

Mrs Frances Harris's Petition

Jonathan Swift

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To their Excellencies the Lords Justices of Ireland,
The humble petition of Frances Harris,
Who must starve and die a maid if it miscarries;
Humble sheweth, that I went to warm myself in Lady Betty's chamber, because I
was cold;
And I had in a purse seven pounds, four shillings, and sixpence, (besides
farthings) in money and gold;
So because I had been buying things for my lady last night,
I was resolved to tell my money, to see if it was right.
Now, you must know, because my trunk has a very bad lock,
Therefore all the money I have, which, God knows, is a very small stock,
I keep in my pocket, tied about my middle, next my smock.
So when I went to put up my purse, as God would have it, my smock was unripped,
And instead of putting it into my pocket, down it slipped;
Then the bell rung, and I went down to put my lady to bed;
And, God knows, I thought my money was as safe as my maidenhead.
So, when I came up again, I found my pocket feel very light;
But when I searched, and missed my purse, Lord! I thought I should have sunk
outright.
"Lord! madam," says Mary, "how d'ye do?" "Indeed," says I, "never worse:
But pray, Mary, can you tell what I have done with my purse?"
"Lord help me!" says Mary, "I never stirred out of this place!"
"Nay," said I, "I had it in Lady Betty's chamber, that's a plain case."
So Mary got me to bed, and covered me up warm:
However, she stole away my garters, that I might do myself no harm.
So I tumbled and tossed all night, as you may very well think,
But hardly ever set my eyes together, or slept a wink.
So I was a-dreamed, methought, that I went and searched the folks round,
And in a corner of Mrs Duke's box, tied in a rag, the money was found.
So next morning we told Whittle, and he fell a swearing:
Then my dame Wadgar came, and she, you know, is thick of hearing.
"Dame," says I, as loud as I could bawl, "do you know what a loss I have had?"
"Nay," says she, "my Lord Colway's folks are all very sad:
For my Lord Dromedary comes a Tuesday without fail."
"Pugh!" said I, "but that's not the business that I ail."
Says Cary, says he, "I have been a servant this five and twenty years come
spring,
And in all the places I lived I never heard of such a thing."
"Yes," says the steward, "I remember when I was at my Lord Shrewsbury's,
Such a thing as this happened, just about the time of gooseberries."

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So I went to the party suspected, and I found her full of grief:
(Now, you must know, of all things in the world I hate a thief:)
However, I was resolved to bring the discourse slyly about:
"Mrs Duke," said I, "here's an ugly accident has happened out:
'Tis not that I value the money three skips of a louse:
But the thing I stand upon is the credit of the house.
'Tis true, seven pounds, four shillings, and sixpence makes a great hole in my
wages:
Besides, as they say, service is no inheritance in these ages.
Now, Mrs Duke, you know, and everybody understands,
That though 'tis hard to judge, yet money can't go without hands."
"The devil take me!" said she, (blessing herself,) "if ever I saw't!"
So she roared like a bedlam, as though I had called her all to naught.
So, you know, what could I say to her any more?
I e'en left her, and came away as wise as I was before.
Well; but then they would have had me gone to the cunning man:
"No," said I, "'tis the same thing, the CHAPLAIN will be here anon."
So the Chaplain came in. Now the servants say he is my sweetheart,
Because he's always in my chamber, and I always take his part.
So, as the devil would have it, before I was aware, out I blundered,
"Parson," said I, "can you cast a nativity, when a body's plundered?"
(Now you must know, he hates to be called Parson, like the devil!)
"Truly," says he, "Mrs Nab, it might become you to be more civil;
If your money be gone, as a learned Divine says, d'ye see,
You are no text for my handling; so take that from me:
I was never taken for a Conjurer before, I'd have you to know."
"Lord!" said I, "don't be angry, I am sure I never thought you so;
You know I honour the cloth; I design to be a Parson's wife;
I never took one in your coat for a conjurer in all my life."
With that he twisted his girdle at me like a rope, as who should say,
'Now you may go hang yourself for me!' and so went away.
Well: I thought I should have swooned. "Lord!" said I, "what shall I do?
I have lost my money, and shall lose my true love too!"
Then my lord called me: "Harry," said my lord, "don't cry;
I'll give you something toward thy loss: "And," says my lady, "so will I."
Oh! but, said I, what if, after all, the Chaplain won't come to?
For that, he said (an't please your Excellencies), I must petition you.
The premisses tenderly considered, I desire your Excellencies' protection,
And that I may have a share in next Sunday's collection;
And, over and above, that I may have your Excellencies' letter,
With an order for the Chaplain aforesaid, or, instead of him, a better:
And then your poor petitioner, both night and day,
Or the Chaplain (for 'tis his trade,) as in duty bound, shall ever pray.