

# DUFFY THE LADY



It was cider-making time, and Squire Lovel went into town to find a housekeeper for his fine house on the hill. His old housekeeper had first gone blind in one eye, then deaf in one ear, then been crippled with arthritis, till finally she died, and now the place was a shambles.

The first thing that caught his attention when he rode into the village was Janey Chygwyn, beating her hired woman, Duffy, over the head with a frying pan.

"Hey, Janey," cried the squire from high on his shiny black horse, "what's the trouble with you and Duffy?"

"This lazy slattern spends all her time gossiping down at the corn mill and can't find half a minute during the day to spin yarn or knit stockings!" Janey shouted, taking another swipe at Duffy with the frying pan before she remembered her manners and curtsied to the squire.

"Don't believe her, your honor," Duffy exclaimed. "My knitting and spinning are the best in the county."

"Could you knit me new socks and sweaters and weave some cloth for woolen trousers?"

"I could, my lord," said Duffy, and Janey snorted loudly.

"Well, Duffy," said the squire, "come home with me, then, for I've need of a housekeeper. I haven't so much as one pair of socks without holes in them. Old Janey will be glad to be rid of you, and I'll be glad to have you."

So Duffy climbed up behind the squire on the horse and went home with him.

When Duffy saw the squire's manor, with dust everywhere and cobwebs on the

candlesticks, dishes that hadn't been washed for over a month, and ashes overflowing in the fireplace, she knew she had her work cut out for her. Still, a job is a job, and better to work for Squire Lovel than complaining old Janey Chygwyn. She did a little dusting, built up a fire in the kitchen stove, and cooked the squire his first decent meal in many a month. But when she saw the room where the spinning was done, with wool piled high to the ceiling, she shut the door and went back to the kitchen to bake the squire an apple pie for his dessert. For the truth must be told: Duffy could neither knit nor spin.

The squire was happy to have his house back in order and was pleased with Duffy's cooking. But after a few days, he started wondering about the new socks and sweaters and woolen trousers Duffy had promised to make him.

"Well, I've had my hands full putting this house in order, my lord," Duffy told him. "But I'll get to it this very day."

"See you do, Duffy," the squire said sternly, and that afternoon Duffy went back to the spinning room to see what she could do.

She sat down at the spinning wheel and spun it around a few times to shake off the dust, but then she hadn't the slightest idea of what to do next. "Oh, curse this knitting and spinning!" she cried in frustration. "The devil may spin for the squire for all I care."

No sooner had she spoken when who should walk out of the corner but a spiffy little man dressed all in black, with a tail wrapped around his waist and horns on his head. Duffy recognized him right away for the devil he was, but not knowing what else to do, she greeted him politely and asked him what his business was.

"Well, Duffy, my dear, I heard you calling me."

"You did?" asked Duffy, astonished.

"Certainly I did. You'd like me to do all this spinning and knitting for you, wouldn't you? And I'm here to tell you I'd be happy to oblige."

Now, Duffy was nobody's fool, and she knew better than to accept an offer like that without reading the fine print in the contract. "If you do all that for me, what do you want me to do for you?" she asked him, narrowing her eyes suspiciously.

"Why, not a thing!" cried the gentleman, with a wounded expression on his face. "I'd be happy to help you out, and I don't want a penny in return."

"Of course," he added, speeding it up a little, "you'd have to agree to go away with me and be my lady after three years. Unless, that is, you could guess my name."

Duffy looked the devil straight in the eye. "Now let me be sure I understand. You'll do all the knitting and spinning for me, but after three years, I've got to go away with you?"

The devil nodded. "That's the deal," he said.

"But," Duffy continued, "if I guess your name before the three years is up, I don't have to go?"

"That's right," said the devil. "All you have to do is guess my name."

## *Duffy the Lady*

Duffy thought about it. If she accepted the devil's offer, she had three years to find out his name, and surely she could do that. But if she didn't take him up on it, the squire was bound to kick her out as soon as he found out she couldn't knit or spin.

"I accept your bargain," she declared. Duffy and the devil shook hands on it, and the deal was done.

After that, Duffy found that all she had to do was wish for something, and so it would be. The first thing she wished for was a pair of strong woolen socks, and when the squire came back from hunting that evening, she presented them to him. He was pleased as could be. Every day she wished for something new — a pair of socks or a warm sweater — and soon the squire had drawers full of socks and sweaters and jackets and fine woolen trousers. The squire boasted up and down the county that his hired woman spun the strongest, warmest wool in the country.

The months passed by, and Duffy kept the devil busy knitting and spinning. Meanwhile, she had plenty of time to spend down at the corn mill with the other women, telling jokes and stories or dancing on the green while the corn was being ground.

One evening Squire Lovel came home from hunting and found Malcolm the gardener waiting in the lane, while Duffy swung on the gate laughing. "What's he after?" the squire grumbled.

Duffy giggled. "Well, I expect he's courting me," she said, and the squire started to worry that maybe Duffy would get herself married and leave him all alone in that great house, with no one to fix him supper or knit stockings so warm that his feet never got cold even if he went out hunting all day and night in the worst of weather.

The next evening, he found Farmer Groundsel had come to call on Duffy, and he grew even more worried. He made up his mind to fix things so that Duffy was bound to stay with him forever. "Duffy," he said, "would you like to be a squire's lady?"

Duffy grinned from ear to ear. "I surely would, my lord," she answered him. So Duffy and the squire got married, and she became Duffy the lady and was happy as a cat with a big bowl of cream.

The three years the devil had promised her passed much more quickly than Duffy ever imagined, and try as she might, she couldn't discover his name. Finally there was only a week to go before her time was up.

In desperation, Duffy went down to the mill to talk to Old Bet, the miller's wife. Bet was known to be a witch, and if ever Duffy needed the help of a witch's magic, the time was now. She told Bet the story from beginning to end, and the old woman promised to help her.

"Bring me a jug of the strongest cider from the squire's cellar," she told Duffy. "Tonight's the full moon, and we're meeting down at Fugoe Hole. Your devil's bound to show up, and I'll get his name out of him for you. Whatever you do, don't go to sleep tonight until

the squire gets home from the hunt, no matter what the hour, and whatever he says, don't say a word back."

The moon rose red that night, and Duffy waited anxiously for the squire to come home. The church bells in the village chimed eleven times, then twelve times, but still the squire did not return, although after midnight his dogs straggled into the yard, panting and wet with sweat.

Finally, as the night sky began to lighten toward dawn, the squire came galloping into the courtyard. He leapt from his horse and kissed his Duffy lady soundly. "Why, m'dear, you'll never guess what I saw tonight," he cried, laughing loudly. But Duffy just bit her tongue and said not a word.

"I'd been hunting all day, without any luck," the squire continued, "and I was ready to head home when we startled a hare. The dogs chased her across the down, all the way to Fugoe Hole, and there we lost her. I was rounding the hill, and what do you imagine I saw, Duffy? Why, it was the witch's dance. They'd lit a great fire, and they were singing and playing the tambourine. Bless my soul, I couldn't tear myself away from the sight. So I hid behind some bushes, and then I saw a spiffy little man dressed all in black. He was dancing around the fire, and every time he danced to the west he took a swig from the jug of cider he held in his hand and jumped up and down and laughed like a madman. If only you could have seen it, Duffy. And can you imagine what he was singing?"

Now Duffy was ready to die with impatience, for of course she hadn't a clue what the old devil was singing, and of course that was what she needed to know. But she kept her peace and just shook her head and waited for the squire to tell her in his own time.

"He was singing about you, Duffy!" the squire cried, roaring with laughter. "He was dancing and singing:

'Duffy, my lady, you'll never know — what?

That my name is Terrytop, Terrytop, Terry — top!'

I swear, Duffy, if only you could have seen it!"

Still laughing, the squire went off to bed, and Duffy went with him. For the first time in many weeks, she slept soundly.

The next day, the three years were up. Duffy had wished for an abundance of knitted things and was in the bedroom, trying to cram some more stockings into a big chest, when the spiffy little man in black appeared before her.

"Well, Duffy, my dear," he said, "I've kept my promise and served you faithfully for three years, so now I hope you're ready to go away with me, as we agreed."

"I'm afraid your country is rather warm," Duffy said with a smile. "It might ruin my fair complexion."

"It's not as hot as some people say," the devil replied. "Come, now. Can you guess my name?"

"Let me see," Duffy sighed, sounding uncertain. "Could it be Lucifer?"

"Lucifer?" the little man cried, stamping his feet. "I wouldn't be caught dead with that scoundrel. Certainly not!"

"Hmmm," murmured Duffy, scratching her head. "Is it Beelzebub?"

The devil snorted. "Beelzebub! He might be a distant cousin, but he's nothing but a common devil, you know."

"Well, sir," said Duffy with a little curtsy, "I hope you're honest enough to admit your real name is Terrytop."

The devil stood up tall (as tall as a little man like him could rise) and bowed deeply. "A gentleman never denies his name. Still, I never expected to be beaten by a lazy slattern like you, Duffy."

And with those words, he disappeared. In the very same moment, all the knitted things he'd made for Duffy over the last three years turned to dust and blew away.

The squire came home an hour later, chilled to the bone and wearing nothing but his shirt and shoes. It seems that while he was out hunting on the moors, his socks and trousers and jacket had suddenly fallen from his back.

"It's witchcraft," Duffy warned. "This morning when I was tidying up I heard a bang, like thunder, and a flash of light, and suddenly every woolen thing in this house disappeared. The witches have cursed you for spying on their dance. Now every time I try to spin, the yarn breaks in my hands. From now on, we'd best have our woolen things made in the village. You wouldn't want to have your clothes disappearing on you while you're out hunting every day — you'd be a laughingstock, and catch your death of cold on top of it."

The squire saw the wisdom in her words, and from that day on he never asked Duffy to do a stitch of knitting or spinning.