



## FOUR PRANKSTERS

There once was a small village and in that village lived four pranksters. More than anything, they enjoyed sitting about in the inn and coming up with all sorts of stories, both believable and unbelievable. One evening, a pilgrim wandered into the inn. He looked to be rich since he was wearing expensive clothes. The jokers took it into their heads that they would relieve him of his clothing. They started a conversation with him and one of them suggested a contest. Each one of them would tell an unbelievable tale and if someone could not possibly believe the tale was true - they would lose their clothes.

Without hesitation, the pilgrim nodded and the pranksters laughed and rejoiced. They took him for a fool since he had agreed to something like that. He didn't look like he could tell unbelievable stories, and even if he could, they wouldn't lose – they would simply say they believed his every word. They called the innkeeper to be their judge and when all was set, the first of the jokers began his tale.

“One evening, when I was coming home from a dance, I threw my hat so high in the sky, it got stuck on the crescent moon. Long I wondered how to get it back, until finally, I thought of this: I took a long rope with a noose on its end and threw it all the way to the moon. When the moon was finally in the noose,

## FOUR PRANKSTERS

I pulled and pulled until the moon started swinging and finally the hat fell down.” When he finished, he looked at the pilgrim, who was, however, just nodding and saying he believed the joker’s story. The rest of them nodded their heads, too, without questioning a single word. They poured more wine in their goblets and the second one began talking.

“I once got lost in the woods and couldn’t find my way home. When dusk fell, I was already really cold. I came across a lake and thought to myself I should take a dip to warm up a little. I stepped into the lake, but the water was cold. I had no choice but to dive to the very bottom of the lake and look around for some wood to make a fire. When I gathered enough sticks, I built a fire on the bottom of the lake. When the water was warm enough, I lay down in the sand next to the fire to wait out the night. I woke up in the morning, fresh as a daisy and swam to the surface. In the light of the new day, it was easy to find my way back home.”

When he finished, everyone’s eyes were fixed upon the stranger, but once again, he only nodded to show he believed the tale. Everyone else also believed the story, only the innkeeper was scratching his head in confusion. Right away, the third jester began his peculiar story.

“Long ago, I decided to climb up the highest hill around – I wanted to know what’s up there, you see. I climbed for almost three days without food or water. When I finally reached the top, I found nothing but an old dead tree. I wanted to return home at once, but I started getting dizzy from the height. I screamed for help for three days, but no one heard me. Finally, I decided to run home and fetch a rope to help me climb down. When I returned, I tied one end of the rope to the dead tree and roped down to the ground. Then I untied the rope, rolled it up and went back home.”

Even now everyone agreed they believed the story, only the innkeeper banged his hand on his forehead, shaking his head. And so the last joker began his story.

“One time, I decided to catch a hare for lunch. As I was chasing it across the field, one hand almost grabbing it by the fur, a hawk swooped down and dragged the hare away. I was livid! I flew up after the hawk and we fought over the hare in the sky.

## FOUR PRANKSTERS

Soon I won the fight and when I landed on the ground, I had a hare for lunch and a hawk for dinner.”

The pranksters expected the pilgrim to cry out something like: “Oh, that’s impossible!” but he only nodded. Now it was his turn.

“Once I decided to dig a well next to my house. I dug for three days and three nights, yet I didn’t find any water. On the fourth day, something odd happened. Four young lads climbed out of the well. They asked me to clothe them and feed them and promised to pay me with their work since they didn’t have a single penny. So we agreed they would work on my farm for the food and clothes I gave them. They didn’t like the work much, though. They preferred sitting about in an inn and telling each other fairy tales. Before long, they fled from my farm. Ever since then, I roam the world looking for them. I’m very glad I have finally found you in this tavern, boys. Come on then, you know you owe me. Return to the farm with me and work as you should.”

The innkeeper raised his eyebrows and the jokers lost their voices.

“Well then, do you believe the pilgrim’s story?” asked the innkeeper, looking at the four men for an answer. The pranksters knew that if they said they believed the stranger, they would have to go to the farm with him and work everything off, but saying they didn’t believe him would cost them their clothes.

There was dead silence in the inn for a moment.

Then the innkeeper repeated his question. They didn’t say a word. He asked again. They refused to answer. He asked one last time. Nothing.

Finally, the innkeeper rang his gong and announced that the pilgrim won the game.

“You are now my slaves,” said the travelling man to the quartet. “I own you as well as your clothes. Take them off and give them to me and I’ll grant you your freedom.”

The jokers took off their clothes and handed them to him. He tied them all into a bundle, hung it over his shoulder and left. The four sly jesters were left standing in the inn, naked as the day they were born.