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A MAN OF AN ASS

Illustrated by P.S. Rau
Once there was a Maulvi in a village. He had started a school in his own house. Many children of the village came to the school. There were several bright children in it but there were some not so bright as well. One day the Maulvi was very angry with some of his students. He shouted at them. "Do you know who I am? I have made men out of asses and I know well how to do that."

At that time a washerman was passing by the Maulvi’s house. He peeped into the class just when the Maulvi was boasting. The washerman heard what the Maulvi said.
The washerman had no children but he had many asses. He ran home to his wife and asked her, "Did you know?"

His wife replied, "How could I know if you did not tell me."

"The Maulvi can make men out of asses," said the washerman. "I heard him say so with my own ears."

"How wonderful!" his wife said. "We have no children. Why not have one of our asses made into a man?"

"That is it," said the washerman. "that is why I ran home to tell you this. We will take our best ass, Moti, to the Maulvi and request him to change him into a man."
Next morning the washerman went to the Maulvi, saluted him and said, "Maulvi Saheb, I have no sons. But I have many asses. Will you change my best ass into a man? It will be of great help to me and to my wife."

The Maulvi was taken aback. "What are you saying?" he asked. "Can an ass ever be made into a man?"

"Don’t say that, Maulvi Saheb," said the washerman. "I know you want to put me off. I know very well that you can do it. Please do help us."

The Maulvi tried to convince him that his request was an impossible one. But the washerman would not change his opinion. The Maulvi concluded that the washerman was a fool and he decided to treat him like one.
The Maulvi then said, "Listen, my friend. I don't do this kind of thing now, but your case is a special one. I shall take your Moti and change him into a man. But, changing an ass into a man takes time and money."

"How much will it cost, Maulvi Saheb?" the washerman asked eagerly.

"Oh, it will cost Rs.200 and take six months," said the Maulvi.

"Thank you, Maulvi Saheb," said the washerman. "I shall come with the money and the ass tomorrow."

The washerman hurried home to tell his wife about the clever bargain he had made. His wife was very happy that at
last they were going to have a son at home. They had saved enough and they could spare Rs. 200 for this. They did not want other people to know of the great miracle that was going to happen in their home.

The washerman took the ass and the money to the Maulvi next day and said, “Maulvi Saheb, here is your fees. Please make my Moti into a man.”

The Maulvi took the money and asked the washerman to tie up the ass to a tree in his courtyard. “This is a beautiful ass,” he said, “and I am sure the man made out of him will be a great man. Now you can go. Come after six months.”
After the washerman left, the Maulvi asked one of his pupils to drive the ass far away into the jungle and leave it there.

Six months passed. The washerman went to the Maulvi with all hopes.

“My dear fellow, where have you been all this time?” the Maulvi enquired. “Your ass has become a learned man. He is now the Kazi of Varanasi. You better go there and see him.”

“Will he recognise me when I meet him?” asked the washerman.

“Of course, he will,” said the Maulvi. “But to make sure, you should take the gunny bag you used to feed him from. He will not forget the bag even if he has forgotten you.”
The washerman went home and told his wife the whole story. They were happy that Moti was now a Government Officer. They wished to see him as soon as possible. The washerman decided to go to Varanasi immediately and bring Moti home.

Early next morning he set out on his journey.

In Varanasi, the Kazi was holding court when the washerman reached there. From a distance he saw the Kazi and was much impressed. ‘What a clever man the Maulvi is!’ He has changed Moti into such a great Kazi. So smart, learned and good-looking!’ He waited for an opportunity to be seen by the Kazi. He moved to various positions and smiled and waved at the Kazi. But the Kazi was very busy and did not take any notice of him. Then he remembered what the Maulvi had said about the feeding bag.
The Kazi stopped writing and lifted his face from the desk. The washerman held up the feeding bag and smiled at him. He did this whenever the Kazi looked in his direction.

The Kazi saw what the washerman was doing. He became curious and sent for the man. The washerman was pleased and said to himself, ‘At last the fool has recognised me.’

The Kazi asked him why he was there and what he wanted. The washerman felt hurt and shouted at the Kazi, “You don’t know me, your own master? You ungrateful ass!” So saying he waved the feeding bag again and asked the Kazi, “Look at this. You don’t recognise this bag from which you ate your corn everyday? Because the Maulvi has made you a man, you have forgotten your past! Come, Moti, let us go home. My wife is waiting for you.”
The Kazi thought that all was not well with the man and tried to talk to him with sympathy. But this only made the washerman more impatient and angry.

So the Kazi ordered the courtiers to drive him out. The washerman went away shouting, "What an ungrateful ass he is! I made a mistake in making him a man. He was an ass and he should have remained one. Is this justice of the land? I shall show him what I am."
The washerman returned home and went straight to the Maulvi. He told the Maulvi the whole story. "Look what he has done to me after all that I have done for him. Please, Maulvi Saheb, please change him back into an ass. Take whatever fees you want. I must teach him a lesson."

The Maulvi laughed to himself. He demanded another Rs. 200 for changing the Kazi into an ass again. The washerman promised to come within a week with the money.
A week later the washerman went to the Maulvi's house with the money. In the meantime the Maulvi had brought Moti back from the jungle and tied it up in the courtyard of his house.

The washerman recognised him immediately.

"Do you now know who I am?" the washerman asked the ass. "You did not recognise me when I came to you. Now you will." So saying he rode home Moti, beating him all the way.