

Now I Should Laugh If I Were Not Dead

Adapted by Mistress Dervila ni Leonon

Based on World Folktales, page 367

Icelandic

Time: About 3:24

Two wives were arguing.

“My husband is more foolish than yours!”

“No, mine is the more foolish!”

“Mine!”

“No, mine!”

This went on for a few minutes, until finally one wife said

“No use arguing about it when we can prove it one way or the other. We shall each test our husbands and see which is the more foolish.”

“Agreed!”

So the wives went home and set to work. The first wife went through the motions of carding and spinning, but without wool. When her husband asked

“Why are you scraping the cards together without any wool?” she said

“Oh, but this is a very fine wool, and hard to see. I am going to make you a fine set of clothes from it.” And so she continued going through the motions. Carding, spinning, weaving, washing, cutting, and sewing. Her husband watched her go through all these steps with wonder and admiration, thinking his wife an amazing woman indeed.

Meanwhile, the second wife said to her husband

“Why are you out and about? Don’t you know you are very sick?”

“But I feel fine.”

“No, you are very sick. You must go lay down.” And her husband did. A few days later, she said

[crying a little] “I have ordered the coffin”

“But why?”

“Silly man, don’t you know you are dead?”

“Dead?”

“Yes, you died in the night.” And so her husband lay very still, thinking he was dead. His wife washed him and dressed him in his best clothes, and he lay limp the whole time, just like a corpse. Then the coffin arrived, and she had him put in the it.

On the day of the funeral, the first wife helped her husband dress in the fine new clothes she had just made for him. *[look proud and pleased]* He strutted around, thinking himself very well dressed when in fact he was naked as the day he was born. And so they joined the funeral procession for the second husband.

Now the second wife had had a window put into the coffin, so her husband could see all the people in his funeral procession. Everyone in the procession was sad and sorry until they saw the first husband strutting around naked. Then they could not help laughing. And when the “dead” husband saw his friend naked, he opened the coffin, sat up, and said

“I would laugh if I were not dead!” And then everyone realized that the two wives had played tricks on their husbands, and they laughed at both of them. The two wives laughed hardest of all. Then the first wife said to the second

[laughing]“I convinced my husband to walk naked in clothes that weren’t there, but you convinced yours that he was dead. You win the argument, your husband is the more foolish.”

Full bibliography of source:

Clarkson, Atelia, and Gilbert B. Cross. World Folktales. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1980. ISBN: 0-684-17763-3

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