

The Gracious Lady

There was once a woman who was, who was...well, you shall soon judge for yourself.

One day there came a-begging to her house an old, old man. He tottered up to the door and prayed thus: "May the Lord give you joy! May God grant your soul salvation, gracious lady!"

The woman heard him and thought to herself, "Well really, I must give him some little thing, if it's only a newly laid egg. It would be for the saving of my soul." She called the old man into the house, gave him a fresh egg and said, "Here you are, old man: a newly laid egg. Eat it, old man, and pray to God for me."

The old man accepted the egg and said to her, "Thank you, gracious lady. May God repay you for your kindness." He turned away and started to leave, but the woman said to herself, "It's a good thing I gave him the egg for already my soul is repenting of its sins. I only hope he does not forget I gave to him."

And so she called the old man to her. "Old man, old man: come back here!" The old man returned. Maybe he thought she was going to give him something else.

"Old man, old man," said the woman. "Did I not give you an egg?"

"You did, gracious lady. May God save your soul. May He bestow luck and health upon you and your children!"

"Well go then," said the woman. And to herself she murmured, "No—he has not forgotten who has given him the gift." But she thought and thought and again called to the old man, "Old man, old man: come back here!"

"What's up now?" thought the old man, returning.

And once more the woman addressed him. "Old man, old man. Did I not give you an egg?"

“You did, gracious lady,” replied he. “May God permit you to rule. May God grant you whatever you asked Him!”

“Well, good,” said the woman. And to herself she said, “Let him pray to God. Let him not forget the gift he received from me.”

And off went the old man once more. Suddenly the woman realized that the old man was beyond the gate, he had gone so fast. “Oh, oh. He’ll forget. Dearie me, he’ll forget who gave him the gift,” remarked the woman. So once more she began to call to the old man. “Old man, old man: come back here!”

The old man wearily again turned back. “What is this all about? God help me,” he said to himself sadly. “She won’t let me out of the yard.” He tottered up to the old woman who once more inquired, “Did I not give you an egg, old man?”

Sadness then overtook the old man and he replied, “Well, as a matter of fact you did, but may you be curse! Yes, you gave away one miserable little egg, and now you are trying to take away my very breath. Here is your egg back and may you choke on it!”

And with these words the poor old man threw the egg in the face of the gracious lady.