



The Story of the Noses

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Easy
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At Dewitz, in the neighborhood of Prague, there once lived a rich and whimsical old farmer who had a beautiful daughter. The students of Prague, of whom there were at that time twenty-five thousand, often walked in the direction of Dewitz, and more than one of them offered to follow the plow in hopes of becoming the son-in-law of the farmer. The first condition that the cunning peasant set on each new servant was this: “I engage you,” he would say, “for a year—that is, till the cuckoo sings the return of spring; but if, from now till then, you say once that you are not satisfied, I will cut off the end of your nose. I give you the same right over me,” he added, laughing. And he did as he said. Prague was full of students with the ends of their noses glued on, which did not prevent an ugly scar, and, still less, bad jokes. To return from the farm disfigured and ridiculed was well calculated to cool the warmest passion.

A young man by the name of Coranda, somewhat ungainly in manner, but cool, adroit, and cunning, which are not bad aids in making one’s fortune, took it in his head to try the adventure. The farmer received him with his usual good nature, and, the bargain made, sent him to the field to work. At breakfast-time the other servants were called, but good care was taken to forget Coranda. At dinner it was the same. Coranda gave himself no trouble about it. He went to the house, and while the farmer’s wife was feeding the chickens unhooked an enormous ham from the kitchen rafters, took a huge loaf from the cupboard, and went back to the fields to dine and take a nap.

“Are you satisfied?” cried the farmer, when he returned at night.

“Perfectly satisfied,” said Coranda; “I have dined better than you have.”

At that instant the farmer’s wife came rushing in, crying that her ham was gone. Coranda laughed, and the farmer turned pale.

“Are you not satisfied?” asked Coranda.

“A ham is only a ham,” answered his master. “Such a trifle does not trouble me.” But after that time he took good care not to leave the student fasting.

Sunday came. The farmer and his wife seated themselves in the wagon to go to church, saying to Coranda, “It is your business to cook the dinner. Cut up the piece of meat you see yonder, with onions, carrots, leeks, and parsley, and boil them all together in the great pot over the kitchen fire.”

“Very well,” answered Coranda.

There was a little pet dog at the farm-house by the name of Parsley. Coranda killed him, skinned him, cut him up with the meat and vegetables, and put the whole to boil over the kitchen fire. When the farmer’s wife returned she called her favorite; but, alas! she saw nothing but a bloody skin hanging by the window.

“What have you done?” said she to Coranda.

“What you ordered me, mistress. I have boiled the meat, onions, carrots, and leeks, and parsley in the bargain.”

“Wicked wretch!” cried the farmer, “had you the heart to kill the innocent creature that was the joy of the house?”

“Are you not satisfied?” said Coranda, taking his knife from his pocket.

“I did not say that,” returned the farmer. “A dead dog is nothing but a dead dog.” But he sighed.

A few days after, the farmer and his wife went to market. Fearing their terrible servant, they said to him, “Stay at home and do exactly what you see others do.”

“Very well,” said Coranda.

There was an old shed in the yard the roof of which was falling to pieces. The carpenters came to repair it, and began, as usual, by tearing down the roof. Coranda took a ladder and mounted the roof of the house, which was quite new. Shingles, lath, nails, and tiles, he tore off everything, and scattered them all to the winds. When the farmer returned the house was open to the sky. “Villain!” said he, “what new trick have you played me?”

“I have obeyed you, master,” answered Coranda. “You told me to do exactly what I saw others do. Are you not satisfied?” And he took out his knife.

“Satisfied!” returned the farmer; “why should I not be satisfied? A few shingles more or less will not ruin me.” But he sighed.

Night came, the farmer and his wife said to each other that it was high time to get rid of this incarnate demon. As is always the case with sensible people, they never did anything without consulting their daughter, it being the custom in Bohemia to think that children always have more wit than their parents.

“Father,” said Helen, “I will hide in the great pear-tree early in the morning, and call like the cuckoo. You can tell Coranda that the year is up, since the cuckoo is singing; pay him and send him away.”

Early in the morning the plaintive cry of the cuckoo was heard through the fields. The farmer seemed surprised. “Well, my boy, spring is come,” said he. “Do you hear the cuckoo singing yonder? I will pay you and we will part good friends.”

“A cuckoo!” said Coranda; “that is a bird which I have always wanted to see.”

He ran to the tree and shook it with all his might, when, behold! a young girl fell from the branches, fortunately more frightened than hurt.

“Villain!” cried the farmer.

“Are you not satisfied?” said Coranda, opening his knife.

“Wretch! you kill my daughter and you think that I ought to be satisfied! I am furious. Begone, if you would not die by my hand!”

“I will go when I have cut off your nose,” said Coranda. “I have kept my word. Do you keep yours.”

“Stop!” cried the farmer, putting his hand before his face. “You will surely let me redeem my nose?”

“It depends on what you offer,” said Coranda.

“Will you take ten sheep for it?”

“No.”

“Ten cows?”

“No; I would rather cut off your nose.” And he sharpened his knife on the door-step.

“Father,” said Helen, “the fault was mine; it belongs to me to repair it. Coranda, will you take my hand instead of my father’s nose?”

“Yes,” replied Coranda.

“I make one condition,” said the young girl. “We will make the same bargain; the first one of us that is not^[114] satisfied after marriage shall have his nose cut off by the other.”

“Good,” replied Coranda. “I would rather it was the tongue; but that will come next.”

Never was a finer wedding seen at Prague, and never was there a happier household. Coranda and the beautiful Helen were a model pair. The husband and wife were never heard to complain of each other; they loved with drawn swords, and, thanks to their ingenious bargain, kept for long years both their love and their noses.

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