

The milkmaid and her pail



This tale was first told by Aesop (pronounced 'eesop'), a Greek slave who lived over 2500 years ago and made up hundreds of stories. People passed on these stories to their children and grandchildren, but they were not written down until the nineteenth century.

There was once a poor farmer who had a daughter. This daughter was always day-dreaming.

"Your head is in the clouds," scolded the farmer. "It is time you learned to milk the cows."

The farmer's daughter did not want to be a milkmaid. Instead, she wanted to become rich. When she had finished milking the cows, she put the pail of milk on her head and set off to the dairy, musing to herself as she walked.

"The milk in this pail will provide me with cream," she reasoned, "and from the cream I shall make butter. Then I shall sell the butter. With the money from the sale of the butter, I shall buy eggs. When the eggs hatch, they will produce chickens. My chickens will lay more eggs. Before long I shall have a whole yard full of poultry. Then I shall sell some hens. With the money I shall buy a fine silk gown."

The milkmaid spun around, swirling her imaginary skirt.

"All the young men will admire my gown," the milkmaid told herself. "But when they come a-courting," she added proudly, "I shall toss my head and have nothing to do with them."

With these words, the milkmaid tossed her head. Down went the pail. All the milk was spilled, and all the milkmaid's dreams were broken.

Moral: do not count your chickens before they are hatched.

