



Epic Tales



Brave Mary

Based on a traditional folk tale adapted by Chip Colquhoun & Tony Cooper

Illustration by Dave Hingley

There was once a farmer who loved playing card games with his friends — but he was *very* bad at it. These were card games where the winners got money from the losers. Because the farmer always lost, he was running out of money to buy food — for himself and his daughter.

The farmer met his friends one night every week — one was a miller who worked in a windmill to make bread; the other was a

blacksmith who made tools out of metal. The miller and the blacksmith loved playing card games with the farmer. Because the farmer always lost, *they* were winning lots of money!

Then, one night at the start of *this* story, the three men were playing cards in the farmer's house when the farmer began to worry. He had just lost his last coin. How was he going to buy food for his daughter now?

Suddenly, an idea popped into his head. He said to the miller and the blacksmith, "Do you know? My daughter is probably the bravest girl in the world. I bet she's braver than your sons!"

The miller and the blacksmith laughed. "Don't be so silly," the blacksmith said. "Who ever heard of a girl being braver than a boy?"

"But it's true," the farmer said. "Maybe we could give our children a challenge to prove it... and the winner gets £10!"

In those days, £10 was a lot of money. It would feed the farmer and his daughter for a whole month.

"Alright," the miller said. "Here's a challenge: our children must go into the bone house in the graveyard, right now in the night-time... and they must bring back a skull!"

Hmmm... Would *you* be scared about going into a bone house in a graveyard at night-time?

How about picking up the head of a skeleton?

The farmer and the blacksmith thought this would be a scary challenge for their children — so they all agreed.

The blacksmith went to get his son first. His son listened carefully, then said... "**Aaaaayyyyyyeeee!** No way, no way!"

So the blacksmith returned to the farmer's house, his cheeks red with embarrassment.

Then the miller went to fetch his son. The boy listened carefully, then said...

"**AAAAAYYYYYYEEEE!** No way, no way, **no way!**"

So the miller returned to the farmer's house, his cheeks flushed red with embarrassment.

The farmer smiled, and held out his hand. "£10 please!" he said.

But the miller shook his head. "Oh no. The bet was to see if your daughter is *braver* than our sons. If your daughter doesn't go to the bone yard either, then she's just as

scared as our boys."

So the farmer called upstairs for his daughter. "Mary? Can you come down please?"

The farmer's daughter Mary had been getting ready for bed, so she came downstairs in her pyjamas and dressing gown.

The miller told Mary the challenge. She listened carefully, then said... "Alright."

The miller said, "Alright? Aren't you scared of ghosts?"

Mary said, "Why would I be scared of ghosts?"

*They walk through doors,
they walk through walls,
They no touch anything at all!
So they no poke my arm,
they no pull my hair,
So why should I be scared?"*

The miller was amazed. "You'll do it then? Right now?"

Mary nodded. "I's just go puts on me boots and stuff, then I gets

you yer skull."

(Mary wasn't very good at speaking, was she. That's because girls like Mary couldn't afford to go to school in those days — there weren't free schools like we have today.)

While Mary changed, the miller said to the blacksmith, "We'll see how brave that girl *really* is! I'll hide in the bone house and pretend to be a ghost! Make sure the farmer doesn't warn her..."

With that, the miller ran to the graveyard...

A little while later, Mary came downstairs wearing a dress, a coat, and her boots. She took a candle to help her see, then left the house to go to the graveyard.

The bone house had a lock that could only be opened from the outside, so Mary put a stone by the door to stop it from closing. Then she stepped inside.

The piles of bones glowed white in the light of her candle. Mary saw one that looked like a

skull, and went over to pick it up.

But remember: the miller was hiding in a dark corner so that Mary couldn't see him. Now he did his best impression of a ghost voice: "**Wooooo!** Leave that skull alone! It's mine!"

Mary looked around, but she couldn't see anyone. "Sorry!" she said politely. Then she carefully put the skull back, and picked up a different one.

The miller tried again. "**Wooooo!** Leave that skull alone! It's my mother's!"

"Oh, I see. Sorry again!" said Mary. She carefully put the skull back, and picked up a different one.

The miller tried yet again. "**Wooooo!** Leave that skull alone! It's my grandfather's!"

But this time, Mary stamped her foot. "Look, I'm sorry, but I *has* to take a skull. If I no, my daddy will no has any money, and we will no gets food. Your grandfather no needs food anymore — but we

does!"

The miller was amazed. Still pretending to be a ghost, he said, "Aren't you scared of me?"

Mary shrugged. "Why should I be scared? You're a ghost!

*You walk through doors,
you walk through walls,
You no touch anything at all!
So you no poke my arm,
you no pull my hair,
So why should I be scared?"*

And with that, Mary left the bone house, shut the door, and strode back home.

The blacksmith was really surprised when Mary came in and showed him the skull. He said, "Didn't you see any ghosts?"

Mary shook her head. "Nope! I heard one, though. He tolded me not to takes the skull, but I tolded him I has to."

"Weren't you scared?" the

blacksmith asked.

Mary shrugged. "Why should I be scared? It was just a ghost!

*It walks through doors, it
walks through walls,
It no touch anything at all!
It no poke my arm, it
no pull my hair,
So why should I be scared?"*

The blacksmith agreed that Mary was braver than the boys, and gave £10 to the farmer. Then he said to Mary, "Didn't the ghost chase you?"

Mary said, "Nope! I locked the door when I left, but he didn't come through it."

Then the blacksmith realised: the miller was trapped in the bone house! He ran to the graveyard, undid the latch to the bone house, and looked inside.

The miller was curled up in the middle of the bone house. His hair had turned grey, his skin was white, and he'd broken his

teeth from shivering. He had been scared to death!

Soon, everyone in town knew about the miller who had died from being scared. The story even got into the newspaper, where it was read by a rich man called Robert.

Robert didn't care too much about the miller. He was more interested in the girl called Mary: the newspaper said she had also gone into the bone house, but she hadn't been scared at all.

You see, Robert had once lived in a huge house. Once upon a time, he had servants who helped look after the house: maids who did tidying, butlers who answered the door, farriers who looked after the horses. He even had servants who looked after him: cooks in the kitchen, valets who helped him get dressed, a driver to take him places using a horse and cart.

But then Robert's great aunt had died, and become a ghost haunting Robert's house. His great aunt would appear next to a servant

and tap them on the shoulder with an icy cold finger, and the servant would say...

"AAAAAYYYYYEEEE!"

Then they would run away, straight out of this story.

Robert's great aunt did this to every servant, until soon Robert had no servants left. His house was untidy, the door was almost always shut, and the horses were dirty. Robert had terrible dinners (because he had to cook them himself), his clothes were often inside-out, and he couldn't go anywhere because he didn't know how to drive.

Soon the only people inside the house Robert and his great aunt. Robert was so scared about being tapped on his shoulder by the icy cold finger of his great aunt that he decided to leave home. Now he was staying at a hotel.

But, after reading about Mary in the newspaper, Robert decided to ask for her help so he could go back home.

Because he was rich, Robert wore a suit, a top hat, and a watch with a gold chain. So when Mary opened her front door and saw him for the first time, she couldn't believe her eyes. Rich people like him didn't usually visit poor people like her!

Robert bowed, and explained who he was. Mary invited him in for some tea. In the kitchen, the rich man told her about his great aunt's ghost.

At the end, he said, "What I'd like you to do is ask my great aunt to go away. Will you do that?"

Mary thought for a moment, then said, "No..."

Robert was surprised. "Oh! Are you scared?"

Mary shrugged. "Of course not! Why should I be scared of your great aunt?"

*She walks through doors,
she walk through walls,
She no touch anything at all!
She no poke my arm,
she no pull my hair,
So why should I be scared?"*

Robert was confused. "Then why did you say 'No'?"

"You no let me finish," replied Mary. "I was going to says, No... Not unless you does something for me!"

This made Robert smile. He said, "You sound like a businesswoman, Mary! If you can do something that someone else can't do, then yes: you should get something in return — that makes you a businesswoman, and *that's* how you can become rich. I know, because I'm a businessman — I build things, and that's how I became rich. So what would you like from me?"

Mary thought for a moment, and then said, "Well... These days, only boys who has money gets

to school. Girls no gets to school, especially if we no has money — and that means we no learns stuff to help us get good jobs. So if I helps with your ghost, you has to build me a school. Then I can learn to does more stuff, and one day I can be as rich as you."

The rich man thought this was a great idea — so he said, "Deal!"

Straight away, the rich man took Mary to his huge house. He gave her the key to get inside — then he ran back to the hotel to hide.

Mary calmly stepped into the house.

Have *you* ever been in a huge house when nobody else is there? It's really quiet... Shadows lie at the end of every corridor, and in the corner of every room... Paintings on the wall look as if they are watching you... Floorboards creak... The wind blows in through a window and makes a door close with a—

BANG!

Would it make you as scared
as it makes me?

Well, Mary didn't care. She
walked through the reception into
the hall...

Through the hall into the
drawing room...

Through the drawing room
into the state room...

Through the state room into
the dining room...

Through the dining room into
the kitchen...

Through the kitchen into the
hall again...

Up the stairs and into another
hall...

Then an icy cold finger tapped
her on the shoulder...

Mary whirled around. The rich
man's great aunt was floating there
with wide eyes that shone white —
and she looked *very angry*...

The great aunt shouted,
"YOU!"

Mary opened her mouth...

...and said, "Yes?"

The great aunt looked
surprised. "You... You're not running
away?"

Mary shrugged. "Of course
not! Why should I run from a ghost
like you?"

*You walk through doors, you walk
through walls,*

You no touch anything at all!

*So you no poke my arm, you no pull
my hair,*

So why should I be scared?"

But now the great aunt looked
confused. "I... I'm a ghost?"

Mary nodded. "Of course!
Did you no know? Look... You're
floating, and you can see right
through you!"

The great aunt looked down.
Mary was right: her legs were
floating, and she could see right
through them! She said, "Oh! I
didn't realise! Well — that explains
why everyone kept running away
from me!"

Then the great aunt looked back at Mary and smiled. “You really are a fearless girl, aren’t you. Come with me, then — I want to show you a secret...”

Mary followed the rich man’s great aunt back down the stairs, then down some more stairs into the basement. The great aunt pointed to the wall, where there was a painting of a knight in armour.

The great aunt said, “Tell my great nephew to look the other side of this painting. Now that I’m dead, he should have everything that’s there.”

A white hole suddenly opened up in the ceiling. The light coming through was so bright that Mary couldn’t see anything on the other side.

The great aunt said to Mary, “Thank you for your help, young lady. I can go now.”

With that, she flew up through the ceiling, and the hole closed behind her.

Moments later, Mary trotted out from the mansion and announced, “Your great aunt is gone!”

Robert was astonished. After listening to Mary’s story, he went with her into the basement to look behind the picture of the knight. On the other side was a hole in the wall to a secret room, which was full of treasure that Robert’s family had collected over the years.

Now the rich man was super rich! He sold some of the treasure for money, and spent that money building a school for girls — girls like Mary — so they could learn skills like reading and writing, and become rich themselves.

Robert also found a diamond ring in the treasure room, which he decided to give to Mary. But because he was a businessman — and Mary had shown that she could be a good businesswoman too — Robert told Mary that he

would only give her the ring if she answered one question.

I wonder if you can guess what that question was?

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