

Master Pfreim

Brothers Grimm

German

Intermediate
8 min read

Master Pfreim was a short, thin, but lively man, who never rested a moment. His face, of which his turned-up nose was the only prominent feature, was marked with small-pox and pale as death, his hair was gray and shaggy, his eyes small, but they glanced perpetually about on all sides. He saw everything, criticised everything, knew everything best, and was always in the right.

When he went into the streets, he moved his arms about as if he were rowing; and once he struck the pail of a girl, who was carrying water, so high in the air that he himself was wetted all over by it. “Stupid thing,” cried he to her, while he was shaking himself, “couldst thou not see that I was coming behind thee?”

By trade he was a shoemaker, and when he worked he pulled his thread out with such force that he drove his fist into every one who did not keep far enough off. No apprentice stayed more than a month with him, for he had always some fault to find with the very best work. At one time it was that the stitches were not even, at another that one shoe was too long, or one heel higher than the other, or the leather not cut large enough.

“Wait,” said he to his apprentice, “I will soon show thee how we make skins soft,” and he brought a strap and gave him a couple of strokes across the back. He called them all sluggards. He himself did not turn much work out of his hands, for he never sat still for a quarter of an hour. If his wife got up very early in the morning and lighted the fire, he jumped out of bed, and ran bare-footed into the kitchen, crying, “Wilt thou burn my house down for me? That is a fire one could roast an ox by! Does wood cost nothing?”

If the servants were standing by their wash-tubs and laughing, and telling each other all they knew, he scolded them, and said, "There stand the geese cackling, and forgetting their work, to gossip! And why fresh soap? Disgraceful extravagance and shameful idleness into the bargain! They want to save their hands, and not rub the things properly!"

And out he would run and knock a pail full of soap and water over, so that the whole kitchen was flooded. Some one was building a new house, so he hurried to the window to look on. "There, they are using that red sandstone again that never dries!" cried he. "No one will ever be healthy in that house! and just look how badly the fellows are laying the stones! Besides, the mortar is good for nothing! It ought to have gravel in it, not sand. I shall live to see that house tumble down on the people who are in it." He sat down, put a couple of stitches in, and then jumped up again, unfastened his leather-apron, and cried, "I will just go out, and appeal to those men's consciences."

He stumbled on the carpenters. "What's this?" cried he, "you are not working by the line! Do you expect the beams to be straight? one wrong will put all wrong." He snatched an axe out of a carpenter's hand and wanted to show him how he ought to cut; but as a cart loaded with clay came by, he threw the axe away, and hastened to the peasant who was walking by the side of it: "You are not in your right mind," said he, "who yokes young horses to a heavily-laden cart? The poor beasts will die on the spot."

The peasant did not give him an answer, and Pfriem in a rage ran back into his workshop. When he was setting himself to work again, the apprentice reached him a shoe. "Well, what's that again?" screamed he, "Haven't I told you you ought not to cut shoes so broad? Who would buy a shoe like this, which is hardly anything else but a sole? I insist on my orders being followed exactly."

"Master," answered the apprentice, "you may easily be quite right about the shoe being a bad one, but it is the one which you yourself cut out, and yourself set to work at. When you jumped up a while since, you knocked it off the table, and I have only just picked it up. An angel from heaven, however, would never make you believe that."

One night Master Pfriem dreamed he was dead, and on his way to heaven. When he got there, he knocked loudly at the door. "I wonder," said he to himself, "that they have no knocker on the door, one knocks one's

knuckles sore.”

The apostle Peter opened the door, and wanted to see who demanded admission so noisily. “Ah, it’s you, Master Pfriem;” said he, “well, I’ll let you in, but I warn you that you must give up that habit of yours, and find fault with nothing you see in heaven, or you may fare ill.”

“You might have spared your warning,” answered Pfriem. “I know already what is seemly, and here, God be thanked, everything is perfect, and there is nothing to blame as there is on earth.”

So he went in, and walked up and down the wide expanses of heaven. He looked around him, to the left and to the right, but sometimes shook his head, or muttered something to himself. Then he saw two angels who were carrying away a beam. It was the beam which some one had had in his own eye whilst he was looking for the splinter in the eye of another. They did not, however, carry the beam lengthways, but obliquely. “Did any one ever see such a piece of stupidity?” thought Master Pfriem; but he said nothing, and seemed satisfied with it.

“It comes to the same thing after all, whichever way they carry the beam, straight or crooked, if they only get along with it, and truly I do not see them knock against anything.”

Soon after this he saw two angels who were drawing water out of a well into a bucket, but at the same time he observed that the bucket was full of holes, and that the water was running out of it on every side. They were watering the earth with rain.

“Hang it,” he exclaimed; but happily recollected himself, and thought, “Perhaps it is only a pastime. If it is an amusement, then it seems they can do useless things of this kind even here in heaven, where people, as I have already noticed, do nothing but idle about.”

He went farther and saw a cart which had stuck fast in a deep hole. “It’s no wonder,” said he to the man who stood by it; “who would load so unreasonably? what have you there?”

“Good wishes,” replied the man. “I could not go along the right way with it, but still I have pushed it safely up here, and they won’t leave me sticking here.”

In fact an angel did come and harnessed two horses to it. "That's quite right," thought Pfriem, "but two horses won't get that cart out, it must at least have four to it."

Another angel came and brought two more horses; she did not, however, harness them in front of it, but behind. That was too much for Master Pfriem, "Clumsy creature," he burst out with, "what are you doing there? Has any one ever since the world began seen a cart drawn in that way? But you, in your conceited arrogance, think that you know everything best."

He was going to say more, but one of the inhabitants of heaven seized him by the throat and pushed him forth with irresistible strength. Beneath the gateway Master Pfriem turned his head round to take one more look at the cart, and saw that it was being raised into the air by four winged horses.

At this moment Master Pfriem awoke. "Things are certainly arranged in heaven otherwise than they are on earth," said he to himself, "and that excuses much; but who can see horses harnessed both behind and before with patience; to be sure they had wings, but who could know that? It is, besides, great folly to fix a pair of wings to a horse that has four legs to run with already! But I must get up, or else they will make nothing but mistakes for me in my house. It is a lucky thing for me though, that I am not really dead."

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com