

The Mouse in the Silver Jug

Rikard Berge

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ONCE upon a time there were two charcoal-burner folk – husband and wife – who lived in a small cabin out in the forest close by the king’s farm. The husband was clever and capable, but the wife was lazy and dull, and complained the whole day long.

One day, when he was out driving, the king passed by the charcoal cabin, and he met the wife. She feigned not to recognise him.

“Huff!” she said, “I wouldn’t have to labour and toil so much, had Eve not brought sin into the world.”

“Indeed,” said the king. “Come with me to the king’s farm, and perhaps you will reconsider.”

And so they went to the king’s farm, which was both stately and fine. They ate the king’s food that came from the king’s table every day. Every morning the king brought in a silver jug, which he put on the table, and every evening, he took it out again. There was a living mouse in the jug.

“Now, you may partake of everything here,” said the king, “but if you look into this jug, then you shall be unhappy.”

No, that was an easy matter, said the wife; by God’s grace they wouldn’t so much as touch the jug.

A day passed, and then another day, and on each morning the jug came to the table. The wife grew sicker and sicker from looking at it.

“What valuable thing could there in this jug,” she said on the third day, “so that no one

may look inside?”

“Oh, that’s none of our business,” said her husband. “We have enough of God’s gifts, so we ought not to tempt Our Lord!”

“You’re as stiff-necked as you always were, you are!” said his wife. “You don’t know, and you don’t want to know! Now, the king? He cannot know, if we but lift the lid,” she said.

“Perhaps not,” said her husband, but it would be better that they keep their fingers to themselves. His wife nagged at him for so long, however, that she got her husband to lift the lid.

Whee! Out jumped the mouse, and off it ran. And no matter how or where they looked, they could not find it again.

In the evening the king came in to fetch the jug.

“You haven’t taken a look, have you?” he said.

“No, you needn’t worry about that,” said the wife. “We have so many of God’s gifts here that we don’t need to even think about touching the jug.”

“Well, we shall see about that!” said the king, as he lifted the lid.

The jug was empty.

“I knew it!” he said. “Now go home to your charcoal cabin and burn charcoal every single day. And don’t come here, blaming Eve for bringing sin into the world!” said the king.

So they had to trudge home to their charcoal cabin, and no one ever heard the woman complaining about Eve again.