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Adventures of Tiny Kato





Now, my dears, I'm going to tell you about the adventures of Tiny Kato, a girl who loves ice-cream and fairy tales. You might laugh. After all what kid doesn't love ice-cream and fairy tales? All right, then, I can also tell you that everyone thinks Tiny Kato is the happiest child ever. She has a mum and dad, grannies and grandpas, friends and playmates. Food and drink. Pretty clothes and places to go to... What else could she wish for?

If Kato heard any of this, she would immediately cry:

'What I really want is not to hear so many don'ts! Why do they stop forbidding me from doing so many things? Why must my every step depend on a grown-up's say-so? I can't move without them! I can't have an ice-cream, can't drink lots of lemonade, can't run as much as I want, or roll about on the ground! They believe it's all too much, but I wonder who set the rules. Don't they always talk about the need to stick to the rules? Those don'ts smother me ! Why am I always guilty of wanting to do something that is forbidden?'

You might think Tiny Kato is right, but you will surely have guessed that if everything was allowed, it wouldn't be possible for magical things to happen ...

There's this huge park in the city – you know it well. It has tall plane trees and bubbling fountains. At one end of the park there's a beautiful kindergarten with sunny passageways – that's where Kato goes. And, at the other end, there's a tall house with wide windows – reflecting the sun in the daytime and the





moon at night. That's where Kato lives.

Every morning Kato slides down the bannisters, all the way through five floors, runs down several steps to the front door, and jogs under the shady plane trees to get to her kindergarten.

Seeing her teacher, Ketino, at the door, she asks:

'Will you tell us a fairy tale today? Will we have some ice-cream today?'

Young, cheerful and lovely, Ketino nods with a smile and then tells her kids all kinds of fairy tales. She's never tired or bored...



Kato is Left without Ice-cream

Indeed, it all started with ice-cream...

One day Kato came home in a particularly good mood as her kindergarten was planning a celebration, when, Ketino told the kids, they would sing, dance and recite poems.

Happy with the news, Kato came home to yet another surprise: her mum was putting a bowl full a fluffy, cream-coloured, sweet-smelling mass into the freezer.

'Ice-cream! Ice-cream!' Tiny Kato exclaimed. 'Please, Mummy, can I have as much as I want today?'

She dipped her finger into the bowl and licked it.

'Be patient, let it freeze,' Mum said and shut the freezer door. Kato couldn't wait, so she opened it to look inside, checking to see if the ice-cream was already frozen.

Every good feeling, but especially happiness, increased Kato's energy, which was already huge.. It made here want to jump and run and spin ten-times more. That's why she grabbed her bike and went down to the yard to while away the time cycling. Would that tire her? No way! She circled the yard – as big as a football pitch – seventeen times until her dad called her from the balcony: 'Enough, Kato, come up!'

Kato promised to finish, and even slowed down to show her readiness to come inside, but as soon as her dad closed the

balcony door, she pedalled hard, dashing through the yard, to circle it three more times.

'Kato! Kato!' Her dad sounded really angry. 'Stop! 'You can't go on forever! Come up, right now!'

All Kato could hear was another 'don't', so pedalled even harder, finishing yet another lap, till her dad appeared in the yard. What? Are twenty-one laps too much? It might be for some, but for Tiny Kato, who would even spin like a top in her sleep, twenty-one laps was nothing. That's why when her angry dad grabbed her bike, lifted her from the saddle, and marched her home, she began to cry so loudly that the noise reached the sky.

'Look, you're soaked in sweat!' Her dad shouted. 'It's too much, you mustn't overdo it!'

And again, the 'mustn't' word hit Kato like an arrow. Still crying, she howled angrily:

'Why? Why, why, why? Why can't I?'

'Stop that shouting. Please remember once and for all to to be less demanding!'

Dad was holding the bike in one hand, and clutching Kato by the collar with the other. But she never gave up easily. This time, too, she mumbled between sobs:

'Who has decided what is normal? How can everyone and everything fit into it?'

'Stop it!' Her dad was losing patience. 'Stop crying or else you won't get the ice-cream!'

Hearing 'ice-cream', Kato freed herself from her Dad's hand, flew up the remaining stairs, rushed into the kitchen and opened the freezer. She was immediately enveloped by the tempting aroma of the magnificent, fluffy ice cream.

‘But, you’re drenched!’ her Mum exclaimed. ‘You can’t have any ice-cream till you’re dry!’ And she put the bowl back in the freezer.

Kato was in despair. She thought life had lost all its beauty and sobbed louder than ever. Tears streamed down her cheeks. She wept till her beautiful emerald eyes turned red and her head began to ache. But that wasn’t the end of it! Her mum suspected she had a temperature. So when the fever was confirmed, Kato was quickly undressed and bathed in hot water. Instead of ice-cream, she was forced to drink warm milk with mineral water and put to bed. Her parents lit her green-shaded bedside lamp, then sat in the glassed veranda as if nothing had happened, while they ate and enjoyed the ice-cream from crystal phials and watched TV.

Grief choked Tiny Kato as she lay in bed: ‘Why must I stay in bed? I wish someone would come and entertain me...’ That’s when she heard a slight rustle, as if a gentle breeze ruffled her hair...



Elves Visit Kato

The curtain over the window moved, but only slightly... It puzzled Kato because the door and the windows were closed. She sat up in bed and looked around. The bedside light gave an eerie, almost magical tint to the room. The curtain still rustled and moved...

Kato strained to see clearly, stretching her neck to have a better look. She stared at the curtain with wide-open eyes.

No, her eyes weren’t playing tricks.. Tiny creatures had popped their tiny heads in the curtain folds and were looking at Kato with their weeny eyes.

‘It’s you!’ Kato exclaimed in surprise.

‘Yes, my lady, it’s us, Tiny Kato!’ cried the leader of the elves, clinging to the curtain.

‘She’s seen us, seen us, seen us!’ The other elves clapped their little hands, then, with their leader, jumped down onto Kato’s blanket and bent their heads in respect to her.

‘Oh my, it’s wonderful that you’ve come now,’ Kato said.

‘We always come when...’ the leader began, then glanced at his fellows to finish his phrase.

‘When children need it,’ the others shouted.

‘How did you know? Are you psychics?’ Kato asked.

‘We’re not, but when we hear...’

'When word reaches us...'

'We immediately fly out.'

'Because we're messengers of kindness!' The leader raised his tiny right hand, 'But not everyone sees us! Thank you for spotting us!'

'You're amazing!' Kato beamed happily. 'And how wonderful you look!'

Indeed, the elves were a marvellous sight: green coats rimmed with dandelion fluff, acorn shoes and hats made from acorn caps. Above all, they were really cute, their smiling faces were radiating kindness. A grain of wheat is minuscule, isn't it? But everything is comparative in this world, so their tiny eyes shone brightly and seemed huge on their little faces because they were wide open, shining with sympathy and joy.

There were nine of them. They were apparently brothers because they all looked alike. One of them, the tallest, their leader.

'Brothers,' the leader turned to the elves standing on the blanket edge, 'first we've got to look after Kato's head, then we'll talk about other things.'

'Dear, Tiny Kato, will you allow us to look after your headache?' the elves asked.

She agreed and so they took off their shoes and leapt onto her face straight from the blanket. They landed gently on her chin, then ran up her cheeks and reached her forehead. There they squatted, then pulled some ointment from the grass tubes they kept in their breast pockets, rubbed it on their hands, then made a chain by linking their arms and began to dance. Their leader danced in the centre, alone.

Tiny Kato lay still, very much pleased by it all as she watched them by rolling her eyes towards her forehead. After a while, fearing they might be tired by their dance, she called out:

'My headache is gone! Thank you, my dear elves!'

The elves seemed tired with sweat dripping from their foreheads, but they were still smiling, happy to have helped Kato. The leader spoke for them all:

'We'll visit you every evening till you are fully recovered. We'll entertain you with colourful stories.'

'There's no one better than you to visit me,' Kato was moved by his words. She wiped the sweat off the elves' foreheads with her handkerchief. 'Who better to befriend than you?'

The elves sat on the blanket, near Kato's face, and vowed to be her friends forever.

'But,' the leader began, lowering his head in embarrassment, 'please don't expect us on a windy day... The wind...' he faltered, blinked rapidly, finding it hard to admit: 'we're afraid of wind. It scatters us as we're so small, too small, in fact.'

'We're not scared of anything else. Not rain or showers or downpours,' the others added from all sides, fearing Kato might think them cowards. 'We can dart between raindrops without getting wet! We really are very nimble!'

'Please don't take it as bragging – we really are extremely nimble!' the leader added firmly.

'Oh, my,' Kato's words came straight from her heart, 'I would love to see you in any weather. I'd like you to be with me day and night. That would make me more than happy, happier than anyone else in the world.'

'Thank you, Tiny Kato, but we can't stay...'



‘We’ll sing you a lullaby and leave...’

‘Before we’re caught in the wind...’

‘Many thanks from our hearts,’ the elves were saying, nodding and holding their tiny hands over their hearts.

‘It’s me who should be thanking you,’ Kato exclaimed impatiently, ‘but I’m so disappointed you’re not staying. I’m heartbroken. I’m sure my temperature will go up again the moment you leave, and my splitting headache will be back.’

‘We will be back!’ the elves reassured Kato. ‘We’ll be coming back until you are well again.’

‘I wonder where you’re going? Where can be better than staying with me?’ Kato’s voice was shaking with pain. She was ready to burst into tears again, but then she remembered ice-cream and lemonade. ‘How can I let you go, my dear guests, without ice-cream and lemonade?’

But the elves refused her invitation, firstly because they didn’t want to bother the sick girl, and secondly, because, they said, they had plenty of both anyway.

‘Plenty?’ Kato cried. ‘Plenty of both?’



‘Yes, my lady,’ the leader said solemnly. ‘Actually, we can make a mountain of ice-cream.’

‘Oh, oh, oh!’ Kato’s head was spinning with a vision of an ice-cream mountain. She rested her head on the pillow for a moment, then sat up and asked in awe, ‘Plenty of lemonade as well?’

The elves were about to burst into laughter when their leader threw them a stern look, telling Tiny Kato there was no question of a shortage.

‘But still?’ Kato wanted to know.

‘Oh, Kato, if you wish we can produce a lemonade fountain.’

On hearing this, Kato nearly fainted. The elves leapt up again, landed on her ears, and brought her back to reality.

‘But how’s that possible?’ She asked as soon as she could speak.

‘Oh, we’ve got a kind of a table that produces all the food and drinks we want.’

‘A table?’ Kato sounded amazed.

‘Right. When we’re hungry, we ask it to lay out a meal, and the table gives us all we want.’

‘My lovely friends, I’m dying to see that table,’ Kato exclaimed impatiently. ‘I’d love to know where you live and what you do.’

The elves thought for some time. Then their leader looked around, as if asking the others what to do about it. That’s when the tiny visitors told their story.



The Story of the Magic Forest

Hardly daring to breathe, Kato listened to the elves' story, occasionally clapping in amazement and admiration. It turned out that the elves lived in a magic forest on a gigantic oak tree protecting it from midges and gnats, as well as serving the Forest Prince. They worked tirelessly from dawn to dusk, aware of the huge responsibility placed on their tiny shoulders. At every daybreak, they would climb to the top of the oak tree and check the surrounding area for any enemies through their little spyglasses. If they spotted a potential enemy, they would take up their quivers full of sharp arrows, ready to ward off any danger to their oak tree. They were brave and expert defenders! They never missed a single midge or gnat! During the day they circled the tree canopy several times but spent the rest of their time taking care of the Prince.

The Prince needed a lot of care and protection. He lived in a magnificent crystal cottage, in the shade of the oak tree. The walls were made of pieces of crystal – all different shapes and sizes, even the roof was covered in crystal tiles. Inside, everything was also made of crystal: the splendid floor, a low table with three-legged stools, the four-poster bed on carved legs with the softest mattress and blanket stuffed with fleece. A crystal ladder was in one corner of the room for the Prince

to climb onto the roof.

The cottage sparkled so beautifully that it made a most pleasing sight. However, that wasn't its only attraction. A pleasing sight is always welcome, but the cottage had another function. Every single crystal piece in the walls, floor and roof tiles, and even the ladder steps produced an amazingly pure musical sound. In short, the cottage was a musical instrument and the Prince spent his days composing tunes. His fingers would touch all those pieces with crystal thimbles or thin pins, sometimes singing along with his tinkling voice. It was all magical, a pleasure to both the eye and the ear.

When the sun shifted to the west, the setting sunbeams would light the cottage through the thick canopy of the oak tree, giving it even greater brilliance. Exhausted from composing music during the day, the Prince would recline on his bed, but at dusk he would sit up and call out:

'Hey, elves! Time to look after the cottage!'

It meant the elves had to clean and polish the cottage from top to bottom. Otherwise gentle and unassuming, the Prince was extremely particular about a single speck of dust. If he spotted one, he would get angry and shout:

'What's this? Have you forgotten that the cottage is a musical instrument? Its sound must be crystal clear!'

Embarrassed, the elves would exchange glances and set to work immediately. When the work was done, they would fill the crystal bath with flavoured water, bathe the Prince, comb his silky golden hair, help him into soft black pants and a snow-white shirt adorned with delicate lace, a sleeveless jacket and emerald flat shoes. At which point the Prince, dressed in his



finery, usually said:

‘Now, my dear elves, it’s time to ring the bell!’

The elves would place an armchair near the oak tree, accompany the Prince to the seat, and then head for a big bell hanging from the lowest branch. At such moments, the Prince watched the setting sun, transfixed, enjoying the ancient tree wrapped in mysterious glow. And, all the while, the elves rang the bell, inviting the forest dwellers to the concert.

Very soon, the area would be full of those eager to listen and watch. Everyone wanted to be in the magic forest at those times...

Lilies-of-the-valley would come, dancing gracefully along the way, then sit on the grass, covering their knees with white dresses, modestly lower their heads, and patiently wait for the concert to begin.

Poppies would fly towards the forest, their scarlet petals flowing, eager to catch the magic tunes. They would roll their jet-black eyes and shout, at least nine times, for the elves to begin.

Usually, the lilies would smile at each other, silently demonstrating their superiority: those poppies have no manners, even their clothes are too bright...

‘We’re starting soon!’ the elves shouted back. ‘We’re don’t forget to clap!’

Then a carriage shaped like a sedan-chair would appear on the slope. Everyone turned to see. Drawn by eight pairs of grasshoppers, the carriage brought the most beautiful of the flowers – Beauty Peal, the Queen of the Roses, together with her train, of course. She wore a magnificent dress made of

the thinnest velvet, deep-cut so that everyone could see the glowing skin of her bare shoulders. With a string of dew pearls around her neck and a garland of dew adorning her curls, she was a true beauty.

Soaring gently above the carriage was the crow, nicknamed Orphan because he had lost his mum recently and was hopelessly in love with Peal. Clad in a black suit, he was a pitiable sight because of his sadness.. When the grasshoppers pulled up, he would reverently offer his arm to the Queen as she stepped down. In response to his tear-filled glance, she would shrug her shoulders, as if to say it wasn’t her fault she was such a beauty. Then she would touch her gorgeous hairdo and head towards the clearing. The peals of her laughter reached everyone, letting them know the concert could begin as she had arrived.

The Prince would ignore her hint because it wasn’t his habit to respond to his listeners, even if it was Beauty Peal. And all the while, the elves would chuckle: ‘Why can’t she remember that good manners suit everyone – the ordinary and the extraordinary? There are others to come, right?’

And true enough, others joined the crowd: red-yellow ladybirds, birds of all sizes and shapes... The very last to come was the poor Monk Dove, leaning on his crutches. The Prince would never begin the concert until he saw Monk Dove among the audience.

Then the elves would sound the bell for the last time, the Prince would rise from his armchair and bow low in all directions, which was met with loud clapping.

The elves would bring him a crystal bowl full of thimbles and

pins of all sizes, from which the Prince would choose some and go to the cottage. That's when the concert usually started.

A pair of elves stood at the four corners of the cottage, turning it at the sign from their leader. And the Prince played and played, producing music that enchanted everyone. Finally, he would climb onto the roof and play on the tiles with four pins held in each hand. As well as playing, he used to move to the tune so gracefully and artistically that it was hard to describe. The elves would sit on the eaves, singing along...

'Hurray for the Prince! Long live the Prince!' the listeners cried.

The magnificent Prince looked even more attractive as he played and sang. He would stand on the crystal roof reflecting the rays of the setting sun and bow with a thankful smile. He never forgot to encourage the modest elves to do the same.

'Bravo! Bravo! Bis!' the excited audience shouted.

'Absolutely amaaazing, truly amaaazing!' Monk Dove would mumble, waiving his crutches.

The tunes were pleasing and magical what they did was prompt sympathy, love and kindness in the listeners, dissolving their sorrows, healing their wounds, and giving them hope and happiness ...

The Orphan Crow would shed tears: if anything eased his grief at losing his mum, it was his adoration of the Beauty Peal, and the Prince's tunes. Monk Dove also sobbed: 'It's the Prince's music that helps me in my loneliness and my old age.'

The Beauty Peal would forget to laugh. Listening to the magical tunes, she would realise that the world appreciated things other than her beauty. In short, everyone thought about

something of their own. They were able to think about their own secret desires and problems. They all agreed on one thing: life wasn't worth living without those tunes.

Having listened very carefully, Tiny Kato was enchanted:

'I'm dying to hear those tunes, too!'

'That's exactly what we are going to do,' the elves replied.. 'We're here to sing the Prince's melody to you.'

Apparently, it was the Prince's evening habit to look through his crystal spyglass, searching for any child in distress. If he spotted one, he would call his elves and order them to fly to



the child, look after them, and ensure they slept well. And, of course, sing his tunes to the sad child...

That's when the elves took their places, according to their voices, and their leader raised his tiny hand to signal the start... They sang... Never had Kato heard anything so magical, so melodious, so pleasing – not from the TV, the radio or anything else ...