

## *Tenali Fools the Thieves*



Long ago a man named Tenali lived on a farm near a village in India. The land around Tenali's village was going through a drought. Very little rain had fallen in several months. Tenali feared that without rain the vegetables in his garden would die. There was little water in Tenali's well. It took a great deal of work to get enough water from the well for the whole garden. Tenali was tired after pulling the bucket up from the well many times.

As he looked at the thirsty plants in his garden one morning, Tenali noticed three strangers watching him from a distance. While he was in the village the day before, Tenali had heard that three men had been stealing from people. His distrust was growing. Tenali feared that these men were planning to steal from him. Tenali thought of a plan to fool the thieves and save his garden at the same time.

Tenali called loudly to his son, "Son, come quickly!"

"Yes, Father," his son replied as he ran to Tenali.

"I heard in the village yesterday that thieves have been stealing things from many people," Tenali said in a loud voice.

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“What can we do to protect ourselves?” his son asked.

Still speaking loudly, Tenali answered, “It is not safe to keep our jewels in the house. Help me put them into a trunk. Then we’ll lower the trunk down to the bottom of the well. It should be safe there. No thief would ever think to search the bottom of a well for a trunk full of treasure.”

Tenali was certain that the thieves had heard all he had said. He smiled and led his son inside the house.

Once inside the house, Tenali told his son of his plan to deceive the thieves. He asked his son to collect some large stones to place into the trunk to make it very heavy. Tenali knew the thieves would believe the trunk was filled with treasure. When the trunk was ready, Tenali and his son dragged it to the well, making a great noise as they moved along.

“Now the jewels should be safe from the thieves, my son!” Tenali shouted as he lowered the trunk into the well.

For the rest of the day, Tenali and his son worked in the garden. They dug small ditches between the rows of plants. Then they dug long ditches from the garden all the way to the well.

As the thieves watched, they thought this was their lucky day. They joked about how the man had led them right to his fortune. They decided to wait in the forest until nightfall. Then they would get the treasure from the bottom of the well.

That night the thieves crept over to the well in Tenali’s yard. One thief climbed into the well. He quickly realized that he couldn’t reach the heavy trunk without removing some of the water first. One of the other thieves found the bucket beside the well but no rope. He gave the bucket to the man inside the well, who filled it with water and slowly handed it to the man waiting beside the well. The thieves then took turns climbing into the well, filling the bucket, and climbing back out. Each time, they would dump the water beside the well. The water flowed through the little ditches that Tenali and his son had made and trickled into the garden.

By the time the thieves reached the trunk at the bottom of the well, the sun was rising. It took all three tired thieves to lift the heavy trunk from the bottom of the well. When they stepped out of the well, the surprised thieves found guards waiting to arrest them. Tenali had sent for the guards from the village the day before.

The story of the thieves quickly spread throughout the village. Everyone who heard the news praised Tenali for tricking the thieves and saving his garden.