

THE FARMER AND HIS WIFE

There was once a farmer who married a lady who, although rich and well brought up, was not very clever or skilful. In fact, some people might say that she was as thick as two short planks, and as nutty as a fruitcake.

One morning, the farmer slaughtered a pig, but then he had to leave to go and work in the fields. Before he left, she asked him what she should do with the carcass. He was looking forward to freshly roast pork for his dinner that day, so he told her to use some of it to garnish the cabbage, and to leave what she didn't use with salt to keep. He was surprised, and a little angry, that a farmer's wife didn't know how to deal with a freshly slaughtered pig, and left her to get on with it.

His wife was no wiser for this answer, so she took him at his word. She took a whole side of pork and carried it out into the cabbage patch. There, she carefully cut it into thin strips and spent all morning tacking them onto all of the cabbages. When she had finished, they looked beautiful! Then she went inside to wait for Salt to come and collect the rest of the meat.

She waited a long, long time. But, while she was waiting an old beggar came to the door. "Is your name Salt?" she asked him.

"Why do you want to know?" the old man asked her.

"Well" she said "we slaughtered a pig this morning, and my husband told me to leave the side of pork which is left with Salt to keep. I've been waiting all day, and nobody has come to collect it. He's in a bad mood, and he'll be angry if everything isn't finished when he gets back."

The little old man's eyes lit up and he smiled. Then he said "It's alright, I'm Salt. I'm sorry that couldn't come earlier, but I can take it now." The farmer's wife rushed happily into the kitchen to fetch the side of pork, which he literally carried away piggy-back. She felt sorry for him but, before she could apologise that his load was so heavy, he was already running down the road in a cloud of dust.

Not long afterwards her husband returned from working in the fields. The first thing he asked her was if she had finished with the pig. "Oh yes!" she replied happily. "The cabbages outside are all decorated and Salt has just taken the rest away." The farmer couldn't believe his ears, so he went into the kitchen. The oven was cold and there was no smell of boiling cabbage or roasting pork. He went into the store room. The sack of salt was still unopened, the barrel was empty, and he couldn't find any sign of the side of pork. He then went outside to the cabbage patch. His eyes widened and he stared, and stared. Every single green cabbage in the field was covered with thin slices of dried ham, all beautifully arranged.

The farmer was very angry at such waste and, when he went back into the house, he really wanted to throw the stupid woman out. But he didn't. She cried and pleaded, promised not to make any more foolish mistakes, pleaded, and cried again until he gave way. And, for a while, nothing else happened, so everything went back to normal, until —

One day, while working, the farmer tore a hole in his trousers. He asked his wife to mend them, carefully and neatly, and then went to work wearing an even older pair. He left his wife standing there, holding the ripped trousers, staring at them with no idea what she should do. Eventually, she decided that she would patch the hole with a nice piece of cloth. She went through the house to see what she could find. In the chest, in the bedroom, she found her husband's best trousers.

When Sunday came the farmer couldn't find his best trousers, and he asked his wife where they were. Not surprisingly he was very angry when he heard her answer, and he really wanted to beat the stupid woman black and blue. But he didn't. She cried and pleaded, promised not to make any more foolish mistakes, pleaded, and cried again until he gave way. And, for a while, nothing else happened, so everything went back to normal, until —

One day, the farmer had not slept well and decided that his eiderdown was dirty and uncomfortable. Instead of being soft and light, it was hard and lumpy, so he asked his wife to wash and air it. While he was away, she took it outside and emptied all the feathers onto a clean sheet. Unfortunately for her, it was a windy day, and all the neighbours were surprised to see such a snowstorm.

After a long day, when the farmer came home he wanted nothing more than to sleep in his clean comfortable bed. Instead, he found the sheets and empty covers and asked his wife what had happened. When she told him he was very angry and he really wanted to kill the stupid woman. But he didn't. She cried and pleaded, promised not to make any more foolish mistakes, pleaded, and cried again until he gave way. Instead of throwing her out, or doing worse, he packed a few things and left.

He had decided that he would try to find out if there was anybody in the world who was more foolish and silly than his wife. If there was, he would return home. If there wasn't, he would never return home because, if he did, he would kill her.

He travelled far and wide, over the mountains and through the the valleys until one day he came to a great city. As he wandered the wide streets, staring up at the magnificent houses, a woman shouted down from an upstairs window. "Hey! You there! Why do you keep staring up at the sky?"

"Why do I keep looking up?" he answered. "Well, you see — I've just fallen from heaven. Now I have to find the hole which I fell through, so that I can get back." The woman was astounded, but very happy to hear this answer, because she still thought about her first husband. She wanted to know how he was

doing since he passed on. The farmer told her “I suppose he’s doing well, except that has no money or clothes.”

“If I give you some money and clothes” the woman cried back “can you take them back for him?” She called the farmer into the house and he went upstairs. There she gave him as many clothes as he could carry, filled his pockets with gold, and he went quickly on his way.

Not long afterwards, her second husband returned from his business in the city. She happily told him that she had heard from a heavenly visitor that her first husband was doing well, except that he needed money and some new clothes, which she had provided. When her new husband heard this, he was very angry that she could be so foolish. After cursing her roundly, he saddled his horse and rode hurriedly after the farmer.

When he heard the horse approaching, the farmer threw the bundle of clothes and the money into the bushes and laid down in the grass. The horseman rode up to the sleeping man and asked him if he had seen anybody go by carrying a large bundle of clothes. “Yes” answered the farmer “not too long ago, such a man came by. You should be able to catch up with him if you are quick. But” he added slyly “if you want to catch him, you should go stealthily. If he hears your horse coming, he might hide.” The gentleman thanked the farmer for his good advice, dismounted and hurried forward on foot, leaving his horse behind.

The farmer then collected his belongings, mounted the horse and rode away in another direction. After a while he came to a small farmhouse with a barn, which he thought would be a good place to spend the night. In the barn he found an old grey couple who were trying to move a pile of nuts into the loft — with pitchforks!

When he saw this, he started to laugh, and laugh. There really were people in the world who were sillier and more foolish than his own wife. He turned away, mounted his horse and rode as fast as he could until he reached his own farm and his, not so, stupid wife. She was very happy that he came back, and promised not to make any more foolish mistakes. She did, sometimes, but when she did he thought back on the other fools he had met. And so, they lived happily ever after.