



# *The Bunnies and the School*

## *Teacher*

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Animals, Humor, Kids

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Twice upon a time...sorry, I miscounted. Once upon a time there lived a school teacher called Clara. She was the only one in town who was clever, which is how she got the job. So, every day she would teach the children about numbers and words and names and things like that. She taught them how many threes there were in twelve, how to spell “chrysanthemum” (which is pretty tricky, let me tell you) and where France was.

And every night she would go home to her empty house where she lived alone.

Her students loved her, the other grown-ups in town respected her but Clara still wasn't happy. She loved children, but it wasn't enough for her to teach other people's children. She wanted to be a mother herself. Unfortunately, “mother” is not a job you can just go in and apply for like when she applied to be school teacher. It's a little more complicated than that. What she really wanted to do was marry a nice man and have children with him. But of all the men in her town, most were married, several were too old, many were too young, and that just left Mark, who was kind of a jerk.

So, poor Clara was beginning to think she'd never marry a nice man and have children, which is a bit sad.

Then, to everyone's great surprise, a new man arrived in the town. He said his name was Johann and he was, in a word, dreamy. Not just handsome or good-looking, he was definitely dreamy. And if you don't know what that means, go ask your mom or your Aunt Gladys or somebody. In any case, Johann was instantly fascinating

to each and every woman in town, up to and including our Clara.

Johann took a house on the edge of town, and he lived there alone except for two little bunnies he had brought with him. He seldom left his house, usually just to buy food and things, and when he did, he paid with gold. He didn't seem to have a job or know any sort of trade, but he always had plenty of money. And any time he did leave the house, he always seemed to be in a great hurry to get back to Leonard and Eula, which were the names of his bunnies.

So, to sum up: Gorgeous, rich and kind to animals. Clara never stood a chance,

After being in town for about a month, he paid a visit to the schoolhouse and introduced himself to Clara.

"May I speak to you? It's rather important...and sort of private," he added, because the schoolhouse was still full of students. Understandably anxious to be alone with Johann, Clara unceremoniously dismissed the students from their lessons about two hours early. "I was wondering if you'd like to make a little extra money. I am in need of a private tutor and I've been reliably informed that you are the only clever person in town."

"I'll be happy to help if I can," she said. "But I don't have a lot of experience teaching grown-ups."

Johann laughed. "No, it's not me. It's the bunnies."

"The what?"

"My two bunnies. Leonard and Eula. I need to hire a tutor for them. I know how that must sound," he added, when he saw the look on the school teacher's face, "but if you'll come to my house tonight after dark, it will all be clear. Please?"

Clara had to think about this. On the one hand, it was starting to look very much like Johann was out of his mind.

On the other hand...dreamy.

Clara agreed and, just after sunset, she knocked on the front door of Johann's house. It was small and cozy, very few pieces of furniture or decoration. A man as wealthy as Johann apparently was could have afforded much more.

"Thank you for coming," said Johann, showing her in. "Now let me go get Leonard and Eula," so saying he went

into the next room...and, to Clara's utter astonishment, he brought forth, not two bunnies, but two six-year-old children. A boy and a girl, both with very black hair. "This is Leonard," he said, indicating the boy, "and this is his sister, Eula."

"I don't understand," said Clara. "I thought Leonard and Eula were your bunnies."

"We are!" said Leonard.

"But only during the day," added Eula.

"I think I'd better explain, guys," said Johann to the children. He sent them back to their room so that he could talk to Clara in private. "First you should know that I'm actually a prince. Some time ago, I met a beautiful maiden with jet black hair and two little white bunnies. She said her name was Greta and I was so taken by her beauty that I asked her to be my wife. On what was to be our wedding day, I found out that Greta was actually a terrible witch who had made herself beautiful to trick me into marrying her. It seems that she was getting old, close to death. And the only way to save her life was to eat a heart full of love. That was what she wanted to do to me. You might say she was fattening up my heart like the proverbial calf so she could feast on it on our wedding night."

Sorry, I should have warned you guys about that gross bit.

"And, as if that wasn't bad enough, I learned that her two pet bunnies were actually her children. For some impossible to fathom reason, Greta despised the children and had cast a spell on them that would turn them into bunnies during the daylight hours. But every night, they turn back into their real selves. Well, once I heard about how she was treating these two innocent children, I didn't care about myself anymore. All I knew was that I had to get the children away from her. So, I packed a few things, enough gold to live off for a few years, took the children and ran away.

"I don't know how to break the curse," Johann continued. "As far as I know, it can only be broken when the witch dies. But, if she really was as close to death as she thought she was, that shouldn't be too much longer. Every morning I go into the children's bedroom hoping to see them in their human form...I'm probably the only person in history who feels heartbroken when he sees two adorable bunnies."

"You're very kind," said Clara. "To care so much for those two."

“I do the best I can to care for them. Food, clothing, shelter. But I don’t know if I’m helping them at all. I do know that they need schooling, and I’m not clever enough for the job. So, what do you say? Will you come here at night to teach two adorable children before they turn back into bunnies by dawn’s early light?”

Clara, of course, agreed. And from then on, she came to Johann’s house every night to teach Leonard and Eula the same way she taught the other children in her school. This went on for three months without anyone in town finding out, which is good because they’d only gossip and spread ugly rumors. In all that time, Clara grew fonder and fonder of Leonard and Eula, and they grew fonder and fonder of her.

And, as a bonus, Clara and Johann were also growing fonder and fonder of each other.

“On the day when the children wake up as children,” he told her one night as she was leaving, “we’ll have to leave town. People will ask why I suddenly have two six-year-old children, and I won’t be able to explain. Besides, I am still sort of supposed to be a prince and I didn’t exactly give notice when I left, so…”

“I understand.”

“No, you don’t. Because when that day comes, I want you to come with us.”

“You want to hire me as a full-time tutor for the children?”

“No. No I don’t.”

You may have read somewhere that Clara was very clever, so it didn’t take her long to get the gist of what Johann was saying. And with a few whispered words and a kiss she’d been dying to give him since day one, the pact was made: When the witch died and the curse was broken, Johann, Leonard, Eula and Clara would run away together and live as a real family at last.

But what about the witch? When she woke up one morning to discover her fiancée had run off and taken her children/bunnies with him, what did she do? Well, she got good and mad, of course. And despite being weak and unwell, she began searching the countryside for Prince Johann and the bunnies. She figured it wouldn’t be hard to find a gorgeous, wealthy man traveling with two adorable bunnies. Seriously, how many of those could there even be?

Finally, late one night, Greta arrived at the town where Johann was hiding. But she was on her last legs. She

barely had enough strength to walk. As she struggled to keep her feet, a young lady came over to her and helped her to stand.

“Are you all right?” asked Clara. She was on her way to Johann’s house when she had seen the old woman stumble.

“No!” said Greta. “No, I’m not even close to...” but then she looked up at Clara’s eyes. There was something in her eyes that was unmistakable, if you knew how to look. And it was exactly what the witch needed.

“You...you’re in love!”

“What?”

“Yes, you are! Your heart is overflowing with love. I must have your heart!”

Suddenly, Clara realized who it was that she had been helping. She tried to run away but found that she couldn’t move. The witch’s body may have been weak, but her magic was as strong as ever and she had frozen Clara to the spot. Slowly, Greta unsheathed a long and very sharp knife. “Hold still, dearie,” said the witch with a sickening smile. “This won’t hurt a bit...it’ll hurt a lot!”

Clara was late. She had never been late. Punctuality was very important to her (not surprising, given her day job) and Johann knew that she was never late. But tonight, she was late. Which meant something must have happened. Warning Leonard and Eula to stay in the house, he ran into the streets to find her. When he did, he found her frozen by magic and about to have her heart cut out by the witch.

“Greta, stop!” he cried.

“Well, hello there, sweetie,” said the witch. “Remember me? Your ex-girlfriend?”

“Please, don’t hurt her.”

“Oh! Now I see. You’ve fallen in love with this one, have you? I guess she is pretty cute.”

“Yes, I’m in love with Clara. Which means my heart is just as full of love as hers. And I’m the one that took the children from you. So, please, I beg you...take my heart and spare hers.”

“Johann, no!” Clara yelled out.

“Clara, please, I know what I’m doing.”

“Very well,” said Greta. And she released Clara from her clutches and froze Johann instead. “And after I eat your heart, I’ll take back those two brats you stole from me and drown them in the river! And you can’t do anything to stop me!”

“No, no I can’t,” admitted Johann as the witch slowly walked toward him, her knife raised, “but I know one thing for sure.”

“And what’s that?”

“You definitely shouldn’t have let Clara go.”

He was right. That was a big mistake. Because now that she was free to move she was able to punch the witch in the face, knock the knife from her hand and kick her legs out from under her.

“See,” said Johann, now able to move. “This is why we never would have worked out, Greta. You’re just not clever enough for me.”

Those were the last words the witch ever heard. In her weakened state, Clara’s attack had been that one little push she had needed and she died.

The next morning was probably the happiest morning of Johann’s entire life. He went into Leonard and Eula’s room and, instead of two adorable bunnies under the covers, there were two adorable children sleeping soundly. The spell was broken! He hugged and kissed them awake. He couldn’t have been happier if they’d really been his own children.

But, of course, they were his, really. After all, their real mother was dead and Johann had been kinder and more loving toward them than she had ever been. It was the most natural thing in the world for Leonard and Eula to call him “father.”

And, soon thereafter, to call Clara “mother.”

Yes, Prince Johann married Clara the very day he returned to his kingdom. He told his subjects (who had, naturally, been worried sick about him since he had left all that time ago) about how he’d had to go on a long journey to save them from an evil witch and that, on the way, he had met Clara and her two beautiful children

(it was a bit of a fib, of course, but he thought it was easier than explaining about the witch's curse). The people of Johann's kingdom were overjoyed, not only to be getting their prince back, but to be gaining a princess and two really nice kids into the bargain.

But don't go thinking that Clara gave up her career. No, as a matter of fact, she kept on teaching for the rest of her life, making her the first princess ever to have a sideline. And every day she taught the children of her kingdom how many threes there were in twelve, how to spell "chrysanthemum" (which hasn't gotten any easier) and where France was.

And every night, she would go home to her loving husband and her precious children. And she lived very happily ever after.

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