



The Gullible World: The Story of a Man Who Didn't Beat His Wife

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Easy
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There was once a poor farm laborer, so poor that all he owned in the world was a hen. He told his wife to take this hen to market and sell it.

“How much shall I ask for it?” the woman wanted to know.

“Ask as much as they’ll pay, of course,” the laborer said.

So the woman took the hen by the feet and set out. Near the village she met a farmer.

“Good day,” the farmer said. “Where are you going with that hen?”

“I’m going to market to sell it for as much as they’ll pay me.”

The farmer weighed the hen in his hand, pursed his lips, thought a moment, and said:

“You better sell it to me. I’ll pay you three pennies for it.”

“Three pennies? Are you sure that’s as much as you’ll pay?”

“Yes,” the farmer said, “three pennies is as much as I’ll pay.”

So the laborer’s wife sold the hen for three pennies. She went on to the village and there she bought a pretty little paper bag with one of the pennies and a piece of ribbon with another penny. She put the third penny into the bag, tied the bag with the ribbon, slipped the ribbon on a stick, put the stick over her shoulder, and then, feeling that she had done a very good day’s work, she tramped home to her husband.

When the laborer heard how stupidly his wife had acted, he flew into a great rage and at first threatened to give her a sound beating.

“Was there ever such a foolish woman in the world?” he shouted angrily.

The poor woman, who by this time was snuffling and weeping, whimpered out:

“I don’t see why you find so much fault with me! I’m sure I’m not the only gullible person in the world.”

“Well,” the laborer said, “I don’t know. Perhaps there are people in the world as gullible as you. I tell you what I’ll do: I’ll go out and see if I can find them. If I do, I won’t beat you.”

So the laborer went out into the world to see if he could find any one as gullible as his wife. He traveled several days until he reached a countryside where he was unknown. Here he came to a fine castle at the window of which stood the lady of the castle looking out.

“Now then, my lady,” the laborer said to himself, “we’ll see how gullible you are.”

He stood in the middle of the road, looked intently up at the sky, and then reaching out his arms as if he were trying to catch hold of something he began jumping up and down.

The lady of the castle watched him for a few moments and then dispatched one of her servants to ask him what he was doing. The servant hurried out and questioned him and this is the story the clever rascal made up:

“I’m trying to jump back into heaven. You see I live up there. I was wrestling up there with one of my comrades and he pitched me out and now I can’t find the hole I fell through.”

With his eyes popping out of his head, the servant hurried back to his mistress and repeated the laborer’s story word for word.

The lady of the castle instantly sent for the laborer.

“You say you were in heaven?” she asked him.

“Yes, my lady, that’s where I live and I’m going back at once.”

“I have a dear son in heaven,” the lady said. “Do you know him?”

“Of course I know him. The last time I saw him he was sitting far back in the chimney corner looking very sad and lonely.”

“What! My son sitting far back in the chimney corner! Poor boy, he must be in need of money! My good man, will you take him something from me? I’d like to send him three hundred golden ducats and material for six fine shirts. And tell him not to be lonely as I’ll come to him soon.”

The laborer was delighted at the success of his yarn and he told the lady of the castle he’d gladly take with him the ducats and the fine shirting and he asked her to give them to him at once as he had to get back to heaven without delay.

The foolish woman wrapped up the shirting and counted out the money and the laborer hurried off.

Once out of sight of the castle he sat down by the roadside, stuffed the fine shirting into the legs of his trousers, and hid the ducats in his pockets. Then he stretched himself out to rest.

Meantime the lord of the castle got home and his wife at once told him the whole story and asked him if he didn’t think she was fortunate to find a man who had consented to deliver to their son in heaven three hundred golden ducats and material for six fine shirts.

“What!” cried the husband. “Oh, what a gullible creature you are! Who ever heard of a man falling out of heaven! And if he were to fall, how could he climb back? The rogue has swindled you! Which way did he go?”

And without waiting to hear the poor lady’s lamentations, the nobleman mounted his horse and galloped off in the direction the laborer had taken.

The laborer, who was still resting by the wayside, saw him coming and guessed who he was.

“Now, my lord, we’ll try you,” he said to himself.

He took off his broad-trimmed hat and put it on the ground beside him over a clod of earth.

“My good fellow,” said the nobleman, “I am looking for a man with a bundle over his shoulder. Have you seen him pass this way?”

The laborer scratched his head and pretended to think.

“Yes, master,” he said, “seems to me I did see a man with a bundle. He was running over there towards the woods and looking back all the time. He was a stranger to these parts. I remember now thinking to myself that he looked like one of those rogues that come from big cities to swindle honest country folk. Yes, master, that’s the way he went, over there.”

The laborer seemed such an honest simple fellow that at once the nobleman told him how the stranger had swindled his wife.

“Oh, the rogue!” the laborer cried. “To think of his swindling such a fine lady, too! Master, I wish I could help you. I’d take that horse of yours and go after him myself if I could. But I can’t. I’m carrying a bird of great value to a gentleman who lives in the next town. I have the bird here under my hat and I daren’t leave it.”

The nobleman thought that as the laborer had seen the swindler he might be able to catch him. So he said:

“My good man, if I sat here and guarded your hat, would you be willing to mount my horse and follow that rascal?”

“Indeed I would, my lord, in a minute, for I can’t bear to think of that rogue swindling such a fine lady as your wife. But I must beg you to be very careful of this bird. Don’t put your hand under my hat or it might escape and then I should have to bear the loss of it.”

The nobleman promised to be most careful of the bird and, dismounting, he handed his bridle to the laborer. That one mounted the nobleman’s horse and galloped off.

It is needless to say the nobleman never saw either man or horse again. He waited and waited. At last when he could wait no longer he decided that he would have to take the bird home with him and let the laborer follow. So he lifted the edge of the hat very

carefully, slipped in his hand, and clutched—the dry clod of earth!

Deeply chagrined he went home and had to bear the smiles of his people as they whispered among themselves that my lord as well as my lady had been swindled.

The laborer as he neared his cottage called out to his wife:

“It’s all right, wife! You won’t get that beating! I find that the world is full of people even more gullible than you!”

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