

# What Katy Did

SUSAN COOLIDGE



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

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In loving memory of  
MICHAEL TRAYLER  
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This edition published 1994 by Wordsworth Editions Limited  
8B East Street, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9HJ

ISBN 978-1-85326-131-2

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Typeset by Antony Gray  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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## *To Five*

Six of us once, my darlings, played together  
Beneath green boughs, which faded long ago,  
Made merry in the golden summer weather,  
Pelted each other with new-fallen snow.

Did the sun always shine? I can't remember  
A single cloud that dimmed the happy blue –  
-A single lightning-bolt or peal of thunder,  
To daunt our bright, unfearing lives: can you?

We quarrelled often, but made peace as quickly,  
Shed many tears, but laughed the while they fell,  
Had our small woes, our childish bumps and bruises,  
But Mother always 'kissed and made them well'.

Is it long since? It seems a moment only:  
Yet here we are in bonnets and tail-coats,  
Grave men of business, members of committees,  
Our playtime ended: even Baby votes!

And star-eyed children, in whose innocent faces  
Kindles the gladness which was once our own,  
Crowd round our knees, with sweet and coaxing  
voices,  
Asking for stories of that old-time home.

'Were *you* once little too?' they say, astonished:  
'Did you too play? How funny! Tell us how.'  
Almost we start, forgetful for a moment;  
Almost we answer, 'We are little *now*!'

Dear friend and lover, whom Today we christen,  
Forgive such brief bewilderment – thy true  
And kindly hand we hold; we own thee fairest.  
But, ah, our Yesterday was precious too!

So, darlings, take this little childish story,  
In which some gleams of the old sunshine play,  
And, as with careless hands you turn the pages,  
Look back and smile, as here I smile today.

## CHAPTER ONE

### *The Little Carrs*

I was sitting in the meadows one day, not long ago, at a place where there was a small brook. It was a hot day. The sky was very blue and white clouds, like great swans, went floating over it to and fro. Just opposite me was a clump of green rushes, with dark velvety spikes, and among them one single tall, red cardinal flower, which was bending over the brook as if to see its own beautiful face in the water. But the cardinal did not seem to be vain. The picture was so pretty that I sat a long time enjoying it. Suddenly, close to me, two small voices began to talk – or to sing, for I couldn't tell exactly which it was. One voice was shrill; the other, which was a little deeper, sounded very positive and cross. They were evidently disputing about something, for they said the same words over and over again. These were the words – 'Katy did.' 'Katy didn't.' 'She did.' 'She didn't.' 'She did.' 'She didn't.' 'Did.' 'Didn't.' I think they must have repeated them at least a hundred times.

I got up from my seat to see if I could find the speakers; and sure enough, there on one of the cat-tail bulrushes, I spied two tiny pale green creatures. Their eyes seemed to be weak, for they both wore black goggles. They had six legs apiece – two short ones, two not so short and two very long. These last legs had joints like the springs to buggy-tops; and as I watched, they began walking up the rush, and then I saw that they moved exactly like an old-fashioned

gig. In fact, if I hadn't been too big, I *think* I should have heard them creak as they went along. They didn't say anything as long as I was there, but the moment my back was turned they began to quarrel again, and in the same old words – 'Katy did.' 'Katy didn't.' 'She did.' 'She didn't.'

As I walked home I fell to thinking about another Katy – a Katy I once knew, who planned to do a great many wonderful things, and in the end did none of them, but something quite different – something she didn't like at all at first but which, on the whole, was a great deal better than any of the things she had dreamed about. And as I thought, this little story grew in my head and I resolved to write it down for you. I have done it; and, in memory of my two little friends on the bulrush, I give it their name. Here it is – the story of What Katy Did.

Katy's name was Katy Carr. She lived in the town of Burnet, which wasn't a very big town, but was growing as fast as it knew how. The house she lived in stood on the edge of the town. It was a large square house, white, with green blinds, and had a porch in front, over which roses and clematis made a thick bower. Four tall locust trees shaded the gravel path which led to the front gate. On one side of the house was an orchard; on the other side were wood piles and barns, and an ice-house. Behind was a kitchen garden sloping to the south; and behind that a pasture with a brook in it, and butternut trees, and four cows – two red ones, a yellow one with sharp horns tipped with tin, and a dear little white one named Daisy.

There were six of the Carr children – four girls and two boys. Katy, the eldest, was twelve years old; little Phil, the youngest, was four, and the rest fitted in between.

Dr Carr, their Papa, was a dear, kind, busy man who was away from home all day, and sometimes all night too, taking care of sick people. The children had not any

Mamma. She had died when Phil was a baby, four years before my story began. Katy could remember her pretty well; to the rest she was but a sad, sweet name, spoken on Sunday, and at prayer-times, or when Papa was specially gentle and solemn.

In place of this Mamma, whom they recollected so dimly, there was Aunt Izzie, Papa's sister, who came to take care of them when Mamma went away on that long journey from which, for so many months, the little ones kept hoping she might return. Aunt Izzie was a small woman, sharp-faced and thin, rather old-looking, and very neat and particular about everything. She meant to be kind to the children but they puzzled her much, because they were not a bit like herself when she was a child. Aunt Izzie had been a gentle, tidy little thing, who loved to sit as Curly Locks did, sewing long seams in the parlour, and to have her head patted by older people and to be told that she was a good girl; whereas Katy tore her dress every day, hated sewing, and didn't care a button about being called 'good', while Clover and Elsie shied off like restless ponies when anyone tried to pat their heads. It was very perplexing to Aunt Izzie and she found it hard to quite forgive the children for being so 'unaccountable', and so little like the good boys and girls in Sunday-school memoirs, who were the young people she liked best and understood most about.

Then Dr Carr was another person who worried her. He wished to have the children hardy and bold, and encouraged climbing and rough plays, in spite of the bumps and ragged clothes which resulted. In fact, there was just one half-hour of the day when Aunt Izzie was really satisfied about her charges, and that was the half-hour before breakfast, when she had made a law that they were all to sit on their little chairs and learn the Bible verse for the day. At this time she looked at them with pleased eyes, they were all so spick and span, with such nicely-brushed jackets

and such neatly-combed hair. But the moment the bell rang her comfort was over. From that time they were what she called 'not fit to be seen'. The neighbours pitied her very much. They used to count the sixty stiff white pantalette legs hung out to dry every Monday morning and say to each other what a sight of washing those children made, and what a chore it must be for poor Miss Carr to keep them so nice. But poor Miss Carr didn't think them at all nice; that was the worst of it.

'Clover, go upstairs and wash your hands! Dorry, pick your hat off the floor and hang it on the nail! Not that nail – the third nail from the corner!' These were the kind of things Aunt Izzie was saying all day long. The children minded her pretty well, but they didn't exactly love her, I fear. They called her 'Aunt Izzie' always, never 'Aunty'. Boys and girls will know what *that* meant.

I want to show you the little Carrs, and I don't know that I could ever have a better chance than one day when five out of the six were perched on top of the ice-house, like chickens on a roost. This ice-house was one of their favourite places. It was only a low roof set over a hole in the ground and, as it stood in the middle of the sideyard, it always seemed to the children that the shortest road to every place was up one of its slopes and down the other. They also liked to mount to the ridge-pole and then, still keeping the sitting position, to let go and scrape slowly down over the warm shingles to the ground. It was bad for their shoes and trousers, of course, but what of that? Shoes and trousers, and clothes generally, were Aunt Izzie's affair; theirs was to slide and enjoy themselves.

Clover, next in age to Katy, sat in the middle. She was a fair, sweet dumpling of a girl, with thick pigtailed of light brown hair, and short-sighted blue eyes which seemed to hold tears just ready to fall from under the blue. Really, Clover was the jolliest little thing in the world; but these

eyes, with her soft cooing voice, always made people feel like petting her and taking her part. Once, when she was very small, she ran away with Katy's doll, and when Katy pursued, and tried to take it from her, Clover held fast and would not let go. Dr Carr, who wasn't attending particularly, heard nothing but the pathetic tone of Clover's voice as she cried: 'Me won't! Me want dolly!' and without stopping to inquire, he called out sharply: 'For shame, Katy! Give your sister *her* doll at once!' which Katy, much surprised, did; while Clover purred in triumph like a satisfied kitten. Clover was sunny and sweet-tempered, a little indolent and very modest about herself, though, in fact, she was particularly clever in all sorts of games, and extremely droll and funny in a quiet way. Everybody loved her, and she loved everybody, especially Katy, whom she looked up to as one of the wisest people in the world.

Pretty little Phil sat next on the roof to Clover, and she held him tight with her arm. Then came Elsie, a thin, brown child of eight with beautiful dark eyes and crisp, short curls covering the whole of her small head. Poor little Elsie was the 'odd one' among the Carrs. She didn't seem to belong exactly to either the older or the younger children. The great desire and ambition of her heart was to be allowed to go about with Katy and Clover and Cecy Hall, and to know their secrets and be permitted to put notes into the little post-offices they were for ever establishing in all sorts of hidden places. But they didn't want Elsie, and used to tell her to 'run away and play with the children', which hurt her feelings very much. When she wouldn't run away, I am sorry to say they ran away from her, which, as their legs were longest, it was easy to do. Poor Elsie, left behind, would cry bitter tears and, as she was too proud to play much with Dorry and John, her principal comfort was tracking the older ones about and discovering their mysteries, especially the post-offices,



which were her greatest grievance. Her eyes were bright and quick as a bird's. She would peep and peer and follow and watch till at last, in some odd, unlikely place, the crotch of a tree, the middle of the asparagus bed, or perhaps on the very top step of the scuttle ladder, she spied the little paper box with its load of notes, all ending with: 'Be sure and not let Elsie know.' Then she would seize the box and, marching up to wherever the others were, she would throw it down, saying defiantly: 'There's your old post-office!' but feeling all the time just like crying. Poor little Elsie! In almost every big family there is one of these unmated, left-out children. Katy, who had the finest plans in the world for being 'heroic' and of use, never saw, as she drifted on her heedless way, that here, in this lonely little sister, was the very chance she wanted for being a comfort for somebody who needed comfort very much. She never saw it and Elsie's heavy heart went uncheered.

Dorry and Joanna sat on the two ends of the ridge-pole. Dorry was six years old; a pale, pudgy boy with rather a solemn face and smears of molasses on the sleeve of his jacket. Joanna, whom the children called 'John' and 'Johnnie', was a square, splendid child, a year younger than Dorry; she had big brave eyes and a wide rosy mouth which always looked ready to laugh. These two were great friends, though Dorry seemed like a girl who had got into boy's clothes by mistake, and Johnnie like a boy who, in a fit of fun, had borrowed his sister's frock. And now, as they all sat there chattering and giggling, the window above opened, a glad shriek was heard, and Katy's head appeared. In her hand she held a heap of stockings, which she waved triumphantly.

'Hurrah!' she cried. 'All done, and Aunt Izzie says we may go. Are you tired of waiting? I couldn't help it, the holes were *so* big, and took so long. Hurry up, Clover, and get the things! Cecy and I will be down in a minute.'