



Just Earnings are Never Lost

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Serbian

Intermediate

8 min read

There was once a poor man who had hired himself to a certain rich one without an agreement as to the wages he was to receive. He served his master for a year and a day, and when the term was ended, he went to him, and asked that he might be paid what his master thought he had earned. The master took out a penny, and said to him,—

“There you have your wages.”

The servant took the penny, thanked the master, and then went to a rivulet which had a very rapid flow. When he reached the bank, he said to himself:

“Good heavens! how does it come to pass that in a whole year I have only earned one penny? God knows whether I have earned no more than that. Therefore I will convince myself, and will throw this little coin into the water; if it should swim, then have I earned it; but if it sink, then have I not earned it.”

Thereupon he crossed himself and said,—

“Merciful heaven! if I have earned this penny, let it float on the top of the water; but if not, then let it sink to the bottom.”

So saying, he threw the penny-piece into the stream; and lo! it sank to the bottom at once.

Then he stooped, took the penny out of the water, and brought it back to his master.

“Master,” he said, “I bring you your money again, as I have not earned it; and I will serve you for another year.”

And he began to serve as before; and when the year and a day were completed, he came again to his master, and asked him to pay him what he thought he had earned. The master again took out a penny and said to him,—

“There you have your wages.”

The hind took the money, thanked his master, and went straight to the same rivulet, crossed himself, and threw the penny into the water, saying,—

“Merciful heaven! if I have rightly earned it, let this money float on the top of the stream; if not, then let it sink to the bottom.”

But when he threw the coin into the stream, it sank to the bottom at once. Then he bent down, drew it out, and taking it to his master said, as he gave it to him,—

“Master, here you have your penny again; I have not earned it yet, and I will therefore serve you for another year.”

So he began his service over again, and when the third year came to a close, he went once more to his master, and asked him to give him as much as he thought he had earned. This time, also, the master gave him only a penny; and he took it, thanked him, and went for the third time to the rivulet to see whether he had rightly earned the money or not. When he got there, he crossed himself, and threw the penny into the water with the words:

“Merciful heaven! if I have rightly earned this money, let it swim upon the top; if not, let it sink down to the ground.”

This time, however, as the penny fell into the water, lo! it swam upon the surface. Full of joy he drew it out of the stream, and thrust it into his pocket: then he went deep into the wood, built himself a little hut, and lived happily therein.

After some time, hearing that his old master was about to sail in a ship across the sea to another country, he

went to him with his penny, and begged of him to buy something with the money in the foreign land. The master promised to do so, took the penny, and set out on his journey. And while on his travels he came once upon some children on the sea-shore, who carried a cat with them which they were about to kill, and then throw into the water. When the master saw this, he hastened down to them and demanded,—

“What are you doing, children?”

And they answered him,—

“This cat does nothing but harm, and we are going to kill it.”

Then he drew out the penny of his old servant, and offered it to the children for the cat. The children were glad of the offer, took the penny, and gave the cat to the merchant. He, however, took the cat on board his ship and set sail.

As he pursued his voyage, there arose one day a violent storm, which carried the vessel heaven knows where, so that for a whole three months he could not find his right way. When the storm abated, the master of the ship, not knowing where he was, sailed on a little farther, and at last landed before a fortress.

As soon as it was known in the fortress that a ship from a foreign land had come to shore, a great many people streamed down to see it, and one of them, a man of importance and very rich, invited the master of the ship home to supper. When he came to the house, there was a sight to see! Rats and mice ran about in all directions, and the servants stood armed with sticks to prevent their jumping on to the table. Then said the merchant to the master of the house,—

“For heaven’s sake, brother, what does this mean?”

And the other answered him,—

“It is always this way with us, brother; we can neither eat our meals, at mid-day nor in the evening, for these creatures; even when we go to sleep each of us has a box that he shuts himself up in, lest the mice should nibble his ears off.”

The master of the ship then remembered the cat he had bought for a penny, and said to his host,—

“I have an animal on board my ship which, in the course of two or three days, would settle all these creatures.”

“Brother,” replied the master of the house, “if you really have such an animal, give it to me; I will fill your ship with gold and silver if what you tell me is true.”

After supper the merchant went on board his ship, brought the cat, and said to his host that they might now all go to sleep without getting into their boxes. But the people would not trust themselves to do this, and he alone slept without a box. Then he let the cat loose, and as she saw the rats and mice she began to catch them and kill them, and to throw them all together in a heap. The rats and mice, however, as soon as they saw what she was, fled for shelter wherever they could. When the day broke, and the people of the house got up, there was a great heap of dead rats and mice to be seen in the middle of the room; and only now and then would there run one or the other of them across the room; but they peeped timidly out of their holes. And after three days there was not one to be seen. Then the master of the house filled our traveller’s ship with gold and silver in return for the cat, and the merchant set sail in his ship for home.

When at last he reached his own house, his old servant came to him to ask what he had brought him for his penny. The master drew out a piece of marble, which was beautifully cut square, and answered, “See, this is what I have bought with your penny.”

The servant, rejoiced at the sight, took the stone, carried it into his hut, and made a table of it. The next day he went out to fetch wood, and when he came back, lo! the stone was changed into gold, and shone like the sun. The whole hut was filled with its light. The honest servant was frightened at this, he ran to the master, and cried,—

“Master, what is this you have given me? it cannot be mine; come and look at it.”

The master went to the hut, and when he saw what a miracle heaven had worked, he exclaimed,—

“My son, I see now that it must be so! Him whom God helps do all the saints help also. Come with me and take your own.”

And herewith he gave him all that he had brought home with him in his ship, and his own daughter for a wife as well.

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