

## Farmer Weathersky

by Sir George Webbe Dasent  
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Once on a time there was a man and his wife, who had an only son, and his name was Jack. The old dame thought it high time for her son to go out into the world to learn a trade, and bade her husband be off with him.

'But all you do', she said, 'mind you bind him to some one who can teach him to be master above all masters'; and with that she put some food and a roll of tobacco into a bag, and packed them off.

Well! they went to many masters; but one and all said they could make the lad as good as themselves, but better they couldn't make him. So when the man came home again to his wife with that answer, she said:

'I don't care what you make of him; but this I say and stick to, you must bind him to some one where he can learn to be master above all masters'; and with that she packed up more food and another roll of tobacco, and father and son had to be off again.

Now when they had walked a while they got upon the ice, and there they met a man who came whisking along in a sledge, and drove a black horse.

'Whither away?' said the man.

'Well!' said the father, 'I'm going to bind my son to some one who is good to teach him a trade; but my old dame comes of such fine folk, she will have him taught to be master above all masters.'

'Well met then', said the driver; 'I'm just the man for your money, for I'm looking out for such an apprentice. Up with you behind!' he added to the lad, and whisk! off they went, both of them, and sledge and horse, right up into the air.

'Nay, nay!' cried the lad's father, 'you haven't told me your name, nor where you live.'

'Oh!' said the master, 'I'm at home alike north and south, and east and west, and my name's *Farmer Weathersky*. In a year and a day you may come here again, and then I'll tell you if I like him.' So away they went through the air, and were soon out of sight.

So when the man got home, his old dame asked what had become of her son.

'Well', said the man, 'Heaven knows, I'm sure I don't. They went up aloft'; and so he told her what had happened. But when the old dame heard that her husband couldn't tell at all when her son's apprenticeship would be out, nor whither he had gone, she packed him off again, and gave him another bag of food and another roll of tobacco.

So, when he had walked a bit, he came to a great wood, which stretched on and on all day as he walked through it. When it got dark he saw a great light, and he went towards it. After a long, long time he came to a little hut under a rock, and outside stood an old hag drawing water out of a well with her nose, so long was it.

'Good evening, mother!' said the man.

'The same to you', said the old hag. 'It's hundreds of years since any one called me mother.'

'Can I have lodging here to-night?' asked the man.

'No! that you can't', said she.

But then the man pulled out his roll of tobacco, lighted his pipe, and gave the old dame a whiff, and a pinch of snuff. Then she was so happy she began to dance for joy, and the end was, she gave the man leave to stop the night.

So next morning he began to ask after Farmer Weathersky. 'No! she never heard tell of him, but she ruled over all the four-footed beasts; perhaps some of them might know him.' So she played them all home with a pipe she had, and asked them all, but there wasn't one of them who knew anything about Farmer Weathersky.

'Well!' said the old hag, 'there are three sisters of us; maybe one of the other two know where he lives. I'll lend you my horse and sledge, and then you'll be at her house by night; but it's at least three hundred miles off, the nearest way.'

Then the man started off, and at night reached the house, and when he came there, there stood another old hag before the door, drawing water out of the well with her nose.

'Good evening, mother!' said the man.

'The same to you', said she; 'it's hundreds of years since any one called me mother.'

'Can I lodge here to-night?' asked the man.

'No!' said the old hag.

But he took out his roll of tobacco, lighted his pipe, and gave the old dame a whiff, and a good pinch of snuff besides, on the back of her hand. Then she was so happy that she began to jump and dance for joy, and so the man got leave to stay the night. When that was over, he began to ask after Farmer Weathersky. 'No! she had never heard tell of him; but she ruled all the fish in the sea; perhaps some of them might know something about him.' So she played them all home with a pipe she had, and asked them, but there wasn't one of them who knew anything about Farmer Weathersky.

'Well, well!' said the old hag, 'there's one sister of us left; maybe she knows something about him. She lives six hundred miles off, but I'll lend you my horse and sledge, and then you'll get there by nightfall.'

Then the man started off, and reached the house by nightfall, and there he found another old hag who stood before the grate, and stirred the fire with her nose, so long and tough it was.

'Good evening, mother!' said the man.

'The same to you', said the old hag; 'it's hundreds of years since any one called me mother.'

'Can I lodge here to-night?' asked the man.

'No', said the old hag.

Then the man pulled out his roll of tobacco again, and lighted his pipe, and gave the old hag such a pinch of snuff it covered the whole back of her hand. Then she got so happy she began to dance for joy, and so the man got leave to stay. But when the night was over, he began to ask after Farmer Weathersky. She never heard tell of him she said; but she ruled over all the birds of the air, and so she played them all home with a pipe she had, and when she had mustered them all, the Eagle was missing. But a little while after he came flying home, and when she asked him, he said he had just come straight from Farmer Weathersky. Then the old hag said he must guide the man thither; but the eagle said he must have something to eat first, and besides he must rest till the next day; he was so tired with flying that long way, he could scarce rise from the earth.

So when he had eaten his fill and taken a good rest, the old hag pulled a feather out of the Eagle's tail, and put the man there in its stead; so the Eagle flew off with the man, and flew, and flew, but they didn't reach Farmer Weathersky's house before midnight.

So when they got there, the Eagle said

'There are heaps of dead bodies lying about outside but you mustn't mind them. Inside the house every man Jack of them are so sound asleep, 't will be hard work to wake them; but you must go straight to the table drawer, and take out of it three crumbs of bread, and when you hear some one snoring loud, pull three feathers out of his head; he won't wake for all that.'

So the man did as he was told, and after he had taken the crumbs of bread, he pulled out the first feather.

'OOF!' growled Farmer Weathersky, for it was he who snored.

So the man pulled out another feather.

'OOF!' he growled again.

But when he pulled out the third, Farmer Weathersky roared so, the man thought roof and wall would have flown asunder, but for all that the snorer slept on.

After that the Eagle told him what he was to do. He went to the yard, and there at the stable-door he stumbled against a big gray stone, and that he lifted up; underneath it lay three chips of wood, and those he picked up too; then he knocked at the stable-door, and it opened of itself. Then he threw down the three crumbs of bread, and a hare came and ate them up; that hare he caught and kept. After that the Eagle bade him pull three feathers out of his tail, and put the hare, the stone, the chips, and himself there instead, and then he would fly away home with them all.

So when the Eagle had flown a long way, he lighted on a rock to rest.

'Do you see anything?' it asked.

'Yes', said the man, 'I see a flock of crows coming flying after us.'

'We'd better be off again, then', said the Eagle, who flew away.

After a while it asked again:

'Do you see anything now?'

'Yes', said the man; 'now the crows are close behind us.'

'Drop now the three feathers you pulled out of his head, said the Eagle.

Well, the man dropped the feathers, and as soon as ever he dropped them they became a flock of ravens which drove the crows home again. Then the Eagle flew on far away with the man, and at last it lighted on another stone to rest.

'Do you see anything?' it said.

'I'm not sure', said the man; 'I fancy I see something coming far far away'.

'We'd better get on then', said the Eagle; and after a while it said again:

'Do you see anything?'

'Yes', said the man, 'now he's close at our heels.'

'Now, you must let fall the chips of wood which you took from under the gray stone at the stable door', said the Eagle.

Yes! the man let them fall, and they grew at once up into tall thick wood, so that Farmer Weathersky had to go back home to fetch an axe to hew his way through. While he did this, the Eagle flew ever so far, but when it got tired, it lighted on a fir to rest.

'Do you see anything?' it said.

'Well! I'm not sure', said the man; 'but I fancy I catch a glimpse of something far away.'

'We'd best be off then', said the Eagle; and off it flew as fast as it could. After a while it said:

'Do you see anything now?'

'Yes! now he's close behind us', said the man.

'Now, you must drop the big stone you lifted up at the stable door', said the Eagle.

The man did so, and as it fell it became a great high mountain, which Farmer Weathersky had to break his way through. When he had got half through the mountain, he tripped and broke one of his legs, and so he had to limp home again and patch it up.

But while he was doing this, the Eagle flew away to the man's house with him and the hare, and as soon as they got home, the man went into the churchyard and sprinkled Christian mould over the hare, and lo! it turned into 'Jack', his son.

Well, you may fancy the old dame was glad to get her son again, but still she wasn't easy in her mind about his trade, and she wouldn't rest till he gave her a proof that he was 'master above all masters'.

So when the fair came round, the lad changed himself into a bay horse, and told his father to lead him to the fair. 'Now, when any one comes', he said, 'to buy me, you may ask a hundred dollars for me; but mind you don't forget to take the headstall off me; if you do, Farmer Weathersky will keep me for ever, for he it is who will come to deal with you.'

So it turned out. Up came a horse-dealer, who had a great wish to deal for the horse, and he gave a hundred dollars down for him; but when the bargain was struck, and Jack's father had pocketed the money, the horse-dealer wanted to have the headstall. 'Nay, nay!' said the man, 'there's nothing about that in the bargain; and besides, you can't have the headstall, for I've other horses at home to bring to town to-morrow.'

So each went his way; but they hadn't gone far before Jack took his own shape and ran away, and when his father got home, there sat Jack in the ingle.

Next day he turned himself into a brown horse, and told his father to drive him to the fair.

'And when any one comes to buy me, you may ask two hundred dollars for me--he'll give that and treat you besides; but whatever you do, and however much you drink, don't forget to take the headstall off me, else you'll never set eyes on me again.'

So all happened as he had said; the man got two hundred dollars for the horse and a glass of drink besides, and when the buyer and seller parted, it was as much as he could do to remember to take off the headstall. But the buyer and the horse hadn't got far on the road before Jack took his own shape, and when the man got home, there sat Jack in the ingle.

The third day, it was the same story over again: the lad turned himself into a black horse, and told his father some one would come and bid three hundred dollars for him, and fill his skin with meat and drink besides; but however much he ate or drank, he was to mind and not

forget to take the headstall off, else he'd have to stay with Farmer Weathersky all his life long.

'No, no; I'll not forget, never fear', said the man.

So when he came to the fair, he got three hundred dollars for the horse, and as it wasn't to be a dry bargain, Farmer Weathersky made him drink so much that he quite forgot to take the headstall off, and away went Farmer Weathersky with the horse. Now when he had gone a little way, Farmer Weathersky thought he would just stop and have another glass of brandy; so he put a barrel of red-hot nails under his horse's nose, and a sieve of oats under his tail, hung the halter, upon a hook, and went into the inn. So the horse stood there and stamped and pawed, and snorted and reared. Just then out came a lassie, who thought it a shame to treat a horse so.

'Oh, poor beastie', she said, 'what a cruel master you must have to treat you so', and as she said this she pulled the halter off the hook, so that the horse might turn round and taste the oats.

'I'M AFTER YOU', roared Farmer Weathersky, who came rushing out of the door.

But the horse had already shaken off the headstall, and jumped into a duck-pond, where he turned himself into a tiny fish. In went Farmer Weathersky after him, and turned himself into a great pike. Then Jack turned himself into a dove, and Farmer Weathersky made himself into a hawk, and chased and struck at the dove. But just then a Princess stood at the window of the palace and saw this struggle.

'Ah! poor dove', she cried, 'if you only knew what I know, you'd fly to me through this window.'

So the dove came flying in through the window, and turned itself into Jack again, who told his own tale.

'Turn yourself into a gold ring, and put yourself on my finger', said the Princess.

'Nay, nay!' said Jack, 'that'll never do, for then Farmer Weathersky will make the king sick, and then there'll be no one who can make him



well again till Farmer Weathersky comes and cures him, and then, for his fee, he'll ask for that gold ring.'

'Then I'll say I had it from my mother, and can't part with it', said the Princess.

Well, Jack turned himself into a gold ring, and put himself on the Princess' finger, and so Farmer Weathersky couldn't get at him. But then followed what the lad had foretold; the king fell sick, and there wasn't a doctor in the kingdom who could cure him till Farmer Weathersky came, and he asked for the ring off the Princess' finger for his fee. So the king sent a messenger to the Princess for the ring; but the Princess said she wouldn't part with it, her mother had left it her. When the king heard that, he flew into a rage, and said he would have the ring, whoever left it to her.

'Well', said the Princess, 'it's no good being cross about it. I can't get it off, and if you must have the ring, you must take my finger too.'

'If you'll let me try, I'll soon get the ring off', said Farmer Weathersky.

'No, thanks, I'll try myself', said the Princess, and flew off to the grate and put ashes on her finger. Then the ring slipped off and was lost among the ashes. So Farmer Weathersky turned himself into a cock, who scratched and pecked after the ring in the grate, till he was up to the ears in ashes. But while he was doing this, Jack turned himself into a fox, and bit off the cock's head; and so if the Evil One was in Farmer Weathersky, it is all over with him now.