



The Silver on the Hearth

(A story from Afghanistan)

There was once a poor farmer who found it a great struggle to get ahead in the world. Though he worked very hard and lived carefully, it was impossible for him to save money year after year. After an entire lifetime of labour he was no better off, it seemed, than he had been on the day he was born.

One morning he seized on the notion that if ever he was to own anything at all in this hard world, it would have to simply appear before him. He wished and wished that one morning he would wake up and discover riches aplenty heaped upon his own hearth. That way he would have no doubt that the good fortune was intended for him.


He thought of this as he went about his daily tasks in the fields.

It happened one day while he was working that some brambles in the field caught and tore his clothes. So that this wouldn't happen again, the man dug a little around the roots and pulled the brambles out of the ground. As he did so, he uncovered the top of a large earthen jar. In great excitement, he dug a little more and then removed the lid of the jar.

He found that the jar was filled to the brim with silver coins. At first he was delighted, but after a few minutes of thought he said, "Oh, I wished for riches upon my own hearth, but instead I have found this money out here in the open fields. Therefore I shall not take it. For if it were intended for me it would surely have appeared on my own hearth, as I wished."

So the man left the treasure where he had found it and went home. When he arrived, he told his wife about his discovery. The woman was angry at her husband's foolishness in leaving the riches in the field.





When her husband lay down to sleep, she went out to the house of a neighbour and told him all about it, saying, "My stupid husband found a hoard of money in the fields, but the blockhead refuses to bring it home. Go and get it for yourself, and share with me."

The neighbour was very pleased with the suggestion, and he went out to find the treasure where the woman had described it. There, where the bramble bush had been uprooted, indeed was an earthen jar. He took it from the ground and opened it. But when he lifted the lid he saw not silver coins, but a jarful of poisonous snakes.

Into the neighbour's mind rushed the thought, "Ah, that woman must be my enemy! She hoped I would put my hand in the jar to be bitten and poisoned!"

So he replaced the lid and carried the jar back home with him, just as he had found it. When night came he went to the house of the poor farmer, climbed on the roof, and emptied the jar of poisonous snakes down the chimney.

When dawn came, the poor farmer who had first discovered the jar got up to start the day. As the morning rays of the sun fell upon the hearth, his eyes opened wide. For the hearth was covered with silver coins. His heart swelled with gratitude. He said, "Oh! Finally I can accept these riches, knowing that they are surely intended for me as they appeared upon my own hearth, as I wished!"

