



A long time ago, there was a hamlet, and in this small village there lived a farm girl named Marney. Marney's parents died when she was very young. She lived on a farm at the bottom of a large mountain with her loving grandparents. Marney's grandparents once had a fertile farm filled with an abundance of vegetables and fruits that her grandfather would take to the market to sell. The farm was rich with trees, birds, and animals of every species that made their homes on the farm. There was plenty for all, and all were happy.

But now things were different. Spring never arrived. The soil had become hard, and the seeds could not be planted. Food was scarce, so the animals that had once inhabited the land left to seek more bountiful homes, plentiful with food and shelter. Marney's grandparents were woeful, worried that they, too, would have to leave their home.

One evening, after a dinner of broth so meager, it ran from the spoon like water, Marney's grandfather, sat beside her at the fire. "Marney, you are a perceptive and sensitive child. As you know, things are not going well for us on the farm this year. Marney, you are the only person that can save the farm from demise."

"Tell me more, Grandpa," Marney said.

"When you were born, Lord Dismalt put an evil spell on our farm. He said that in the year that you turned ten, our beautiful and fertile farm would become barren, the trees would not bear fruit and the land would become so tough that no seeds would be planted. Soon the farm and all of us would perish. He told us that you were the only one who could save us and that you would have to travel up the forbidden mountain and overcome many obstacles in order to reach the golden key that would unlock the curse and redeem our land."

That night, Marney couldn't sleep. She put on her clothes and quietly crept out of the kitchen door into the dark night. She was frightened, but she couldn't let that stop her.

She walked faster and faster until she reached the foot of the mountain, which was surrounded by a forest. The trees were so thick that it was impossible to find a path through the forest. Suddenly, a white goat appeared.

"Hello, goat. I am trying to find my way through this murky forest, dark and dense, so that I can save my family's farm, but I cannot find a path on which to walk. Do you think that you could help me, please?"

"Follow me," said the white goat.

Marney followed the goat as he munched a path for her through the forest. At the end of the forest, he turned to Marney and said, "I can go no farther. Good luck on your journey, my friend." With that, the white goat vanished.

Marney began the steep climb up the incline of the dark mountain. Suddenly, it began to rain. The mountainside was slick, and Marney kept slipping and skidding into the mud. She began to weep, "Please, please can someone help me! I must make this trek to the dark castle to save my family's farm."

There before her appeared a giant white eagle. The bird spread its colossal wings, swooped down from the sky, picked Marney up, and flew her to the top of the mountain.

"Thank you for your help, eagle. Now I must find the golden key," Marney said.

"Good luck on your journey," the eagle replied. "The obstacles that you have faced are nothing like the one that lies ahead of you." With that, the eagle flew away.

"Clang ... clang ... clang, clang," something hard fell from the sky. It hit the side of the building and the roof of the entryway before landing at Marney's feet. "You're going to need this," the eagle shouted from the blackened branch of a tree. Marney picked up the sword.

She walked toward the door of the castle and opened it ever so slowly. A cold breeze enveloped her. She walked down a dark hallway to the right, then turned a gloomy corner. There she saw him, the evil Lord Dismalt slobbering over a roasted vulture leg.



"Ho, there!" Marney called.

"What, is someone here?"

"Yes. It is I, Marney. When I was born, you put an evil curse on my family. I have come to get the magic key that will restore my family's farm to what it once was."

"I have no key, child."

"You are a liar. It is there on the chain around your neck!"

"You will have to take this key from me. I will never give it up."

Marney moved in closer. She pointed her sword at the evil Lord Dismalt. "Give me the key. Give me the key or we will fight to the death."

At that, Lord Dismalt pulled his sword from its sheath and lunged toward Marney with all of his might. When he stood up, Marney realized that Lord Dismalt was only four feet tall. He had really skinny legs, so Marney decided to strike there first. She gave him one big kick to the shins, and Lord Dismalt fell on his knees crying. She zoomed in and stuck her sword in his face.

"Give me the key, Dismalt, or face your death!"

"Oh, all right!" Dismalt yanked the key from around his neck and tossed it over to Marney. As he placed the key in Marney's hand, he transformed into a radiant white pony.

Marney climbed upon his back and rode him safely back to her grandparents' farm.

When they saw her, Marney's grandparents were overjoyed. Marney dismounted and noticed that her grandfather was carrying a box. "What's that?" Marney asked.

"This is your last challenge, Marney. The key will unlock this box."

Marney put the key in the box and turned it to the right. The box popped open, and from it flowed the spring.

At that moment, the flowers bloomed. The soil became rich and fertile. Marney could hear the birds in the sky and the animals returning to their homes. Marney had saved spring and restored her family farm! And as for Lord Dismalt ... well, he lives happily in the paddock, munching grass and basking in the light of day!