

The Bell of Atri | Texto Completo

In the old Italian town of Atri, the King bought a fine, large bell and hung it in the marketplace tower. A long rope that reached the ground was attached to the bell. The smallest child could ring the bell by pulling the rope. "It shall be the Bell of Justice," said the King. The bell gave the people of Atri cause for a great holiday. Everyone came to the marketplace to admire the Bell of Justice. "Perhaps the King will ring it," said the people, waiting to see what the King would do.

But The King did not ring the bell; he stopped and raised his hand. "My people", he said, "this bell is yours, but you must never use it except in times of need. When it rings, the judges shall come together at once, hear the case, and give justice. Rich and poor, young and old, it doesn't matter, all will be judged equally." Many times, through the years, the bell in the marketplace called the judges. Many troubles were corrected, and criminals answered for their crimes.

As time passed, the thick rope grew so thin and short that only a tall man could reach it. "This will never do," said the judges one day. "What if a child should find himself in trouble?" The judges gave orders that a new rope should be hung down to the ground. But no lengthy rope could be found in all of Atri. They sent across the mountains for one, but it would be weeks before it arrived. What if some great trouble should happen before it came?

"Let me fix it for you," said a man nearby. He ran into his garden and came back with a strong vine. "This will do for a rope," he said, climbing the bell tower to tie the vine to the bell. The vine easily reached the ground. "Yes," said the judges, "that will do." On the hills above the village, there lived a man who had once been a Knight, visiting foreign lands and waging battles. His companion through all that time was his Loyal Horse.

As the Knight grew older, he sought only gold. He sold all that he had, except his Loyal Horse. Day after day, he sat in his little house among his moneybags and planned how he might get more gold. Day after day, the Loyal Horse stood outside the Knight's house, starving and teeth

chattering from the cold. "What is the use of keeping an old horse that can't work?" the mean old Knight said to himself one morning. "I will turn him out to fend for himself. If he dies of starvation, good riddance."

So, the brave, old horse was turned out among the rocks on the empty hills. He limped weakly, nibbling at rare blades of grass. One hot afternoon, the Loyal Horse happened to walk into the deserted marketplace, and he saw the long plant rope that hung from the Bell of Justice. The leaves upon it were still fresh and green. What a satisfying dinner they would be for a starving horse! He stretched his thin neck, tugging at a delicious leaf, and the great bell above him began to ring, which all the people in Atri heard.

The bell seemed to say, "Someone has done me wrong! Oh, come and judge my case!" The judges donned their official robes and went through the marketplace. When they passed through the gate, they saw the old horse eating the plant. "Ha!" cried one, "it is the mean old Knight's Loyal Horse. Everybody knows the Knight mistreats him. He shall have justice!" said another citizen.

Meanwhile, a crowd came into the marketplace, eager to hear a trial. The Loyal Horse left them awestruck. All the citizens could testify to how they saw the old Knight neglecting his Loyal Horse and counting his bags of gold instead. "Go bring the old Knight before us," said the judges. When the Knight came, the judges gave their judgment. "This Loyal Horse has served you well for many years," they said. "He has saved you from danger and helped you become wealthy; therefore, we order that one half of all your gold be set aside for your Loyal Horse. With the money, we can buy a green field for your Loyal Horse to graze in and a warm stable to comfort him in his old age." The mean old Knight hung his head, angry to have lost his gold, but the people shouted with joy. The Loyal Horse was led to his new stable and had a dinner fit for a brave and Loyal Horse.