

PALLADIUM SHORT STORY PAGE

The Man Who Laughed ~ By Bela Czoth Translated from the Hungarian by Eugene Lucas

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A story-teller thus started his new tale:

One hot summer day my steps were directed to the great bazaar of Stamboul. I was very thirsty, having walked all the way; so I sat down in the street, in front of a coffee house, and ordered a lemonade. Next to me a gray-haired old man was sitting on a divan, and incessantly he laughed to himself.

At first I thought he must be reading some humorous story; but on looking at him more closely, I perceived that he had no book in his hands. Then I thought perhaps he saw something funny going on in the coffee house; but indoors there was no one save a young black-smoker, who stirred the fire in the oven.

And the gray little man continued to laugh in the same lively manner. Curiously enough, to bother me. What was the reason for such a laugh? With furtive glances I looked all around me: "What can this little old man be laughing at?"

His glances rested upon rather trivial, yet at all laughable, things. Opposite the coffee house there were a cobbler's and a barber's shop. My gray little man watched these shops, and never ceased laughing.

I determined to find out the cause of his laughter. I did not see anything to laugh at—the wooden shoemaker was a very decent-looking old man, who, with his little pole-axe, speedily cut out high-heeled shoes from hornbeam. A man stopped at his shop and asked for a pair of wooden shoes.

My neighbor again burst out laughing.

The buyer fingered and scrutinized about twenty pairs of wooden shoes. One was too high, another too low, another again was too long, and another too small for him. My gray-bearded old man laughed more and more heartily, and I became more and more angry, for I didn't see any reason for all this merriment.

The customer at last found the right size of shoes, but he thought the price was too high, and as they couldn't agree, he went away. The cobbler let him a short distance, then called after him: "Come back, sir; let me be your and wear them in good health."

The man returned to the shop, paid for the shoes, took the package under his arm, and, with "God bless you," left the shop.

The laughing man now laughed so heartily that he again fell over on his back. I was willing to give a gold coin to any one who could tell me the reason for his merry humor.

After a short while another scene was enacted in the cobbler's shop. A young man came in to buy a pair of shoes. He tried about twenty pairs, and not one of them fitted him well enough.

"I have such tender feet," he said to the cobbler.

After a long search, finally, somehow, a pair of shoes came forth that fitted him to his entire satisfaction. The young man bargained for a long while, and not coming to an agreement, he left the cobbler's. He

was called back, however, paid his own price, put on his new shoes, and limped out of the store. Evidently the new shoes hurt his tender feet. But surely there was nothing to laugh at in this. However, the old man laughed more heartily than before. I really would have given two gold coins to learn the reason of his laughter.

Now a porter came limping into the barber's shop, carrying a heavy coffee bag.

"Good heavens!" said he, kicking on his shoes, "cut this corn out for me immediately. The confounded thing hurts so much that I see a thousand stars."

The barber put on his glasses and started with the operation. The porter howled now and then, but finally, when he was relieved, dropped a small coin into the barber's plate, and, still limping a bit, dragged his bag forth.

My gray little friend laughed so much during this operation that the tears rolled down his face.

Curiosity goaded me now; I urgently that I could not restrain myself from addressing him.

"Sir," said I, bowing politely to my neighbor, "pardon me for intruding. I confess that you will oblige me greatly if you will be kind enough to tell me what you find to laugh at in these everyday happenings. A man buys a pair of wooden shoes, and you laugh; another buys a pair of leather boots, and again you laugh; and a third has his corn cut out, and the tears simply roll down your cheeks. May I ask you to explain this to me?"

"Why, gladly sir," said the jolly little old man, with a friendly air. "I laugh at these human weaknesses—the troubles everybody has with their feet; because wise men, like fools, seek for wooden shoes and leather boots; they choose them, try them on, bargain about them, pay for them, and then hobble and during their business hours come into the barber shop, have their corns cut out, suffer, and in addition to all that, drop some money into the barber's plate."

"My dear sir, I understand you less now than I did before."

"I am talking very plainly, though," said the old man. "I consider it ridiculous that people should bother so much with such useless and unnecessary things as legs."

"I really don't understand a word of what you say," said I in astonishment. "Do you really mean that legs are useless, unnecessary things?"

"That's what I say, young man," said my friend, laughingly. "Look here!"

And he quickly took out of his kaffan two wooden legs.

I was deeply affected by the sight of this wretchedness, but my neighbor gayly continued his narrative:

"Well, haven't I a hundred reasons to bless the Lord because of my wooden legs? To you, my dear sir, I am not forced to buy either wooden shoes or other boots; and I don't have to bother trying them on, either; I don't bargain with merchants, and my money remains in my pocket.

"It's a short while another scene was enacted in the cobbler's shop. A young man came in to buy a pair of shoes. He



"I stretched out my arms and, with great devotion, thrice said: 'Sundam bundam.'"

Corns never bother me, and my feet never hurt me other wise, either. While I walk I don't need to be afraid that my feet will be hurt by stones or pierced by thorns. Whether I walk on gravel, in mud, in snow or in water, it makes no difference to me; and I don't need to be afraid that I may catch cold, for my boots will never get wet.

"If I stumble against a snake, I am not frightened, and I don't fear dogs biting my legs, either. When my wife is saucy, I always have something at hand to beat her with. When I sit before the fireplace, my poker is always on hand. And when my legs will have served me sufficiently,

I'll make a fire with them to warm me withal.

"You see, my dear sir, why it is that I am always laughing at people who are having trouble with their feet."

The old man spoke again, and laughed again. And I didn't feel so much sympathy for him any more. However, my curiosity didn't let me rest.

"Sir," said I to him, "since you have enlightened me so much already, won't you please tell me how this accident happened?"

"What accident?"

"Why, the losing of your legs."

"That's a fortune, young man—good

Juck, I tell you. The greatest fortune of my life. Not only because wooden legs are a hundred times more serviceable, as I have proved to you, but particularly because through them I became a happy and honest man. Let's have another drink and I will tell you my story."

After we had had our drink, the little gray, laughing old man said:

"When I was a very young man I speedily squandered all the property my father left me, and, being desperate, decided to take lessons from the two greatest thieves in the world—All Bingos and his brother, Jusuf Blinel. But when I saw how one could steal the eggs from under a magpie in her nest, and the other, meanwhile, could steal the stockings off his brother's legs, I became hopeless of ever making my way in such a profession, and fled back to the city.

"I strolled around for a long while in the desolate streets, and then said to myself:

"Why, this thief-handicraft must be a good handicraft, after all. I think it would be a pity to give it up forever. It is not absolutely necessary to be immoral artists like All Bingos and Jusuf Blinel. I don't want to steal from magpies, but from careless people, which is a much easier job, I suppose."

"And all of a sudden, I wished I could try out this business. The thing that tempted me was a house built near to the mansion of the wealthiest jeweler of Smyrna, Caisbukdian. I could crawl up on the roof of Caisbukdian's house. There I could sit quietly, and when I perceived that every one in the house was sleeping I could steal in through the attic, break into the jeweler's cabinet, fill all my pockets with precious stones, and then in the same way I came I could slide down on the scaffold.

"With great difficulty I got up to the jeweler's roof. My head went around, for the house was very tall, and the moon shone with nearly the brightness of daylight. Holding my breath, I crawled down at the attic door and listened to see whether the people were still awake.

"They were, very much so. Caisbukdian said something in a very loud voice, maybe to his wife, for at times a woman's voice interrupted. Pressing my ears on the door, I could hear everything.

"'Why, darling, I didn't get rich from my trade,' said the Armenian in his thick voice, 'but from thievery.'

"'And are you not ashamed?' lamented the woman.

"'I would be ashamed if I had been an ordinary thief,' answered Caisbukdian. 'But let it be known to you that I got my power to be a great thief from the beneficent Djins.'

"'Why, how did you come to these Djins?'

"'I can tell you that, too. Once I found a lead bottle on the seashore, such a lead bottle as that in which our Father Abraham imprisoned Djins. I broke the seal and released the Djin, who then, from

gratitude, taught me how to use a moonbeam as a ladder.'

"'As a ladder?' repeated the woman, in amazement.

"'Quite so. Why, that was the secret of my success. For, my darling, I could walk on the moonbeam like other people walk on stairs; nay, moreover, I could fly on it. That's how I robbed the treasure tower of the Sultan. I went up on the moonbeam to his highest window, on which there was no grill, and got hold of two bags of diamonds.'

"And then how did you come down?'

"I swallowed this conversation as I would the sweetest honeyed sausages."

"But how is it that you are the only one who knows about this moonbeam walking?" asked the woman.

"Because I am the only one who was enchanted by the beautiful Djin with the enchanting words," said Caisbukdian. "Everything depended on those words. He who knows these two words is able to walk up and down on the moonbeam."

"Well, and what are these two words?" asked the woman, curiously.

"I will tell you, my wife. I won't use them, anyway, for I have stolen enough in my life already."

"A lynx never listened more eagerly than I did to what followed."

"The whole matter is very simple. He who wants to go up somewhere has to stand in the moonbeam, and, with his arms outstretched, say thrice, 'Bundam bundam.' At the very minute he ascends, like the fluke in the breeze, and he goes where he wants to. And, if he feels like coming down from the air, with outstretched arms, thrice only, he says these words: 'Sundam bundam.' He then lets go his hold, and he will descend as smoothly into the deepness as if angels were carrying him on their palms."

"The Armenian stopped talking. Immediately there arose an unceasing eagerness in me, a yearning to do this miracle. The moon shone just at me. I stretched out my arms and, with great devotion, thrice said: 'Bundam bundam.' And then, with my back leaned on the waste-air, I fell like a stone. Both my legs were broken, I was lying in my blood on the street, moaning. Immediately the door of the house opened, and the Armenian came out with a lamp in his hand, followed by his whole family.

"Oh, you silly thief," said Caisbukdian, leaning above me. "It was really not my intention that you should come to such grief. But be it known to you, you wretched creature, that when you crawled upon the roof of my house I noticed you, and thought that this stupid fable would be the best way of getting rid of you. I surely didn't wish that you should break yourself in pieces. That's why I shall take you into my house, you poor fellow, and will cure and cherish you humanely."

"Then I lost my wooden legs, my dear boy. And I tell you that was the greatest fortune of my life. For I became an honest and happy man."

Rhymes for Children

The Boodlefinch

By HANK.

THE Boodlefinch has nickels for its eyes, and I've been told. Each feather on its back is made Of shiny, glistening gold; Its beak is formed of silver, but It's always hungry, for No matter how much coin it spits It always cries for more.



A little girl, or little boy, Who disobeys Mama By asking for a penny from Their brother or Papa, Had best look out, or they perhaps Will some day feel a pinch Upon their arm, and there will be The hungry Boodlefinch.

There's a Reason

"That woman's heartless!" "Why do you say that?" "She devotes more attention to her dog than she does to her own child!"

"Hum! Have you seen the child?"

A Christmas Idea

"I think I'll have my picture taken." "What for?" "Oh, they make lovely Christmas gifts for folks you don't care to spend much money on."

How to Grow Your Own Funny Calabash Gourds.

The United States Government Will Send Seeds and Instructions to Housewives Who Want to Make Their Own Jardinieres and Window Decorations.

WHY not grow your own pipes? It is surely worth while if you are a smoker—especially when the United States Government is willing to tell you exactly how to do it.

But maybe nobody wants pipes for their ladies would like to grow these curious calabash gourds for pipes for pipes, little nests, baskets, "catch plates," window decorations, and other household ornaments.

The Plant Bureau is about to publish a special bulletin on the calabash, telling how to grow them and how to make the new-fangled calabash pipes, which are beginning to be introduced in this country. Already they are the rage in Europe, being declared by smokers to be the most delightful and satisfactory of all pipes. But they are very expensive, costing from \$5 to \$12 apiece.

Incidentally as seeds of the requisite gourds are now obtainable, and the plant is easily grown, there does not seem to be any good reason why people should pay money for these very delicate pipes. They can produce them just as well for themselves.

Hence it is that the Plant Bureau has thought it worth while to spread information on the subject broadcast, so as the seeds, anybody can find out how to get them by applying to the Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction of the Department of Agriculture.

Mr. David Fairchild and Mr. G. N. Cole, (authors of the forthcoming bulletin) say that the calabash pipes are made from the crooked necks of a large species of gourd, belonging to the group of plants which include the cucumber, the melon, and the squash. They are graceful in shape, color like meerschaum, and are delightful smokers. Unlike the cheap pipes which are turned out by machinery, no two calabash pipes are alike. In this lies much of their charm.

If the vine is to be grown for the sake of its gourds, it should not be trained on a trellis, but allowed to sweep over the ground. Under such circumstances the gourds from their necks with the crooked crook, and, while not all of them by any means make suitable for pipes, a fair percentage of them do. It seems to be best, for securing a perfect neck, to stand the gourd up when half grown so that they will be their big ends.



Growing Plants in Homemade Calabash.

Piece of Calabash Cut Off for Pipe Bowl.

Pota.

The Lower End of the Calabash Makes an Excellent Flower Pot.



The Lowest Human Beings on Earth.

THE War Office of Great Britain has received reports from the military patrol in the remote parts of the Nigerian province of Muri on the Upper Benue—a tributary of the River Niger—which indicate the discovery of the lowest type of human beings that ever existed.

The operations of the patrol were undertaken for the purpose of establishing effective administration over a territory so little known that in many cases the villages visited had never before been seen by a white man. The relations between the Government and the Wurkum people—the tribe chiefly concerned—had never been friendly, and the three expeditions previously sent against them having had no satisfactory result, a fresh force was sent into the country in consequence of attacks upon traders and the Wurkum under control.

Sometimes this deity is fully clothed, on other occasions he is naked. One of the pagan deities kills all women who see him.

At a place called Bashima was seen an iron spear placed in the ground at a spot held in great reverence and worshipped by the people at night. In many of the houses and the temples wooden idols, which are not objects of worship in themselves, but are, as a rule, images of departed pagans.

The people are described as being of the lowest type, every village being cannibal. Worship consists of the worst

form of fetish. In most cases the entire population is naked. The religious beliefs of these pagans are interesting, but above all the abomination of souls, a man being in their view reborn by the same mother after death.

An evil man's soul becomes a witch, whose fate is death by burning. In some cases the people worship a deity, who at their religious celebrations is represented as armed with a long horn, which he blows at intervals.