

Susan Coolidge
WHAT KATY DID

Read by **Laurel Lefkow**

**JUNIOR
CLASSICS**



CD 1

1	Katy's name was Katy Carr.	6:53
2	The children jumped up gladly, and slid down the roof.	6:38
3	'What shall we do now?' asked Clover...	5:04
4	Mrs. Knight's school, to which Katy and Clover and Cecy went...	5:01
5	Just then the bell tinkled...	5:39
6	When all was in order again...	4:54
7	Monday was apt to be rather a stormy day at the Carr's.	4:02
8	It was certainly splendid fun.	3:53
9	A little knot of the school-girls were walking home together...	5:45
10	Cousin Helen had bright eyes, which danced when she laughed...	4:37
11	Next morning Cousin Helen didn't wake till late.	5:26
12	'Papa,' she said, after dinner, 'who is Alex?'	5:30
13	Her last sleepy thought was an intention to be an angel...	3:53
14	It must be confessed that Miss Izzie was right.	4:25

15	When she opened her eyes she was lying on the sofa...	3:58
16	Such a long, long afternoon that was!	5:45
17	If anybody had told Katy, that first afternoon...	6:24
18	The first thing which broke in upon this sad state of affairs...	4:22
19	'I should say this: "Now, Katy Carr..."	6:09
20	Katy looked bright and eager.	4:50
21	'What are the children all doing to-day?' said Katy.	5:23
22	It seemed only a minute, before the children...	4:23
23	The next day, and the next, and the next after that passed...	5:16
24	Two Years Afterward.	4:43
25	Somebody tapped at the door, as she spoke.	6:26
26	It was about six weeks after this...	6:18
27	So it was settled. Clover seemed to be very busy...	4:47
28	It appeared that this happy thought of getting Cousin Helen...	4:19

Total time: 2:24:59

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Things have changed a lot in terms of what people expect of women since *What Katy Did* was published. The fact that certain books remain enormously popular has to be because of the quality of the writing and characters (although it may be because some parents want their children to behave just like the heroines of the past). *What Katy Did* is typical. On the one hand, there is the vivacious family and the gangly heroine Katy, sitting on the ice-house or clambering over fences, determined to be a caring and special person but always falling foul of her own impulsiveness and fallible nature. On the other hand, the story offers lessons in patience and humility, and implies that the most a woman should strive towards is a humble position within a household. But Katy (the character as well as the story) has survived despite the rather dated opinions about how to

be a respectable woman. This survival – and that of other books of the time – is in part because the best authors were themselves extraordinary, independent women who created a liberating, imaginative world for their heroines. And they were often intellectual revolutionaries even when they appeared to be following a much more predictable and conservative home life.

Susan Coolidge was born Sarah Chauncey Woolsey (the 'Chauncey' was also spelled without the 'e') in 1835 in Ohio to a large, well-to-do family. Her family and home were essentially the models for the characters and setting of the *Katy* books. There were five in total – *What Katy Did* (1872), *What Katy Did at School* (1873), *What Katy Did Next* (1886), *Clover* (1888) and *In The High Valley* (1890) – the last two concentrating more on Katy's

brothers and sisters, and seeing Katy married. Woolsey started writing when young, as many women of the time did, producing stories and poems. During the American Civil War (1861-1865) she served as a nurse and an administrator of a hospital. It was during this time that she became friends with some of the leading women of her time – like Helen Hunt Jackson, a campaigner for the rights of the indigenous American Indians; or Louisa May Alcott, author of the hugely successful family saga *Little Women*, who edited Woolsey's first published work. Susan used a pseudonym that borrowed a surname from her sister, who wrote under the name of Margaret Coolidge. It was a generous in-joke, as Susan said she wanted to be known as 'the sister of the famous Margaret' – but her own popularity was by far the greatest of her family. She wrote a great many novels, stories, travelogues and some highly-regarded poetry before her death in 1905; but her fame rests now on the first three Katy novels. They

have not just remained in print, but are enormously well-loved, especially among pre- and young teenage girls.

Katy Carr is rather ungainly – indeed, her ungainliness may have given her her name: the book's title is a pun on the popular name for a long-horned grasshopper, a katydid. She is an affectionate, impatient, imaginative, endlessly active, impulsive, outdoors-loving, energetic and occasionally intolerant tomboy with dreams of greatness. She lives at home with her widowed father, her five siblings and their rather particular spinster Aunt Izzie (who, needless to say, conceals a heart of gold behind her sharp exterior). The children are always finding themselves in scrapes, longing for the freedom of the outside world and the shady cove that is their Paradise. A guest at the house is their cousin Helen, a radiantly generous woman who is an invalid. When an accident injures Katy so severely that she becomes bedridden, it is Helen who offers her a means to escape what seems to Katy to be the

torture of a life spent indoors. Katy applies herself to following the advice, developing homely skills that she hopes will make her 'the heart of the house'.

There is plenty here for a social historian to study – the treatment of invalids at the time, for example, which seems to be essentially to sit them indoors and hope they manage to get by; or the role and status of the unmarried older woman (Woolsey herself never married); or the way of life of a well-off family in mid-nineteenth century America. The book can also be seen as a coming-of-age fable for the Christian middle-classes – where the young girl is essentially cocooned as she matures into adulthood, when childish things must be put away for the responsibilities of the house and home. But the core of the book, and its great joy, is Katy. She shows the cheerful vigour of an unconventional young heroine growing up in a home where her energies clash with the grown-ups' expectations; and in a sense she is the American frontier spirit while the adults

are imitating mature European society.

However, Katy avoids being just a symbol through her individuality and credibility. She is headstrong and very human (the occasional desire to push one's younger sister down the stairs is pretty much universal), optimistic, brave and profoundly sympathetic. Her enthusiasm is infectious and as genuine as her awkwardness and occasional selfishness. And the warmth that the reader instinctively feels towards her is the result of a generous narrator who seems to enjoy the games and adventures just as much as her characters. But this changes after Katy's illness. Her waywardness becomes focussed, her impulsiveness responsible, her intuitiveness conditioned; and it is possible that Woolsey rather regretted the effect Katy's accident had on her open-hearted pleasure in living. In the sequel, although Katy is the central character, the rebellious neighbour Rose Red gets to have the fun.

For all the similarities with any number of books published around the

same time involving hoydenish heroines coping with the fact that they were growing into young women, *What Katy Did* retains a fresh, direct appeal that is as moving as it is entertaining; and Katy's pleasures and struggles are evidently still striking resonant chords with readers – whatever may have happened to society since she first sat on the roof of the ice-house.

Notes by Roy McMillan



Laurel Lefkow is an accomplished stage, television and radio actress. She has won awards for a number of her audio books and was nominated for best supporting actress for her performance in *A Shayna Maidel* in London's West End. Other theatre roles include Alison in *Look Back in Anger*, Irina in *The Three Sisters* and Rose in *Slow dance on the Killing Ground*. Her television and film credits include *In Suspicious Circumstances*, *The Tracey Ullman Show*, *Spy Game*, *Inside the Twin Towers* and *A Perfect Family*. She was born in Washington DC and grew up in India, Kenya and France where her father worked as an American Diplomat. She trained at the Webber Douglas Academy in London. Laurel also has an extensive and successful career as a voice-over artist in many well known cartoons and advertising campaigns. She has also read *Pollyanna* for Naxos AudioBooks.

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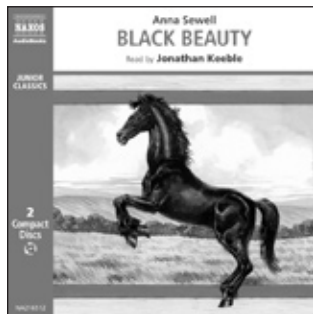
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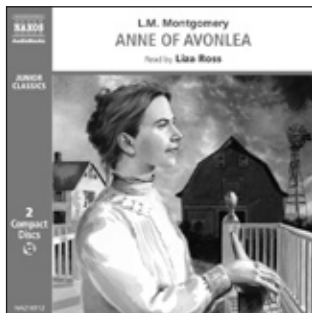
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Susan Coolidge

WHAT KATY DID

Read by **Laurel Lefkow**

Meet Katy Carr. She's impulsive, gangly, adventurous, awkward and brave; she loves clambering over fences, sitting on roofs, making up games or going for picnics with her five brothers and sisters (much to the horror of her Aunt Izzie).

But when she falls from a swing, she suddenly has to cope with being stuck indoors – maybe for ever...

What Katy Did is fresh, lively, funny and moving; and Katy herself is a warm and loving character that readers have taken to their hearts for over a hundred and thirty years.

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