

THE FOOLISH WEAVER PUSHTO TALE

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THE FOOLISH WEAVER^[0]

Once a weaver, who was in want of work, took service with a certain farmer as a shepherd.

The farmer, knowing that the man was very slow-witted, gave him most careful instructions as to everything that he was to do.

Finally he said: 'If a wolf or any wild animal attempts to hurt the flock you should pick up a big stone like *this*' (suiting the action to the word) 'and throw a few such at him, and he will be afraid and go away.' The weaver said that he understood, and started with the flocks to the hillsides where they grazed all day.

By chance in the afternoon a leopard appeared, and the weaver instantly ran home as fast as he could to get the stones which the farmer had shown him, to throw at the creature. When he came back all the flock were scattered or killed, and when the farmer heard the tale he beat him soundly. 'Were there no stones on the hillside that you should run back to get them, you senseless one?' he cried; 'you are not fit to herd sheep. To-day you shall stay at home and mind my old mother who is sick, perhaps you will be able to drive flies off her face, if you can't drive beasts away from sheep!'

So, the next day, the weaver was left at home to take care of the farmer's old sick mother. Now as she lay outside on a bed, it turned out that the flies became very troublesome, and the weaver looked round for something to drive them away with; and as he had been told to pick up the nearest stone to drive the beasts away from the flock, he thought he would this time show how cleverly he could obey orders. Accordingly he seized the nearest stone, which was a big, heavy one, and dashed it at the flies; but, unhappily, he slew the poor old woman also; and then, being afraid of the wrath of the farmer, he fled and was not seen again in that neighbourhood.

All that day and all the next night he walked, and at length he came to a village where a great many weavers lived together.

‘You are welcome,’ said they. ‘Eat and sleep, for to-morrow six of us start in search of fresh wool to weave, and we pray you to give us your company.’

‘Willingly,’ answered the weaver. So the next morning the seven weavers set out to go to the village where they could buy what they wanted. On the way they had to cross a ravine which lately had been full of water, but now was quite dry. The weavers, however, were accustomed to swim over this ravine; therefore, regardless of the fact that this time it was dry, they stripped, and, tying their clothes on their heads, they proceeded to swim across the dry sand and rocks that formed the bed of the ravine. Thus they got to the other side without further damage than bruised knees and elbows, and as soon as they were over, one of them began to count the party to make sure that all were safe there. He counted all except himself, and then cried out that somebody was missing! This set each of them counting; but each made the same mistake of counting all except himself, so that they became certain that one of their party was missing! They ran up and down the bank of the ravine wringing their hands in great distress and looking for signs of their lost comrade. There a farmer found them and asked what was the matter. ‘Alas!’ said one, ‘seven of us started from the other bank and one must have been drowned on the crossing, as we can only find six remaining!’ The farmer eyed them a minute, and then, picking up his stick, he dealt each a sounding blow, counting, as he did so, ‘One! two! three!’ and so on up to the seven. When the weavers found that there were seven of them they were overcome with gratitude to one whom they took for a magician as he could thus make seven out of an obvious six.

[0] From the Pushto. ↑

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