

## Not A Pin To Choose Between Them

by Sir George Webbe Dasent  
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Once on a time there was a man, and he had a wife. Now this couple wanted to sow their fields, but they had neither seed-corn nor money to buy it with. But they had a cow, and the man was to drive it into town and sell it, to get money to buy corn for seed. But when it came to the pinch, the wife dared not let her husband start for fear he should spend the money in drink, so she set off herself with the cow, and took besides a hen with her.

Close by the town she met a butcher, who asked:

'Will you sell that cow, Goody?'

'Yes, that I will', she answered.

'Well, what do you want for her?'

'Oh! I must have five shillings for the cow, but you shall have the hen for ten pounds.'

'Very good!' said the man; 'I don't want the hen, and you'll soon get it off your hands in the town, but I'll give you five shillings for the cow.'

Well, she sold her cow for five shillings, but there was no one in the town who would give ten pounds for a lean tough old hen, so she went back to the butcher, and said:

'Do all I can, I can't get rid of this hen, master! you must take it too, as you took the cow.'

'Well', said the butcher, 'come along and we'll see about it.' Then he treated her both with meat and drink, and gave her so much brandy that she lost her head, and didn't know what she was about, and fell fast asleep. But while she slept, the butcher took and dipped her into a tar-barrel, and then laid her down on a heap of feathers; and when she woke up, she was feathered all over, and began to wonder what had befallen her.

'Is it me, or is it not me? No, it can never be me; it must be some great strange bird. But what shall I do to find out whether it is me or not. Oh! I know how I shall be able to tell whether it is me; if the calves come and lick me, and our dog Tray doesn't bark at me when I get home, then it must be me, and no one else.'

Now, Tray, her dog, had scarce set his eyes on the strange monster which came through the gate, than he set up such a barking, one would have thought all the rogues and robbers in the world were in the yard.

'Ah, deary me', said she, 'I thought so; it can't be me surely.' So she went to the straw-yard, and the calves wouldn't lick her, when they snuffed in the strong smell of tar. 'No, no!' she said, 'it can't be me; it must be some strange outlandish bird.'

So she crept up on the roof of the safe and began to flap her arms, as if they had been wings, and was just going to fly off.

When her husband saw all this, out he came with his rifle, and began to take aim at her.

'Oh!' cried his wife, 'don't shoot, don't shoot! it is only me.'

'If it's you', said her husband, 'don't stand up there like a goat on a house-top, but come down and let me hear what you have to say for yourself.'

So she crawled down again, but she hadn't a shilling to shew, for the crown she had got from the butcher she had thrown away in her drunkenness. When her husband heard her story, he said, 'You're only twice as silly as you were before', and he got so angry that he made up his mind to go away from her altogether, and never to come back till he had found three other Goodies as silly as his own.

So he toddled off, and when he had walked a little way he saw a Goody, who was running in and out of a newly-built wooden cottage with an empty sieve, and every time she ran in, she threw her apron over the sieve just as if she had something in it, and when she got in she turned it upside down on the floor.

'Why, Goody!' he asked, 'what are you doing?'

'Oh', she answered, 'I'm only carrying in a little sun; but I don't know how it is, when I'm outside, I have the sun in my sieve, but when I get inside, somehow or other I've thrown it away. But in my old cottage I had plenty of sun, though I never carried in the least bit. I only wish I knew some one who would bring the sun inside; I'd give him three hundred dollars and welcome.'

'Have you got an axe?' asked the man. 'If you have, I'll soon bring the sun inside.'

So he got an axe and cut windows in the cottage, for the carpenters had forgotten them; then the sun shone in, and he got his three hundred dollars.

'That was one of them', said the man to himself, as he went on his way.

After a while he passed by a house, out of which came an awful screaming and bellowing; so he turned in and saw a Goody, who was hard at work banging her husband across the head with a beetle, and over his head she had drawn a shirt without any slit for the neck.

'Why, Goody!' he asked, 'will you beat your husband to death?'

'No', she said, 'I only must have a hole in this shirt for his neck to come through.'

All the while the husband kept on screaming and calling out:

'Heaven help and comfort all who try on new shirts. If anyone would teach my Goody another way of making a slit for the neck in my new shirts, I'd give him three hundred dollars down and welcome.'

'I'll do it in the twinkling of an eye', said the man, 'if you'll only give me a pair of scissors.'

So he got a pair of scissors, and snipped a hole in the neck, and went off with his three hundred dollars.

'That was another of them', he said to himself, as he walked along.

Last of all, he came to a farm, where he made up his mind to rest a bit. So when he went in, the mistress asked him:

'Whence do you come, master?'

'Oh!' said he, 'I come from Paradise Place', for that was the name of his farm.

'From Paradise Place!' she cried, 'you don't say so! Why, then, you must know my second husband Peter, who is dead and gone, God rest his soul.'

For you must know this Goody had been married three times, and as her first and last husbands had been bad, she had made up her mind that the second only was gone to heaven.

'Oh yes', said the man; 'I know him very well.'

'Well', asked the Goody, 'how do things go with him, poor dear soul?'

'Only middling', was the answer; 'he goes about begging from house to house, and has neither food nor a rag to his back. As for money, he hasn't a sixpence to bless himself with.'

'Mercy on me', cried out the Goody; 'he never ought to go about such a figure when he left so much behind him. Why, there's a whole cupboard full of old clothes up-stairs which belonged to him, besides a great chest full of money yonder. Now, if you will take them with you, you shall have a horse and cart to carry them. As for the horse, he can keep it, and sit on the cart, and drive about from house to house, and then he needn't trudge on foot.'

So the man got a whole cart-load of clothes, and a chest full of shining dollars, and as much meat and drink as he would; and when he had got all he wanted, he jumped into the cart and drove off.

'That was the third', he said to himself, as he went along. Now this Goody's third husband was a little way off in a field ploughing, and when he saw a strange man driving off from the farm with his horse and cart, he went home and asked his wife who that was that had just started with the black horse.

'Oh, do you mean him?' said the Goody; 'why, that was a man from Paradise, who said that Peter, my dear second husband, who is dead and gone, is in a sad plight, and that he goes from house to house begging, and has neither clothes nor money; so I just sent him all those old clothes he left behind him, and the old money box with the dollars in it.' The man saw how the land lay in a trice, so he saddled his horse and rode off from the farm at full gallop. It wasn't long before he was close behind the man who sat and drove the cart; but when the latter saw this he drove the cart into a thicket by the side of the road, pulled out a handful of hair from the horse's tail, jumped up on a little rise in the wood, where he tied the hair fast to a birch, and then lay down under it, and began to peer and stare up at the sky.

'Well, well, if I ever!' he said, as Peter the third came riding up. 'No! I never saw the like of this in all my born days!'

Then Peter stood and looked at him for some time, wondering what had come over him; but at last he asked:

'What do you lie there staring at?'

'No', kept on the man, 'I never did see anything like it!--here is a man going straight up to heaven on a black horse, and here you see his horse's tail still hanging in this birch; and yonder up in the sky you see the black horse.'

Peter looked first at the man, and then at the sky, and said:

'I see nothing but the horse hair in the birch; that's all I see!'

'Of course you can't where you stand', said the man; 'but just come and lie down here, and stare straight up, and mind you don't take your eyes off the sky; and then you shall see what you shall see.'

But while Peter the third lay and stared up at the sky till his eyes filled with tears, the man from Paradise Place took his horse and jumped on its back and rode off both with it and the cart and horse.

When the hoofs thundered along the road, Peter the third jumped up; but he was so taken aback when he found the man had gone off with his horse that he hadn't the sense to run after him till it was too late.

He was rather down in the mouth when he got home to his Goody; but when she asked him what he had done with the horse, he said,

'I gave it to the man too for Peter the second, for I thought it wasn't right he should sit in a cart, and scramble about from house to house; so now he can sell the cart and buy himself a coach to drive about in.'

'Thank you heartily!' said his wife; 'I never thought you could be so kind.'

Well, when the man reached home, who had got the six hundred dollars and the cart-load of clothes and money, he saw that all his fields were ploughed and sown, and the first thing he asked his wife was, where she had got the seed-corn from.

'Oh', she said, 'I have always heard that what a man sows he shall reap, so I sowed the salt which our friends the north-country men laid up here with us, and if we only have rain I fancy it will come up nicely.'

'Silly you are', said her husband, 'and silly you will be so long as you live; but that is all one now, for the rest are not a bit wiser than you. There is not a pin to choose between you.'