Ririro
READ ANYWHERE, ANYTIME

Farmer Weatherbeard

Andrew Lang

Once there was a couple with an only son named Jack. The mother decided it was time for him to go out and learn a trade, and told her husband to take him somewhere.

"Find him such a good place that he becomes master of all masters," she said, and packed some food and a roll of tobacco in a bag.

They visited many masters, but every one of them said, "I can make the boy as good as I am, but no better." When the father came home with that answer, his wife said, "Then try again. I want him to be master of all masters." So she packed more food and tobacco, and the man and his son set off once more.

After a while they came to a frozen lake, where they met a man driving a black horse in a carriage.

"Where are you headed?"

"To find someone to teach my son a trade. His mother insists he be made master of all masters."

"Then we're well met," said the driver, "because that's exactly what I do, and I'm looking for an apprentice. Hop up behind," he told the boy, and off the horse flew with them straight up into the air.

"Wait!" shouted the father. "I ought to know your name and where you live!"

"I'm at home in the north, south, east, and west," called the master. "I'm called Farmer Weatherbeard. Come back in a year, and I'll tell you if the boy suits me." And away they went.

When the father got home, his wife asked where their son was.

"Heaven knows. They went up into the sky," he said, and told her what had happened.

But when she heard that he didn't know where Jack was or when his apprenticeship would end, she sent him out to find out, with another bag of food and a roll of tobacco.

He walked a long time and came to a great forest that went on all day. At nightfall he saw a light, and after a long walk he came to a hut at the foot of a

rock. Outside, an old woman was drawing water from a well with her nose, so long was it.

"Good evening, mother," said the man.

"Good evening," she said. "Nobody has called me mother in a hundred years."

"May I stay the night?"

"No."

The man took out his tobacco, lit a little, and gave her a whiff. She was so delighted that she began to dance, and gave him leave to stay. Before long he asked about Farmer Weatherbeard.

She knew nothing, she said, but she ruled all the four-footed animals, and perhaps one of them might know. She blew her whistle and gathered them all. None knew anything of Farmer Weatherbeard.

"There are three of us sisters," said the old woman. "Perhaps one of the others knows. You can borrow my horse and carriage, and you'll get there by night, though her house is three hundred miles away."

The man set out, and arrived that night. This old woman was also drawing water from the well with her nose.

"Good evening, mother."

"Nobody has called me mother in a hundred years."

"May I stay the night?"

"No." But he took out his tobacco, took a whiff, and put a pinch of snuff on the back of her hand. She was so delighted she danced and let him stay. Soon he asked about Farmer Weatherbeard. She knew nothing, but she ruled all the fishes, and perhaps one knew. She whistled and they all came. None of them knew.

"I have another sister," said the second old woman. "She lives six hundred miles away. Take my horse and carriage and you'll be there by nightfall."

He reached the third sister's cottage by nightfall. She was raking the fire with her nose.

"Good evening, mother."

"Nobody has called me mother in a hundred years."

"May I stay the night?"

"No." But he lit his pipe and gave her enough snuff to cover the back of her

hand. She danced with delight and let him stay. He asked about Farmer Weatherbeard. She knew nothing, she said, but she ruled the birds. She gathered them with her whistle. The eagle was missing, but it came soon after, and when asked, said it had just come from Farmer Weatherbeard's. So the old woman told it to guide the man. But the eagle wanted food first, and then to wait until morning, for it was so tired from the long flight that it could hardly lift off the ground.

When the eagle had eaten and rested, the old woman plucked a feather from its tail and set the man in its place, and the bird flew away with him. They didn't reach Farmer Weatherbeard's until midnight.

"Inside, everyone is so sound asleep that it won't be easy to wake them," said the eagle. "Go straight to the table drawer and take out three bits of bread. If you hear someone snoring, pluck three feathers from his head. He won't wake."

The man took the bread and pulled out one feather.

"Oof!" screamed Farmer Weatherbeard.

He plucked a second. "Oof!" He plucked a third, and Farmer Weatherbeard screamed so loud that the man thought the walls would crack, but he went on sleeping.

The eagle then told the man what to do next. He went to the stable door and stumbled over a hard stone. Beneath it lay three splinters of wood, which he picked up. He knocked at the stable door and it opened. He threw down the three bits of bread, and a hare came out and ate them. The man caught the hare. The eagle told him to pluck three feathers from its tail, then put the hare, the stone, the splinters, and himself in their place, and carry them all home.

When the eagle had flown a long way, it landed on a rock. "Do you see anything?"

"A flock of crows coming after us."

"Then we'd better fly on." They flew on a while. "Now?"

"They're right behind us."



"Throw down the three feathers you plucked from his head."

The man threw them down, and the feathers turned into a flock of ravens that chased the crows home. The eagle flew on much farther, and landed on another rock. "Anything?"

"I'm not sure. I think I see something far away."

"Then we'd better fly on." After a while: "Now?"

"They're close behind."

"Throw down the splinters of wood from under the stone."

He did, and they grew into a great thick forest. Farmer Weatherbeard had to go home for an axe to cut a way through. The eagle flew a long, long way, then rested in a fir tree. "Anything?"

"I think I see something far, far away."

"Then fly on." And later: "Now?"

"He's close behind us."

"Throw down the big stone."

The man threw it, and it became a high mountain of rock. Farmer Weatherbeard had to break his way through it, and halfway, he broke a leg and had to go home to have it mended.

While he did, the eagle flew the man home with the hare. At the churchyard the man had some earth laid on the hare, and it turned into his son Jack.

When the fair came, Jack turned into a pale-coloured horse and told his father to take him to market. "If someone wants to buy me, ask a hundred dollars. But don't forget to take off the halter, or I'll never get free of Farmer Weatherbeard, because he's the one who'll come to bargain."

So it happened. A horse-dealer paid a hundred dollars, and then asked for the halter.

"That wasn't part of the bargain," said the father. "I have other horses to sell." They each went their way. The dealer hadn't gone far before Jack took his own shape again, and when his father got home, Jack was sitting on the bench by the stove.

The next day he turned into a brown horse and told his father to ask two hundred dollars. "He'll give it, and treat you to a drink, too. But whatever you

drink or do, don't forget to take off the halter."

The father got his two hundred dollars and a drink, and just remembered to take off the halter. The buyer hadn't gone far before Jack took his own shape, and again he was on the bench by the stove when his father arrived.

On the third day he turned into a great black horse. "If a man offers three hundred dollars and treats you well, sell me. But whatever you drink, don't forget the halter, or I'll never get away from Farmer Weatherbeard."

"I won't forget," said his father.

At the market he got his three hundred dollars, but Farmer Weatherbeard treated him so handsomely that he forgot to take off the halter. So Farmer Weatherbeard led the horse away.

Farther along, Weatherbeard went into an inn for brandy. Before he went in, he tied the horse to a hook and left it with a barrel of red-hot nails by its nose and a trough of oats behind its tail, so it couldn't reach what it wanted. The horse stamped and kicked and snorted until a girl came out. She thought it was a shame to treat a horse so cruelly.

"Poor creature! What a master you must have!" she said, and she pushed the halter off the hook so the horse could turn to the oats.

"I'm here!" shrieked Farmer Weatherbeard, rushing out. But the horse had shaken off the halter and leapt into a goose pond, where he turned into a small fish. Weatherbeard followed as a great pike. Jack turned into a dove, and Weatherbeard into a hawk that flew after him and struck him. A princess standing at the palace window watched the fight.

"If you knew what I know," she said to the dove, "you'd fly in to me through the window."

The dove flew in, turned into Jack, and told her all that had happened.

"Turn yourself into a gold ring and sit on my finger," said the princess.

"That won't work," said Jack. "Farmer Weatherbeard will make the king ill, and no one can cure him until Weatherbeard comes, and as payment he'll ask for the ring."

"I'll say it was my mother's and I won't give it up."

So Jack turned into a gold ring on the princess's finger, where Weatherbeard couldn't touch him. And all Jack had predicted came to pass. The king fell ill, no doctor could help, until Farmer Weatherbeard arrived and demanded the ring on the princess's finger as his reward.

The king sent for the ring. The princess refused, saying she'd inherited it from her mother. The king flew into a rage and said he'd have it anyway.

"It's no use being angry," said the princess. "I can't get it off. If you want the ring, you'll have to take the finger too!"

"I'll try," said Farmer Weatherbeard. "The ring will come off soon enough."

"No thank you, I'll try myself," said the princess. She went to the fireplace and put some ashes on the ring. The ring slipped off and was lost among the ashes.

Weatherbeard turned into a hare and scratched about in the fireplace, digging until the ashes were up to his ears. But Jack turned into a fox, and caught the hare, and there was an end of Farmer Weatherbeard.

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