

Hungarian original titled “A róka, a medve, és a szegény ember” published in the ebook “Elegyes gyűjtések Magyarország és Erdély különböző részeiből (Népköltési gyűjtemény 1. kötet)” Authors: Arany László, Gyulai Pál.

This folk tale was collected by Gyulai Pál, around Kolozsvár in the 19th century.

The fox, the bear, and the poor man

A long time ago there lived a poor man. One day he took his wagon and his two cows, and went to his plot of land to plow it. When he passed near the forest he heard some deep growling and sharp squealing noises, and he stopped to investigate. When he went into the forest he saw a giant bear wrestling with a small bunny rabbit. The poor man couldn't hold back his laughter, because he has never seen a little rabbit fighting off a big bear.

The bear heard the loud laugh of the poor man, and turned to him: Hey you puny little human, how dare you laughing at a big bear like me? I'm going to teach you a lesson! I'll eat you and both your cows!

The poor man stopped laughing in a flash., and started begging the bear not to eat him and the cows. The bear insisted that he will eat all three of them, so the poor man said: If you have to eat us, then at least wait till the evening, because by then I would plow the land, and my family won't starve.

Oh well, I can wait till evening. Said the bear. But in the evening I will eat all three of you. With that the bear went back to the forest.

The poor man started plowing in the saddest mood he has ever been, and he was thinking all the time just how could he change bear's mind.

It was about noon when a fox walked by the plot of land, and the fox saw the sad face of the poor man. So the fox asked him “What's bugging you? If you tell me I might help you.

The poor man told the fox the story of his encounter with the bear.

The fox listened and then said: Is this all the trouble you have? I have just the thing for you. Trust me, you and your cows will not be eaten, and on top of it, you get to keep the hide of that bear. But I need to know how would you pay me for my services?

The poor man thought hard about what he could offer as a payment. At the end he gave in, and agreed to pay the fox nine hens and one rooster. The poor man knew he didn't have nine hens, so he started thinking where he could find those hens to pay the fox.

The fox started to explain his plan: So, listen to me carefully! When the bear comes around in the evening I will be hiding in the bushes. I will make sound like the horns hunters blow when they are on a hunt. When the bear asks you if you heard the sound

you will say that you hear hunters are coming. The bear will be scared at the thought of being chased by hunters, and he will ask you to hide him. You will tell him to hide in this charcoal bag. The I come out from the bush and ask you what's in the bag. You'll say it's just charcoal. I won't believe you, and ask you to hit the bag with your ax, to hear if indeed there is charcoal in the bag. When you hit the bag, you'll hit the bear and kill him.

The poor man decided to go along with the plan. And from the minute the bear showed up everything happened as the fox predicted it. So, the poor man escaped dying and losing the two cows.

What did I tell you? Wasn't this a great plan? Bragged the fox. Learn from this he told the poor man. Brain power can get you further than brute force. But now I have to go home. I'll go to your house in the morning, so you can pay me. Just make sure the hens are real fat. And don't even try to trick me, because you'll regret it.

The poor man loaded the bear onto his wagon, made a nice dinner from the bear, and he went to sleep without much worry, because he was thinking that brain power will serve him better than brute force.

When he woke up in the morning he barely opened his eyes when the fox knocked on his door. I'm bringing the hens and the rooster, yelled out he poor man; give me a minute to get dressed. But when he got dressed he didn't open the door, but stayed in the middle of the house, and started barking loudly.

Hey you, poor man! Shouted the fox. Do you have fox hounds in the house?

I don't know how it happened, but two hounds just came in from the back porch, and they want get you. They picked up your smell when you arrived. I can hardly keep them from breaking down the front door!

Hey, poor man, do me a favor and hold on to those hounds just long enough so I can sprint away, said the fox. You can keep the hens and the rooster, just let me get away.

When the poor man opened his front door the fox was well over the hill, and was still running. The poor man laughed heartily, and still laughs if he is still alive.