

# THE STORY MUSEUM

## Light as a feather

Once there was, and once there was not, a place in Poland called Helm. Helm was most unusual place. It was here that people liked to discuss seriously the problems of the universe. They would scratch their heads and pull their beards as they thought. But the strange thing was, the longer they thought, the sillier their answers became. Once day, the elders of Helm decided that what they needed was a bath house, a place in which they could meet and think serious thoughts. After much head scratching and beard pulling they decided that to get the bath house, they needed money first. They sent charity collectors out to the surrounding villages to collect money, amongst them, Mottel and Feivel. After a couple of days, Mottel and Feivel had a sack of money but when it was time to head home, they saw many potential problems ahead. "The sack is too heavy for my back," said Mottel. "And what about robbers?" said Feivel. "They'll slit our throats for the money and it's not even our money. It belongs to Helm. What shall we do?"

Then Mottel had an idea. "We should spend all the money on something no one values and no one wants. That way we'll get home safely with our investment safe." "You're a genius!" Feivel exclaimed. They went to the market and sat on a bench to examine what people wanted and didn't want. There were long queues at the butcher, the bakers, the candlestick makers, the dairy, the book shop and the cobblers but no one at the feather stall. "It's summer," cried Mottel. "No one wants feathers to fill their duvets, pillows and quilted jackets. It's the wrong time of year. And our load will be as light as a feather," Feivel cheered. There was a sad old lady on the stall with nothing to do. Mottel and Feivel bought twenty sacks of feathers with the money but then couldn't carry them so they dragged them back to the bench.

They sat and they thought, they thought and they sat, scratching their heads and pulling their beards until Feivel had an idea about birds and how they could migrate and always find their destination no matter how far away it was.. Surely then, if they threw the feathers up in the air, eventually, when the wind blew in the right direction, the feathers would find their way to Helm. "Fidel, you're a genius," said Mottle. Feivel split the bags open and the feathers flew out whirling in eddies and clouds until they finally disappeared. Feeling light-hearted and happy with their plan, Feivel and Mottel headed home to Helm. When they got there, they asked everyone if they had seen the feathers but no one had.

They waited for weeks and weeks but there was no sign. Finally they went to tell their story to the elders who listened very sympathetically. "You did the right thing," said the chief elder. "We'll get the feathers back. We just have to work out how." He thought and he thought and he thought and about six hours later said to Mottle and Fidel. "The foreign feathers can't find their way here because they don't see \*Helm as their home. We must rip open all our duvets and pillows, our quilted jackets - whatever we have - and send the feathers of Helm out to bring the foreign feathers you bought home." And so they did. There were so many feathers in the sky it looked like a snow storm had descended over Helm. But after days, months and years, none of the feathers ever returned.

Now there are Helmites - people from Helm - scattered all over the world, just like those feathers. You can recognise them by the way they all, on occasion, find themselves looking wistfully up into the heavens, waiting for those feathers to return to them.

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