

Story 814 (1974 Tape 18)

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The ~~Rooster~~ Teaches His Owner a Lesson

A farmer went to his field with his oxen and plowed all day. In the evening he went home and put the oxen in the stable. There one of the oxen said, "Oh, I am so very tired tonight!"

A donkey in the stable overheard this and said to the ox, "Tomorrow don't eat anything. Our master will think you are sick, and he will not take you to the field."

The owner of these ^{donkeys and oxen} animals understood animal speech, and he was listening to this conversation. He thought to himself, "Well, if the ox won't eat anything in the morning, I shall take the donkey to the field and harness him in the ox's place." In the morning when the ox did not eat, he did as he had planned, harnessing the donkey to the plow with the other ox. That evening he brought the donkey back to the stable.

There the donkey said, "I'm terribly tired tonight, but I have a piece of news for you. Our master said today, 'If that sick ox does not start eating today, I shall slaughter

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him in the morning."¹

The farmer again overheard their conversation, and he was greatly amused by it. He laughed and laughed over it. His wife asked him, "Why are you laughing so much?"

"I cannot tell you." This man had been given the power to understand the language of animals, but it was on the condition that he would never reveal to anyone that he had this power. If he broke his oath and told anyone, he would die at once ²

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But his wife kept asking him, "Why did you laugh so hard today when you were with the animals?" Each time he refused to tell her

After a while, however, her nagging about this matter became more than he could stand, and finally, in despair, he said, "Go and put a large cauldron of water on the fire to heat for me, and then later I shall tell you why I laughed. His wife went at once and put a cauldron of water over the fire.

¹ Moslems will eat meat only after it had been thoroughly bled. It cannot be so bled after its death, and thus sick animals are often slaughtered so that their death will not bring total loss.

² Solomon was said to know the languages of birds and beasts, and it is often thought that all such linguistic ability comes from Solomon. He is not mentioned in this tale.

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Meanwhile, the rooster was bringing in the flock of chickens. When he saw the house dog sleeping in the doorway blocking it, he said, "Dog, get up from there so that I take the chickens inside for the night."

Moving aside, the dog said to the rooster, "You had better begin to look out for yourself, for our master is soon going to die. Who will look after us then?"

The rooster said, "Of course, anyone as bad as you are could very well lose a master. But what is going to happen?"

The dog answered, "Our master laughed earlier this evening about something he heard the ox and the donkey talking about. His wife has insisted that he tell her why he laughed. He refused several times to tell her, for he knows that he will die at once if he reveals to anyone his ability to speak our language. But now he is worn out by pestering. He has had a cauldron of water heating so when he tells his wife why he laughed and dies as a result, they can wash him properly for burial."³

"That master of ours is a good man, but he is a fool," said the rooster. "Here I am able to manage this whole

³ Before a Moslem burial, the corpse must be thoroughly and properly washed. This is more than a matter of cleansing the body physically. It is also a ritual ablution to cleanse the spirit as well.

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flock of hens without letting any of them get an upper hand over me, but he cannot manage even one wife.

"But what can he do now?" asked the dog.

"Instead of telling her why he laughed," said the rooster, "he should take this stick lying here and beat her soundly with it."

Overhearing all of this from inside the house, the master said to himself, "My rooster is right." Taking the stick, he beat his wife with it. After that, she did not ask again why he had laughed.⁴

⁴ This tale is well known throughout the Moslem world. A variant of it appears in the introductory passage of The Arabian Nights.