Clever Else

There was once a man who had a daughter who was called Clever Else, and when she was grown up, her father said she must be married, and her mother said, "Yes, if we could only find some one that would consent to have." At last one came from a distance, and his name was Hans, and when he proposed to her, he made it a condition that Clever Else should be very careful as well. "Oh," said the father, "she does not want for brains." - "No, indeed," said the mother, "she can see the wind coming up the street and hear the flies cough." - "Well," said Hans, "if she does not turn out to be careful too, I will not have her." Now when they were all seated at table, and had well eaten, the mother said, "Else, go into the cellar and draw some beer." Then Clever Else took down the jug from the hook in the wall, and as she was on her way to the cellar she rattled the lid up and down so as to pass away the time. When she got there, she took a stool and stood it in front of the cask, so that she need not stoop and make her back ache with needless trouble. Then she put the jug under the tap and turned it, and while the beer was running, in order that her eyes should not be idle, she glanced hither and thither, and finally caught sight of a pickaxe that the workmen had left sticking in the ceiling just above her head. Then Clever Else began to cry, for she thought, "If I marry Hans, and we have a child, and it grows big, and we send it into the cellar to draw beer, that pickaxe might fall on his head and kill him." So there she sat and cried with all her might, lamenting the anticipated misfortune. All the while they were waiting upstairs for something to drink, and they waited in vain. At last the mistress said to the maid, "Go down to the cellar and see why Else does not come." So the maid went, and found her sitting in front of the cask crying with all her might. "What are you crying for?" said the maid. "Oh dear me," answered she, "how can I help crying? if I marry Hans, and we have a child, and it grows big, and we send it here to draw beer, perhaps the pickaxe may fall on its head and kill it." - "Our Else is clever indeed!" said the maid, and directly sat down to bewail the anticipated misfortune. After a while, when the people upstairs found that the maid did not return, and they were becoming more and more thirsty, the master said to the boy, "You go down into the cellar, and see what Else and the maid are doing." The boy did so, and there he found both Clever Else and the maid sitting crying together. Then he asked what was the matter. "Oh dear me," said Else, "how can we help crying? If I marry Hans, and we have a child, and it grows big, and we send it here to draw beer, the pickaxe might fall on its head and kill it." - "Our Else is clever indeed!" said the boy, and sitting down beside her, he began howling with a good will. Upstairs they were all waiting for him to come back, but as he did not come, the master said to the mistress, "You go down to the cellar and see what Else is doing." So the mistress went down and found all three in great lamentations, and when she asked the cause, then Else told her how the future possible child might be killed as soon as it was big enough to be sent to draw beer, by the pickaxe falling on it. Then the mother at once exclaimed, "Our Else is clever indeed!" and, sitting down, she wept with the rest. Upstairs the husband waited a little while, but as his wife did not return, and as his thirst constantly increased, he said, "I must go down to the cellar myself, and see what has become of Else." And when he came into the cellar, and found them all sitting and weeping together, he was told that it was all owing to the child that Else might possibly have, and the possibility of its being killed by the pickaxe so happening to fall just at the time the child might be sitting underneath it drawing beer; and when he heard all this, he cried, "How clever is our Else!" and sitting down, he joined his tears to theirs. The intended bridegroom stayed upstairs by himself a long time, but as nobody came back to him, he thought he would go himself and see what they were all about And there he found all five lamenting and crying most pitifully, each one louder than the other. "What misfortune has happened?" cried he. "O my dear Hans," said Else, "if we marry and have a child, and it grows big, and we send it down here to draw beer, perhaps that pickaxe which has been left sticking up there might fall down on the child's head and kill it; and how can we help crying at that!" - "Now," said Hans, "I cannot think that greater sense than that could be wanted in my household; so as you are so clever, Else, I will have you for my wife," and taking her by the hand he led her upstairs, and they had

the wedding at once.

A little while after they were married, Hans said to his wife, "I am going out to work, in order to get money; you go into the field and cut the corn, so that we may have bread." - "Very well, I will do so, dear Hans," said she. And after Hans was gone she cooked herself some nice stew, and took it with her into the field. And when she got there, she said to herself, "Now, what shall I do? shall I reap first, or eat first? All right, I will eat first." Then she ate her fill of stew, and when she could eat no more, she said to herself, "Now, what shall I do? shall I reap first, or sleep first? All right, I will sleep first." Then she lay down in the corn and went to sleep. And Hans got home, and waited there a long while, and Else did not come, so he said to himself, "My clever Else is so industrious that she never thinks of coming home and eating." But when evening drew near and still she did not come, Hans set out to see how much corn she had cut; but she had cut no corn at all, but there she was lying in it asleep. Then Hans made haste home, and fetched a bird-net with little bells and threw it over her; and still she went on sleeping. And he ran home again and locked himself in, and sat him down on his bench to work. At last, when it was beginning to grow dark, Clever Else woke, and when she got up and shook herself, the bells jingled at each movement that she made. Then she grew frightened, and began to doubt whether she were really Clever Else or not, and said to herself, "Am I, or am I not?" And, not knowing what answer to make, she stood for a long while considering; at last she thought, "I will go home to Hans and ask him if I am I or not; he is sure to know." So she ran up to the door of her house, but it was locked; then she knocked at the window, and cried, "Hans, is Else within?" - "Yes," answered Hans, "she is in." Then she was in a greater fright than ever, and crying, "Oh dear, then I am not I," she went to inquire at another door, but the people hearing the jingling of the bells would not open to her, and she could get in nowhere. So she ran away beyond the village, and since then no one has seen her.

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