



The Merry Wives

Andrew Lang's Fairy Books

Danish

Intermediate
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There lay three houses in a row, in one of which there lived a tailor, in another a carpenter, and in the third a smith. All three were married, and their wives were very good friends. They often talked about how stupid their husbands were, but they could never agree as to which of them had the most stupid one; each one stuck up for her own husband, and maintained that it was he.

The three wives went to church together every Sunday, and had a regular good gossip on the way, and when they were coming home from church they always turned into the tavern which lay by the wayside and drank half a pint together. This was at the time when half a pint of brandy cost threepence, so that was just a penny from each of them.

But the brandy went up in price, and the taverner said that he must have fourpence for the half-pint.

They were greatly annoyed at this, for there were only the three of them to share it, and none of them was willing to pay the extra penny.

As they went home from the church that day they decided to wager with each other as to whose husband was the most stupid, and the one who, on the following Sunday, should be judged to have played her husband the greatest trick should thereafter go free from paying, and each of the two others would give twopence for their

Sunday's half-pint.

Next day the tailor's wife said to her husband, 'I have some girls coming to-day to help to card my wool there is a great deal to do, and we must be very busy. I am so annoyed that our watchdog is dead, for in the evening the young fellows will come about to get fun with the girls, and they will get nothing done. If we had only had a fierce watchdog he would have kept them away.'

'Yes,' said the man, 'that would have been a good thing.'

'Listen, good man,' said the wife, 'you must just be the watchdog yourself, and scare the fellows away from the house.'

The husband was not very sure about this, although otherwise he was always ready to give in to her.

'Oh yes, you will see it will work all right,' said the wife.

And so towards evening she got the tailor dressed up in a shaggy fur coat, tied a black woollen cloth round his head, and chained him up beside the dog's kennel.'

There he stood and barked and growled at everyone that moved in his neighbourhood. The neighbour wives knew all about this, and were greatly amused at it.

On the day after this the carpenter had been out at work, and came home quite merry; but as soon as he entered the house his wife clapped her hands together and cried, 'My dear, what makes you look like that? You are ill.'

The carpenter knew nothing about being ill; he only thought that he wanted something to eat, so he sat down at the table and began his dinner.

His wife sat straight in front of him, with her hands folded, and shook her head, and looked at him with an anxious air.

'You are getting worse, my dear,' she said; 'you are quite pale now; you have a serious illness about you; I can see it by your looks.'

The husband now began to grow anxious, and thought that perhaps he was not quite well.

‘No, indeed,’ said she; ‘it’s high time that you were in bed.’

She then got him to lie down, and piled above him all the bedclothes she could find, and gave him various medicines, while he grew worse and worse.

‘You will never get over it,’ said she; ‘I am afraid you are going to die.’

‘Do you think so?’ said the carpenter; ‘I can well believe it, for I am indeed very poorly.’

In a little while she said again, ‘Ah, now I must part with you. Here comes Death. Now I must close your eyes.’ And she did so.

The carpenter believed everything that his wife said, and so he believed now that he was dead, and lay still and let her do as she pleased.

She got her neighbours summoned, and they helped to lay him in the coffin—it was one of those he himself had made; but his wife had bored holes in it to let him get some air. She made a soft bed under him, and put a coverlet over him, and she folded his hands over his breast; but instead of a flower or a psalm-book, she gave him a pint-bottle of brandy in his hands. After he had lain for a little he took a little pull at this, and then another and another, and he thought this did him good, and soon he was sleeping sweetly, and dreaming that he was in heaven.

Meanwhile word had gone round the village that the carpenter was dead, and was to be buried next day.

It was now the turn of the smith’s wife. Her husband was lying sleeping off the effects of a drinking bout, so she pulled off all his clothes and made him black as coal from head to foot, and then let him sleep till far on in the day.

The funeral party had already met at the carpenter’s, and marched off towards the church with the coffin, when the smith’s wife came rushing in to her husband.

‘Gracious, man,’ said she, ‘you are lying there yet? You are sleeping too long. You know you are going to the

funeral.'

The smith was quite confused; he knew nothing about any funeral.

'It's our neighbour the carpenter,' said his wife, 'who is to be buried to-day. They are already half-way to church with him.'

'All right,' said the smith, 'make haste to help me on with my black clothes.'

'What nonsense!' said his wife, 'you have them on already. Be off with you now.'

The smith looked down at his person and saw that he was a good deal blacker than he usually was, so he caught up his hat and ran out after the funeral. This was already close to the church, and the smith wanted to take part in carrying the coffin, like a good neighbour. So he ran with all his might, and shouted after them, 'Hey! wait a little; let me get a hold of him!'

The people turned round and saw the black figure coming, and thought it was the devil himself, who wanted to get hold of the carpenter, so they threw down the coffin and took to their heels.

The lid sprang off the coffin with the shock, and the carpenter woke up and looked out. He remembered the whole affair; he knew that he was dead and was going to be buried, and recognising the smith, he said to him, in a low voice, 'My good neighbour, if I hadn't been dead already, I should have laughed myself to death now to see you coming like this to my funeral.'

From that time forth the carpenter's wife drank free of expense every Sunday, for the others had to admit that she had fooled her husband the best.

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