

The Emperor Trojan's Goat's

Ears

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SerbianSlavic

Advanced
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There once lived an emperor whose name was Trojan. This emperor had goat's ears, and he used to call in barber after barber to shave him. But whoever went in never came out again; for while the barber was shaving him, the emperor would ask what he observed uncommon in him, and when the barber would answer that he observed his goat's ears, the Emperor Trojan would immediately cut him into pieces.

At last it came to the turn of a certain barber to go, who feigned illness, and sent his apprentice instead. When the apprentice appeared before the emperor he was asked why his master did not come, and he answered, "Because he is ill." Then the emperor sat down, and allowed the youth to shave him. As he shaved him the apprentice noticed the emperor's goat's ears, but when Trojan asked him what he had observed, he answered, "I have observed nothing."

Then the emperor gave him twelve ducats, and said to him,—

"From this time forth you shall always come and shave me."

When the apprentice came home, his master asked him how he got on at the emperor's, and the youth answered,—

“All well; and the emperor has told me that I am to shave him in future.”

Then he showed the twelve ducats he had received; but as to the emperor's goat's ears, of that he said nothing.

From this time forth the apprentice went regularly to Trojan to shave him, and for each shaving he received twelve ducats; but he told no one that the emperor had goat's ears.

At last it began to worry and torment him that he dare tell no one his secret; and he became sick and began to pine away. His master, who could not fail to observe this, asked him what ailed him, and after much pressing the apprentice confessed that he had something on his heart which he dared not confide to any one, and he added,—“If I could only tell it to somebody, I should feel better at once.”

Then said the master,—

“Tell it to me, and I will faithfully keep it from everybody else; or if you fear to trust me with it, then go to the confessor and confide it to him; but if you will not do even that, then go into the fields outside the town, there dig a hole, thrust your head into it, and tell the earth three times what you know, then throw the mould in again and fill up the hole.”

The apprentice chose the last course; went into the field outside the city, dug a hole, into which he thrust his head, and called out three times,—

“The Emperor Trojan has goat's ears!”

Then he filled up the hole again, and with his mind quite relieved went home.

When some time had passed by, there sprang an elder-tree out of this very hole, and three slender stems grew up, beautiful and straight as tapers. Some shepherds found this elder, cut off one of the stems, and made a pipe of it. But as soon as they began to blow into the new pipe, out burst the words:

“The Emperor Trojan has goat's ears!”

The news of this strange occurrence spread immediately through the whole city, and at last the Emperor

Trojan himself heard the children blowing on a pipe:

“The Emperor Trojan has goat’s ears!”

He sent instantly for the barber’s apprentice, and shouted to him,—

“Heh! what is this you have been telling the people about me?”

The poor youth began at once to explain that he had indeed noticed the emperor’s ears, but had never told a soul of it. The emperor tore his sabre out of its sheath to hew the apprentice down, at which the youth was so frightened that he told the whole story in its order: how he had confessed himself to the earth; how an elder-tree had sprang up on the very spot; and how, when a pipe was made of one of its stems, the tale was sounded in every direction.

Then the emperor took the apprentice with him in a carriage to the place, to convince himself of the truth of the story; and when they arrived there they found there was only a single stem left. The Emperor Trojan ordered a pipe to be made out of this stem, that he might hear how it sounded. As soon as the pipe was ready, and one of them blew into it, out poured the words:

“The Emperor Trojan has goat’s ears!”

Then the emperor was convinced that nothing on this earth could be hidden, spared the barber apprentice’s life, and henceforth allowed any barber, without exception, to come and shave him.

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