



Learn English Through Stories

**Adapted and modified by
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The Old Man and the Trolls

Once there lived an old farmer who had three daughters, each married to a troll and living beneath the earth in hidden mounds. Though the farmer missed his girls dearly, years had passed since their strange weddings, and he'd grown curious about their lives. One crisp morning, he resolved to visit them. His wife, practical and gruff, handed him a sack of dry bread for the journey, muttering, "Don't expect me to coddle you out there." With a nod, he set off, his steps slow but determined.

The Youngest Daughter

After trudging a fair distance, the farmer grew weary and famished. He plopped down on the east side of a grassy mound, the morning sun warming his back, and began gnawing on his stale bread. Suddenly, the earth rumbled, and the mound split open. Out stepped his youngest daughter, radiant despite the shadows clinging to her trollish home. "Father!" she exclaimed. "Why sit out here alone? Come inside!"

"I didn't know you were so close," he said, brushing crumbs from his beard. "And I certainly didn't see a door." She laughed and beckoned him in.

The mound's interior glowed with an eerie warmth, all stone and root-twisted walls. Soon, the troll husband lumbered home, his hulking frame filling the doorway. The daughter whispered to him, "Father's here—fetch some beef for broth to welcome him." The troll grinned, a jagged row of teeth glinting. "No need to buy anything," he rumbled. He seized an iron spike, drove it into a beam overhead, and charged headfirst into it. The impact cracked off chunks of his skull, which fell sizzling to the floor—yet he stood unharmed, chuckling. "Plenty for broth now," he said, tossing the pieces into a pot. The farmer gaped as the stew bubbled, rich and hearty.

Before he left, the troll pressed a heavy sack of gold into the old man's hands. "A gift," he grunted. Laden with wealth, the farmer trudged homeward, but as he neared his farm, he remembered his prized cow, heavy with calf. Worried she'd birthed alone, he dropped the sack in the grass and raced to the barn. "Has she calved yet?" he panted to his wife.

She scowled. "What's this mad rush? No, she hasn't!"

"Then come help me fetch a sack of gold!" he cried.

“Gold?” she scoffed, but his wild eyes convinced her to follow. When they reached the spot, the sack was gone—snatched by some unseen thief. Her tongue lashed him like a whip. “You fool! What now?”

He only smiled faintly. “Hang the gold. I know what I’ve learned.”

The Middle Daughter

Weeks later, the farmer’s curiosity stirred again. He took more dry bread from his wife—who rolled her eyes—and set out for his middle daughter. Tired and hungry, he sat by another mound, chewing thoughtfully, when the earth parted. His second daughter emerged, her face bright with surprise. “Father! Come in from the cold!” He followed her gladly.

That evening, the troll husband returned, his eyes glinting in the dark. “We need candles,” the daughter said. The troll smirked. “No need to waste coin.” He thrust his gnarled fingers into the hearth’s flames, and they blazed like torches, unburned and steady. The farmer blinked, marvelling at the sight as the room filled with flickering light.

This troll, too, gifted him generously—two sacks of gold. The old man staggered home under the weight, but again, thoughts of his cow nagged him. He set the sacks down, propping them against a tree, and dashed to his wife. “Has she calved yet?”

“No!” she snapped. “What’s wrong with you?”

“Help me with two sacks of gold, then!” She grumbled but trailed him, only to find the sacks vanished, pilfered once more. Her fury erupted, but he just shrugged. “Ah, if you knew what I’ve learned.”

The Eldest Daughter

Undeterred, the farmer soon ventured to his eldest daughter. He sat by a third mound, eating his bread, when she appeared, warm and welcoming. Inside, the troll arrived as dusk fell. “Fish for supper?” she asked. The troll hefted her dough trough and ladle. “No need to buy—follow me.” They rowed onto the glassy lake beside the mound, the farmer clinging to the trough’s edge.

Out on the water, the troll peered at his wife. “Are my eyes green?”

“Not yet,” she said, puzzled.

He rowed farther. “Now?”

“No,” she replied. He sighed, then fixed his gaze on the farmer. “Tell me they’re green.”

The old man hesitated, then nodded. “Aye, they’re green.” With a wild grin, the troll leapt overboard, ladling up fish until the trough brimmed. They rowed back, feasting richly that night.

Three sacks of gold were his reward this time. Nearing home, the cow loomed in his mind again. He laid the sacks down, topped them with his wooden shoes as a marker, and ran to his wife. “Has she calved?”

“No, you daft old man!” she barked. Convinced at last, she followed him—only to find the shoes alone, the gold stolen. Her wrath boiled over, but he murmured, “Hang the money. I know what I’ve learned.”

The Reckoning

One day, his wife craved broth. “Go buy beef,” she ordered.

“No need,” he said, eyes gleaming. He drove a spike into the barn beam and rammed his head against it. Blood trickled; he collapsed, groaning. She nursed him, fuming, until he recovered.

Later, she demanded candles. “No need,” he insisted, plunging his hand into the fire. The burns blistered, and he lay abed again, wincing. Still, he grinned through the pain.

Finally, she hankered for fish. “Bring some home!”

“No need,” he said, hauling out the dough trough. They rowed onto the lake, her scepticism sharp as the wind. “Are my eyes green?” he asked.

“No,” she snapped.

He rowed on. “Now?”

“Why would they be?” she retorted.

“Please, say they’re green,” he begged. Exasperated, she relented. “Fine, they’re green!”

With a triumphant cry, he sprang into the water, ladle in hand—and sank beneath the waves, never to resurface. His wife rowed back alone, shaking her head. “Well,” she muttered, “he learned something, alright.”