



# *Clever Manka: The Story of a Girl Who Knew What to Say*

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*Easy*  
*11 min read*

There was once a rich farmer who was as grasping and unscrupulous as he was rich. He was always driving a hard bargain and always getting the better of his poor neighbors. One of these neighbors was a humble shepherd who in return for service was to receive from the farmer a heifer. When the time of payment came the farmer refused to give the shepherd the heifer and the shepherd was forced to lay the matter before the burgomaster.

The burgomaster, who was a young man and as yet not very experienced, listened to both sides and when he had deliberated he said:

“Instead of deciding this case, I will put a riddle to you both and the man who makes the best answer shall have the heifer. Are you agreed?”

The farmer and the shepherd accepted this proposal and the burgomaster said:

“Well then, here is my riddle: What is the swiftest thing in the world? What is the sweetest thing? What is the richest? Think out your answers and bring them to me at this same hour tomorrow.”

The farmer went home in a temper.

“What kind of a burgomaster is this young fellow!” he growled. “If he had let me keep the heifer I’d have sent him a bushel of pears. But now I’m in a fair way of losing the heifer for I can’t think of any answer to his foolish riddle.”

“What is the matter, husband?” his wife asked.

“It’s that new burgomaster. The old one would have given me the heifer without any argument, but this young man thinks to decide the case by asking us riddles.”

When he told his wife what the riddle was, she cheered him greatly by telling him that she knew the answers at once.

“Why, husband,” said she, “our gray mare must be the swiftest thing in the world. You know yourself nothing ever passes us on the road. As for the sweetest, did you ever taste honey any sweeter than ours? And I’m sure there’s nothing richer than our chest of golden ducats that we’ve been laying by these forty years.”

The farmer was delighted.

“You’re right, wife, you’re right! That heifer remains ours!”

The shepherd when he got home was downcast and sad. He had a daughter, a clever girl named Manka, who met him at the door of his cottage and asked:

“What is it, father? What did the burgomaster say?”

The shepherd sighed.

“I’m afraid I’ve lost the heifer. The burgomaster set us a riddle and I know I shall never guess it.”

“Perhaps I can help you,” Manka said. “What is it?”

So the shepherd gave her the riddle and the next day as he was setting out for the burgomaster’s, Manka told him what answers to make.

When he reached the burgomaster’s house, the farmer was already there rubbing his hands and beaming with self-importance.

The burgomaster again propounded the riddle and then asked the farmer his answers.

The farmer cleared his throat and with a pompous air began:

“The swiftest thing in the world? Why, my dear sir, that’s my gray mare, of course, for no other horse ever passes us on the road. The sweetest? Honey from my beehives, to be sure. The richest? What can be richer than my chest of golden ducats!”

And the farmer squared his shoulders and smiled triumphantly.

“H’m,” said the young burgomaster, dryly. Then he asked:

“What answers does the shepherd make?”

The shepherd bowed politely and said:

“The swiftest thing in the world is thought for thought can run any distance in the twinkling of an eye. The sweetest thing of all is sleep for when a man is tired and sad what can be sweeter? The richest thing is the earth for out of the earth come all the riches of the world.”

“Good!” the burgomaster cried. “Good! The heifer goes to the shepherd!”

Later the burgomaster said to the shepherd:

“Tell me, now, who gave you those answers? I’m sure they never came out of your own head.”

At first the shepherd tried not to tell, but when the burgomaster pressed him he confessed that they came from his daughter, Manka. The burgomaster, who thought he would like to make another test of Manka’s cleverness, sent for ten eggs. He gave them to the shepherd and said:

“Take these eggs to Manka and tell her to have them hatched out by tomorrow and to bring me the chicks.”

When the shepherd reached home and gave Manka the burgomaster’s message, Manka laughed and said:

“Take a handful of millet and go right back to the burgomaster. Say to him: ‘My daughter sends you this millet. She says that if you plant it, grow it, and have it harvested by tomorrow, she’ll bring you the ten chicks and you can feed them the ripe grain.’”

When the burgomaster heard this, he laughed heartily.

“That’s a clever girl of yours,” he told the shepherd. “If she’s as comely as she is clever, I think I’d like to marry her. Tell her to come to see me, but she must come neither by day nor by night, neither riding nor walking, neither dressed nor undressed.”

When Manka received this message she waited until the next dawn when night was gone and day not yet arrived. Then she wrapped herself in a fishnet and, throwing one leg over a goat's back and keeping one foot on the ground, she went to the burgomaster's house.

Now I ask you: did she go dressed? No, she wasn't dressed. A fishnet isn't clothing. Did she go undressed? Of course not, for wasn't she covered with a fishnet? Did she walk to the burgomaster's? No, she didn't walk for she went with one leg thrown over a goat. Then did she ride? Of course she didn't ride for wasn't she walking on one foot?

When she reached the burgomaster's house she called out:

"Here I am, Mr. Burgomaster, and I've come neither by day nor by night, neither riding nor walking, neither dressed nor undressed."

The young burgomaster was so delighted with Manka's cleverness and so pleased with her comely looks that he proposed to her at once and in a short time married her.

"But understand, my dear Manka," he said, "you are not to use that cleverness of yours at my expense. I won't have you interfering in any of my cases. In fact if ever you give advice to any one who comes to me for judgment, I'll turn you out of my house at once and send you home to your father."

All went well for a time. Manka busied herself in her house-keeping and was careful not to interfere in any of the burgomaster's cases.

Then one day two farmers came to the burgomaster to have a dispute settled. One of the farmers owned a mare which had foaled in the marketplace. The colt had run under the wagon of the other farmer and thereupon the owner of the wagon claimed the colt as his property.

The burgomaster, who was thinking of something else while the case was being presented, said carelessly:

“The man who found the colt under his wagon is, of course, the owner of the colt.”

As the owner of the mare was leaving the burgomaster’s house, he met Manka and stopped to tell her about the case. Mankawas ashamedof her husband for making so foolish a decision and she said to the farmer:

“Come back this afternoon with a fishing net and stretch it across the dusty road. When the burgomaster sees you he will come out and ask you what you are doing. Say to him that you’re catching fish. When he asks you how you can expect to catch fish in a dusty road, tell him it’sjust as easy for you to catch fish in a dusty road as it is for a wagon to foal. Then he’ll see the injustice of his decision and have the colt returned to you. But remember one thing: you mustn’t let him find out that it was I who told you to do this.”

That afternoon when the burgomaster chanced to look out the window he saw a man stretching a fishnet across the dusty road. He went out to him and asked:

“What are you doing?”

“Fishing.”

“Fishing in a dusty road? Are you daft?”

“Well,” the man said, “it’sjustas easy for me to catch fish in a dusty road as it is for a wagon to foal.”

Then the burgomaster recognized the man as the owner of the mare and he had to confess that what he said was true.

“Of course the colt belongs to your mare and mustbe returned to you. But tell me,” he said, “who put you up to this? You didn’t think of it yourself.”

The farmer tried not to tell but the burgomaster questioned him until he found out that Manka was at the bottom of it. This made him very angry. He went into the house and called his wife.

“Manka,” he said, “do you forget what I told you would happen if you went interfering in any of my cases? Home you go this very day. I don’t care to hear any excuses. The matter is settled. You may take with you the one thing you like best in my house for I won’t have people saying that I treated you shabbily.”

Manka made no outcry.

“Very well, my dear husband, I shall do as you say: I shall go home to my father’s cottage and take with me the one thing I like best in your house. But don’t make me go until after supper. We have been very happy together and I should like to eat one last meal with you. Let us have no more words but be kind to each other as we’ve always been and then part as friends.”

The burgomaster agreed to this and Manka prepared a fine supper of all the dishes of which her husband was particularly fond. The burgomaster opened his choicest wine and pledged Manka’s health. Then he set to, and the supper was so good that he ate and ate and ate. And the more he ate, the more he drank until at last he grew drowsy and fell sound asleep in his chair. Then without awakening him Manka had him carried out to the wagon that was waiting to take her home to her father.

The next morning when the burgomaster opened his eyes, he found himself lying in the shepherd’s cottage.

“What does this mean?” he roared out.

“Nothing, dear husband, nothing!” Manka said. “You know you told me I might take with me the one thing I liked best in your house, so of course I took you! That’s all.”

For a moment the burgomaster rubbed his eyes in amazement. Then he laughed loud and heartily to think how Manka had outwitted him.

“Manka,” he said, “you’re too clever for me. Come on, my dear, let’s go home.”

So they climbed back into the wagon and drove home.

The burgomaster never again scolded his wife but thereafter whenever a very difficult case came up he always said:

“I think we had better consult my wife. You know she’s a very clever woman.”

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