



Little Witch Buttonnose

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Storybook, fiction

Age: 7+

The night the little witch-girl was born was absolutely extraordinary. Firstly, the sun came out – in the middle of the darkest of nights, and secondly – the little girl was incredibly ugly. She had pink skin, a nose that was too small and resembled a tiny little button, and her hair was long and red. Her mother was devastated, and smeared dirt all over her daughter's face to make her look nice and grey like a proper witch. In school, Buttonnose conjured rainbows instead of thunder, and everyone in the forest was happy to finally get rid of her.

Buttonnose turns one hundred and leaves in search of her own life. She takes a nice summer cottage as her domicile, cleans it, and begins her independent life, when the Toadstool family suddenly arrives. The little house is their summer residence – two children, a mother and a father. After some initial misunderstandings, they all make peace, and decide that the young witch will stay with the family. The Toadstool family's neighbours represent different aspects of human behaviour. As the story unfolds, all of them will learn their lessons – the hunter will understand that killing animals is not right, bad boys will get their punishment, the old lady will find her peace of mind, the wounded cat will be cured, and the posh, rich people will find out that money does not solve everything.

Awards:

2012 Nukits competition, 1st place

2010 Annual Children's Literature Award of
the Cultural Endowment of Estonia

Reading sample

Chapter Five, in which Buttonnose becomes interested in cooking and the family gets an uninvited guest

Buttonnose was an early riser, and thus was up before everyone else the next morning. She went to the kitchen to look for something to eat, where she noticed a cookbook lying on the table. The girl sat down to peer at the colourful photographs. The book was titled "Quick and Simple Foods for your Summer Cottage". Mrs. Toadstool had brought the book along to their cottage so she could make the family proper meals with little effort.

Buttonnose took in each picture for several full minutes, gulping down the saliva that collected around her mouth from time to time.

"Ah, so these are the kinds of meals that people eat!" she gasped in wonder. "I want to surprise my welcoming family with a decent breakfast!"

Buttonnose paged through the book for a few more moments until she found a suitable picture. The photo showed a large bowl brimming with steaming mushroom-macaroni casserole, a basketful of fresh carrot rolls, and a potbellied pitcher of milk. The young witch also liked the delightful green colour of the dishes.

"Abracadabra!" Buttonnose incanted, tracing figures in the air with her finger.

The next moment, a green bowl with mushroom-macaroni casserole, a basketful of carrot dinner rolls, and a glimmering green pitcher of milk appeared on the dining table in the Toadstool family's cottage. The food smelled divine.

"Ahh!" Buttonnose sighed, and filled her lungs with the incredible new smell. "Now, I will wake up Mr. and Mrs. Toadstool and the children, and invite them to breakfast."

Buttonnose did not even manage to take a step before the parents' bedroom door opened and Mrs. Toadstool entered the room.

"What smells so good in here?" Mrs. Toadstool asked in wonder. "Have you been baking something here, Buttonnose?"

Mrs. Toadstool took a step towards the table and a smile spread across her face. "I didn't know that you can cook! That's absolutely fantastic!" "I fiddled around here a bit," Buttonnose replied modestly. "I thought I would offer all of you a simple and quick cottage breakfast."

Mr. Toadstool, Annemai and Aadu also woke up to the smell, and soon the whole family sat eagerly around the breakfast table.

The food was truly tasty! None of the Toadstool family was used to eating mushroom and macaroni casserole for breakfast, but despite of – or maybe even due to this very fact, everyone wildly enjoyed the food.

"That's interesting – I don't remember having such lovely dishes at all," said Mrs. Toadstool in amazement, inspecting the quickly emptying serving trays. "Of course, they look familiar, but I don't believe I've ever used them before."

"Oh, you always buy up all sorts of things for the cottage," said Mr. Toadstool. "Or maybe you received them as a Christmas present?"

"No, we haven't been here at all since Christmas. I feel like I've rather seen them in a magazine. Or maybe it was some advertisement..."

Mr. Toadstool and the children continued eating, their cheeks puffed full of casserole and rolls, and didn't bother troubling their minds with such boring things as some bowls and trays.

"Now I know!" Mrs. Toadstool exclaimed suddenly, rose from the table, and took a cookbook off of the shelf. "That food is straight out of this book! You found the recipe in my cookbook, Buttonnose!"

Mrs. Toadstool flicked through the book, scanned the table of contents and soon found the correct page number. "Here it is – mushroom-macaroni casserole!" Mrs. Toadstool announced triumphantly, and looked at the picture. Then she stared at the book with her mouth agape, unable to believe her eyes. The picture showed a chequered tablecloth and a yellow wall... and nothing else at all. Not one trace of the macaroni casserole, nor the green dishes!

Mrs. Toadstool cast a glance at Buttonnose, who had begun to giggle.

"I should have thought so!" Mrs. Toadstool chuckled, laying the open book on the table.

The others now saw the amusing photo as well, and everyone broke out into raucous laughter.

"Buttonnose could make all of the foods in the book for us, just like that!" said Annemai, coming up with a clever idea. "And then, Mom, you can go to the bookstore and say you were sold a book with misprinted pictures and then they'll have to give you a new one!"

"I don't believe I'd have the nerve to trick anyone like that," Annemai's mother laughed. "But we could always take a picture of every meal and then tape it onto the empty spot in the cookbook afterwards."

"Oh, and we can pick out great toys and candy and ice cream from ads in magazines!" shouted Aadu, whose excitement was now piqued.

"Yeah! And we can look for a picture of the world's cutest kitty and puppy and pony from an animal picture book!" Annemai exclaimed ecstatically, already imagining how she would sit on a saddle riding her very own darling, furry pony.

"Hold on, hold on!" said Mr. Toadstool, interrupting his children's daydreaming. "Children certainly do not decide such things! I'm not sure at all that I want a pony living in our backyard. Plus, what if you start thinking that a picture-book

rhinoceros looks irresistibly cute?"

"Or a crocodile!" added Mrs. Toadstool, raising her eyebrows.

Annemai and Aadu looked pleadingly towards Buttonnose, but the young witch nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes – you know, the thing with those animal pictures is that bewitching them may make it all go sideways," she said. "One time, I made a picture of an adorable little squirrel come alive, and it turned into a two-meter-long predator that drove all of the moose and deer and boars out of the forest, not to mention the rabbits and other squirrels!"

"That's hideous!" exclaimed Mrs. Toadstool, clutching her chest. "Where did such a frightful thing happen? I don't suppose it was around here?"

"Well, to tell the truth it didn't happen anywhere," admitted Buttonnose, smiling slyly. "I was telling tall tales. Although it's not at all impossible for something similar to really happen. I've never actually tried it. There wasn't a single animal picture book in the witch's woods where I used to live."

"And maybe it is indeed better if you don't try conjuring animals," Mr. Toadstool quickly affirmed. "There are quite enough live squirrels here in the forest, and if the children want to get a cat or a dog – well, that we can also discuss without any magic tricks."

"Are we going to get a cat? Hurray!"

Annemai squeaked in delight.

"Err..." Mr. Toadstool stammered and darted his eyes towards Mrs. Toadstool. "Well, ah..."

"Maybe in few years, when you're older,"

Mrs. Toadstool replied. "In any case, not right away."

"That's totally unfair!" mumbled Aadu, making a long face in disappointment.

"But a little tiny puppy dog?" Annemai pressed further.

"No! Now let's end this talk of dogs and cats!" said Mrs. Toadstool strictly.

Just then, a quiet meowing started to sound from behind the cottage door.

"Buttonnose!" Mrs. Buttonnose chided, and looked angrily at the witch-girl.

But Buttonnose spread her hands in surprise.

Aadu opened the door cautiously and a small, scraggly cat limped into the room. It had soiled, matted fur, and was so thin that its ribs were clearly visible on both sides. A length of twine was tied around the cat's back paw, which had dug into the animal's flesh and bloodied it. The cat had probably been white and quite pretty at one time, however it now looked ugly and was a dirty shade of gray.

"Oh wow, it's Vilberg!" Aadu shouted.

"That's the cat Riina got as a present last summer!"

"It couldn't be!" said Mrs. Toadstool, rolling

her eyes. "You mean the Richies girl's cat from the yellow house over there? No, they certainly took their cat with them to the city for the winter."

"Apparently they didn't," said Annemai and stroked the cat, which had now begun to meow miserably. "It IS Vilberg! He has Vilberg's blue eyes!"

"Oh, you poor animal!" crooned Mrs.

Toadstool, and likewise knelt down to pet the cat. "Your leg is cut wide open! Annemai, bring me the nail clippers from my toiletries bag! We'll cut through this twine."

"The poor thing, he probably got caught in a trap!" Aadu reckoned.

Everyone gathered around to inspect the cat's leg. Mrs. Toadstool sat on the floor and Vilberg limped over to lie on her lap trustingly. Mrs. Toadstool picked up the scissors, but then cast a doubtful glance at the mouth full of sharp teeth.

"If I cut through the twine now, then I don't suppose Vilberg will attack me with his claws and teeth as a token of thanks? Maybe I should put on my garden gloves?"

"No need," said Buttonnose, stroking the cat's head.

The witch-girl had also sat on the floor, and the others noticed just now that she was humming some kind of unfamiliar melody. Vilberg had become completely calm and began to purr.

Mrs. Toadstool carefully cut through the twine and removed it from around the cat's paw. The twine had cut a deep wound into the cat's leg, which undoubtedly caused it agonizing pain.

Tears started to well up in Annemai's eyes.

"We have to take him to a veterinarian!" she demanded.

"No need," said Buttonnose again.

Mr. Toadstool couldn't believe his ears.

"How's there no need? The poor cat's leg is almost ripped right off, but you think it doesn't need a doctor?!"

Buttonnose stood up.

"I said there's no need a veterinarian. I didn't say it doesn't need treatment. Please, be so kind as to make a fire in the fireplace."

The witch-girl disappeared into the guest bedroom and stayed there pattering around for a short time. She then returned with a charred-black three-legged witch's cauldron and a small linen sack, from which she removed a number of dried herbal remedies and yellowed scraps of paper, and placed the items on the dinner table.

"Ah, you're going to heal Vilberg yourself!"

Annemai perceived with relief, and dried her eyes.

Mr. Toadstool was somewhat embarrassed over just losing his temper, and now did everything he could to get a fire going in the fireplace quick-snap. The logs started crackling and took flame in a few moments. At Buttonnose's request, Aadu poured two full mugs of water into the cauldron, and the witch-girl positioned the pot amid the

flames. When the first bubbles began to boil, Buttonnose started tossing various herbs into the cauldron. A strange and slightly unpleasant smell, the likes of which the Toadstool family had never sensed before, wafted through the room.

Buttonnose busied herself in deep concentration, and the others did not wish to interrupt her with their questions. They gawked, entranced by the witch's doings, and when she asked for something from time to time, they fulfilled her request immediately.

Buttonnose then poked her head close to the cauldron, so close that her hair almost lit on fire, and inhaled the steam deeply.

"Ready!" she declared, satisfied. "Now we need a bandage, too. I'll go and see whether there's moss somewhere on a large rock."

"We have gauze!" said Mrs. Toadstool, still sitting on the floor and holding the cat in her lap.

"I'll go get it!" Mr. Toadstool promptly promised. He vanished towards the cupboard and soon came back with a roll of gauze. "Will this do?"

Buttonnose was content with the item. She took the witch's brew off of the fire, strained out the herbs, and rinsed a long stretch of gauze in the potion. Then, the girl wrapped the bandage carefully around the cat's leg.

"How long does the bandage have to be there?" Annemai asked.

"Quite long," Buttonnose replied. "It's an angry wound, so it will still take a good five minutes."

The witch-girl quite soon unwrapped the bandage from around Vilberg's leg, and everyone 'ooh'-d and 'aah'-d at the cat's completely healed, furry paw. Vilberg was fully well again, and stepped perkily off of Mrs. Toadstool's lap.

The children cheered with joy while Mr. and Mrs. Toadstool observed the cat prancing about with a softened expression.

"Oh, he's certainly hungry!" Mrs. Toadstool suddenly realized. "Aadu, bring a sausage from the refrigerator, please! We're going to keep Vilberg, and I don't want to hear a single "but" about it!"