

## Well Done And Ill Paid

by Sir George Webbe Dasent  
from *Popular Tales from the Norse*

Once on a time there was a man, who had to drive his sledge to the wood for fuel. So a Bear met him.

'Out with your horse', said the Bear, 'or I'll strike all your sheep dead by summer.'

'Oh! heaven help me then', said the man; 'there's not a stick of firewood in the house; you must let me drive home a load of fuel, else we shall be frozen to death. I'll bring the horse to you to-morrow morning.'

Yes! on those terms he might drive the wood home, that was a bargain; but Bruin said, 'if he didn't come back, he should lose all his sheep by summer'.

So the man got the wood on the sledge and rattled homewards, but he wasn't over pleased at the bargain you may fancy. So just then a Fox met him.

'Why, what's the matter?' said the Fox; 'why are you so down in the mouth?'

'Oh, if you want to know', said the man; 'I met a Bear up yonder in the wood, and I had to give my word to him to bring Dobbin back to-morrow, at this very hour; for if he didn't get him, he said he would tear all my sheep to death by summer.'

'Stuff, nothing worse than that', said the Fox; 'if you'll give me your fattest wether, I'll soon set you free; see if I don't.'

Yes! the man gave his word, and swore he would keep it too.

'Well, when you come with Dobbin to-morrow for the bear', said the Fox, 'I'll make a clatter up in that heap of stones yonder, and so when the bear asks what that noise is, you must say 'tis Peter the Marksman,

who is the best shot in the world; and after that you must help yourself.'

Next day off set the man, and when he met the Bear, something began to make a clatter up in the heap of stones.

'Hist! what's that?' said the Bear.

'Oh! that's Peter the Marksman, to be sure', said the man; 'he's the best shot in the world. I know him by his voice.'

'Have you seen any bears about here, Eric?' shouted out a voice in the wood.

'Say, no!' said the Bear.

'No, I haven't seen any', said Eric.

'What's that then, that stands alongside your sledge?' bawled out the voice in the wood.

'Say it's an old fir-stump', said the Bear.

'Oh, it's only an old fir-stump', said the man.

'Such fir-stumps we take in our country and roll them on our sledges', bawled out the voice; 'if you can't do it yourself, I'll come and help you.'

'Say you can help yourself, and roll me up on the sledge', said the Bear.

'No, thank ye, I can help myself well enough', said the man, and rolled the Bear on to the sledge.

'Such fir-stumps we always bind fast on our sledges in our part of the world', bawled out the voice; 'shall I come and help you?'

'Say you can help yourself, and bind me fast, do', said the Bear.

'No, thanks, I can help myself well enough', said the man, who set to binding Bruin fast with all the ropes he had, so that at last the bear couldn't stir a paw.

'Such fir-stumps we always drive our axes into, in our part of the world', bawled out the voice; 'for then we guide them better going down the steep pitches.'

'Pretend to drive your axe into me, do now', said the bear. Then the man took up his axe, and at one blow split the bear's skull, so that Bruin lay dead in a trice, and so the man and the Fox were great friends, and on the best terms. But when they came near the farm, the Fox said:

'I've no mind to go right home with you, for I can't say I like your tykes; so I'll just wait here, and you can bring the wether to me, but mind and pick out one nice and fat.'

Yes! the man would be sure to do that, and thanked the Fox much for his help. So when he had put up Dobbin, he went across to the sheep-stall.

'Whither away, now?' asked his old dame.

'Oh!' said the man, 'I'm only going to the sheep-stall to fetch a fat wether for that cunning Fox, who set our Dobbin free. I gave him my word I would.'

'Whither, indeed', said the old dame; 'never a one shall that thief of a Fox get. Haven't we got Dobbin safe, and the bear into the bargain; and as for the Fox, I'll be bound he's stolen more of our geese than the wether is worth; and even if he hasn't stolen them, he will. No, no; take a brace of your swiftest hounds in a sack, and slip them loose after him; and then, perhaps, we shall be rid of this robbing Reynard.'

Well, the man thought that good advice; so he took two fleet red hounds, put them into a sack, and set off with them.

'Have you brought the wether?' said the Fox.

'Yes, come and take it', said the man, as he untied the sack and let slip the hounds.

'HUF', said the Fox, and gave a great spring; 'true it is what the old saw says, "Well done is often ill paid"; and now, too, I see the truth of another saying, "The worst foes are those of one's own house."' That was what the Fox said as he ran off, and saw the red foxy hounds at his heels.