



Full Text

SAGACIOUS MARCELLA Our story for today comes from the book *Philippine Popular Tales* by Dean S. Fansler, to be read by Juan Lorenzo Flojo. The story was originally told in English by Lorenzo Licup from Pampanga.

Long, long before the Spaniards came, there lived a man who had a beautiful, virtuous, and, above all, clever daughter. He was a servant of the king. Marcela, the daughter, loved her father devotedly, and always helped him with his work. From

childhood she had manifested a keen wit and undaunted spirit. She would even refuse to obey unjust orders from the king. No question was too hard for her to answer, and the king was constantly being surprised at her sagacity.

One day the king conceived a plan by which he might test the ingenious Marcela. He bade his servants procure a tiny bird and carry it to her house. “Tell her,” said the king, “to make twelve dishes out of that one bird.”

The servants found Marcela sewing. They told her of the order of the king. After thinking for five minutes, she took one of her pins, and said to the servants, “If the king can make twelve spoons out of this pin, I can also make twelve dishes out of that bird.” On receiving the answer, the king realized that the wise Marcela had gotten the better of him; and he began to think of another plan to puzzle her.

Again he bade his servants carry a sheep to Marcela’s house. “Tell her,” he said, “to sell the sheep for six reales, and with the money this very same sheep must come back to me alive.”

At first Marcela could not make out what the king meant for her to do. Then she thought of selling the wool only, and not the whole sheep. So, she cut off the wool

and sold it for six reales, and sent the money with the live sheep back to the king. Thus, she was again relieved from a difficulty.

The king by this time realized that he could not beat Marcela in points of subtlety. However, to amuse himself, he finally thought of one more scheme to test her sagacity. It took him two weeks to think it out. Summoning a messenger, he said to him, "Go to Marcela, and tell her that I am not well, and that my physician has advised me to drink a cup of bull's milk. Therefore, she must get me this medicine, or her father will lose his place in the palace."

The king also issued an order that no one was to bathe or to wash anything in the river, for he was going to take a bath the next morning.

As soon as Marcela had received the command of the king and had heard of his second order, she said, "How easy it will be for me to answer this silly order of the king!" That night she and her father killed a pig, and smeared its blood over the sleeping-mat, blanket, and pillows. When morning came, Marcela took the stained bed-clothing to the source of the river, where the king was bathing. As soon as the king caught sight of her, he said in a voice of thunder, "Why do you wash your stuff in the river when you know I ordered that nobody should use the river today but me?"

Marcela replied, "It is the custom, my lord, in our country, to wash the mat, pillows, and other things stained with blood, immediately after a person has given birth to a child. As my father gave birth to a child last night, custom forces me to disobey your order, although I do it much against my will."

"Nonsense!" said the king. "The idea of a man giving birth to a child! Absurd! Ridiculous!"

"My lord," said Marcela, "it would be just as absurd to think of getting milk from a bull."

Then the king, recollecting his order, said, "Marcela, as you are so witty, clever, and virtuous, I will give you my son for your husband."

Source: Dean S. Fansler, Filipino Popular Tales. Lancaster, P.A. and New York: American Folklore Society and G. E. Stechert and Co., 1921. Available from Project Gutenberg.

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