

THE LITTLE WHITE HARE

Once upon a time there lived a little girl called Annette. She was kind hearted and as good as gold, but her parents were dead, and she worked as a shepherdess on a farm near Théix.

One day she was out grazing her sheep in the gulf of Morbihan. There salt streams run through the plains, and the animals feed on the sea grass that grows beside them. Suddenly, Annette saw something moving in a thorn bush. It was a young hare, no bigger than two clenched fists, with fur as white as January snow.

“Don’t be afraid, little hare,” said Annette. “I won’t hurt you.”

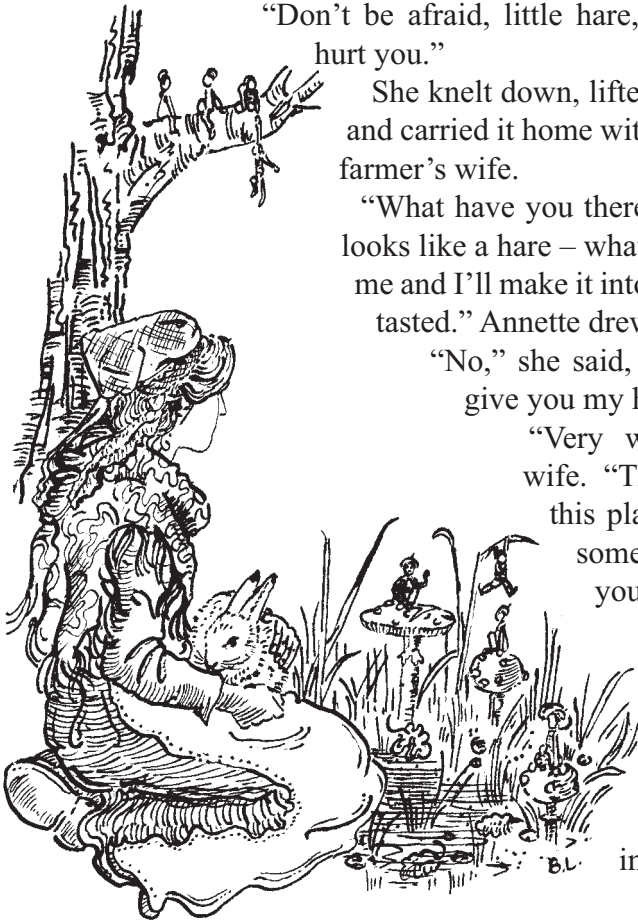
She knelt down, lifted the hare into her apron, and carried it home with her. She was met by the farmer’s wife.

“What have you there?” asked the woman. “It looks like a hare – what fine white fur! Give it to me and I’ll make it into the best stew we’ve ever tasted.” Annette drew back in dismay.

“No,” she said, “I would rather die than give you my hare.”

“Very well,” said the farmer’s wife. “Then you can both leave this place. No doubt you’ll find some kind soul who will take you in.”

So the little girl left the farm. She walked and walked, but she found no house where she could ask for shelter. At last she saw a castle standing in a forest clearing.



“Perhaps the people here will be kind and give us shelter,” she said. She knocked on the door, and it was opened by a serving woman.

“Come in, my dear,” she said. “You may stay here tonight, and many other nights, if you wish – on condition you give me that white hare in your apron. I will make a tasty dish with it – and I will share it with you.”

“No – I will not part with my treasure,” said Annette.

“Then you can be on your way,” said the servant, and slammed the door.

The little girl wiped away the tears that had risen to her eyes, and set off along a path that led into the forest. After a while she came to a great oak tree. She sat down on the moss at its base, and began to stroke the hare and wonder what she should do. Suddenly, she noticed a gentle rustling amongst the grass and the branches of the oak. Hundreds and hundreds of tiny figures were coming towards her. They sat down in a circle about the tree, some on leaves, others on toadstools, and some clinging to the plants.

Annette felt frightened, and was about to run away, when a voice as sweet as a nightingale’s began to speak.

“Do not be afraid, dear Annette,” said the chief of the little people. “We are Korrigans of the forest, and we want to help you. We know all about the troubles you have had since you found your hare, and we want to help you care for it. Come and live with us and be our housekeeper, and we will look after both of you.”

“Thank you,” said the little girl. “I will gladly come and live with you – especially as you will also take care of my little hare.”

The Korrigans led Annette to an underground cave, hidden beneath some great stones in the deepest part of the forest. Each day they brought the hare wild thyme and garden thyme, and they brought Annette the sweetest honey, and fruits from orchards and gardens.

Five months passed in this happy way. Annette’s cheeks grew round and rosy, and the hare’s fur became more sparkling white than ever.

One day Annette noticed a great commotion amongst the Korrigans. They were running hither and thither, forming into ranks, and each one held a dagger and was mounted on a rabbit.

“We are off to the other end of the land,” said their chief. “We are going to storm the fortress of the cruel giant, Dialul Bras, and slay him. You will be more pleased than anyone if we succeed. Farewell, and do not fear for us.”

The Korrigans set off towards the East. They passed with ease through

the gorse bushes on the heath, and the rows of corn in the fields, but they stopped in dismay when they reached a large pond.

“Never fear,” said their chief. He blew a whistle, and the fish who lived in the pond rose to the surface, and formed a silvery bridge across the water.

The Korrigans crossed over and rode on until they reached the giant’s castle. It was very tall, and its walls were as smooth as glass. All the doors were locked and barred – how were they to get in? Once again their chief blew his whistle. The wood pigeons who live in the forest flew down and took the Korrigans on their backs. They flew with them over the walls and into the giant’s castle.

The giant was fast asleep, but he was soon awoken. Little people filled the courtyard, the rooms, the furniture, even the kitchen utensils. Although they were not much bigger than wasps, they marched on the giant from all sides, their daggers held in their hands.

The giant tried to hide, but he could not escape. He rushed to the castle walls but still he was pursued. He grew frightened and, losing his head, leapt from the walls and fell dead on the ground beneath.

Gladdened by their victory, the Korrigans took the shortest way home, humming joyfully as they went.

“You are avenged, Annette,” they cried. “Your enemy is dead!”

“But who is my enemy?” asked the little girl. “I have never harmed anyone, and I did not know anyone was angry with me.”

It was the hare who answered this question. It had leapt down from Annette’s apron into the midst of the Korrigans, and a young woman had appeared in its place.

She was beautiful and graceful, and dressed in the most magnificent clothes.

“Thank you,” she said to the little folk. “You have saved two helpless creatures. The cruel giant, Diaul Bras, robbed us of our castle, and turned me into a white hare. My daughter, Annette, had to work as a shepherdess for a hard-hearted farmer’s wife. Thanks to her kind heart I was protected and taken care of. We can now return to our home. Korrigans of wood and moor, you will always be welcome at the castle of the white hare.”

Annette was full of joy to have found her mother and said good bye to her forest friends.

They lived together for many years in their beautiful castle, and were loved by all the people round about.

Told by François Le Tallec, from Their