

The Greatest Children's Stories

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 juggernaut

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1

The Witch's Brew

A short hike up from the town of Ladakh, where the brown hills end and the snow peaks begin, there lived a witch named Duga with her grandson Tinley.

Now, there are witches of all kinds – young and old, joyful and crabby, good and wicked, tall and short, thin and chubby. Duga was a cranky old evil witch who was short and thin and droopy. She was so evil that the whole town had come together to shoo her away. So, with a suitcase stuffed with her magic kit, she left town with her grandson and walked up the hill until she could walk no more. There, in a clearing, she

put down her suitcase and whipped up a wobbly, wonky hut for them to live in.

The two lived peacefully for years, away from the town and people Duga could try her magic on, until one winter when an adventurous hiker strayed from his path and ended up outside her house.

'This will do for the night,' he said, famished. 'It should be safe to tent here.'

He quickly set up his tent and went to hunt for some dinner.

Duga, who had been watching the hiker all this while, saw him come back with a big fat rabbit and cook it on a blazing fire.

'That meat sure looks juicy. All I eat is the same old bark that Tinley collects and muddy roots and leaves. What wouldn't I give for that scrumptious meal!' she thought.

She spent the rest of the night chewing on the remaining bark and coming up with a plan. By

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dawn she knew exactly what she was going to do.

She would brew a potion for the young hiker and serve it to him in a soup. A bowlful would be enough to put him under her spell and make him obey all her commands for a long long time!

'Oh Tinley! I'll have delicious hunt for the rest of my life and not have to move a finger!' she exclaimed, her head bent over the boiling cauldron as she put in one ingredient after another – spider brains, earthworm intestines, centipede legs, stems of poison mushrooms, rat potty, dry dirt, wet dirt, snake gourd, and finally, garlic, chillies and salt for taste.

'But you already don't lift a finger,' muttered Tinley.

'What did you say, boy?'

'No, nothing,' he said.

'Good, now go to the young hiker and tell him that I invite him for lunch, but do not tell him about my potion.'



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Tinley went over to the hiker, who was cooking a duck for breakfast, and said, 'Excuse me, sir. My grandmother invites you for lunch of soup and bread.' And because Tinley was an honest boy, he went on, 'She told me to keep it a secret that the soup is mixed with her potion of spider brains, earthworm intestines and whatnot and that she means to cast you under her spell and make you do as she tells.'

'My name is Jim,' said the hiker without a thought, 'and I would love to come.'

As promised, he went over to the hut for lunch, and Duga was very happy to see him. She sat him down at the table and went to the kitchen to get the soup.

While she was away, Jim quickly pulled out an empty bowl from his jacket and put it on his lap.

'Here, son, a steaming bowl of my special soup. I'm sure you haven't eaten anything

healthy in days,' Duga said, coming back with a bowl of hot soup and placing it in front of him.

'This looks delicious.' Jim smiled. 'But excuse me, I must cover my mouth with my handkerchief when I eat. I lost my front teeth recently and I am awfully embarrassed by it.'

'Not at all, child, drink away!' Duga cackled, not suspicious at all.

So Jim unfurled a large handkerchief that covered his mouth and reached all the way to the bowl on his lap. He then made a lot of loud noises, as if slurping on the soup, every time he took a spoonful and poured it into the bowl on his lap.

When he was finished, he wiped his mouth with the handkerchief and tucked it away in his pocket. 'Thank you for that meal,' he said, 'but my mother taught me to always give something in return for kindness. Here is a bowl of my own special rabbit soup.'

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Since Duga had seen the boy hunt the rabbit, she unsuspectingly took the bowl and drank up the soup at once. She had just put the bowl down when her eyes began to glisten and a strange smile spread on her face.

‘Here’s an actual bit of rabbit. Now go cook your nice grandson a lovely meal,’ Jim ordered as he handed Duga some rabbit meat.

Duga nodded obediently and rushed into the kitchen. ‘And remember, from now you will obey Tinley.’

Saying this, he patted a delighted Tinley on the head and bid him goodbye.