



WISE MATTHEW AND THE FOOLS

Once upon a time, a man named Matthew went to roam the world to look for a bride. As he was walking, he got lost and found himself in a picturesque village where he went to a dance and met a beautiful girl. The very next day he called upon her father to for her hand in marriage. Her father was a farmer. He greeted Matthew, sat him down in the kitchen and offered him some water.

“Won’t you go and fetch us a bite to eat from the pantry, my dear?” the farmer asked his wife.

She left immediately, but after several long minutes had passed, she still wasn’t back.

“Could you go see what’s taking your mother so long?” the farmer asked his daughter.

The girl went to the pantry and closed the door behind her, but she also didn’t return.

“What in the world are they doing in there?” the father asked, annoyed. Another minute passed and he went to take a look himself.

Matthew waited in the kitchen, sitting at the table. The cuckoo clock kept announcing the passing hours, but no one had come back yet and after a while Matthew decided it was time to go and see if something bad had happened to

WISE MATTHEW AND THE FOOLS

them. When he opened the door to the pantry, however, he found all three of them sitting on the floor, hugging each other and sobbing.

“My goodness!” Matthew said. “What happened?”

But the three were crying so loudly they didn’t even notice Matthew was in the pantry. He didn’t know what to do, but after a moment the mother raised her head and said, “Look, Matthew, over there! There’s an axe hacked into the beam just above your head. When you two get married and have a child, we’ll surely take it to the pantry for a nap. The axe will get loose and fall on the baby in the crib. Oh, what a tragedy! That’s why we’re crying. We’re mourning a nearly certain death!”

Matthew couldn’t believe his ears. “These must be the three biggest fools in the world!” he thought. He didn’t know whether to laugh or sit down and cry with them. He calmed them down and brought them back to the kitchen.

“If I can find at least three more people as foolish as you, I’ll return and marry your daughter,” he said. He picked up his hat and walked out, shutting the door behind him.

Matthew walked day and night until he came across a large farmstead. He peeked over the fence, looking for the farmer, and noticed a woman standing by the henhouse, holding a hen and thrashing it against the ground.

“Excuse me! What are you doing with that hen?” he shouted.

“Oh, hello! Well, you see, she had chicks recently, but she refuses to give them milk,” the woman called back. “They’ll all die unless the blasted animal starts giving milk!”

Matthew couldn’t believe what she was saying. Chicks don’t drink milk from their mothers! He hopped over the fence, took a handful of grains from a manger and scattered it on the ground. Immediately, the little chicks ran out of the henhouse and started pecking at the grains.

“That’s how you feed chickens,” Matthew told the woman, but she just stared at them, marvelling at the fact that they didn’t need milk.

“Well, it didn’t take too long to run into the first fool,” Matthew thought.

He set off again and walked until he reached a small village nestled below a forest. He could hear its church bells from afar and saw what must have been the entire

WISE MATTHEW AND THE FOOLS

village walking towards him in a long funeral procession. The strongest men were at the front, carrying a coffin on their shoulders, and crying women in black veils followed behind. As he got closer, he saw there was a girl lying in the coffin – but she was perfectly alive. Matthew couldn't help himself and asked a weeping passer-by, "What kind of a funeral is this, and why are you carrying a living girl in a coffin?"

Tears streaming down her face, the passer-by responded, "That's the daughter of our mayor. A great tragedy has befallen her – she dropped two coins in a clay jug and when she went to take them out, her hand got stuck. We did what we could to get it out, but it was all in vain. We don't want her to suffer her whole life, so we're burying her alive before she can become a laughing stock."

Now this was something else! Matthew just gaped at her, not knowing whether or not he should laugh. Quickly he hurried to the front of the procession and whacked the jug against the side of the coffin. The jug broke into a million pieces. The whole crowd whooped and rejoiced – the girl was saved! They turned back and went straight to the mayor's house, where the funeral feast was immediately turned into a celebration of life. The townspeople carried Matthew on their shoulders while his hat was been passed around, and everyone gave him at least one coin for saving the mayor's daughter from a certain death.

"Well," thought Matthew as he left the town. "This was a whole village of fools!" As he walked, he came across an inn standing beside the road. He was thrilled, since he had skipped the feast and his stomach was rumbling with hunger after all the walking. He went inside to have a bite of something good and rest his bones a little. As he sat there, he noticed the innkeeper bringing bowls full of food to the table next to his. Suddenly everyone at the table stood up and stepped away from the table. Matthew watched, confused, as mice scurried onto the table and around the food and started stuffing themselves. As soon as they finished and left again, the people sat back down and ate the remains. Matthew couldn't help himself, and asked,

"What on earth are you doing, my good people, eating only scraps of food after letting the mice eat their fill?" Everyone in the inn stopped talking and looked at

WISE MATTHEW AND THE FOOLS

Matthew. Finally, a grizzled old man spoke.

“You’ll get used to it. We fought the mice a good long time, but they always beat us. This way we feed them and then they leave us alone.”

Matthew stood up and went outside, returning an hour later with a large tomcat he’d found in a nearby barn. He sat back down where he’d been sitting before, put the cat down next to him, and called the innkeeper over.

“Bring me the best food you have, please!”

She filled the table with all sorts of delicacies. There were pies and puddings, cheeses and thick, freshly baked breads, still warm from the oven. Within seconds, the mice came running to the feast. They didn’t see the tomcat, but he saw them! He let out a loud meow and gave chase over tables and under chairs. Meanwhile, Matthew enjoyed his meal and happily watched the chase play out. As soon as the other people saw it, they all ordered heaps of food. They all wanted to know what it was like to enjoy their food without having to share it with mice!

As soon as Matthew left, he headed right back to his bride so he could finally get married. If there were this many fools in the world, knowing that his wife would be no more foolish than anyone else!