

1812

GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES
THE LITTLE FARMER

Jacob Ludwig Grimm and Wilhelm Carl Grimm

Grimm, Jacob (1785-1863) and Wilhelm (1786-1859) - German philologists whose collection "Kinder- und Hausmarchen," known in English as "Grimm's Fairy Tales," is a timeless literary masterpiece. The brothers transcribed these tales directly from folk and fairy stories told to them by common villagers. The Little Farmer (1812) - In a village with many rich farmers there lives one poor farmer who carves a cow out of wood and sets in motion the events that lead to his great fortune and the downfall of the rich.

LITTLE FARMER

THERE WAS a certain village where lived many rich farmers and only one poor one, whom they called the Little Farmer. He had not even a cow, and still less had he money to buy one; and he and his wife greatly wished for such a thing. One day he said to her, "Listen, I have a good idea; it is that your godfather the joiner shall make us a calf of wood and paint it brown, so as to look just like any other; and then in time perhaps it will grow big and become a cow." This notion pleased the wife, and godfather joiner set to work to saw and plane, and soon turned out a calf complete, with its head down and neck stretched out as if it were grazing.

The next morning, as the cows were driven to pasture, the Little Farmer called out to the drover, "Look here, I have got a little calf to go, but it is still young and must be carried." "All right!" said the drover, and tucked it under his arm, carried it into the meadows, and stood it in the grass. So the calf stayed where it was put, and seemed to be eating all the time, and the drover thought to himself, "It will soon be able to run alone, if it grazes at that rate!" In the evening, when the herds had to be driven home, he said to the calf, "If you can stand there eating like that, you can just walk off on your own four legs; I am not going to lug you under my arm again!"

But the Little Farmer was standing by his house-door, and waiting for his calf; and when he saw the cow-herd coming through the village without it, he asked what it meant. The cow-herd answered, "It is still out there eating away, and never attended to the call, and

would not come with the rest." Then the Little Farmer said, "I will tell you what, I must have my beast brought home." And they went together through the fields in quest of it, but some one had stolen it, and it was gone. And the drover said, "Mostly likely it has run away." But the Little Farmer said, "Not it!" and brought the cow-herd before the bailiff, who ordered him for his carelessness to give the Little Farmer a cow for the missing calf.

So now the Little Farmer and his wife possessed their long-wished-for cow; they rejoiced with all their hearts, but unfortunately they had no fodder for it, and could give it nothing to eat, so that before long they had to kill it. Its flesh they salted down, and the Little Farmer went to the town to sell the skin and buy a new calf with what he got for it. On the way he came to a mill, where a raven was sitting with broken wings, and he took it up out of pity and wrapped it in the skin.

The weather was very stormy, and it blew and rained, so he turned into the mill and asked for shelter.

The miller's wife was alone in the house, and she said to the Little Farmer, "Well, come in and lie down in the straw," and she gave him a piece of bread and cheese. So the Little Farmer ate, and then lay down with his skin near him, and the miller's wife thought he was sleeping with fatigue. After a while in came another man, and the miller's wife received him very well, saying, "My husband is out; we will make good cheer." The Little Farmer listened to what they said, and when he heard good cheer spoken of, he grew angry to think he had been put off with bread and cheese. For the miller's wife presently brought out roast meat, salad, cakes, and wine.

Now as the pair were sitting down to their feast, there came a knock at the door. "Oh dear," cried the woman, "it is my husband!" In a twinkling she popped the roast meat into the oven, the wine under the pillow, the salad in the bed, the cakes under the bed, and the man in the linen-closet. Then she opened the door to her husband, saying, "Thank goodness, you are here! What weather it is, as if the world were coming to an end!" When the miller saw the Little Farmer lying in the straw, he said, "What fellow have you got there?" "Oh!" said the wife, "the poor chap came in the midst of the wind and rain and asked for shelter, and I gave him some bread and cheese and spread some straw for him." The husband answered, "Oh well, I have no objection, only get me something to eat at once." But the wife said, "There is nothing but bread and cheese."

“Anything will do for me,” answered the miller, “bread and cheese for ever!” and catching sight of the Little Farmer, he cried, “Come along, and keep me company!” The Little Farmer did not wait to be asked twice, but sat down and ate.

After a while the miller noticed the skin lying on the ground with the raven wrapped up in it, and he said, “What have you got there?” The Little Farmer answered, “A fortune-teller.” And the miller asked, “Can he tell my fortune?” “Why not?” answered the Little Farmer. “He will tell four things, and the fifth he keeps to himself.” Now the miller became very curious, and said, “Ask him to say something.” And the Little Farmer pinched the raven, so that it croaked, “Crr, crr.” “What does he say?” asked the miller. And the Little Farmer answered, “First he says that there is wine under the pillow.” “That would be jolly!” cried the miller, and he went to look, and found the wine, and then asked, “What next?” So the Little Farmer made the raven croak again, and then said, “He says, secondly, that there is roast meat in the oven.” “That would be jolly!” cried the miller, and he went and looked, and found the roast meat. The Little Farmer made the fortune-teller speak again, and then said, “He says, thirdly, that there is salad in the bed.”

“That would be jolly!” cried the miller, and went and looked and found the salad. Once more the Little Farmer pinched the raven, so that he croaked, and said, “He says, fourthly and lastly, that there are cakes under the bed.” “That would be jolly!” cried the miller, and he went and looked, and found the cakes.

And now the two sat down to table, and the miller’s wife felt very uncomfortable, and she went to bed and took all the keys with her. The miller was eager to know what the fifth thing could be, but the Little Farmer said, “Suppose we eat the four things in peace first, for the fifth thing is a great deal worse.” So they sat and ate, and while they ate, they bargained together as to how much the miller would give for knowing the fifth thing; and at last they agreed upon three hundred dollars. Then the Little Farmer pinched the raven, so that he croaked aloud. And the miller asked what he said, and the Little Farmer answered, “He says that there is a demon in the linen-closet.” “Then,” said the miller, “that demon must come out of the linen-closet,” and he unbarred the house-door, while the Little Farmer got the key of the linen-closet from the miller’s wife, and opened it. Then the man rushed forth, and out of the house, and the miller said, “I saw the black rogue with my own eyes; so that is a good riddance.” And the Little Farmer took himself off by daybreak next morning with the three hundred dollars.

And after this the Little Farmer by degrees got on in the world, and built himself a good house, and the other farmers said, "Surely the Little Farmer has been where it rains gold pieces, and has brought home money by the bushel." And he was summoned before the bailiff to say whence his riches came. And all he said was, "I sold my calf's skin for three hundred dollars." When the other farmers heard this they wished to share such good luck, and ran home, killed all their cows, skinned them in order to sell them also for the same high price as the Little Farmer. And the bailiff said, "I must be beforehand with them." So he sent his servant into the town to the skin-buyer, and he only gave her three dollars for the skin, and that was faring better than the others, for when they came, they did not get as much as that, for the skin-buyer said, "What am I to do with all these skins?" Now the other farmers were very angry with the Little Farmer for misleading them, and they vowed vengeance against him, and went to complain of his deceit to the bailiff. The poor Little Farmer was with one voice sentenced to death, and to be put into a cask with holes in it, and rolled into the water. So he was led to execution, and a priest was fetched to say a mass for him, and the rest of the people had to stand at a distance. As soon as the Little Farmer caught sight of the priest he knew him for the man who was hid in the linen-closet at the miller's.

And he said to him, "As I let you out of the cupboard, you must let me out of the cask."

At that moment a shepherd passed with a flock of sheep, and the Little Farmer knowing him to have a great wish to become bailiff himself, called out with all his might, "No, I will not, and if all the world asked me, I would not!" The shepherd, hearing him, came up and asked what it was he would not do.

The Little Farmer answered, "They want to make me bailiff, if I sit in this cask, but I will not do it!" The shepherd said, "If that is all there is to do in order to become bailiff I will sit in the cask and welcome." And the Little Farmer answered, "Yes, that is all, just you get into the cask, and you will become bailiff." So the shepherd agreed, and got in, and the Little Farmer fastened on the top; then he collected the herd of sheep and drove them away.

The priest went back to the parish-assembly, and told them the mass had been said. Then they came and began to roll the cask into the water, and as it went the shepherd inside called out, "I consent to be bailiff!" They thought that it was the Little Farmer who spoke, and they answered, "All right; but first you must go down below and look about you a little," and they rolled the cask into the water.

Upon that the farmers went home, and when they reached the village, there they met the Little Farmer driving a flock of sheep, and looking quite calm and contented. The farmers were astonished and cried, "Little Farmer, whence come you? How did you get out of the water?"

"Oh, easily," answered he, "I sank and sank until I came to the bottom; then I broke through the cask and came out of it, and there were beautiful meadows and plenty of sheep feeding, so I brought away this flock with me." Then said the farmers, "Are there any left?" "Oh yes," answered the Little Farmer, "More than you can possibly need." Then the farmers agreed that they would go and fetch some sheep also, each man a flock for himself; and the bailiff said, "Me first." And they all went together, and in the blue sky there were little fleecy clouds like lambkins, and they were reflected in the water; and the farmers cried out, "There are the sheep down there at the bottom." When the bailiff heard that he pressed forward and said, "I will go first and look about me, and if things look well I will call to you." And he jumped plump into the water, and they all thought that the noise he made meant "Come," so the whole company jumped in one after the other.

So perished all the proprietors of the village, and the Little Farmer, as sole heir, became a rich man.

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