

The Baker's Apprentice

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Italian

Easy
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There was once a baker who every morning loaded an ounceworth of bread on a horse that came to his shop. One day he said: "I give this ounceworth of bread to this horse and he renders me no account of it." Then he said to his apprentice: "Vincenzo, the horse will come to-morrow and I will give him the bread, but you must follow him and see where he goes."

The next day the horse came and the baker loaded him, and gave the apprentice a piece of bread for himself. Vincenzo followed the horse, and after a while came to a river of milk, and began to eat bread and milk, and could not overtake the horse again. He then returned to his master, who, seeing him return to no purpose, said: "To-morrow the horse will come again; if you cannot tell me where he goes I will no longer have you for my apprentice."

The next day the apprentice followed the horse again, and came to a river of wine, and began to eat bread and wine, and lost sight of the horse. He returned to his master in despair at having lost the horse. His master said: "Listen. The first time, one pardons; the second time, one condones; the third time, one beats. If to-morrow you do not follow the horse I will give you a good thrashing and send you home." What did poor Vincenzo do? He followed the horse the next day with his eyes open. After a while he came to a river of oil. "What shall I do? the horse will get away from me now!"

So he tied the horse's reins to his girdle and began to eat bread and oil. The horse pulled, but Vincenzo said: "When I finish the bread I will come." When he had finished the bread he followed the horse, and after a time he came to a cattle-farm where the grass was long and thick and the cattle so thin that they could scarcely stand on their feet. Vincenzo was astonished at seeing the grass so long and the cattle so lean. Then he came to another farm, and saw that the grass was dry and short, and the cattle fatter than you can believe. He said to himself: "Just see! There, where the grass was long, the cattle were lean; here, where you can hardly see the grass, the cattle are so fat!"

The horse kept on, and Vincenzo after him. After a while he met a sow with her tail full of large knots, and wondered why she had such a tail. Farther on he came to a watering-trough, where there was a toad trying to reach a crumb of bread, and could not. Vincenzo continued his way, and arrived at a large gate. The horse knocked at the gate with his head, and the door opened and a beautiful lady appeared, who said she was the Madonna. When she saw the youth she asked: "And what are you here for?" Vincenzo replied: "This horse comes constantly to my master's to get an ounceworth of bread, and my master never has been able to find out where he carries it."

"Very well; enter," said the lady; "I will show you where he carries it." Then the lady began to call all the souls in purgatory: "My children, come hither!" The souls then descended; and to some she gave the worth of a grano of bread, to some the worth of a baiocco, and to others the worth of five grani, and the bread was gone in a moment. When the bread had disappeared, the lady said to Vincenzo: "Did you see nothing on your way?" "Yes, lady. The first day that my master sent me to see where the horse went, I saw a river of milk."

The lady said: "That is the milk I gave my son." "The second day I saw a river of wine." "That," said the lady, "is the wine with which my son was consecrated." "The third day I saw a river of oil."

"That is the oil that they ask of me and of my son. What else did you see the third day?" "I saw," answered Vincenzo, "a farm with cattle. There was plenty of grass, but the cattle were lean. Afterwards I saw another farm, where you could scarcely see the grass, and the cattle were fine and fat." "These, my son, are the rich, who are in the midst of wealth; and no matter how much they eat, it does no good; and the fat ones, that have no grass to eat, are the poor, for my son supports and fattens them. What else did you see?" "I saw a sow with her tail full of knots."

"That, my son, is those who repeat their rosaries and do not offer their prayers to me or to my son; and my son makes knots in them." "I also saw a watering-trough, with a toad that was reaching after a crumb of bread, and could not get it." She said: "A poor person asked a woman for a bit of bread, and she gave his hand such a blow that she made him drop it. And what else did you see, my son?" "Nothing, lady."

"Then come with me, and I will show you something else." She took him by the hand and led him into hell. When the poor youth heard the clanking of chains and saw the darkness, he came near dying, and wanted to get out. "You see," said the lady, "those who are lamenting and in chains and darkness are those who are in mortal sin. Now come, and I will take you to purgatory."

There they heard nothing, and the darkness was so great that they could see nothing. Vincenzo wished to depart, for he felt oppressed by anguish. "Now," said the lady, "I will take you to the church of the Holy Fathers. Do you see it, my son? This is the church of the Holy Fathers, which first was full and now is empty. Come; now I will take you to limbo. Do you see these little ones? These are those who died unbaptized." The lady wished to show him paradise; but he was too confused, so the lady made him look through a window. "Do you see this great palace? There are three seats there; one for you, one for your master, and one for your mistress."

After this she took him to the gate. The horse was no longer there. “Now,” said Vincenzo, “how shall I find my way back? I will follow the tracks of the horse, and so will get home.” The lady answered: “Close your eyes!” Vincenzo closed his eyes, and found himself behind his master’s door. When he entered he told all that had occurred to his master and mistress. When he had finished his story all three died and went to paradise.

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