

"Man in a Hat"

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Once when I was hiking high up in the Siskiyou mountains I met an ornery old black bird who pestered me for days. It would hover over me at the most obnoxious times and ridicule me in perfect English. "If you had wings like civilized folks, you wouldn't be so slow and ungraceful." I had always wished I could fly like a bird, envious to the graceful swooping and gliding high above the earth, unrestricted by rivers and mountains. I began to hate this bird. I plotted.

Then one day I captured the bird in a blanket and put him in a gunny sack. The bird continued taunting me "What do you think you can do to me? Nothing! You can't kill me, you can't harm me, you are weak and foolish man." I became angry and struck the bird with a large stone. Believing that the bird was dead, I started to bury it. "So, you think I would accommodate you by passing on so easily? I think not! Clumsy man!" Quickly I stuffed the bird back into the gunny sack and stitched it closed. The bird laughed at me "Ha Ha Ha, you can not hurt me and you can not kill me. What will you do with me, silly man? Nothing, that's what!" I place the bag into the hole and started filling it in. As the dirt hit the bag, the bird spoke with much less confidence "what are you doing? Don't bury me, kind man, I would have to wait a long time to get out and I would get so lonely." I thought for a while and then continued to fill the hole. "Stop, wait, I will promise I will leave you alone. I can tell you a secret that will help you with your journey." I brushed away a little dirt off of the bag and said to the bird "How is it that you speak and do it so well?" The bird replied "I laid trapped beneath the earth from the time I was barely a hatchling. A trap set by evil one's swallowed me up and held me trapped in the ground. All alone. Scared. Doomed. Then one day I was found by a person with great strength and skill. Him and others with him set me free and

taught me to speak. Now I work with him to help all the children. He sent me to find you." I pondered what the bird said and I decided that he was telling the truth. "Tell me of your master, the teacher" letting the repentant creature loose. Shaking himself free then fluttering onto a rock, carefully taking a stance. The bird lifted its wing and rolled up both eyes, throwing back its head in a dignified and theatrical fashion began to orate:

"There was an old man who wore an old hat
who walked with a limp
and moved like a cat.

A long dusty coat
that dropped past his knees
tall stiffened collar
that stopped any breeze

Gleam in his eye
scowl for a grin
single tooth smile
and a smudge on his chin

stretching for the sky
with staff in his hand
untied boots
leaving tracks in the sand

'Where the children are
I will go,
Where I have been
not many should know,

To follow the dream
to work for the goal
is to walk in the stream
and make for the shore
calling the children
with a voice that will roar."

He trudged over hill
and passed out of sight
down went the sun
and soon it was night

A Champion of children
I'm telling you
won't tell you the name
but it starts with a Q"

The bird turned his back and shouted to me
"Follow! Follow me!"

So I did.