



## THE OLD FARMER AND THE TRICKSTERS

Once upon a time, there was an old farmer who had a very old cow. The cow was so old she couldn't give milk or bear calves anymore, so he decided to bring her to the market in town and sell her to the butcher for some coins that he could use to buy a young cow.

The next day, the farmer walked to town with his cow. He got there early, but already there were salesmen everywhere, setting up their stalls and getting ready for their day. The market was so busy that he didn't notice that two tricksters were sitting on a fence nearby and watching him.

"Hey, farmer," one of them called out. "That's a nice goat you've got there! Surely you want to sell it. How much is it?"

"These fools can't even tell a goat from a cow," the farmer muttered to himself. He waved them off and walked on.

The tricksters, already very amused by this game, quietly ran ahead of him, quickly changed their clothes, and leaned against a wall to wait for him to approach.

"What a nice goat, mister farmer, sir!" the second trickster called out. "Are you gonna sell it?"

"Have people lost their minds," the farmer wondered, "or am I going mad myself?" He looked at the cow again to make sure he'd brought the right animal

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with him, and sure enough he saw his old cow.

He walked on, trying to forget the tricksters, but what seemed to be another two young men ran up to him and offered him a small satchel of silver coins for his goat. The farmer was so frustrated, he gave up and sold them the cow for only the price of a goat. Thrilled with themselves, the tricksters ran to the butcher and sold the cow for three satchels of gold coins.

On his way home, the farmer thought about what had happened and thought about how he must have gone crazy. It was the only explanation, right?

Suddenly, the farmer noticed some clothes lying on the ground. They looked familiar, but he felt too sorry for himself to stop and look. After a few steps, though, he saw even more clothes hanging on a fence. These he recognized immediately, and he suddenly understood what had happened! He wasn't crazy, he'd just been tricked! That cow had been a cow, not a goat! He couldn't believe they'd fooled him so easily, and he was so angry he decided to do something about it.

The farmer came up with a plan, so he went to the pub and said to the innkeeper, "I want to have some fun today. In a little while, I'm going to come in here with two friends. We're going to have some food and drinks. I'm going to pay for it all right now, but please don't tell them anything. When we're about to leave, I'll spin this hat above my head and ask you whether it's all been paid for. I need you to say yes, all paid for, tip included."

The farmer paid for everything and the innkeeper agreed to help out. Then, the farmer made the same deal in two other pubs and went to find the tricksters.

When he found them, he thanked them profusely for giving him such a fair deal. "I couldn't sell that goat for the life of me," the farmer said. "It was lucky for me that you took her off my hands. I'd like to invite you for a good meal, to say thank you. What do you say?"

The tricksters giggled under their breath, thinking he hadn't noticed anything.

"Farmer, it was our pleasure doing business with you. We would be happy to go toast with you and celebrate the very good deal we made."

The farmer took them to the first pub, where they ate and drank until they were

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almost bursting. When it was time to pay, the farmer spun his hat above his head and asked the innkeeper: “All paid for?”

“Yes sir, all paid for, even the tip,” the innkeeper said.

The tricksters were amazed, because they hadn’t seen the farmer pay anything at all. He’d just spun his hat above his head and that was it! They left the first pub with the farmer and walked for a while until they passed the second pub.

“Well, friends,” the farmer said, “why don’t we have a little something in here, too?”

The tricksters had never in their lives turned down free food and drinks, so they agreed and, once again, they feasted as much as they could. They drank, toasting their good deal and clinking glasses for hours. When they were ready to leave, the farmer lifted his hat a second time, spinning it over his head and asking the innkeeper if the bill was paid.

“Yes sir,” he said, “all paid for, even the tip.”

Once again the tricksters were shocked. When the farmer took them to a third pub and did it all again, they couldn’t take it anymore and asked the farmer why he didn’t ever have to pay. The farmer leaned in close and beckoned them to do the same. Then, in a very hushed, secret voice, he said,

“Well, you see, I got this magic hat from my grandfather. All I have to do is spin it over my head and ask the innkeeper if everything’s been paid. Everything pays itself, even the tip for the innkeeper, and I don’t ever have to pay!”

The tricksters stared at the hat, and then immediately started begging the farmer to sell it to them.

“Just name your price! We’ll pay anything!” they exclaimed.

“No,” the farmer said, “it’s too valuable!”

“Please!” they said.

The farmer, knowing that the tricksters would do anything for such a hat, said no until they had offered to give him everything they had on them. A hundred satchels of silver coins, the three satchels of gold coins they’d gotten for his cow, two gold rings they were wearing, and even a pearl pocket watch. Solemnly, the farmer gave them the hat.

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“There’s only one thing,” he said, just to be careful. “You can’t use it more than three times a day, so you’ll have to wait until tomorrow to try it.”

The farmer went home, happy to have tricked the tricksters. The next day, he went to the market and bought not one, but two young cows, and still had silver coins to spare! And so he used the rest of his money to fix up his farm.

The tricksters, meanwhile, went to test the magic hat. They invited all their friends and ate and drank their fill for hours. When they were ready to leave, one of them took the hat, spun it above his head and asked: “All paid for?”

The whole pub burst out laughing. The innkeeper thought it was especially funny, since he’d been in on the joke, and he decided he would let the tricksters wash dishes and scrub floors to work off their debt. That way, they would have plenty of time to think about how it feels to have a trick played on you.