

*There is an innocence in a child's story. The blemishes of the adult world blur into insignificance as we wander a different place, out of time and sense. Here we shed our sorrows, our sadness and grow in ourselves. Innocence like wine, is absorbed in the mind, smoothing our sharp edges and freeing us from the bonds which tie us to this planet, and the complicated lives we live.*

Their quarrel began in the womb. Her, her mother's daughter and him, his father's milksop. Never had two children bickered so much, fought tooth and nail, wailing at night, and screaming through the day. Their poor mother never had so much as a minute to do the cooking, washing or cleaning for she was forever having to keep the two apart, and this was before either could walk. As the two children grew older their father, a carver by trade, who smelt of sawdust and sweat, was forced to down his tools and help with the miscreant children.

"Oh mother, what have we done to offend god so to deserve two such bellicose children?", the old father moaned, "Oh hear how they constantly sniggle, and fidget at each other, what shall be done to ease us of this pain?"

"Father," the old woman replied "Although it was your own fault these two wretches were brought into the world, and I should think it has been your problem to fix what airs they have, by the application of a strong arm. I fear for too long you have been weakhearted, and it is far too late now for discipline of any kind to have effects. I have however have been giving thought to the whole problem." And here she lowered her voice so it could barely be heard over the din of the children. "I hear the colliery on the other side of the valley requires children to work in the pit, could we not send one of our little dears to work in the mines? We will be well rid of one, and be paid a pretty penny for their work."

The old man looked shocked by the suggestion, but being the man he was, cowed and trifling in the scheme of things, agreed on the plan. His only response being a low whisper "how shall we pick from the two?"

The mother of the children smiled a toothless smile, and said, "If our hen lays a brown egg then it shall be our daughter, if it be a white egg, our son."

This course of action had been long planned by the mother, who had secretly kept on hand a store of snow white eggs. For although she despised both her children, her daughter was of course her mother's girl, besides she was strong, and good at work, while her son was a wan and sickly fop.

That night before she offed to bed the mother slipped quietly from the house and replaced the brown egg she found under the hen with the pure white egg. Returning to the house she settled under the covers for a comfortable sleep, knowing that soon she would be free of her son, and free of the ruckus the two children created.

The next morning the children's mother woke refreshed, and joyfully traipsed out to the hen house her husband in tow to collect the eggs. But when she arrived she found that the hen's nest was empty. She was most vexed by this.

"Must have been that sly old fox", the old man grunted before stomping off to his workshop to continue working on the project he started earlier.

His wife spent the day muttering and bemoaning her fate, and paid repeated visits to the basket in the larder where she had stored her milk white eggs.

That night once again the old maid slipped from the house on the pretence of emptying the bedpans, and swapped the brown egg she found under the hen with one of alabaster white.

On the dawn of the next day before the cock crow she dragged her husband out of bed and forced him into the hen house ... “nope, there aren’t any eggs in here today either, I wonder if there is something wrong with old henny penny here .. you right old girl?”

The mother was fuming. She stormed back into the house cursing and spitting, the old man smiled and wandered back to his workshop.

The old woman stomped back into the house, scuffed both her children -- which instantly provoked an argument about who was hit hardest -- and pounded back into the larder to check her eggs. She was of course a shrewd woman and the night before had counted the number of eggs remaining in the basket, strangely enough this morning she found that the number she had last night had increased by one. She smiled a not very pleasant smile to herself.

That evening the carver walked in from his workshop a happy man. Whistling a little tune, he commented in passing that he had just finished a great project which he was sure was going to make some one quite happy.

“Oh that is grand!”, cried the woman, “for I shall cook for us, tonight a banquet to celebrate the finish of your latest project.”

The old man patted his stomach in agreement.

The meal was set, pork roast with thick crackling, mashed potatoes fried into cakes, roast vegetables, and a deep dark red wine...

The man was asleep before he finished his meal, his wife picked him up threw him over her shoulder and carried him to bed.

The next morning, the carver woke with a start, sat up, and fell back down again. His head was throbbing, but in the back of his mind he knew he had forgotten to do something important ...

“The egg was white”, his wife stated matter of factly, as he stumbled downstairs.

He nodded and looked at her sadly, then walked to his workshop and came out again with two large bundles. He called his children to him and handed them with the presents.

“I was going to wait until Christmas to give you these, but now is as good a time as any.”

The children ripped open the presents and found the carver had created a doll for each of them, the doll was of the other child.

“So you never get lonely” he said though his tears...