

Jack Hannaford



There was once a farmer and his wife. She had been married before, her first husband had died, and now she was married again. They lived on a remote farm in the West of England, and what a proper pair of fools they were! Which of them was the most foolish? Listen to the story and decide for yourself.

In those days, there also lived an old soldier called Jack Hannaford. The elbows of his coat were frayed, but nobody could take him for a fool. When he left the army, he roamed over the country looking for opportunities to practice his cunning. After he had rambled for some time, he came across the farm belonging to the pair. He rapped on the door of the house and was answered by the wife. She looked him up and down, quite astonished, because few strangers made it across the moors to such lonely place.

“And where have you come from?” she asked.

Jack rolled his eyes up to the bleak sky and replied, “Heaven.”

“Lord a’ mercy!” she exclaimed. “Did you see my old man there?” (meaning her first husband who had died).

“Oh yes, I knew him well when I was staying in Heaven,” said Jack.

“And how is he doing?” asked the good lady.

“So so,” replied the old soldier. “He works hard sewing and mending for the saints and angels, but even so he’s short of a few shillings to buy anything much to eat.”

“And did he have a message for me?” asked she.

“Why yes, that’s why I’ve come here. He asked me to fetch him some money so that he can spend his days in paradise more comfortably.”

Now the lady’s heart almost bled with pity for her first husband. “Why I shan’t deny him anything, for he’s a good man, bless his soul,” she said. She went to the chimney where the couple’s savings were kept hidden. She pulled down a full ten pounds, which in those days was a very decent sum of money. She handed the lot over to the old soldier and told him to hurry up and give it to her husband.

“That I will,” he assured her, “as soon as I make my way back up to Heaven.”

When the farmer returned, the good woman told him all about how a messenger had come from Heaven asking for money for her first husband who had died, and was hard up in the life ever after.

“Why you fool!” cried the farmer. “How could you believe such a fantastic story?”

“Well you’re a bigger fool,” said the woman, “because you told me where the money was hidden.”

The husband did not quite see the reason in this, but he hurried off on his horse to try and find the old soldier before he got too far down the road.

Jack Hannaford heard the clattering of hooves behind him, and thought it likely that the farmer was after him and the money. He knelt by the side of the road, shaded his eyes with one hand, and pointed up to the sky with the other.

The farmer soon caught up with him and asked: "What you be doing there by the side of the road, shading your gaze, and pointing up the sky?"

"Lord Save Me!" said the man. "That's a wonderful sight."

"What kind of wonder?" asked the farmer.

"A man walking straight up to Heaven on a rainbow, just as if it were a road."

The farmer gazed at the sky, but he could not see the amazing rainbow or the man walking on it.

"Here," said the soldier, "kneel down by the side of the road and look up like I'm doing."

"I will if you'll hold my horse," said the farmer, and he jumped down. As soon as he was lying on the ground, the soldier leapt onto the horse and rode off.

Now who do you think was the bigger fool, the farmer or his wife? Bertie says that in a competition, it would be a photo finish.