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THE DAY IT SNOWED TORTILLAS

The Day It Snowed Tortillas by Joe Hayes *A Mexican American Folktale*

Here is a story about a poor woodcutter. He was very good at his work. He could swing his ax powerfully and cut down big trees. He would split them up into firewood to sell in the village. He made a good living.



But the poor man was not well educated. He couldn't read or write. He wasn't very bright either. He was always doing foolish things and getting himself into trouble. But he was lucky. He had a very clever wife, and she would get him out of the trouble his foolishness got him into.

One day he worked far off in the mountains, and when he started home at the end of the day, he saw three leather bags by the side of the trail. He picked up the first bag and discovered that it was full of gold coins! He looked into the second. It was full of gold too. And so was the third.

He loaded the bags onto his donkey and took them home to show to his wife. She was aghast. "Don't tell anyone you found this gold!" she warned him. "It must belong to some robbers who have hidden it out in the mountains. If they find out we have it, they'll kill us to get it back!" But then she thought: *My husband can never keep a secret. What shall I do?*

She came up with a plan. She told her husband, "Before you do anything else, go into the village and get me a sack of flour. I need a big sack. Bring me a hundred pounds of flour."

The man went off to the village grumbling to himself, "All day I work in the mountains, and now I have to drag home a hundred pounds of flour. I'm tired of all this work." But he bought the flour and brought it home to his wife.

"Thank you," she told him. "You've been working awfully hard. Why don't you go lie down for a while?"

He liked that idea. He lay down on the bed and soon fell fast asleep.

As soon as he began to snore, his wife went to work. She began to make tortillas. She made batch after batch of tortillas. She made them until the

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stack reached clear up to the ceiling in the kitchen. She turned that whole hundred pounds of flour into tortillas. Then she took them outside and threw them all over the ground.

The woodcutter was so tired he slept all that evening and on through the night. He didn't wake up until morning. When he awoke, he stepped outside and saw that the ground was covered with tortillas. He called to his wife. "What's the meaning of this?" he asked.

His wife joined him at the door. "Oh, my goodness!" she said. "It must have snowed tortillas last night!"

"Snowed tortillas? I've never heard of such a thing."

"What? You've never heard of it snowing tortillas? Well! You're not very well educated. You'd better go to school and learn something."

She packed him a lunch and dressed him up in his Sunday suit and made him go off to school.

He didn't know how to read or write, so they put him in the first grade. He had to squeeze into one of the little chairs the children sat in. The teacher asked questions and the children raised their hands enthusiastically. He didn't know the answers to any of those questions. He grew more and more embarrassed.

Finally, he couldn't stand it any longer. He stomped out of the school and hurried home. He picked up his ax and said to his wife, "I've had enough education. I'm going to go cut firewood."

"Fine," she called after him. "You go do your work."

About a week later, just as the woman had suspected, the robbers showed up at the house one day. "Where is that gold your husband found?" they demanded.

The wife acted innocent. "Gold?" she said and shook her head. "I don't know anything about any gold."

"Come on!" the robbers said. "Your husband's been telling everyone in the village he found three sacks of gold. They belong to us. You'd better give them back."

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She looked disgusted. "Did my husband say *that*? Oh, that man! He says the strangest things! I sure don't know anything about your gold."

"We'll find out," the robbers said. "We'll wait here until he comes home." And they stayed around the house all day long—sharpening their knives and cleaning their pistols.

Toward evening the woodcutter came up the trail with his donkey. The robbers ran out and grabbed him roughly and demanded, "Where's that gold you found?"

The woodcutter scratched his head. "Gold?" he mumbled. "Oh, yes, now I remember. My wife hid it." He called out, "Wife, what did you do with that gold?"

His wife sounded puzzled. "I don't know what you're talking about. I don't know anything about any gold."

"Sure you do. Don't you remember? It was just the day before it snowed tortillas. I came home with three bags of gold. And in the morning you sent me to school."

The robbers looked at one another. "Did he say, 'snowed tortillas'?" they whispered. "And that his wife makes him go to school?" They shook their heads in dismay. "Why did we waste our time with this fool? He's out of his head!"

And the robbers went away thinking the woodcutter was crazy and that everything he said was nonsense.

From that day on, it didn't really matter whether the man was well educated or clever. It didn't even matter if he was a good woodcutter. He was a rich man! He and his wife had three sacks of gold all to themselves. And the robbers never came back.

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