

1812

GRIMM'S FAIRY TALES

THE GOOD BARGAIN

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 Good Bargain (1812) - A simple peasant throws his money to some frogs he thinks are mocking him, then loses a cow to a pack of dogs. When he goes to complain to the king, he is rewarded for making the princess laugh.

THE GOOD BARGAIN

A PEASANT had led his cow to the market and sold her for seven dollars. On his way home he had to pass a pond, but long before he reached it he could hear the frogs crying "Akt! akt! akt! akt!"¹ "Yes, I hear you," he said, "screaming out in your snug quarters; but it's seven I have received, not eight." As soon as he reached the water he exclaimed: "Stupid creatures that you are, don't you know better? Seven dollars are not eight dollars." The frogs, taking no heed, continued to cry "Akt! akt! akt!" "Now," said the peasant, "if you do not believe me, I can count it out to you"; and he took the money out of his pocket and counted out his seven dollars in groschen.

The frogs cared nothing for the peasant's reckoning, but went on croaking "Akt! akt! akt! akt!" "Oh!" cried the peasant in a rage, "do you know better how to count than I do?" and he threw the money into the water right in the midst of them. Then he stood and waited till they were ready to return his property to him, but the frogs were constant to their first opinion and screamed out still louder, "Akt! akt! akt! akt!" and did not attempt to throw the money back again to him.

¹ The word "acht" is German for eight.

He waited for a good while till evening came on, and he knew he must go home. Then he abused the frogs, and cried, "You water

plashers! you thick heads! you blind eyes! With your great jaws, you can scream enough to split one's ears, but you cannot count seven dollars; and do you think I am going to stay here and wait till you are ready?" Then he walked away very fast, but he heard the frogs still croaking "Akt! akt!" for a long distance, and he arrived home quite out of humor.

After a time he bought another cow, which he slaughtered, and while reckoning how much he should get by the sale of the flesh, as well as the skin, he hoped to make a good bargain with profits, even with the loss caused by the obstinacy of the frogs.

So he started off to the town to sell his dead cow, but on arriving at the butcher's stall he saw a pack of hounds, who all surrounded him, barking and smelling at the meat. "Was! was!" 2 they cried.

"Ah, yes!" said the peasant, "it is all very well to say, 'What? what?' as if you wanted to know what I have got here, and you know it is meat all the while."

2 The German "was" is translated "what." It is used instead of "bow-wow" for the bark of a dog.

There was no one to watch the butcher's shop but a large house dog, and the countryman had often heard his master say how true and faithful he was. So he said to him, "if I leave this meat here, will you answer for these friends of yours that it shan't be touched?" "Was! was!" cried the dog; while the others barked "Was! was!" and sprang at the meat.

"Oh, well!" said the peasant to the butcher's dog, "as you have promised, I will leave the meat for your master to sell; but, remember, I must have the money in three days, and if he doesn't send it, I shall come for it." Thereupon he laid the meat down on the counter, and turned to go. The dogs all ran round it barking "Was! was!" and the peasant heard them for a long distance. "Ah!" he said, "they are all longing for a piece; but it's all right, the big one is answerable for them." Three days passed, and the countryman made himself quite comfortable in the thought of what he was to receive. "I shall have plenty of money in my pocket by tomorrow evening," he said in a contented tone.

But the morrow came, and no money. He waited two days and then said, "I can't stand this; I must go and demand my money." The butcher at first thought he was talking about a sparrow.

"Sparrow, indeed!" replied the peasant. "I want my money for the meat I left under the care of your great dog three days ago- the

flesh of a whole cow.” At this the butcher flew in a rage, and seizing a broom, laid it over the peasant’s shoulders and drove him out of the shop.

“Just wait,” cried the peasant; “there is some justice after all left in the world.” And away he went to the castle, where, as it happened on that day, the King himself sat as chief magistrate, with his daughter by his side.

“What is your trouble?” asked the King. “Alas! Your Majesty,” he replied, “the frogs and the dogs have taken all I possess, and when I asked the butcher for my money, he beat me with a broomstick.” And then he related in a confused manner all that had occurred.

On hearing the countryman’s story, the King’s daughter burst into a fit of laughter, and laughed so loudly that for some minutes the King could not speak.

At length he said, “I cannot restore to you the money you have lost, but I can give you my daughter in marriage. She has never during her whole life laughed till now. I long ago promised her as a wife to the first man who could make her laugh, and you are that man, so you may thank Heaven for your good fortune.” “Ah, my lord King!” replied the peasant, “I cannot marry the Princess; I have one wife at home already, and she is quite too much for me to manage; there is no room for another in our chimney corner.” Then was the King angry, and said, “You are a rude clown!” “Ah, my lord King!” he replied, “what can you expect from a pig but a grunt?” and he turned to go.

“Stay!” cried the King, calling him back; “I mean you to have some reward after all. Five hundred times as much as you have lost shall be ready for you if you come here again in three days.” The peasant looked so joyful as he passed out after hearing this that the sentinel asked him the cause. “You have made the Princess laugh, I hear. What reward are you to have?” “Five hundred dollars,” he replied.

“Why, what will you do with all that money?” asked the sentinel. “You may as well give me some.” “I will, if you like,” he said; “and if you will go with me to the King in three days, he shall pay you two hundred dollars instead of me”; and away he went.

A Jew, who was standing near, overheard this promise, and running after the peasant, pulled him by the sleeve, and said, “You are a lucky fellow, friend, to have all that money promised you, but you must wait three days for it; would you not like to receive it at once, cash down?” “I should, indeed,” replied the peasant.

“How can it be managed?” “Oh, very easily! You shall give me an order to receive the three hundred dollars, and I will pay you the amount in silver and small coin.” So the bill of exchange was drawn, and the money paid; but the Jew charged such enormous interest, and some of the coins were so bad, that the peasant did not get much, after all.

At the end of three days the peasant went to the King, according to his command. “You must open your pockets very wide to receive all these dollars,” said the King.

“Ah, no!” cried the peasant, “they do not belong to me. Two hundred I have promised to the sentinel, and I have given a Jew a bill to receive three hundred, as he gave me cash for it, so that I have justly nothing to receive.” While he spoke in came the soldier and the Jew, who demanded what they had obtained from the peasant, and persisted that the money was justly theirs.

At first the King could not help laughing at the countryman’s folly, and then he became angry at the conduct of the Jew and the soldier. “So,” he said to the peasant, “as you have been so foolish as to give up your money, before it even belonged to you, to strangers, I suppose I must make you some compensation. Go into that room opposite, and help yourself to as much money as your pockets will hold.” The countryman did not require to be told twice; he went, as he was told, and filled his wide pockets to overflowing.

Away he started to the inn to count his money, and the Jew sneaked after him and heard him talking to himself. “Now, if I had been a knave and hidden all this from the King, he would never have allowed me to take this money. I wish I knew how much I had. Oh, if the King had only told me what amount I was to take. I’m so afraid I may have taken more than I ought.”

“Ah! ah!” muttered the Jew, “he is grumbling even now, and speaking disrespectfully of my lord the King. Catch me quarreling with such a sum of money because I couldn’t count it.” The Jew had spoken loud enough for the King to hear, and he called him, and desired him to fetch the ungrateful man again before His Majesty. “You must appear before the King immediately!” cried the Jew. “There must be no excuse.” “Indeed, I cannot,” he replied. “Whoever heard of a man with such a heap of gold in his pockets as I have, going before the King in such a ragged coat as this?” The Jew, seeing that the peasant was determined, and fearing that the wrath of the King would cool, promised to lend him a coat, which was very good and nearly new. “I lend it you for true friendship’s

sake," he said; "and that is seldom done in the world." So the peasant put it on and went into the King's presence. But when the King repeated what he had been told by the Jew, the peasant exclaimed, "Your Majesty, it is all false; there is never a true word out of that Jew's mouth. I dare say he will affirm that the coat I have on belongs to him." "What do you mean?" screamed the Jew. "You know it is my coat! I lent it you out of pure friendship, that you might appear before the King!" "Yes, of course, to hear your lies about me, and get punished by having the money taken from me," replied the peasant. Then he repeated what he had really said at the inn; and the King dismissed them both, saying that the Jew's word was

evidently not to be taken, and therefore the countryman might keep the coat as his own as some recompense for the Jew's false accusation.

The peasant went home joyfully to count the gold in his pockets, and said to himself, "This time, at least, I have made a good bargain."

THE END