

Humpty Dumpty

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At the very top of the hay-mow in the barn, the Speckled Hen had made her nest, and each day for twelve days she had laid in it a pretty white egg. The Speckled Hen had made her nest in this out-of-the-way place so that no one would come to disturb her, as it was her intention to sit upon the eggs until they were hatched into chickens.

Each day, as she laid her eggs, she would cackle to herself; saying, "This will in time be a beautiful chick, with soft, fluffy down all over its body and bright little eyes that will look at the world in amazement. It will be one of my children, and I shall love it dearly."

She named each egg, as she laid it, by the name she should call it when a chick, the first one being "Cluckety-Cluck," and the next "Cadaw-Cut," and so on; and when she came to the twelfth egg she called it "Humpty Dumpty."

This twelfth egg was remarkably big and white and of a very pretty shape, and as the nest was now so full she laid it quite near the edge. And then the Speckled Hen, after looking proudly at her work, went off to the barnyard, clucking joyfully, in search of something to eat.

When she had gone, Cluckety-Cluck, who was in the middle of the nest and the oldest egg of all, called out, angrily,

"It 's getting crowded in this nest; move up there, some of you fellows!" And then he gave CadawCut, who was above him, a kick.

"I can't move unless the others do; they 're crowding me down!" said Cadaw-Cut; and he kicked the egg next above him. And so they continued kicking one another and rolling around in the nest until one kicked Humpty Dumpty, and as he lay on the edge of the nest he was kicked out and rolled down the hay-mow until he came to a stop near the very bottom.

Humpty did not like this very well, but he was a bright egg for one so young, and after he had recovered from his shaking up he began to look about to see where he was. The barn door was open, and he caught a glimpse of trees and hedges, and green grass with a silvery brook running through it. And he saw the waving grain and the tasselled maize and the sunshine flooding it all.

The scene was very enticing to the young egg, and Humpty at once resolved to see something of this great world before going back to the nest.

He began to make his way carefully through the hay, and was getting along fairly well when he heard a voice say,

"Where are you going?"

Humpty looked around and found he was beside a pretty little nest in which was one brown egg.

"Did you speak?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the brown egg; "I asked where you were going."

"Who are you?" enquired Humpty; "do you belong in our nest?"

"Oh, no!" answered the brown egg; "my name is Coutchie-Coulou, and the Black Bantam laid me about an hour ago."

"Oh," said Humpty proudly; "I belong to the Speckled Hen myself."

"Do you, indeed!" returned Coutchie-Coulou. "I saw her go by a little while ago, and she 's much bigger than the Black Bantam."

"Yes, and I 'm much bigger than you," replied Humpty. "But I 'm going out to see the world, and if you like to go with me I 'll take good care of you."

"Is n't it dangerous for eggs to go about all by themselves?" asked Coutchie, timidly.

"Perhaps so," answered Humpty; "but it 's dangerous in the nest, too; my brothers might have smashed me with their kicking. However, if we are careful we can't come to much harm; so come along, little one, and I 'll look after you."

Coutchie-Coulou gave him her hand while he helped her out of the nest, and together they crept over the hay until they came to the barn floor. They made for the door at once, holding each other by the hand, and soon came to the threshold, which appeared very high to them.

"We must jump," said Humpty.

"I 'm afraid!" cried Coutchie-Coulou. "And I declare! there 's my mother's voice clucking, she 's coming this way."

"Then hurry!" said Humpty. "And do not tremble so or you will get yourself all mixed up; it does n't improve eggs to shake them. We will jump but take care not to bump against me or you may break my shell. Now,--one,--two,--three!"

They held each other's hand and jumped, alighting safely in the roadway. Then, fearing their mothers would see them, Humpty ran as fast as he could go until he and Couthie were concealed beneath a rosebush in the garden.

"I 'm afraid we 're bad eggs," gasped Couthie, who was somewhat out of breath.

"Oh, not at all," replied Humpty; "we were laid only this morning, so we are quite fresh. But now, since we are in the world, we must start out in search of adventure. Here is a roadway beside us which will lead us somewhere or other; so come along, Couthie-Coulou, and do not be afraid."

The brown egg meekly gave him her hand, and together they trotted along the roadway until they came to a high stone wall, which had sharp spikes upon its top. It seemed to extend for a great distance, and the eggs stopped and looked at it curiously.

"I 'd like to see what is behind that wall," said Humpty, "but I do n't think we shall be able to climb over it."

"No, indeed," answered the brown egg, "but just before us I see a little hole in the wall, near the ground; perhaps we can crawl through that."

They ran to the hole and found it was just large enough to admit them. So they squeezed through very carefully, in order not to break themselves, and soon came to the other side.

They were now in a most beautiful garden, with trees and bright-hued flowers in abundance and pretty fountains that shot their merry sprays far into the air. In the center of the garden was a great palace, with bright golden turrets and domes, and many windows that glistened in the sunshine like the sparkle of diamonds.

Richly dressed courtiers and charming ladies strolled through the walks, and before the palace door were a dozen prancing horses, gaily caparisoned, awaiting their riders.

It was a scene brilliant enough to fascinate anyone, and the two eggs stood spellbound while their eyes feasted upon the unusual sight.

"See!" whispered Couthie-Coulou, "there are some birds swimming in the water yonder. Let us go and look at them, for we also may be birds someday."

"True," answered Humpty, "but we are just as likely to be omelets or angel's-food. Still, we will have a look at the birds."

So they started to cross the drive on their way to the pond, never noticing that the King and his courtiers had issued from the palace and were now coming down the drive riding upon their prancing steeds. Just as the eggs were in the middle of the drive the horses dashed by, and Humpty, greatly alarmed, ran as fast as he could for the grass.

Then he stopped and looked around, and behold! There was poor Coutchie-Coulou crushed into a shapeless mass by the hoof of one of the horses, and her golden heart was spreading itself slowly over the white gravel of the driveway!

Humpty sat down upon the grass and wept grievously, for the death of his companion was a great blow to him. And while he sobbed, a voice said to him,

"What is the matter, little egg?"

Humpty looked up, and saw a beautiful girl bending over him.

"One of the horses has stepped upon Coutchie-Coulou," he said; "and now she is dead, and I have no friend in all the world."

The girl laughed.

"Do not grieve," she said, "for eggs are but short-lived creatures at best, and Coutchie-Coulou has at least died an honorable death and saved herself from being fried in a pan or boiled in her own shell. So cheer up, little egg, and I will be your friend--at least so long as you remain fresh. A stale egg I never could abide."

"I was laid only this morning," said Humpty, drying his tears, "so you need have no fear. But do not call me 'little egg,' for I am quite large, as eggs go, and I have a name of my own."

"What is your name?" asked the Princess.

"It is Humpty Dumpty," he answered, proudly. "And now, if you will really be my friend, pray show me about the grounds, and through the palace; and take care I am not crushed."

So the Princess took Humpty in her arms and walked with him all through the grounds, letting him see the fountains and the golden fish that swam in their waters, the beds of lilies and roses, and the pools where the swans floated. Then she took him into the palace, and showed him all the gorgeous rooms, including the King's own bed-chamber and the room where stood the great ivory throne.

Humpty sighed with pleasure.

"After this," he said, "I am content to accept any fate that may befall me, for surely no egg before me ever saw so many beautiful sights."

"That is true," answered the Princess; "but now I have one more sight to show you which will be grander than all the others; for the King will be riding home shortly with all his horses and men at his back, and I will take you to the gates and let you see them pass by."

"Thank you," said Humpty.

So she carried him to the gates, and while they awaited the coming of the King the egg said,

"Put me upon the wall, Princess, for then I be able to see much better than in your arms."

"That is a good idea," she answered; "but you must be careful not to fall."

Then she sat the egg gently upon the top of the stone wall, where there was a little hollow; and Humpty was delighted, for from his elevated perch he could see much better than the Princess herself.

"Here they come!" he cried; and, sure enough, the King came riding along the road with many courtiers and soldiers and vassals following in his wake, all mounted upon the finest horses the kingdom could afford.

As they came to the gate and entered at a brisk trot, Humpty, forgetting his dangerous position, leaned eagerly over to look at them. The next instant the Princess heard a sharp crash at her side, and, looking downward, perceived poor Humpty Dumpty, who lay crushed and mangled among the sharp stones where he had fallen.

The Princess sighed, for she had taken quite a fancy to the egg; but she knew it was impossible to gather it up again or mend the matter in any way, and therefore she returned thoughtfully to the palace.

Now it happened that upon this evening several young men of the kingdom, who were all of high rank, had determined to ask the King for the hand of the Princess; so they assembled in the throne room and demanded that the King choose which of them was most worthy to marry his daughter.

The King was in a quandary, for all the suitors were wealthy and powerful, and he feared that all but the one chosen would become his enemies. Therefore he thought long upon the matter, and at last said,

"Where all are worthy it is difficult to decide which most deserves the hand of the Princess. Therefore I propose to test your wit. The one who shall ask me a riddle I cannot guess, can marry my daughter."

At this the young men looked thoughtful, and began to devise riddles that his Majesty should be unable to guess. But the King was a shrewd monarch, and each one of the riddles presented to him he guessed with ease.

Now there was one amongst the suitors whom the Princess herself favored, as was but natural. He was a slender, fair-haired youth, with dreamy blue eyes and a rosy complexion, and although he loved the Princess dearly he despaired of finding a riddle that the King could not guess.

But while he stood leaning against the wall the Princess approached him and whispered in his ear a riddle she had just thought of. Instantly his face brightened, and when the King called, "Now, Master Gracington, it is your turn," he advanced boldly to the throne.

"Speak your riddle, sir," said the King, gaily; for he thought this youth would also fail, and that he might therefore keep the Princess by his side for a time longer.

But Master Gracington, with downcast eyes, knelt before the throne and spoke in this wise:

"This is my riddle, oh King:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall All the King's horses And all the King's men Cannot put Humpty together again!"

"Read me that, sire, an' you will!"

The King thought earnestly for a long time, and he slapped his head and rubbed his ears and walked the floor in great strides; but guess the riddle he could not.

"You are a humbug, sir!" he cried out at last; "there is no answer to such a riddle."

"You are wrong, sire," answered the young man; "Humpty Dumpty was an egg."

"Why did I not think of that before!" exclaimed the King; but he gave the Princess to the young man to be his bride, and they lived happily together.

And thus did Humpty Dumpty, even in his death, repay the kindness of the fair girl who had shown him such sights as an egg seldom sees.

The Woman Who Lived in a Shoe

The Woman Who Lived in a Shoe

There was an old woman Who lived in a shoe, She had somany children
She did n't know what to do; She gave them some broth Without any bread,
And whipped them all soundly And sent them to bed.

A long time ago there lived a woman who had four daughters, and these in time grew up and married and went to live in different parts of the country. And the woman, after that, lived all alone, and said to herself, "I have done my duty to the world, and now shall rest quietly for the balance of my life. When one has raised a family of four children and has married them all happily, she is surely entitled to pass her remaining days in peace and comfort."

She lived in a peculiar little house, that looked something like this picture.

It was not like most of the houses you see, but the old woman had it built herself, and liked it, and so it did not matter to her how odd it was. It stood upon the top of a little hill, and there was a garden at the back and a pretty green lawn in front, with white gravel paths and many beds of bright colored flowers.

The old woman was very happy and contented there until one day she received a letter saying that her daughter Hannah was dead and had sent her family of five children to their grandmother to be taken care of.

This misfortune ruined all the old woman's dreams of quiet; but the next day the children arrived--three boys and two girls--and she made the best of it and gave them the beds her own daughters had once occupied, and her own cot as well; and she made a bed for herself on the parlor sofa.

The youngsters were like all other children, and got into mischief once in awhile; but the old woman had much experience with children and managed to keep them in order very well, while they quickly learned to obey her, and generally did as they were bid.

But scarcely had she succeeded in getting them settled in their new home when Margaret, another of her daughters, died, and sent four more children to her mother to be taken care of.

The old woman scarcely knew where to keep this new flock that had come to her fold, for the house was already full; but she thought the matter over and finally decided she must build an addition to her house.

So she hired a carpenter and built what is called a "lean-to" at the right of her cottage, making it just big enough to accommodate the four new members of her family. When it was completed her house looked very much as it does in this picture.

She put four little cots in her new part of the house, and then she sighed contentedly, and said, "Now all the babies are taken care of and will be comfortable until they grow up." Of course it was much more difficult to manage nine small children than five; and they often led each other into mischief, so that the flower beds began to be trampled upon and the green grass to be worn under the constant tread of little feet, and the furniture to show a good many scratches and bruises.

But the old woman continued to look after them, as well as she was able, until Sarah, her third daughter, also died, and three more children were sent to their grandmother to be brought up.

The old woman was nearly distracted when she heard of this new addition to her family, but she did not give way to despair. She sent for the carpenter again, and had him build another addition to her house, as the picture shows.

Then she put three new cots in the new part for the babies to sleep in, and when they arrived they were just as cozy and comfortable as peas in a pod.

The grandmother was a lively old woman for one of her years, but she found her time now fully occupied in cooking the meals for her twelve small grandchildren, and mending their clothes, and washing their faces, and undressing them at night and dressing them in the morning. There was just a dozen of babies now, and when you consider they were about the same age you will realize what a large family the old woman had, and how fully her time was occupied in caring for them all.

And now, to make the matter worse, her fourth daughter, who had been named Abigail, suddenly took sick and died, and she also had four small children that must be cared for in some way.

The old woman, having taken the other twelve, could not well refuse to adopt these little orphans also.

"I may as well have sixteen as a dozen," she said, with a sigh; "they will drive me crazy some day, anyhow, so a few more will not matter at all!"

Once more she sent for the carpenter, and bade him build a third addition to the house; and when it was completed she added four more cots to the dozen that

were already in use. The house presented a very queer appearance now, but she did not mind that so long as the babies were comfortable.

"I shall not have to build again," she said; "and that is one satisfaction. I have now no more daughters to die and leave me their children, and therefore I must make up my mind to do the best I can with the sixteen that have already been inflicted upon me in my old age."

It was not long before all the grass about the house was trodden down, and the white gravel of the walks all thrown at the birds, and the flower beds trampled into shapeless masses by thirty-two little feet that ran about from morn till night. But the old woman did not complain at this; her time was too much taken up with the babies for her to miss the grass and the flowers.

It cost so much money to clothe them that she decided to dress them all alike, so that they looked like the children of a regular orphan asylum. And it cost so much to feed them that she was obliged to give them the plainest food; so there was bread-and-milk for breakfast and milk-and-bread for dinner and bread-and-broth for supper. But it was a good and wholesome diet, and the children thrived and grew fat upon it.

One day a stranger came along the road, and when he saw the old woman's house he began to laugh.

"What are you laughing at, sir?" asked the grandmother, who was sitting upon her doorsteps engaged in mending sixteen pairs of stockings.

"At your house," the stranger replied; "it looks for all the world like a big shoe!"

"A shoe!" she said, in surprise.

"Why, yes. The chimneys are shoe-straps, and the steps are the heel, and all those additions make the foot of the shoe."

"Never mind," said the woman; "it may be a shoe, but it is full of babies, and that makes it differ from most other shoes."

But the Stranger went on to the village and told all he met that he had seen an old woman who lived in a shoe; and soon people came from all parts of the country to look at the queer house, and they usually went away laughing.

The old woman did not mind this at all; she was too busy to be angry. Some of the children were always getting bumped heads or bruised shins, or falling down and hurting themselves, and these had to be comforted. And some were naughty and had to be whipped; and some were dirty and had to be washed; and some

were good and had to be kissed. It was "Gran'ma, do this!" and "Gran'ma, do that!" from morning to night, so that the poor grandmother was nearly distracted. The only peace she ever got was when they were all safely tucked in their little cots and were sound asleep; for then, at least, she was free from worry and had a chance to gather her scattered wits.

"There are so many children," she said one day to the baker-man, "that I often really do n't know what to do!"

"If they were mine, ma'am," he replied, "I 'd send them to the poor-house, or else they 'd send me to the madhouse."

Some of the children heard him say this, and they resolved to play him a trick in return for his ill-natured speech.

The baker-man came every day to the shoe-house, and brought two great baskets of bread in his arms for the children to eat with their milk and their broth.

So one day, when the old woman had gone to the town to buy shoes, the children all painted their faces, to look as Indians do when they are on the warpath; and they caught the roosters and the turkey-cock and pulled feathers from their tails to stick in their hair. And then the boys made wooden tomahawks for the girls and bows-and-arrows for their own use, and then all sixteen went out and hid in the bushes near the top of the hill.

By and by the baker-man came slowly up the path with a basket of bread on either arm; and just as he reached the bushes there sounded in his ears a most unearthly war-whoop. Then a flight of arrows came from the bushes, and although they were blunt and could do him no harm they rattled all over his body; and one hit his nose, and another his chin, while several stuck fast in the loaves of bread.

Altogether, the baker-man was terribly frightened; and when all the sixteen small Indians rushed from the bushes and flourished their tomahawks, he took to his heels and ran down the hill as fast as he could go!

When the grandmother returned she asked,

"Where is the bread for your supper?"

The children looked at one another in surprise, for they had forgotten all about the bread. And then one of them confessed, and told her the whole story of how they had frightened the baker-man for saying he would send them to the poor-house.

"You are sixteen very naughty children!" exclaimed the old woman; "and for punishment you must eat your broth without any bread, and afterwards each one shall have a sound whipping and be sent to bed."

Then all the children began to cry at once, and there was such an uproar that their grandmother had to put cotton in her ears that she might not lose her hearing.

But she kept her promise, and made them eat their broth without any bread; for, indeed, there was no bread to give them.

Then she stood them in a row and undressed them, and as she put the nightdress on each one she gave it a sound whipping and sent it to bed.

They cried some, of course, but they knew very well they deserved the punishment, and it was not long before all of them were sound asleep.

They took care not to play any more tricks on the baker-man, and as they grew older they were naturally much better behaved.

Before many years the boys were old enough to work for the neighboring farmers, and that made the woman's family a good deal smaller. And then the girls grew up and married, and found homes of their own, so that all the children were in time well provided for.

But not one of them forgot the kind grandmother who had taken such good care of them, and often they tell their children of the days when they lived with the old woman in a shoe and frightened the baker-man almost into fits with their wooden tomahawks.