

# THE CENTREFOLD STORY

## HEESI'S MILLSTONE or Why the Sea is Salt

*submitted by John Goddard who worked up this version of the Finnish folk tale for a workshop run by Pat Keysell.*

Long, long ago, in a land far north of here, if, on a bright, star-crackling winter's night, you'd been passing through that village of neat, wooden fisherfolk's cottages, you might just have heard—above the moan of the wind in the trees of the great forest—above the brawl of the waves on the shore—coming from the meanest of those cottages, on the very edge of the village, you might just have heard the sound of children crying... And inside, the fisherman's wife scolding her husband that, of all times of the year, it should be now, Christmas Eve, that there should be absolutely nothing at all to eat in the house.

"Can't you, at least, go to that rich cousin of yours at the other end of the village and beg him to spare us something to eat... ? For the children's sakes, if not ours!..."

So it wasn't long before the poor fisherman was knocking at the door of his rich cousin's house.

"Dear cousin, I hate being such a trouble to you like this, but could you possibly spare us a little something to eat for Christmas? We have nothing, and my children are starving."

"Huh!" said the cousin, and shut the door in his face. But as the poor fisherman stood there, numb with cold and bewilderment, a moment later his cousin returned and - "Huh!" - thrust a cow's hoof at him.

"Thank you, cousin! Thank you. May God... "

But before the poor fisherman could thank his cousin in full measure for such generosity - "Huh! - have your pick of the entire larder, would you! To the Devil with you"; and the door was once more slammed in his face.

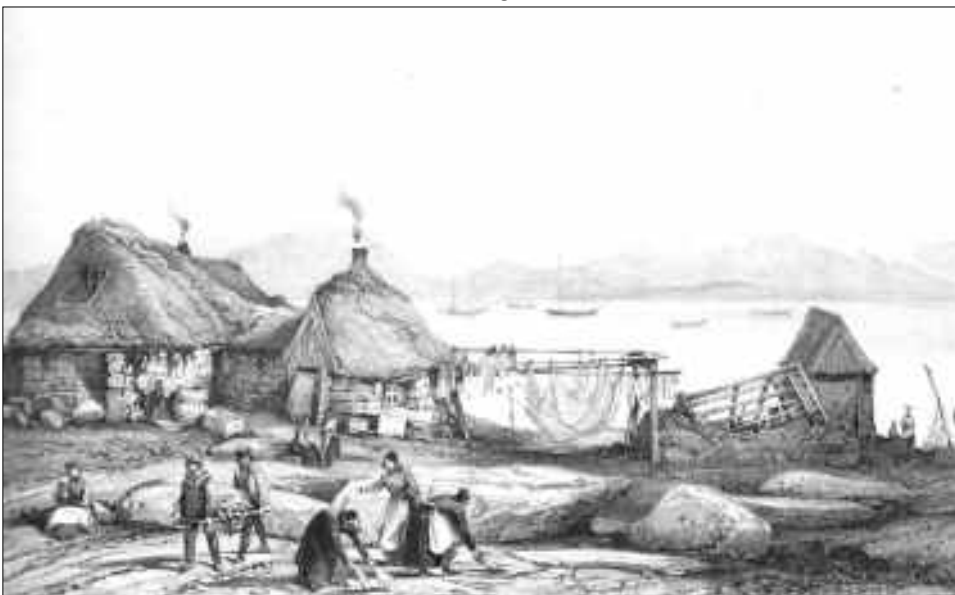
" - Bless you, cousin. I will. I will."

And with that the poor fisherman set off with his cow's hoof to find where the Devil might dwell. He wandered into the forest, following a beaten track, until, at last, he caught - chop... chop...

chop... - the sound of woodmen at work.

"Woodmen, woodmen," he called, "do you know where I might find the Devil?"

"Sure we do," they replied. "Though, if you'd take our advice, you'll keep well clear of him. The Devil is the ogre, Heesi, more than three men's height, and master



of this forest. What do you want with him?"

"My cousin, who is both kind and wise, and who gave me this cow's hoof for Christmas, God bless him, has said that I should go to the Devil," explained the fisherman. "So, I beg you, please to tell me the way."

"If go you must," they said, "then follow the trail of our felled trees, for we are the Devil's woodcutters. You'll come to his house soon enough. But listen well. Take one of these stout birch logs, for, as you enter his house, he will go to shake your hand. Give him the birchwood log instead, or he'll turn your hand to mincemeat! And one thing more. Should he offer you a reward, ask for nothing save the millstone he keeps hanging on the wall."

Thanking the woodmen, the fisherman went on his way through the night and the forest, until he came to Heesi's house, where he knocked boldly at the giant's door, waited briefly for his summons - "Come!" - and, stout in his faith in his cousin's kindness and wisdom, heaved the door open.

Inside, a great fire blazed in the huge, stone fireplace. And there, toasting his tremendous bulk before it, his white hair and beard reaching almost to the floor, a single yellow tooth showing over his bottom lip, and his brown, gnarled hands broader even than the oldest tree in the forest, stood the ogre himself. Suddenly, the fisherman was perhaps just a little afraid. He stared about him nervously, as Heesi stretched out his enormous hand.

"Welcome, friend!"

Straightway the fisherman thrust forth his stout birch log, and watched as the sawdust ran through the ogre's giant fingers.

"I've b-b-brought you a g-gift," he stuttered. "A c-cow's hoof."

Heesi smiled, took the cow's hoof, crunched it contentedly between his gums, and swallowed it down whole, leaving not a scrap of bone or gristle.

"Many promise me gifts of food when I meet them out in the forest; but none have the courage to bring them to me in person, as you have done. You must have a reward. What will you take: - a pot of gold? ... "

"I have no use for gold," replied the fisherman.

"Will you, then, take a tub of silver?"

"I have no use for silver."

"Will you, then, take a chest of salt?"

At this the fisherman thought for a moment. Then... "I have no use for salt," he said, "but if you wish to reward me, I will take the millstone that hangs on the wall."

At that Heesi's smile quickly disappeared. But a promise is a promise, and soon he had taken down the millstone from its place on the wall, and the fisherman had it slung across his shoulders.

"One last thing," said Heesi, the ogre, as the fisherman was about to take his leave. "This is no ordinary millstone. Just say, 'Grind my millstone, grind away!' and it will bring you what you wish; and when you've had enough, 'Enough and have done, my millstone!' and it will stop. Now be off with you... before I change my mind."

As the fisherman approached his cottage, his heavy load weighing him down monstrously, he saw his wife waiting for him, hands on hips, and heard their children still bawling loudly.

"Where have you been, you good-for-nothing husband? And what's that you're carrying? We can't put a millstone in the pot to cook!"

But with a smile the fisherman pushed past her into the cottage, placed the millstone on the table, and stood back proudly. Then, loud enough to raise the roof: "Grind, my millstone, grind away: bring food a-plenty for the holiday!"

And all at once, Heesi's millstone began to turn, pouring out loaves of bread, cabbage pies, butter, eggs, cheese, mutton and ham, cakes and candies, jugs of milk and ale—until: "Enough and have done, my millstone." Never in their lives had the family set eyes on such tasty fare. And they were happy children, indeed, who went out to play when the family had all eaten their fill.

It was just then that the fisherman's rich cousin chanced to come by.

"Huh!" he growled, "I see my cow's hoof has served you well."

"Yes! - Father took it to Heesi and brought back a magic millstone that gives us all we need," piped up the eldest of the fisherman's children.

Without a knock, the cousin strode straight into the fisherman's cottage.

"Is this true what I hear? Do you possess a magic millstone that can bring you all you need?"

"It is, dear cousin—and all owing to your kindness and wisdom."

"Huh? ...! "

"Sending me to Heesi with the cow's hoof."

"Huh."

"I just say, `Grind, my millstone, grind away!" and it brings me all I want."

"Then you must lend it to me. After all, it was my cow's hoof that brought you this good fortune..

And almost before the simple fisherman had chance to give his assent - "Of course, dear cousin" - or say anything more, indeed, his cousin was halfway down to the shore with it, where he placed it in the bows of his own fishing-boat, and headed out to sea. It wasn't long, then, before he'd cast his nets and hauled onboard a goodly catch of fish.

Then: "Grind, my millstone, grind away: pour out *salt* the livelong day!" he bellowed at the top of his voice—and looked on gleefully as the millstone began to spin and grind out the purest, whitest salt, until there was enough to salt the whole, teeming boatload of fish. He rubbed his hands, and smacked his lips. But the millstone continued to pour out its salt: more... and more... and more... - in a never-ending stream.

"Stop, my millstone - stop, stop, stop!" ...

"Grind no more, and cease your work!" ...

What were the words he must he say? ...!

"Enough, enough, enough, I say!" ...

But it was no use. The salt just kept on coming. And so heavy was the boat by now that it was beginning to sink. Soon the sea was over the sides, and the boat near to capsizing.

With a desperate effort, he tried to pick the millstone up from the deck and cast it overboard. But it seemed stuck fast, and would not budge.

"Help! Help me, someone!..."

But there was no one to hear. And as the sea closed over his final cries, he, his boatload of fish and salt, and the millstone all sank, down ... down ... down ...

And there, on the seabed, Heesi's millstone is still turning, even to this day. Which, of course, is why the sea is salt.