

N **CON-GUY IN HIS HOME VILLAGE**

ow Con-Guy got sick and tired of wandering all by himself, without doing anything, just to mess up other people's business and laugh at their stupidity. So he made up his mind to settle down, like all hard-working people, to build his own house, to buy a little land estate, in short to finally get decent.

And since the Romanian says there is no place like a man's home village, Con-Guy went back to his home village and he started over like all people who have nothing, I mean he pulled whatever strings he pulled, got himself a little heifer, and sent her to the village pasture.

Because this is the way to get rich.

As she grazes, a little heifer grows and becomes a heifer, then more, she gets to be a young cow, then a cow, then the cow calves a heifer, and you can sell the cow and the heifer to buy seven heifers, and you send them to the village pasture.

Why is the pasture there, if not to have people's heifers graze on it?

So, Con-Guy's heifer grazed, and the more she grazed, the more she grew up, that no other heifer in the village could compete with her, and when she grew to be a young cow, the other young cows couldn't compete with her either.

"My, my, my," the women in Con-Guy's neighborhood were saying, "what could this be? This heifer is better than any other! What can he feed her on? What race is this that she grows so good?"

It wasn't such a rare race, and the food wasn't special, either; but the heifer belonged to Con-Guy, and Con-Guy minded his business, he had no time to watch the heifer, so she sometimes broke into people's farmed lands. When she grew to be a young cow, Con-Guy's heifer became the mistress of the land. She wandered around like her owner had done before he settled down, and you could find her exactly where you never thought she could be, in the wheat field, in the corn field, the Lord alone knows where else.

And Con-Guy complained to people that his heifer was too much of a wanderer and that he was busy and couldn't chase her.

Well, people would've complained, too, but there was nobody to take their grievances to anymore, now that Con-Guy jumped the gun and complained to them first, and so badly, that he was touchingly pitiful.

So, when they saw that Con-Guy's heifer would soon become a cow, people started giving it serious thought. They knew what was going to happen. They could almost see the seven heifers growing up, becoming young cows, finally growing to be cows, too, then Con-Guy selling them and coming back from the market with a whole heard of heifers, all hungry, all ready by nature to grow up and become young cows, then full-fledged cows.

"Look," they cried, "this man will eat us alive with his heifer, he's drying us up, he's making barren land out of all those farmed fields of ours."

But what could they do to Con-Guy? It wasn't his fault and he was busy, he couldn't waste all summer chasing his heifer.

They talked about it and they discussed this over and over, until they finally figured out that all that flesh the little heifer had put on to become a heifer and then a young cow was flesh gathered from the fodder on their lands, namely according to justice, flesh of the flesh that was supposed to be theirs, so only the hide belonged to Con-Guy, because the little heifer already had it when he brought her to the village.

So, now that they got enlightened, they killed the heifer, took the meat and ate it and they threw the hide over the fence into Con-Guy's yard.

No question about it, this calculation was short, but a lot of things happen in Con-Guy's home village.

Con-Guy, what could he do? Well, do something!

If he had wanted to, he would have found a sting to fit the villagers' trespass; but he didn't want this. He had a soft spot for the people in his village. No! He couldn't mess up the people in his home village, the way he would've done, for instance, to the people in Sloth-Guy's village.

So he stretched out the hide to dry it up, and when it got dry he hung it on a stick spike and off he went with it to the market to sell it.

So Con-Guy was on the road again.

He kept on walking and walking, from morning till lunch-time and then again from lunch to dusk. When it got dark, he stopped in a village on the road side and looked around to find a house where he could stay, a widow or a woman whose husband was out.

Not because, the Lord forbid such thoughts, no, but because Con-Guy was a man who had traveled up and down in this world and knew women get cold feet easily, they hate being alone and they are happy to have guests, if only to know there is a man staying overnight in their house.

And Con-Guy found a woman, right on the edge of the village, her husband was gone to the forest to bring wood. Of course, the woman kept telling him this and that, bla, bla, bla, her husband wasn't home, what will

people think; Con-Guy wanted to just lie in some corner of the house, a shed, a porch, wherever, just so the house wouldn't be empty. So the poor woman had no choice, she had to take him in, but she told him to go right to sleep, because maybe he was tired, poor man!

"What could that be?" said Con-Guy.

He knew women talk a lot and they want to know everything about everything in heaven or earth, and this woman told him nothing, she didn't ask him where he was coming from, how he had traveled, what he did, what he knew. There had to be something weird here, and Con-Guy, instead of going to sleep, cast glances, right eye, then left eye, and again, to see what was going on in the house and around it.

It just got dark and the woman began to boil, fry, cook all sorts of foods, pies, a fried piglet and a scalded rib with cooked cabbage. And then brandies and then wines. A feast, no less!

You couldn't call Con-Guy an experienced man if he didn't know this hard-working woman did all this for someone else, not her husband, because she was also adorned as if for a wedding.

It was true, she didn't do it for her husband, she did it for the village chief, she was waiting for him like maidens wait for suitors, going to the door and to the small gate every minute, to see if he was coming, is he coming, is he late, is he on his way?

Don't you believe this, the Lord forbid, that!... No! Just because the chief was the most important man in the village and she couldn't treat him in her house like a nobody, and during the day the chief, a busy man, couldn't come, so he honored their house now, at dusk.

Nothing else was at stake. The Lord forbid!

So the woman was ready now in all things: the piglet was beautiful and roasted that its skin cracked in your teeth, the ribs were scalded, the cabbage was cooked, the pies were hot and steamy, the brandy was on the table, only the chief himself was missing. Only the chief was missing when suddenly, this is so amazing!, her husband came back. Poor man, one of his axles broke on the road and he had no choice but to come back, put on a new axle on his wagon, and go to the forest tomorrow.

A good, faithful wife knows her husband's walk, his cough, his sneezing, even his whip sound, and the woman Con-Guy found accommodation with was good and faithful. She knew her husband's wheel squeaking, and that squeaking could be heard from far away, far enough for a hard-working woman like her to get things settled.

She wasted no time, she took the beautiful, roast piglet and hid it fast behind the oven, took the pie and hid it fast in the oven, took the ribs with cooked cabbage and put them in the oven, and again, wasting no time, she hid the brandy under the pillow on the bed and the wine under the bed, and by the time the wagon and oxen came into the yard, everything was in perfect order.

Not because, the Lord forbid, that!... But, well! It was better that her husband wouldn't know.

Now home, the man, like any man who lost something, began to complain, the woman, like any good, faithful woman, soothed him with kind words, and Con-Guy, like any decent man, came out of his dark corner to tell the master of the household that he was there, to pray forgiveness because he had dared, and to ask him for accommodation.

"Hey, woman," the man said after he got a little warmer in his nest, "I'm hungry: do you have any food?"

Well! What could the man do? He got hungry on the road. Yes, he still had in his bag the food he had taken for the road; but when he is home no man is happy to eat the food he brings back from the road.

"Oh, my goodness, what am I going to do!" the woman answered, "where can I get food now? I wasn't waiting for you until tomorrow. But I'll cook a good corn pie for you, so you can eat it with garlic juice."

"Well, let's have the corn pie, then!" the man said.

When he's hungry, man is happy even with corn pie.

As a man who had traveled, Con-Guy knew they'd invite him to dinner, to have a chat, and he wasn't sorry, because he was a wanderer, too, and he was hungry, like any man who has arrived from a trip.

And as they chatted while the woman was cooking the corn pie, Con-Guy, who wasn't dumb, kept trying to figure out how not to eat the corn pie, but the roast piglet, the beautiful, brown piglet, with that skin cracking in your teeth, the ribs with cabbage and the good pies; how to drink a mouthful of brandy and taste that old wine at least once.

He suddenly frowned and stealthily hit the hide with his stick.

And there goes old Con-Guy, the hardened trickster! All he had to do was feel that smell once, and he was on top of the situation!

Like any traveler, he always kept his stick at hand and the heifer hide, his merchandise, his entire fortune, was at his feet.

The man kind of wondered what his guest had against the hide, but he said nothing. It was his stick, his hide: his business.

A little later, Con-Guy hit the hide again with his stick, he even snapped at it:

"Keep our mouth shut, witch!"

The man was silent again.

Con-Guy hit the hide a third time and snapped even worse.

"What have you got against that hide?" our man asked.

Con-Guy first raised his shoulders, then avoided an answer, then he prayed forgiveness that he was not allowed to tell.

"Well," he finally began to talk, "this thing looks like a hide, but, the way you see it, it's not a hide, it's a prophet, who knows all the unknown things and is always trying to tell things that shouldn't be told."

"And what is he trying to say?" the man asked in amazement.

"Here," Con-Guy said and he put his ear against the hide. "Miracle! He says go look under the pillow and you'll find brandy."

The man looked and he found.

"Great miracle! Who put it there?"

"It's a secret!" Con-Guy answered, "no one is supposed to know that."

"And what else if the prophet saying?"

"He tells you to go to the oven and you'll find a roast piglet," Con-Guy said, after putting his ear against the hide again.

"Look at that, ain't that strange? And what else is the prophet saying?"

"Look under the bed, and you'll find wine."

And so on, until they revealed the ribs and the pie, and so the table was a darling to see, and sit down at, and eat.

The man wondered, the wife wondered even harder, the whole village would have wondered; only Con-Guy didn't wonder, because he knew the merchandise and what it could do.

"Well, well!" he kept saying, "this guy here is a real prophet, no kidding, he'll even find the mole in the ground for you!"

True or not, the thing is Con-Guy got a meal worthy of a Turkish sultan, so rich that he could barely walk now.

"It's good to have such a prophet!" the man said to his wife after he got stuffed, too. "Would you sell it?"

"God, no!" answered Con-Guy. "How could I sell such a precious thing? How?"

"What if I give you a good price?"

"Listen to him! A good price? Such a prophet is priceless."

As he wished to eat well and always know what was going on in his house, our man began to bargain with Con-Guy. At first he offered a bag of gold coins, then two bags, then three, and so on, until they reached seven bags, which is good money, even for a wealthier man than Con-Guy.

"Well, since, the way I see it, you want so badly to buy my prophet," Con-Guy said, beginning to come around, "I'll do as you wish, not for the money, but because you let me into your house, you asked me to dinner, and you said friendly words to me. I hope it brings you good luck."

Thus spoke Con-Guy, and he gave the heifer hide to the man, to take the seven bags of gold coins, good money, even for a wealthier man than Con-Guy.

And there was no man in this world happier than that wife's man, because from now on he would be able to know everything that went on in his house and eat well, at the same time.

And Con-Guy, after he sold his hide and hid the money well, went to sleep, because tomorrow he had a long way to walk back to his village.

Next day Con-Guy said good-by and went back home.

And as he walked down the road, feeling so loaded with money as he had never been before in his entire life, he really made up his mind that from

now on he was never going to move again, not to the right or to the left, he would only go straight, forget all lies, never again try to con others into doing what was useful to himself, no! no! no! now he'd be a decent man like all others who want to be straight, get settled, and become the foremost men of their village.

If only it hadn't been for that hard-working woman!

Poor woman, she was restless and she felt as though the house was falling down on her head when she thought about the prophet she was supposed to take care of. Not because, the Lord forbid, that! But women get cold feet and they don't exactly feel comfortable when they have things like Con-Guy's hide around.

So she pulled whatever strings and she sent her husband to the forest again, then, when she was alone, as she was such a hard-working woman, she took her pitch fork and began to follow Con-Guy, she hurried, she ran to catch up with him, and ask him what she could do to make the hide be just a hide like all hides and to take away from it that prophecy gift.

As for Con-Guy, well, what could he do? Man stays away from loss, never from gain: he took another seven bags from the woman and he told her all she had to do was pour on the hide hot water from the source, run through a thick sift, and he went on his way as if nothing had happened.

"Now I'll really settle down, I'll even get to be chief in my village!" he said when he got home.

And he did it.

God! He built himself a beautiful house, so beautiful that there wasn't any other house like his in the whole village, it had a huge porch on pillars, he bought lands, a wagon with four oxen, a riding horse, a milk cow, breeding sheep; finally, everything that has to be there at the house of a wealthy man, everything was now in Con-Guy's house.

And there was no man in that village more decent than Con-Guy.

If only the people in his village hadn't been so foolish!

Seeing Con-Guy build, buy, buy, and buy, always giving and never receiving, the neighborhood women began to whisper and the villagers thought maybe Con-Guy had a lot of money and most likely he found that money somewhere, he got it, or he took it from someone. The thing is they wanted to know where Con-Guy had gotten the money.

"Hey, Con-Guy," one of the men asked him, "where did you get all that damned money, that you keep giving and never stop?"

Con-Guy was sitting on his house porch, his pipe in his mouth, and he was watching his four-oxen wagon entering his large, full yard.

"Where did I get all that money?" he answered. "Where, for God's sake, could I get it, I sold that estate, how else?"

"What estate, Con-Guy, you never had any estate?!"

"Really?! What about that heifer hide, ha? Wasn't it mine? That was all I had: I sold it and I took the money to make another fortune with it."

“All that money for a heifer hide?”

“Oh, man, get this through your thick head!” Con-Guy now said, because he didn’t want to lie anymore. “Don’t you understand that my heifer was a brooding heifer? If I had kept her, she would’ve calved a heifer and the heifer would’ve grown up and it would’ve become a cow, and I would’ve had two cows, and two cows would’ve calved two heifers and now there would be four cows, and from four you go to eight cows, from eight to sixteen, and in time you get to have an entire herd of cattle. This is the way you calculate when you go to the market to sell your merchandise. You don’t sell an entire fortune for nothing!”

The man nodded and all the men in Con-Guy’s village nodded, and they began to think hard.

They had brooding heifers, too. Why should Con-Guy be the only one to sell the hide for a high price? Why should they be more stupid than him? Why should they sell an entire fortune for nothing?

So they hurried, they killed their brooding heifers, they ate their meat as much as they could and they went to the market with the hides, to sell them the way Con-Guy had sold his.

Except it doesn’t always happen this way and not everybody is able to sell their merchandise like Con-Guy.

It was no good telling their customers that it was a brooding heifer hide, nobody wanted to pay the price they asked, so they came back home downhearted, alas!

They were downhearted, alas!, but alas for Con-Guy as well!

When they realized their loss plus the trick played on them, the men gathered again and talked, wondering what to do, what to pull, in order to get rid of Con-Guy, because there was no doubt now, he was going to mangle all of them if he stayed alive. “He’s gonna set fire to his house to make us do the same to ours,” one of the cautious men warned.

“He’s gonna break a leg, so we’ll break ours!” another said.

“He’s gonna jump into the well, so we’ll all jump after him!” they all cried.

There was no doubt about it, they had to get rid of him if they didn’t want to die, all of them, some ugly death.

But how could they get rid of him? That was the question.

Kill his oxen, his cow, his sheep, his riding horse, set his house on fire and chase him away from the village. That was possible. But who could guarantee he was never gonna come back?

They had to put out the light of his life; this was their only escape, to really get rid of him.

So they decided to kill Con-Guy; but they didn’t want to spill his blood and they didn’t want to murder a man directly, so they talked again and after a lot of debates they decided to throw him into the Danube, where the water was deepest, so he would never ever get out of there and see daylight again.

But what if Con-Guy escapes, even from the bottom of the Danube?
That's it! What if he could still get away?! What was gonna happen then?!

No doubt about it, they had to do whatever was in their power so as not to let Con-Guy get away, not in any form, never.

So they again talked and debated and after a lot of discussion they decided to put Con-Guy in a bag, to tie its mouth up very tight, then to tie the bag with Con-Guy in it to a millstone, because the millstone, round as it is, would sink to the deepest bottom of the Danube and it would take with it the bag carrying Con-Guy.

So, as they agreed, all the people in Con-Guy's village, young, old, everybody, they took the bag, the string for the bag mouth, the rope to tie the bag to the stone, they took the biggest millstone they found as far as three days' walking around, and they all went, young and old, everybody, to storm Con-Guy's house, take him, lift him, go with him, and never stop until he reached the bottom of the Danube.

Con-Guy was sitting on his house porch, his pipe in his mouth, and he was watching his four-oxen wagon entering his large, full yard – Con-Guy was sitting, his pipe in his mouth, and he was watching – when he suddenly saw the whole village, young and old, so many that they didn't have enough room in that large yard of his.

What could he do, poor man, what?!

All he could do was let them catch and tie him, if he didn't stay where he was before and the evil one made him go back to his home village, get settled down and stop lying. But man has one life to live and one death to die.

"So it looks like this is my fate," Con-Guy said, "to die in my home village as a decent man."

Because he couldn't get anymore decent than he already was; he felt that, too.

But still, he was kind of sorry he had to die now, when he had his own house, his four-oxen wagon, his large yard, and Con-Guy would've liked to get away without lying if possible, because he was determined to stop lying: but that couldn't be, because the people were without mercy and cunning.

So Con-Guy let them do it, he let them, he had no choice, they put him in the bag like he was a tomcat, they lifted him and took him to his death.

He was riding in front, the millstone was behind him, then came the foremost men in the village and then the entire village, young and old, at the end of the row, they went out of the large yard, passed through the village, and began crossing the sandy field straight to the big, deep Danube.

"Wait," cried the most cautious man in Con-Guy's village.

They all stopped, young and old, everybody.

"We forgot one thing," the cautious man said.

"What did we forget?"

“The stake, to look for the bottom of the Danube.”

“Right,” the men in Con-Guy’s village said, “we forgot the stake to look for the bottom of the Danube.”

Now they had Con-Guy: how could they throw him without knowing where they were going to throw him?

So they went back to the village, they looked for the longest of all stakes and only then they took Con-Guy to the Danube, the stake riding in front, then the bag with Con-Guy, the millstone, the foremost men in the village and then the entire village, young and old, everybody.

“Wait,” the cautious man cried again.

They stopped again.

“Let’s tie him to the millstone, so he won’t run away while we look for the bottom of the Danube!”

“Let’s tie him,” they all cried “so he won’t run away.”

So they tied Con-Guy to the huge stone, then they left to search with the stake, to find the deepest water in the Danube, to throw him there.

The most cautious man in Con-Guy’s village took the stake himself, hit the waters with it once, he thrust it as deeply as he could, but he couldn’t reach the bottom.

“Here,” he said, “the Danube has no bottom, we got to look for another place.”

“Right,” they all cried, “We must search for another place, where the Danube has a bottom.”

That was the only way to do it. The idea was that the millstone would roll and sink, hitting the bottom of the Danube: where could the stone stop if the Danube had no bottom?

So they all started out to look for the bottom of the Danube, so as not to throw him in an inappropriate place by any chance, and lose him now, when they had him caught and tied.

They had to know where the stone with the bag and with Con-Guy in it were going to stop.

And poor Con-Guy, he was left in the bag, tied to the millstone, the biggest the people in his village could find as far as three days’ walking around.

“Wait!” the cautious man cried.

They all stopped again.

What was happening?

As cautious people, they had to be very careful, to search thoroughly before throwing Con-Guy into the Danube.

Where should they throw him? Uphill, where the water comes from, or downhill, where the water goes?

Some said uphill was better, because there is more water there, since this is where the water comes from, and it wouldn’t be coming down if there wasn’t enough of it.

But others felt there was more water downhill, because that is where it all gathered, the water coming from uphill, and if they threw him uphill, as the water keeps coming and coming, and it goes on flowing and flowing, maybe Con-Guy would be left on land, get out of the bag and that would be such a calamity for them!

So they all gathered and talked, to make sure they weren't going to do anything stupid, and after a lot of discussion they agreed to look for a place as far downstream as possible, so all the water would gather above Con-Guy's head.

While the people in Con-Guy's village were out looking for the bottom of the Danube with their long stake, here came a cattle herdsman, who was taking a one thousand oxen strong herd to the market and as the herdsman walked along the bank, he finds the bag with Con-Guy in it, he wonders, as any man would wonder when he found such a thing in his way.

"Hey, how 'bout you," the herdsman asked, "how did you get into that bag and what are you doing in there?"

"I didn't get in," Con-Guy answered, "other people put me here."

"And why did they do that?"

"To throw me into the Danube."

"Why throw you into the Danube?"

"Oh, my, I'm just a poor sinner," Con-Guy answered, "because they want to make me chief and I don't wanna take it."

"And why don't you wanna take it?"

"Well!" Con-Guy said. "Because it's bad to be chief in this village."

"Why?"

"Because there are many wives here, and all the men go to work, and they don't come back for weeks, and the chief is left alone with the wives."

"And why don't you want to be alone with the wives?"

"Because there are very many of them, and they are all young and nimble like ants, and I can't control them."

When he heard this, the herdsman was more than amazed, because he would've been happy to be chief in a village like Con-Guy's.

"Oh, man, you are stupid!" he said. "A wiser man would take it with both hands."

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"A wiser man is wiser and he can do what the fool can't," Con-Guy answered. "Come on, if you feel tough enough, get into this bag and, when you see them trying to throw you into the Danube, tell them you accept to be their chief."

"And do you think they'll want me?"

"More than anybody else!" Con-Guy answered. "Both hands!"

That was enough for the herdsman, who wasn't afraid of the wives in Con-Guy's village.

He untied the bag to let Con-Guy out, then he got into the bag.

Con-Guy took a breath of relief, closed the bag mouth, fastened it, then he walked away, he only stopped at the oxen herd, which he drove home, into his large yard, where there was room for all of them.

And the herdsman in the bag was laughing at him, thinking how he was going to cheat the fools in Con-Guy's village, who didn't know, poor souls, that the bag no longer contained a fool like them.

But he laughed most of all when he felt they lifted him to take him and throw him into the Danube in the deepest spot they had found. Only when he felt they were driving him off to throw him, only then he cried out as loudly as he could:

"Wait!"

They all stopped, in panic and amazement, because they understood, too, that the voice coming from the bag was not Con-Guy's.

"Let me go," the herdsman spoke, "I accept to be your chief."

"Listen to that," cried the most cautious man of Con-Guy's village, who was also chief of the village, "he's changing his voice so we won't recognize him, and he wants to be our chief on top of all, don't be surprised now if he tells us he's not Con-Guy!"

"No, I'm not!" the herdsman answered.

When they heard that, the people got angry real bad, because they had seen him with their own eyes being put into the bag and they had tied the bag mouth themselves, so, angry as they were, they all rushed on him, lifted him with the stone and one, two, three, go! they threw him into the Danube, so nobody, not the grandson of his grandson, would ever come to light again.

And, God! they felt so relieved when they saw it went right to the bottom of the Danube, that it never came back out, and that the water kept flowing on, from hill to valley, gathering on top of it.

And Con-Guy was sitting on his house porch, and he was watching his four-oxen wagon entering his large yard, full of beautiful cattle.

"Wait!" cried the cautious man. "Wait!" he said again.

"Hey, wait!" cried all the people of Con-Guy's village when their eyes saw what their mind couldn't understand, and they all stopped, frozen.

"How did you get here?" the village chief asked.

"Right," they all said, "how did you get here?"

"Big deal!" answered Con-Guy. "How could I get here if not like you, coming from there to here?!"

"But you're dead! We threw you into the Danube!"

"No!" spoke Con-Guy. "The Danube water is cold and it makes you move even faster than before."

"Great miracle!" the people cried. "This one sure dies hard! You throw him tied to a stone to die in the Danube and he comes back home faster than you do!"

"But where did you get all them beautiful cattle?" they asked.

“Where could I get them,” Con-Guy answered, “if not from the place where you, guys, left me?”

“But who gave them to you?”

“Give them to me? I took them: a man takes as much as he can and what he can’t carry, he leaves there for others.”

That was all the people in Con-Guy’s village needed! As they were all gathered at Con-Guy’s house, they all went back to the Danube and didn’t discuss anything this time, they jumped like frogs, one after another, into the waters, to take as many as possible, each of them, and their wives stayed on the bank, each waiting for her husband with a herd of cattle.

Of course, the priest was with them, and because priests are greedier than other people, he rushed faster than the others and jumped where the water was deepest, but his kamelaukion still floated above.

His wife, who stayed on the bank, greedy, too, when she saw the kamelaukion, thought the priest didn’t have enough guts to dive deeper and that other people would take all the cattle before he reached the bottom.

“Go deeper, father,” she cried, “deeper! The best, horned cattle are there!”

And the priest did go in deep, but he never came back, like all the others, who never came back, either.

So Con-Guy was left to be the most hard-working, the most decent, the foremost man in his village, because well! he was alone with the wives.

Whoever knows the sequel to this story, let him go and share it with others.

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