



The Golden Godmother: The Story of Poor Lucas

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Chinese

Easy
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There was once a wealthy farmer named Lukas who was so careless in the management of his affairs that there came a time when all his property was gone and he had nothing left but one old tumble-down cottage. Then when it was too late he realized how foolish he had been.

He had always prayed for a child but during the years of his prosperity God had never heard him. Now when he was so poor that he had nothing to eat, his wife gave birth to a little daughter. He looked at the poor unwelcome little stranger and sighed, for he didn't know how he was going to take care of it.

The first thing to be thought about was the christening. Lukas went to the wife of a laborer who lived nearby and asked her to be godmother. She refused because she didn't see that it would do her any good to be godmother to a child of a man as poor as Lukas.

“You see, Lukas, what happens to a man who has wasted his property,” his wife said. “While we were rich the burgomaster himself was our friend, but now even that poverty-stricken woman won’t raise a finger to help us. . . . See how the poor infant shivers, for I haven’t even any old rags in which to wrap it! And it has to lie on the bare straw! God have mercy on us, how poor we are!” So she wept over the baby, covering it with tears and kisses.

Suddenly a happy thought came to her. She wiped away her tears and said to her husband:

“I beg you, Lukas, go to our old neighbor, the burgomaster’s wife. She is wealthy. I’m sure she hasn’t forgotten that I was godmother to her child. Go and ask her if she will be godmother to mine.”

“I don’t think she will,” Lukas answered, “but I’ll ask her.”

With a heavy heart he went by the fields and the barns that had once been his own and entered the house of his old friend, the burgomaster.

“God bless you, neighbor,” he said to the burgomaster’s wife. “My wife sends her greeting and bids me tell you that God has given us a little daughter whom she wants you to hold at the christening.”

The burgomaster’s wife looked at him and laughed in his face.

“My dear Lukas, of course I should like to do this for you, but times are hard. Nowadays a person needs every penny and it would take a good deal to help such poor beggars as you. Why don’t you ask some one else? Why have you picked me out?”

“Because my wife was godmother to your child.”

“Oh, that’s it, is it? What you did for me at that time was a loan, was it? And now you want me to give you back as much as you gave me, eh? I’ll do no such thing! If I were as generous as you used to be, I’d soon go the way you have gone. No! I shall not walk one step toward that christening!”

Without answering her, Lukas turned and went home in tears.

“You see, dear wife,” he said when he got there, “it turned out as I knew it would. But don’t be discouraged, for God never entirely forsakes any one. Give me the child and I myself will carry it to the christening and the first person I meet I shall take for godmother.”

Weeping all the while, the wife wrapped the baby in a piece of old skirt and placed it in her husband’s arms.

On the way to the chapel, Lukas came to a crossroads where he met an old woman.

“Grandmother,” he said, “will you be godmother to my child?” And he explained to her how every one else had refused on account of his poverty and how in desperation he had decided to ask the first person he met. “And so, dear grandmother,” he concluded “I am asking you.”

“Of course I’ll be godmother,” the old woman said. “Here, give me the dear wee thing!”

So Lukas gave her the child and together they went on to the chapel.

As they arrived the priest was just ready to leave. The sexton hurried up to him and whispered that a christening party was coming.

“Who is it?” he asked, impatiently.

“Oh, it’s only that good-for-nothing of a Lukas who is poorer than a church mouse.”

The godmother saw that the sexton was whispering something unfriendly, so she pulled out a shining ducat from her pocket, stepped up to the priest, and pressed it into his hand.

The priest blinked his eyes in amazement, looking first at the ducat and then at the shabby old woman who had given it. He stuffed the ducat into his pocket, whispered hurriedly to the sexton to bring him the font, and then christened the child of poor Lukas with as much ceremony as the child of the richest townsman. The little girl received the name Marishka.

After the christening the priest accompanied the godmother to the door of the chapel and the sexton went even farther until he, too, received the reward for which he was hoping.

When Lukas and the old woman came to the crossroads where they had met, she handed him the child. Then she reached into her pocket, drew out another golden ducat which she stuck into a fold of the child’s clothes,

and said: "From this ducat with which I endow my godchild, you will have enough to bring her up properly. She will always be a joy and a comfort to you, and when she grows up she will make a happy marriage. Now good-bye."

She drew a green wand from her bosom and touched the earth. Instantly a lovely rosebush appeared, covered with blooms. At the same moment the old woman vanished.

In bewilderment Lukas looked this way and that but she was gone. He was so surprised that he didn't know what had happened. I really think he would be standing on that same spot to this day if little Marishka had not begun to cry and by this reminded him of home.

His wife, meantime, was anxiously awaiting him. She, poor soul, was suffering the pangs of hunger, thirst, and bodily pain. There wasn't a mouthful of bread in the house, nor a cent of money.

As Lukas entered the room, he said: "Weep no more, dear wife. Here is your little Marishka. But before you kiss the child, take out the christening gift that you will find tucked away in her clothes. From it you will know what an excellent godmother she has."

The wife reached into the clothes and pulled out not one ducat but a whole handful of ducats!

"Oh!" she gasped and in her surprise she dropped the ducats and they rolled about in the straw that littered the wretched floor.

"Husband! Husband! Who gave you so much money? Just look!"

"I have already looked and at first when I saw them I was more surprised than you are. Now let me tell you where they come from."

So Lukas related to his wife all that had happened at the christening. In conclusion he said: "When I saw the old woman was really gone, I started home. On the way curiosity overcame me and I drew out the christening present and instead of one ducat I found a handful. I can tell you I was surprised but instead of letting them drop on the ground I let them slip back into the baby's clothes. I said to myself: 'Let your wife also have the pleasure of pulling out those golden horses.' And now, dear wife, leave off exclaiming. Give thanks to God for that which he has bestowed upon us and help me gather up the golden darlings, for we don't want any one coming in and spying on us just now."

As they began picking them up, they had a new surprise. Wherever there was one ducat, there they found ten! When they got them all together they made a fine big heap.

"Oh, dear, oh, dear!" said the woman as she gazed at the pile. "Who knows whether this money will be blessed to our use? Perhaps that old woman was an evil spirit who just wants to buy our souls!"

Lukas looked at his wife reprovingly. "How can you be so foolish? Do you suppose an evil spirit would have gone with me to church, allowed herself to be sprinkled with holy water, yes, and even herself make the sign of the cross! Never! I don't say that she is just an ordinary human being, but I do say that she must be a good spirit whom God has sent to us to help us. I'm sure we can keep this money with a clear conscience. The first question is where to hide it so that no one can find it. For the present I shall put it into the chest, but tomorrow night I shall bury it under the pear tree. And one thing, wife, I warn you: don't say anything about it to any one. I shall take one ducat and go to the burgomaster's wife and ask her to change it. Then I shall go buy some milk and eggs and bread and flour, and I'll bring back a woman with me who will make us a fine supper. Tomorrow I'll go to town and buy some clothes and feather beds. After that what else shall I buy? Can you guess?"

"The best thing to do would be to buy back our old property—the house, the fields, and the live stock, and then manage it more wisely than before."

"You're right, wife, that's just what I'll do. And I will manage prudently this time! I have learned my lesson, I can tell you, for poverty is a good teacher."

When Lukas had hidden the money in the chest and turned the key, he took one ducat and went out to make his purchases. While he was gone his wife spent the time nursing the child and weaving happy dreams that now, she was sure, would come to pass.

After a short hour the door opened and Lukas and a red-cheeked maid entered. The maid carried a great pail of foaming milk. Lukas followed her with a basket of eggs in one hand and on top of the eggs two big round brown cakes, and in the other hand a load of feather beds tied in a knot.

“God be with you!” said the maid, placing the milk pail on the bench. “My mistress, the burgomaster’s wife, greets you and sends you some milk for pudding. If there is anything else you need you are to let her know.” The maid curtsied and went away before the poor woman could express her thanks.

Lukas laughed and said: “You see, wife, what just one ducat did! If they knew how many more we had they would carry us about in their arms! The burgomaster’s wife has sent us all these things. She is lending us feather beds until tomorrow and she is going to send us an old woman to help us out. I told her our child had received a handful of ducats as a christening gift. If she comes here to see you, make up your mind what you’re going to say.”

Then Lukas built a fire. Presently the old woman came and soon good hot soup was ready. It was just plain milk soup, but I can tell you it tasted better to hungry Lukas and his wife than the rich food which the king himself ate that day from a golden platter.

The next day after breakfast Lukas set out for town. The burgomaster’s wife took advantage of his absence to visit his wife and find out what she could about the money.

“My dear neighbor,” she said, after she had made the necessary inquiries about health, “the blessing of God came into your house with that child.”

“Oh,” said the other, “if you mean the christening gift, it isn’t so very much. A handful of ducats soon roll away. However, may God repay that good woman, the godmother. At least we can now buy back our old farm and live like respectable people.”

On the way home the burgomaster’s wife stopped at the houses of her various friends and gave them a full account of Lukas’ wealth. Before noon every small boy in the village knew that at Lukas’ house they had a

hogshead of ducats.

In the evening Lukas came back from town driving a cart that was piled high with furniture and clothing and feather beds and food. The next day he bought back his old farm with the cattle and the implements.

This marked the beginning of a new life for Lukas. He set to work with industry and put into practice all the lessons that poverty had taught him.

He and his wife lived happily. Their greatest joy was Marishka, a little girl so charming and so pretty that every one loved her on sight.

“Dear neighbor,” all the old women used to say to the child’s mother, “that girl of yours will never grow up. She’s far too wise for her years!”

But Marishka did very well. She grew up into a beautiful young woman and one day a prince saw her, fell in love with her, and married her. So the old godmother’s prophecy that Marishka would make a happy marriage was fulfilled.

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