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The Bogey-Beast

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There was once a woman who was very, very cheerful, though she had little to make her so; for she was old, and poor, and lonely. She lived in a little tiny cottage and earned a small living by running errands for her neighbours, getting a bite here, a sup there, as reward for her services. So she did the best with what little she had and always looked as perky and cheery as if she had not a want in the world.

Now one summer evening, as she was trotting, full of smiles as ever, along the high road to her shack, what should she see but a big black pot lying in the ditch!

"Goodness me!" she cried, "that would be just the very thing for me if I only had something to put in it! But I haven't! Now who could have left it in the ditch?"

And she looked around her expecting that the owner would not be far away; but she didn't see anybody.

"Maybe there is a hole in it," she went on, "and that's why it has been thrown away. But it would do fine to put a flower in for my window; so I'll just take it home with me."

And with that she lifted the lid and looked inside. "Mercy me!" she cried, fair amazed. "It's full of gold pieces. Here's luck!"

And so it was, brimful of great gold coins. Well, at first she simply stood stock-still, wondering if she was standing on her head or her heels. Then she began saying: "Wow! I feel rich. I feel awful rich!"

After she had said this many times, she began to wonder how she was to get her treasure home. It was too heavy for her to carry, and she could see no better way than to tie the end of her shawl to it and drag it behind her like a cart.

"It will soon be dark," she said to herself as she trotted along. "That will be better! The neighbours will not see what I'm bringing home, and I will have all the night to myself, and be able to think what I'll do! Perhaps I'll buy a grand house and just sit by the fire with a cup of tea and do no work at all like a queen. Or maybe I'll bury it at the garden and just keep a bit in the old china teapot on the chimney-piece. Or maybe..."

By this time she was a bit tired of dragging such a heavy weight, and, stopping to rest a while, turned to look at her treasure.

And look! It wasn't a pot of gold at all! It was nothing but a lump of silver.

She stared at it, and rubbed her eyes, and stared at it again.

"Well! I never!" she said at last. "And me thinking it was a pot of gold! I must have been dreaming. But this is luck! Silver is far less trouble—easier to mind, and not so easy stolen. Those gold pieces would have been the death of me, and with this great lump of silver—"

So she went off again planning what she would do, and feeling as rich as rich, until becoming a bit tired again she stopped to rest and gave a look round to see if her treasure was safe; and she saw nothing but a great lump of iron!

"Well! I never!" she said again. "I mistook it for silver! I must have been dreaming. But this is luck! It's real convenient. I can get penny pieces for old iron, and penny pieces are handier for me than your gold and silver. Why! I should never have slept a wink for fear of being robbed. But a penny piece comes in useful, and I will sell that iron for a lot and be real rich—rolling rich."

So on she trotted full of plans as to how she would spend her penny pieces, until once more she stopped to rest and looked round to see her treasure was safe. And this time she saw nothing but a big stone.

"Well! I never!" she cried, full of smiles. "And to think I mistook it for iron. I must have been dreaming. But here's luck indeed. I wanted a stone terrible bad to stick open the gate. It's a fine thing to have good luck."

So, in a hurry to see how the stone would keep the gate open, she trotted off down the hill until she came to her own cottage. She unlatched the gate and then turned to unfasten her shawl from the stone which lay on the path behind her. Aye! It was a stone sure enough. There was plenty light to see it lying there, strong and peaceful as a stone should.

So she bent over to unfasten the shawl, when—"Oh my!" All of a sudden it gave a jump, a squeal, and in one moment was as big as a haystack. Then it let down four great lanky legs and threw out two long ears, nourished a great long tail and romped off, kicking and squealing and whinnying and laughing like a naughty, mischievous boy!

The old woman stared after it until it was fairly out of sight, then she burst out laughing too.

"Well!" she chuckled, "I am in luck! I'm the luckiest woman in town. Seeing the Bogey-Beast all to myself! My goodness! I feel uplifted—GRAND!"—

So she went into her cottage and spent the evening chuckling over her good luck.



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