

The Butcher and the Widow

(based on a true story)

Once upon a time, there was a butcher that owned a butcher shop in a rural village. Life in the village was very slow and few big things seemed to ever happen there.

There was a church in the village that was usually empty, except for an old widow that had no children to care for her and struggled to make her ends meet.

She prayed and prayed there everyday, speaking to God, and hoping for the salvation of herself and the others in her village.

The butcher rarely entered the church, thinking that it was not of much use to him to follow these kinds of religious things. They were like fairy tales to him; fantasies that were nice to believe in, but not really part of the real world.

There were many other people in the same village as well. Each person was busying themselves about each day with the things that they believed were real and important.

The farmer was worried about getting all the work done in time so the crops would all be harvested. The mother was worried about making sure that her daughters got married off quickly. The clerk was worried about making sure all the documents were in order so that his boss would be happy. The child was worried about whether he would get the gift he wanted for his birthday. The boy was worried about whether the girl liked him. The teacher was worried about whether enough students would come and pay their fees for the coming semester. The students were worried about the test that they had to do.

These things were the real world for the people of the village. The daily worries and pleasures of everyday life were the reality that they lived in. They never knew a different world than this.

But the old woman knew a different world. Measured against the length of eternity, the daily worries and cares of this life, are worth almost nothing at all by comparison. Even if she was poor, forgotten or abandoned, she believed herself richer than all of them, because the treasure in her life was worth more than the ephemeral things in theirs.

Her mother was like her in the way she thought as well.

Her mother once told her that there was a kind of fungus that came out in the morning at sunrise and died at sunset. In the whole life of the fungus, it never saw the darkness of night. She told her that the cicadas on the trees were born in the spring and died before the summer ended, and that they never

saw what fall or winter looked like. She also told that there were trees that lived for thousands of years and yet the life of these trees was just a blink of an eye in the span of the lifetime of the universe.

And she told her that leaves on a tree that come out as little buds in the spring, flare out and do their work in the summer sun, then start changing their appearance, wilting and fall away in the autumn and winter, only to be replaced by the next generation the coming year – and she said that human life on Earth was no different than this.

The old woman was ignored by most people, but she prayed to God for all of them everyday at the church, in the hope that they might come to the reality that she knew where they had hope of something more than a mere twinkling in the long night.

The butcher had no time for this kind of nonsense. He believed what he could see and his reality was little different from that of most people. His business, his family, his everyday chores and activities – this was reality.

He had never seen anything to convince him that there was a different reality than this one and he no matter what was ever told him, he would never think anything otherwise. He didn't have time or the desire to really look into the subject and consider what might otherwise have been real.

He had a daughter that didn't want to get married, even though she was already 25, and he and his wife constantly urged her to get a husband soon before it was too late and it would become impossible. He wanted to make sure that he would have grandchildren after him that would survive him. This was his reality and he worried about this.

His business had some debts that it owed, due to a bad year and he struggled to try to pay off the money that was owed, fearing that his creditors might get impatient eventually and demand that his business be handed over to them. This was his reality and he worried about this.

His elderly father had health problems and it was not clear how much longer he would be with them. This was his reality and worried about this.

One day there was an army captain that came to his shop to buy some meat and the butcher gladly showed off his product. He had some good hams that he had cured with sea salt and his own special blend of spices that he was quite proud of, as well as leg of lamb, steaks, pork sausages and many other things.

After the captain had picked out some sausages, he asked the butcher for the price and then handed the money over.

Right then at that moment, the door opened again and the widow came in.

The butcher glared suspiciously at the widow, wondering what she wanted. He knew that she certainly didn't have enough money to pay for his meat and he didn't have much tolerance for beggars.

The widow looked at him with an innocent expression and said, "Sir, could you give me some meat?"

The butcher responded, "If you pay for it, you can buy anything in the store."

She said, "I don't have any money to give you, unfortunately, but I can pray for you at the church."

The butcher chuckled and said, "I'm sorry, but prayers can't buy you any meat at my store. You will have to find someone else to help you."

She said, "My prayers can help people a lot."

The captain listened, but did not intervene, and let the two talk with each other.

The butcher had a thought that he found quite humorous and said, "OK, I'll make a deal with you then. I promise I'll give you as much meat as your prayers are worth."

The butcher then opened a drawer to take out a sheet of paper. He then grabbed a pen next to the cash register and began writing on it. He spoke out loud as he wrote the sentence: "This old woman promises to pray for me at the church."

He then fetched a set of large balance scales and placed it on a table. He neatly folded the piece of paper and placed it on one of the scales.

The woman knew what he was about to do, but she determined to stay there despite his mockery.

The butcher then took out a cut of pork and cut off a tiny piece of it with his knife, which he then placed on the other end of the scales.

Surprisingly to the butcher, the scales didn't move. The butcher then said, "I guess this piece belongs to you, it is worth as much as what is written on that paper, I see."

He then cut off a larger piece and placed it on the scales. Again, surprisingly to the butcher, the scales still didn't move.

He checked the scale to make sure that it wasn't broken and that it was able to teeter like normal.

It worked as normal, but for some reason the meat wasn't making it budge a bit.

He then took the entire piece of pork that he was making cuts from and placed it on the scales, and again it didn't move.

"What's happening?" he said with some distress.

The old woman said, "You promised to give me as much meat as what is written on the paper is worth."

He then grabbed an entire leg of lamb and tried to hold it upright so that it rested on one end of the scales. The scales still didn't move.

"What is this thing? It won't move at all."

He then removed the paper from its side of the scales and the side holding the meat immediately struck the table with a loud thud.

He then placed the paper back on the scales again, and they returned back to the even position.

The captain watched it all with amazement. He finally spoke out, "I think all of the meat in this store is maybe not enough."

The butcher said, "I can't believe it, this stuff actually is true. It is a miracle!"

The butcher then spoke to the woman and made an agreement with her. He said that he maybe didn't have enough meat to pay for his earlier promise, nor would he ever have enough, but he promised to give her a regular allowance of meat from his store and in return she would pray for him at the church everyday.

The butcher and the captain both also decided to visit the church more frequently than before, because they finally realized that the old woman was right, and that sometimes the most real things of all are those things that are neither seen nor touched nor heard.

All Glory to God