

The Four Brothers (Czech Tale)

A. H. Wratislaw

Czechoslovak

Easy

10 min read

There was, once upon a time, a huntsman who had four sons, and these sons wanted to go to gain experience in the world. When they were all over sixteen years old, they said to their father: 'We are going into the world, father; we pray you give us money for our journey.' The father gave them 100 florins and a horse apiece. They mounted their horses and rode to the mountains. On a mountain were four roads, and between them stood a beech-tree. At this beech-tree they halted, and the eldest said to the rest, 'Brothers, let us separate here, and go each by a different road to seek his fortune in the world. Let us each stick his knife into this beech-tree, and in a year and a day let us all meet together here. These knives will be tokens for us; if any one of the knives is rusty, the one of us to whom it belongs will be dead; and he whose knife is free from rust will be alive and well.'

They separated, and went each his way, and when they came to suitable places they each learned a handicraft. The eldest learned to be a cobbler, the second to be a thief, the third to be an astrologer, and the fourth to be a huntsman. When the year and day arrived, they started on their return. The eldest came first to the beech-tree, pulled out his own knife and looked at the other knives. Seeing that they were all free from rust, he rejoiced, and said, 'Praise be to God! we are all alive and well.' He went home.

When he came to his father, his father asked him, 'What manner of handicraft have you learnt?' The son replied, 'Daddy, it's no use telling you stories; I'm a cobbler.'

The father said, 'Well, you've learned a nice gainful handicraft.'

The son answered, 'But, daddy, I'm not a cobbler like other cobblers, but I'm this kind of cobbler: if anything is worn out, I only say, "Let it be mended up," and it is so at once.'

The father had a coat worn out at the elbows, and told him to cobble it up. The son gave the command, 'Let it be mended up,' and in a moment the coat was mended up as if it were brand new, nor was it possible to know that it had been mended at all. Upon this the father said nothing more. The next day the second son came to the beech. He pulled out his own knife, and looked at the remaining two; the third was already gone.

Seeing that they were both free from rust, he rejoiced, and said, 'Praise be to God! we are all alive and well; our eldest brother is at home already.' He also went home. When he came to his father, his father asked him, 'What manner of handicraft have you learned?' The son replied, 'Dear daddy, it's no use telling stories to you; I'm a thief.'

The father said, 'Oh, you've learned a nice gainful trade! Shame on you!' The son said to him, 'But, daddy, I'm not a thief like a thief, but I'm such a thief that, if I think of anything, be it where it may, I have it with me at once.'

Just then a hare came running on the hillside; it could be seen through the window; the father told him to fetch the hare. The son immediately said, 'Let you hare be here,' and it was with them at once. After this the father said no more. The third day the third son came to the beech, pulled out his own knife and looked at the other knife, two not being there. Seeing that it was clear of rust, he said, 'Praise be to God! we are all alive and well; my two elder brothers are at home already.'

He also went home. When he came to his father, his father asked him what manner of handicraft he had learned. The son replied, 'Dear daddy, it's no use to tell you stories; I'm an astrologer.'

His father said to him that it was a nice pretty handicraft. The son answered, 'But, daddy, I am this kind of astrologer: if I look at the sky, I see at once where anything is in the whole earth.'

On the fourth day the youngest son came to the beech and pulled out his knife, the other three being there no longer. He was glad, and said, 'My brothers are already all at home.' He also went home. When he came to his father, the father asked him what manner of handicraft he had learned. The son answered that he was a

hunter.

The father said, 'Anyhow, you have not despised my craft; for that you're a good lad.' The son said, 'But, dear daddy, I'm not such a hunter as you are, but one of this kind; if there is an unusually fine head of game, I say, 'Let it be shot,' and immediately shot it is.'

There was a hare darting along the hillside; it was visible through the window. The father said, 'Shoot it!' The youngest son spoke the word, and the hare lay dead. The father said, 'I don't see whether it is lying dead.' The astrologer looked at the sky, and said, 'Yes, daddy, it's lying there behind the bushes.'

The father said, 'Yes, it's lying there, but how are we to get it?' The brother who was a thief said, 'Let it be here,' and immediately there it was. But it had come through thorny bushes, and was all torn. The father said, 'The whole skin is torn; who'll buy it of us?' The brother who was a cobbler said, 'Let it be mended up,' and immediately mended up it was. The father said, 'Well, you'll all four maintain yourselves by your handicrafts.'

They lived for some time at home with their father, and maintained themselves well. Then a king lost the princess, his daughter, and made proclamation that whoever should find her, to that person he would give his daughter and the kingdom as well. The brothers said to one another, 'Let us go thither.' The father didn't give them leave to go, but go they did, and gave out that they were the people who would find the lost princess.

The king immediately sent a carriage for them. When they came to the king, they said that they understood he had made proclamation that his daughter was lost, and that he would give her and the kingdom as well to whoever should find her. The king said that this was very truth, and immediately asked them to tell him where his daughter was. The astrologer replied that he could not tell him just then, but when evening came he would perceive in the sky where she was. About eight or nine o'clock they went out and gazed at the sky. The astrologer said that she had been taken captive by a dragon; that the dragon had seized her as she was out walking, and was keeping her on an island beyond the Red Sea; that she was obliged to fondle him for two hours every day, and that the dragon then had his head placed on her lap. When day came, they assembled and drove in the carriage to the Red Sea. Then they got into a boat and rowed to the island where the princess was. When they arrived at the island, the princess was out walking, and the dragon wasn't at home; but the princess made signs to them that they were in evil case, for the dragon was just flying home. The thief-brother called out with speed, 'Let the princess be here!'

She was with them in the boat at once, but cried out that they were in evil case, and would all perish. They rowed speedily away in the boat, but the dragon, full of wrath, roared and growled and rose in the air above them. The astrologer said to the huntsman, 'Brother, shoot him.' The huntsman-brother said, 'Let him be shot.' The dragon was shot, but fell on the boat and broke a hole in it, so that the water came in. They threw the dragon into the sea, and the huntsman-brother gave the word to the cobbler-brother, 'Mend the leak.'

The cobbler-brother mended the leak, so that not a drop of water came into the boat to them. Thus they arrived safely with the princess at the sea-shore, landed on the beach, took their seats in the carriage with the princess, and drove off. But as they drove along in the carriage, they disputed to which of them the princess and the kingdom belonged.

The astrologer said, 'The princess is mine. If it hadn't been for me, we shouldn't have known where the princess was.' The thief said, 'The princess is mine. If it hadn't been for me, we shouldn't have got the princess into the boat.'

The huntsman said that the princess was his; if it hadn't been for him, they wouldn't have shot the dragon. The cobbler shouted that the princess was his if it hadn't been for him, they would all have been drowned and have perished. When they came to the palace to the king, they asked him to decide to whom the princess belonged.

The king said, 'Dear brothers, I will judge you righteously. It is true that you have all deserved her, but you cannot all obtain her. According to my promise, the astrologer-brother must obtain her, for I made proclamation that whoever should find the lost princess should obtain her and the kingdom with her; the astrologer found her, and told us where she was. But, that none of you may be unfairly dealt with, each shall receive a district of his own, and ye shall each be kings in your own districts.'

They were all content. The astrologer, as soon as the wedding was over, sent home for his father. The father came, and was delighted that his sons had become monarchs each in his district. In the spring he lived with the cobbler, in the summer with the thief, in the autumn with the huntsman, and in winter with the astrologer, and enjoyed himself everywhere till death.

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com