

A SINGLE SPECKLED EGG

By Sonia Levitin

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IN A FARAWAY VILLAGE carved into a mountainside lived three farmers, Abel, Nagel and Zeke. When their work was done they walked home through their fields together. And while they walked they worried. They worried together so well that they talked about little else.

One afternoon Abel sighed, "My best hen laid only a single speckled egg today. What could be the matter with that hen?"

Said Nagel, "Your hen might stop laying altogether. And a speckled egg, you know, is bad luck."

"Bad luck," said Zeke, "could only mean that your whole hen house will burn down. Then what will you do? You will have to sell your farm!"

They worried and worried about poor Abel, who would have to sell his farm.

At home Abel wept to his wife, "My best hen laid only a single speckled egg today. We are going to be ruined!"

"Nonsense," said the wife, bringing Abel his supper. "Do not worry about such a little thing!"

"A speckled egg is not a little thing," wailed Abel. "It is bad luck. Next the hen house will burn down, and I will have to sell the farm."

Abel worried until he fell asleep in his chair without eating his super.

The next afternoon Nagel groaned, "My spotted cow kicked over a bucket of milk today. The bucket hit me on the leg. Oh, pain! Oh, misery!"

"By tomorrow your leg might be swollen," said Abel. "You could be lame for weeks."

"You might be in bed for months," cried Zeke. "Then who will tend your fields? You will have to sell your farm!"

They worried and worried about poor Nagel, who would have to sell his farm.

At home Nagel moaned to his wife, "My spotted cow kicked over the milk bucket, which hit me on the leg. We are going to be ruined!"

"Your leg will be better by tomorrow," said the wife.

"By tomorrow I will be lame," groaned Nagel. "With a lame leg I cannot work. I will have to sell the farm."

Nagel worried all night and did not sleep a wink.

The next afternoon Zeke shouted, "My horse ate mustard weed today and got a stomachache. He would not let me hitch him to the plow."

Said Abel, "Mustard weed can poison a horse. It might be sick for weeks."

Said Nagel, "That horse is as good as dead. What use is a farmer without a horse? You will have to sell your farm!"

They worried and worried about poor Zeke, who would have to sell his farm.

At home Zeke shouted to his wife, "My horse ate mustard weed and got a stomachache. We are going to be ruined!"

"By tomorrow," said the wife, "The horse will be fine."

"By tomorrow that horse might be dead!" screamed Zeke.

"I will have to sell the farm."

Zeke was so angry that he went out to sleep in the woodshed.

The next day the wives of Abel, Nagel and Zeke met at the well. They talked about their husbands, but they could not think of a way to make them stop worrying. Finally they decided, "Let us go down the mountain to see the Teacher. He will tell us what to do."

That very day they went down the mountain to the home of the Teacher. They waited in a long line for a long time. At last they stood before the Teacher and explained their problem. When they had finished, the Teacher sighed and stroked his beard. He closed his eyes, thinking long and hard. Then he spoke.

"Your husbands can find no peace," he said, "with such great worries on their minds."

The three wives nodded and said, "It is true."

The Teacher continued. "A worry can be as heavy as a sack full of stones. No man can carry it alone. You must help your husbands to carry their worries."

“How can we do that?” asked the wives.

The Teacher replied, “You must learn to worry even better than your husbands. If they weep, you must weep harder. If they groan, you must groan longer. If they shout, you must shout louder. And if your husbands say that terrible things will happen, you must believe them.”

“Our husbands say they must sell the farms!” cried the wives.

“Then let it be so,” said the Teacher.

The three wives bowed low before the Teacher. He was the wisest of all wise men. But all the way home they wondered how the Teacher’s advice could help them.

THE NEXT DAY Abel came home weeping. “My best hen laid only a single speckled egg again today. We are going to be ruined!”

Abel’s wife sank down at his feet, weeping and wailing. “Oh! Oh! A speckled egg is bad luck. The hen house will burn down. At least let us save our poor chickens. Hurry! We must bring them into the house.”

In came the chickens, flapping and fluttering. They cackled. They screeched. Roosters fought and feathers flew. Hens roosted on the rafters, on the table, and even on the bedposts. During the night an egg dropped down on Abel’s head.

In the morning Abel’s wife said, “The hen house might still burn down. I will go to town and let it be known that we are selling the farm.”

Abel said nothing. He took the chickens back to the hen house and went about his chores.

That afternoon Nagel came home moaning, “My spotted cow kicked over the milk bucket again today. The bucket hit me on the leg. We are going to be ruined!”

Nagel’s wife bent over groaning. “Woe and misery! You might never walk again. We will have to sell the farm! At least let me try to ease your pain.”

She gave him horrible-tasting medicine. She soaked a cloth in hot water and vinegar and bandaged Nagel’s leg. To keep the leg raised high, she tied it with a rope to the rafters. Nagel could not sleep from the bitter taste in his mouth, the bad smell in his nose, and his leg tied to the ceiling.

In the morning Nagel’s wife said, “Your leg might still get worse. I will go to town and let it be known that we are selling the farm.”

Nagel said nothing. He untied the rope, took off the bandage and went about his chores.

That afternoon Zeke came home shouting, "My horse is sick again from eating mustard weed. We are going to be ruined!"

Zeke's wife began to shout and scream. "The horse will die! You will never plow again. We will have to sell the farm. At least let us help the poor horse in his suffering. We must stay with him out in the barn."

Zeke and his wife went out to the barn and laid the horse down in its stall. They fed it corn meal mash, rubbed its stomach and kept it warm. Then Zeke's wife sang to the horse a lullabye. The louder she sang the more the cows stamped and bellowed. Mice fled in all directions. The horse kicked so hard that the barn door flew open. Zeke had to make repairs.

In the morning Zeke's wife said, "The horse might still die. I will go to town and let it be known that we are selling the farm."

Zeke said nothing. He took the horse out into the field and went about his chores.

That afternoon when Abel, Nagel and Zeke returned to their homes, they were astounded. Crowds of people had gathered. Their shouts rang out over the mountainside. They had come to buy the farms.

"Go away!" shouted Abel. "My farm is not for sale."

Abel's wife said, "But your best hen lays only a single speckled egg. We might as well sell the farm."

"Leave us alone!" cried Nagel. "My farm is not for sale."

Nagel's wife said, "But your spotted cow kicks over the milk bucket which hits you on the leg. We ought to sell the farm."

"Out! Out!" roared Zeke. "My farm is not for sale."

Zeke's wife said, "But your horse gets sick from eating mustard weed. We had better sell the farm."

Abel, Nagel and Zeke called all the people together.

"You know how women are," said Abel. "They worry all the time."

"Let one little thing go wrong," said Nagel, "and right away they say we are going to be ruined."

"What nonsense," said Zeke. "Certainly, we are not going to sell our farms."

From then on, if Abel's hen laid a single speckled egg, Abel said tenderly, "Look at the pretty egg my dear hen gave me today."

When Nagel's cow kicked over the milk bucket which hit him on the leg, Nagel chuckled and said, "My spotted cow is feeling frisky today."

When Zeke's horse ate mustard weed Zeke said, "My horse has a good, strong stomach. Even mustard weed does not make him sick for long."

And nothing was ever said again about having to sell the farms.