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The Little Bird

R.H. Busk

There was an old peasant couple who worked hard in the fields from dawn to dusk.

"It all comes from the foolishness of Adam and Eve," said the wife one day. "If they hadn't been so curious, we'd all still be in Paradise."

"Exactly," said the husband. "If you and I had been there instead of them, the whole human race would still be living in the garden."

Their master the count, who happened to overhear this, came to them with a proposition. Would they like to come and live in his palazzo — fine food, servants, everything they could want?

They said yes, with great enthusiasm.

"There is one condition," said the count. "In Paradise there was one tree not to be touched. At my table there will be one dish not to be opened. You must promise to leave it alone."

"Of course!" cried the husband. "What did Eve want with that one forbidden fruit when she had everything else? And we're used to far scantier living than whatever your table will offer us. One covered dish is nothing to us."

The count led them inside, settled them into comfortable rooms, and gave quiet instructions to his servant: lay a splendid table, but in the middle put a covered earthen dish with a small live bird inside. If anyone lifted the lid, the bird would fly out. Report everything.

The old couple sat down to the finest meal of their lives. They praised everything. They laughed and marvelled. When they noticed the dish in the middle of the table, they agreed at once that they had no need to open it, not with so many other good things before them.

They ate their way through dish after dish. The meal was excellent. But as the last plates were cleared away and nothing remained but the covered dish, the wife began to wonder what was inside.

"We might just lift the lid a little bit," she said.

"Better not," said the husband.

A minute later: "If we only peeked at one corner, it would hardly be opening it, really."

"Leave it alone."

Five minutes more: "I cannot imagine what the count could possibly have put in there."

"Nor can I," said the husband, "and I don't see that it can matter much to him if we looked."

"Exactly what I think," said the wife — and lifted the lid.



The bird flew straight out of the window. The servant ran to tell the count. The count came down, told them to pack their things, and sent them back to their fields.

"And," he said firmly, "let us hear no more complaints about Adam and Eve."

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