd better not laugh either or I'll.... ”

“ You'll what ? ”

“ I don't know ” wailed Joanne and suddenly tears were running down her cheeks and she was sobbing as if her heart would break something both found disconcerting though Rob didn't hesitate. He held her safe in his embrace holding her and rocking her until she was more herself. Then when he thought she was calm enough to hear and to be aware of what he said he spoke but not to her. Not yet but in his view she had to know he respected her beliefs even if he didn't understand them.

“ Well fairies, I guess I'd better deal with you first since you're a power I'm not sure of. I'm sorry if I'm treading where I shouldn't but I'm here and I can't change that. All I can do is to trust you to understand I thought Toadie needed me.”

“ I hate that nickname ” Joanne muttered still sounding perilously close to tears.

“ Why ? ”

“ Ever since I was little and sent to play with you boys I knew it was I was too ugly to be with the girls. I keep trying to believe I might get to looking better as I'm growing up and then one of you calls me by that silly name and I know all the wishing hasn't worked. ”

You're mad ! ”

Rob was so shocked by what he'd just heard he forgot to be as careful in his response as he might have been before he tried to work what might help but he was floundering. He'd no idea what was right so he said exactly what he felt on the basis that Toadie would forgive him if he said the wrong thing where she'd never forgive a dishonest approach.

“ You might not be the greatest looker in the world ” he said hesitantly, “ but after hearing that pretty bitch I can't see why so many folk set such store by people like her. I mean you've got a brain and a heart. You'd never say anything spiteful behind a wall because you didn't have the guts to say what you wanted to their face. There's nothing there I find good other than the shape and the skin and they don't stay that long in the grand scheme of things. No ! Give me a good , honest Toadie any day. That's what I say. The trouble is the only Toadie I know might never find me good enough.”

Without warning Rob suddenly had the feeling he'd talked himself into a tight corner and unable to find anything to say that would be meaningful he acted on impulse. Seeing Joanne's face full of conflict between

doubt and hope he kissed her gently and more than once. He got his reward in the glowing radiance of her face and somehow forced himself to stop. He wasn't sure why but he was suddenly very sure that to kiss her again would be once too often. All he could do then was knowing this was all about her he went back a while and asked what made a fairy ring.

"I don't know" said Joanne. "I only know people call them that and they're often found around here on hot days. On hot days they look green once everything else around has dried out. It's probably why people call them fairy rings and of course fairies make magic so people wish in them. When I was little I wished on them lots and most times they seem to come true. It's why I came here today, that and because I didn't know what else to do."

"But you're feeling better than you did?"

"Mmmm."

"Do we have to?"

"They'll come looking for us if we don't."

"They'll still ask us all sorts of questions..."

Rob thought Joanne was sounding frightened again and promptly did his best to resolve the problem before it got out of hand. "You're right" he said, "so we'd better have our answers ready so they don't get a chance to make something ugly out of what turned out to be a beautiful moment. All we need to say is that is we heard a dog barking like there was trouble near the wood so we went to find out what it could be. Turned out the silly thing was jumping all around a hedgehog so we grabbed it and sent it on its way but we waited a bit to see the hedgehog wasn't hurt."

"Is that all?"

"Teachers can only punish us if they can prove we lied. Keep the story short enough to be remembered and real enough to be likely and there's nothing much they can do."

"You're so clever" said Joanne, flinging her arms round the boy and kissing him.

"Do that again and someone sees us no one will believe a word about the dog and hedgehog."

Neither spoke as they set off to do what they had to until they neared school when Rob asked a question.

"Can I please carry on calling you Toadie?" he asked.

"Why?"

"Because for me it's always been the name of a special friend and I want it to carry on that way. Think about it

before you say yes because I don't want you to be unhappy about it. ”

“ Alright then ” Joanne said, blushing as she remembered those kisses and Rob knew though he was kind enough to avoid spoiling what had been a magical moment.

“ You can blame the fairies if you like. I acted as I did because I wanted you to know how special you are. Anyway ” he said, “ and even when you were so unhappy you looked more like a princess than anyone I've ever known and right now you look so much better. ”

“ I'm glad you think the fairies helped even if they did have to take a bit of my muddle head ” said Joanne and there was more than a hint of laughter in her voice.

“ How could the magic be wrong if it worked ? ”

“ I don't know but either the fairies were wrong or we were because in story it was just wrong. The princess was the one to kiss the frog which turned him back into a handsome prince.... ”

“ -and this time they were just as right in getting the prince to kiss a girl called Toadie. She was free then to be as beautiful as she always had been. ”

“ Oh you ” laughed Joanne as they walked into school.

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