SUSAN COOLIDGE

WHAT KATY DID

Susan Coolidge

What Katy Did

Enriched edition. Including "What Katy Did at School" & "What Katy Did Next"

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EAN 8596547390343

Edited and published by DigiCat, 2022

Table of Contents

Introduction
Historical Context
Synopsis (Selection)

What Katy Did

Analysis
Reflection
Memorable Quotes

Introduction

Table of Contents

This collection presents the original Katy trilogy by Susan Coolidge — What Katy Did, What Katy Did at School, and What Katy Did Next — three complete novels of nineteenth-century American children's fiction. Writing under the name Susan Coolidge, Sarah Chauncey Woolsey created a narrative that traces a spirited girl's progress through changing worlds. The purpose here is to gather the foundational arc of Katy Carr's development from high-spirited girlhood through adolescence into early adulthood. Read continuously, the novels reveal how character is shaped by home, education, and travel, and why Katy's story has remained a touchstone for generations of readers.

As a collection, these works represent closely related forms within the novel tradition. What Katy Did is a domestic novel rooted in family life; What Katy Did at School extends the series into the school-story mode; What Katy Did Next moves into the travel novel, observing manners and cultures abroad. All three belong to children's and young-people's literature, told in accessible prose and organized in lively episodes. The books emphasize everyday experiences rather than sensational events, using humor, dialogue, and reflective narration to illuminate moral choices. Together, they demonstrate the range available to a single protagonist within nineteenth-century popular fiction.

The opening novel introduces Katy Carr, the energetic eldest sister in a large American household, whose imagination, impatience, and generosity animate the

rhythms of home. The narrative dwells on small adventures, family projects, and decisions that ask Katy to balance impulse with responsibility. Domestic scenes, neighborhood friendships, and the subtle authority of caring adults establish a setting in which character is tested by ordinary challenges. Without relying on melodrama, the book invites readers to watch how play, work, and affection create habits of mind. It offers a portrait of early adolescence attentive to growth that unfolds through daily life.

The second novel relocates Katy and her sister Clover to a boarding school, where routines, rules, and peer communities present fresh trials of judgment and loyalty. The school-story framework opens room for new friendships, missteps, and recoveries, and for the discovery of talents that flourish outside the family home. Academic expectations and communal living require tact, patience, and self-reliance, while preserving the series' lightness of tone. The result is a narrative that explores how independence develops in shared spaces, and how youthful confidence is tempered by consideration for others without dampening the curiosity and spirit that define Katy.

The third novel carries Katy beyond the classroom and the parlor, accompanying her on a journey abroad as a companion to family friends. The travel setting introduces varied landscapes and customs, and invites observations about hospitality, taste, and tact. Away from the familiar, Katy learns to judge situations for herself, to navigate difference respectfully, and to balance openness with prudence. Scenes of conversation, sightseeing, and quiet reflection sustain the series' interest in character over spectacle. The book completes a phase of development by showing how a well-rooted upbringing equips a young woman to meet the wider world.

Across the trilogy, Coolidge’s stylistic signature is clarity joined to warmth. She favors brisk, episodic plotting; dialogue that advances moral reflection without sermonizing; and a steady attention to the textures of daily life. The books celebrate sisterhood, friendship, and intergenerational care, while recognizing mischief, disappointment, and the effort required to mend mistakes. They prize education, kindness, and self-command, not as abstract ideals but as habits built in kitchens, classrooms, and parlors. This blend of humor and earnest purpose gives the series its distinct voice: intimate in scale, unsentimental in observation, and confident that character is formed through practice.

The continuing significance of the Katy books lies in their approachable portrait of growth and the historical insight they offer into nineteenth-century expectations for girls and young women. Readers encounter a world in which family structure, schooling, and travel serve as laboratories of character, yet the writing remains immediately readable and companionable. The trilogy has been cherished by generations for its engaging heroine and its faith in everyday improvement. It invites contemporary discussion about resilience, community, and the uses of imagination, while standing as an important document in the development of children’s fiction and the enduring school-story tradition.

Historical Context

Table of Contents

Published between 1872 and 1886, Susan Coolidge's Katy books emerged in post-Civil War America, during Reconstruction and the rapid growth of a commercial juvenile-literature market. Boston's Roberts Brothers, buoyed by the success of Louisa May Alcott's Little Women (1868–69), cultivated realistic domestic fiction for girls, into which Coolidge (Sarah Chauncey Woolsey, 1835–1905) fit comfortably. The nation's healing ethos prized narratives of moral steadiness and family cohesion. Middle-class readers sought stories that blended lively character with instructive purpose, and the Katy series met that demand, offering a recognizably American household world shaped by New England letters yet accessible to a widening national audience.

The series was also animated by debates around girls' education. After the founding of Vassar College in 1865, followed by Smith (1871) and Wellesley (1875), expectations for young women's intellectual discipline intensified, while controversies over coeducation swirled. The well-regulated girls' boarding school, a staple of Anglo-American school-story tradition since Thomas Hughes's Tom Brown's School Days (1857), provided a setting where companionship, competition, and self-governance could be dramatized. These currents shaped the portrayal of study, letters, and rules across the Katy books, aligning personal growth with the era's belief that orderly habits and serious reading prepared girls for respectable participation in an expanding public culture.

Contemporary medical ideas powerfully informed the series' emphasis on illness, care, and character. The Civil War's hospital system and the United States Sanitary Commission (1861–65) elevated nursing and home convalescence in public esteem; Coolidge herself volunteered as a wartime nurse, sharpening her attention to patient routines. Late-Victorian anxieties about female health and "invalidism," later codified in S. Weir Mitchell's rest cure (publicized in the 1870s), encouraged narratives where physical setback became moral schooling. Domestic sickrooms, attentive physicians, and the discipline of recovery appear not merely as plot devices but as reflections of widely shared beliefs about health, patience, and feminine fortitude.

Equally influential was the domestic ideology that located moral authority in the home. Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe's The American Woman's Home (1869) codified housekeeping as a civic responsibility, and postbellum conduct literature reasserted virtues of duty, tact, and self-control. The Katy books translate these ideals into everyday routines—meals, chores, visiting—while testing them against mischief, grief, and sibling friction. A paternal physician's counsel and the management of a motherless household echo common nineteenth-century circumstances and advice literature. By dramatizing how sympathy and order sustain family life, the series aligned with readers' expectations that fiction should model practical, repeatable habits for middle-class households.

The third volume's transatlantic travel rests on technological and cultural infrastructures reshaping the 1880s. Regular steamship service, organized tours by Thomas Cook, and Baedeker's guidebooks normalized middle-class tourism to Britain and the Continent. At the

same time, an Anglo-American book market ensured rapid circulation: British publishers quickly issued American juvenile titles, and American houses reciprocated, well before the International Copyright Act of 1891. The Katy series thus spoke to readers on both sides of the Atlantic, balancing American manners with European scenes. Its tone of curiosity under chaperonage reflects prevailing norms for respectable female travel, as well as the aspirational horizons of affluent readers.

Regional textures also matter. Coolidge's Midwestern upbringing in Cleveland and her long New England connections, including kinship with Yale president Theodore Dwight Woolsey, supplied complementary idioms of frontier bustle and collegiate polish. Fictionalized towns evoke the rail-linked prosperity of the 1860s and 1870s, when household goods, mail, and magazines circulated with new speed. A girls' school situated along the Connecticut River conjures the disciplined quiet of northern academies, while family visits and excursions depend on dependable trains and steamers. These geographies anchor the series' mobility without loosening its attachment to hearth and neighborhood, a balance many contemporary readers recognized in their own lives.

Changes in the infrastructure of reading further framed the books' reach and reception. Uniformly bound juvenile series encouraged collecting, while affordable reprints and illustrated editions widened access. The founding of the American Library Association in 1876 signaled growing institutional oversight of children's reading, and schools increasingly recommended wholesome narratives that rewarded diligence and kindness. Within this ecosystem, the Katy books circulated easily in parlors, classrooms, and lending libraries. Their delicate blend of humor, correction,

and sentiment suited gatekeepers wary of sensation while satisfying girls seeking lively heroines, helping to stabilize a market niche that sustained many American women writers of the period.

Over time, the series’ negotiation between spirited independence and prescriptive virtue mirrored late-nineteenth-century tensions over women’s roles. Even before the 1890s New Woman debates, American culture weighed female ambition against decorum, valuing sociability, philanthropy, and cultivated taste. Coolidge’s perspective—formed in wartime service, New England literary circles, and a culture of educational improvement—favored cheerful resilience over open rebellion. Contemporary reviewers praised the books’ brightness and propriety, and their long shelf life owed much to their responsiveness to broad social shifts: national reconstruction, expanding schooling, and transatlantic mobility. Together these forces furnished the recurring trials, horizons, and consolations that knit the collection into a cultural touchstone.

Synopsis (Selection)

Table of Contents

What Katy Did

In a lively American household, headstrong Katy faces a sudden change that forces her to rethink habits, hopes, and responsibilities.

With a warm, gently didactic tone, it foregrounds family care, imagination, and learning patience and kindness through everyday choices.

What Katy Did at School

Sent to boarding school with her sister, Katy negotiates rules, gossip, and friendships that test judgment and loyalty.

The focus shifts to social education and character under scrutiny, told with episodic humor and moral lightness typical of Coolidge.

What Katy Did Next

As a young adult, Katy travels to Europe, meeting new people and customs that broaden her sense of duty and independence.

The series widens into travelogue and cultural observation while keeping its emphasis on empathy, tact, and steady self-improvement.

What Katy Did

Main Table of Contents

What Katy Did
What Katy Did at School
What Katy Did Next

What Katy Did

Table of Contents

Chapter I. The Little Carrs
Chapter II. Paradise
Chapter III. The Day of Scrapes
Chapter IV. Kikeri
Chapter V. In the Loft
Chapter VI. Intimate Friends
Chapter VII. Cousin Helen's Visit
Chapter VIII. To-morrow
Chapter IX. Dismal Days
Chapter X. St. Nicholas and St. Valentine
Chapter XI. A New Lesson to Learn
Chapter XII. Two Years Afterward
Chapter XIII. At Last

So in they marched, Katy and Cecy heading the procession, and Dorry, with his great trailing bunch of boughs, bringing up the rear.

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 play-time 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 To-day 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 to-day.

Chapter I.

The Little Carrs

Table of Contents

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 so 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 doings she had dreamed about. And as I thought, this 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 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 oldest, 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 hadn't 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 parlor, and to have her head patted by older people, and 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 quite hard to 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 in 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 on, they were what she called “not fit to be seen.” The neighbors 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 up stairs 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 favorite places. It was only a low roof set over a hole in the ground, and, as it stood in the middle of the side-yard, 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 pig-tails 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, and 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 said: "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 to 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.

introductions. Hostesses, acquaintances, and fellow passengers form ad hoc networks that provide information and safety while testing discernment. Leadership is quieter, often enacted through timing, tone, and tact rather than formal authority. The series suggests continuity: early domestic mutuality and schoolroom cooperation mature into cosmopolitan sisterhoods that coordinate across borders. These ties reveal how women’s solidarities can open access, diffuse tensions, and translate private virtues into public, practical stewardship.

Question 4

How are Victorian norms negotiated with ambition, creativity, and ethical growth in Katy's journey?

In the first book, prevailing norms celebrate compliance, modesty, and usefulness, yet Katy's imagination and appetite for movement strain against narrow scripts. The narrative does not suppress her energy; it redirects it through projects that require ingenuity and sustained effort. A serious interruption to ordinary play turns creative force toward organizing time, beautifying spaces, and encouraging younger siblings. Ambition is redefined as consistency and breadth of care rather than showy triumph. Ethical growth is not submission to dullness, but conversion of restless desire into considered choice, preserving individuality while honoring the responsibilities of a 19th-century daughter.

In the school setting, ambition becomes academically legible and socially accountable. Girls pursue excellence within clear constraints, mastering subjects, manners, and teamwork without transgressing decorum. Creativity appears in problem-solving and the invention of harmless amusements that build solidarity rather than notoriety. Norms still press for restraint, yet the environment allows initiative to surface as organization, persuasion, and steady reliability. Ethical growth includes admitting errors publicly and repairing trust, a model of ambition that accepts boundaries while stretching them through competence. The story imagines agency as earned influence, tolerated because it improves life for peers and teachers.

The travel volume introduces cosmopolitan norms alongside American expectations, complicating the code.

Ambition looks like curiosity and cultural literacy, expressed through attentive observation and respectful inquiry. Creativity navigates unfamiliar rooms, devising ways to support companions and connect across custom. Ethical growth turns outward, interrogating easy judgments of other places and declining to equate novelty with superiority. Victorian scripts persist—deference, sobriety, propriety—but the narrative finds latitude within them, legitimizing a woman’s public presence as helper, interpreter, and thoughtful guest. Katy’s journey sketches a path where aspiration harmonizes with courtesy, yielding influence without scandal or self-effacement.

Memorable Quotes

Table of Contents

1q "Poor Katy! Her propensity to fall violently in love with new people was always getting her into scrapes."

2q "Vacations are just splendid!"

3q "The only cure for such a hurt is time and patience."

4q "But after them she would pick herself up, and try again, and harder."

5q "I like this sort of day, when nobody comes in to interrupt us."

6q "The summer had been cool; but, as often happens after cool summers, the autumn proved unusually hot."

7q "It was like a miracle to the others, in the beginning, to watch her going about the house;"

8q "The night seemed short; for the girls, tired by their journey, slept like dormice."

9q "Morning brings counsel, says the old proverb."

10q "Live it down! Live it down! Live it down!"

11q "Make the most of it, for we all feel as if we could never let you go from home again."

12q "There is something hopeless in such cold."