

Nail

At the fair, the merchant happened to trade very well; he sold all his goods and filled his purse with gold and silver. He decided to head home, expecting to arrive before nightfall. So he tied his suitcase full of money to his saddle and rode away from the fair.

At noon he stopped in a town to rest; but when he prepared to continue his journey, the groom said, "Sir, there is a nail missing from the horseshoe on the left hind leg." "Well, let it be," replied the merchant. "I have only six hours of travel left; perhaps the horseshoe will not fall off."

In the afternoon, when the merchant again dismounted and ordered that his horse be fed some bread, the groom said, "Sir, your horse is missing a horseshoe on its left hind leg; shall we not take him to the blacksmith?" "Well, let it be missing!" answered the merchant. "I have only two hours of riding left; surely the horse will hold out. And I am in a hurry!"

He rode on, but could not go far: the horse began to limp... And it did not limp long before it started stumbling; nor did it stumble long—it fell and broke its leg. The merchant had to abandon the horse, untie the suitcase from the saddle, hoist it onto his shoulders, and walk home on foot; and only late at night did he finally reach home! "The cause of all my misfortune," he later reasoned, "was that accursed nail!"

The slower you go, the farther you'll get!