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Jem, The Mummer

Maud Lindsay

Once upon a Twelfth Night in a small village lived a jovial man named Jem. He was known for his merriness and eccentricities, which made him a favorite among the villagers. This particular night, he announced, "Tonight, I will be the mummer and join the grand show of mumming!" His wife, Goodwife, a woman of practicality, merely chuckled and replied, "Very well, Jem. Only a man as daft as you would revel in such foolery."

Jem, with a mischievous glint in his eye, decided not to reveal his mumming attire to his wife, hoping to surprise her upon his return. In his most elaborate mumming costume, Jem looked quite the oddity! He had adorned a donkey's head with its mouth wide open, draped himself in a strange ensemble half goatskin, half lamb's wool, and attached bells around his knees that jingled and jangled with every step. He was indeed a peculiar sight!



As Jem ventured into the village square, the children ran off in fear, the young lads rolled in laughter, and the maidens squealed in delight. The mummers gathered on the village green, and with boisterous joy, they made their merry way to the Castle, Inn, and Hall. The rich folks in the gentry watched their antics with appreciative laughter, and it was a night of grand welcome, delicious plum cake, and the wassail bowl.

Jem, filled with exhilaration, thought to himself, "What a jolly frolic that was! I was the finest mummer, and I played my part well!" His spirits high, he strutted back towards his cottage, eager to surprise his wife, Goodwife.

The cottage was cloaked in the darkness of the night, and their loyal dog, Lass, began to bark at the strange figure approaching. Jem tried to reassure her, "Down, Lassie, down! 'Tis your Master," but his words fell on deaf ears. Lass continued to bark, alarming Goodwife. "Who is it, a thief?" she cried out in fear. No matter how much Jem shouted, the frightened Goodwife could not recognize him, causing a commotion among the neighbors.

Suddenly, a shower of pots and pans fell around him, and Jem took to his heels,

chased by Lass. Soon enough, other dogs joined the pursuit. Dogs of every size, breed, and color were now on Jem's heels. He dashed through the village, leaped over ditches, and stumbled in the mire.

In his desperate escape, he saw the familiar sight of the church and the parsonage. With a giant leap, he made it over the wall and knocked fervently on the parson's door. The Parson, a wise and understanding man, recognized Jem's voice amidst his panting and pleas for help. He advised Jem to remove the donkey head he was wearing.

Jem touched his head, realizing he still had his mumming costume on. "Why, I hadn't thought of that," Jem slowly said, feeling a bit foolish. He thanked the Parson for his wise advice and quickly rid himself of his Twelfth Night attire before heading home.

By the time he reached his cottage, all the dogs had disappeared except for faithful Lass. As Jem entered, Goodwife Tib greeted him nonchalantly, "Ah, Jem, my man, you're finally home. Had your fill of mumming?" Jem was surprised, but Goodwife only chuckled and revealed, "You couldn't fool your goodwife, Jem. I knew it was you all the time!"

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