



The Three Brothers

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Serbian

Intermediate
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He who asks little shall obtain much.

There lived once three brothers whose only property in this bright world consisted of a pear-tree which they watched one after another; whilst one of them was left watching it the two others would go to their daily labour.

One day an angel from heaven was commanded to go and see how the brothers were living, and to provide them with better means of subsistence if they needed it. As soon as the angel had descended to the earth he assumed the shape of a beggar, and having come to the brother who was watching the tree, he begged him for a pear. The man plucked one of the pears which belonged to him, gave it to the angel and said,—

“Here you have one of my own pears; of those which belong to my brothers I cannot give you any.”

The angel thanked him and went away. On the following day the second brother stopped at home to watch the tree; the angel came also to him and asked for a pear. The second brother likewise plucked one of the pears which belonged to him, and gave it to the angel, and said,—

“Here you have one of my own pears; of those which belong to my brothers I cannot give you any.”

The angel thanked him and went away. When the turn came for the third brother to watch the tree, the angel came to him also and asked for a pear. The youngest brother, in like manner, plucked one of those which belonged to him, gave it to the angel, and said,—

“Here you have one of my own pears; of those which belong to my brothers I cannot give you any.”

On the fourth day the angel took the form of a monk, and having come early in the morning he found the brothers still at home, to whom he said,—

“Come with me, and I will give you something better to do.”

The brothers followed the angel without any hesitation. When they had come to a broad, rapid stream, they all rested there, and the angel said to the eldest brother,—

“What would you like to have?”

And he answered, “I should like this water to be turned into wine and belong to me.”

The angel made the sign of the cross with his staff, and lo!—instead of water, there flowed wine in the stream. Casks were being made, wine was being poured into them; people were seen working, and a village arose. The angel left the eldest brother there and said, “Now you have what you wished for, stop and live here.”

Then the angel took the two younger brothers, and went with them farther on. They soon came to a field in which an enormous number of pigeons were feeding. There the angel asked the second brother,—

“What would you like to have?”

And he answered, “I should like all these pigeons to be changed into sheep and belong to me.”

The angel made the sign of the cross with his staff over the field, and in an instant all the pigeons became sheep. A dairy appeared in which some women were milking the ewes, others were measuring the milk, collecting cream, making cheeses, and melting fat; there was also a slaughter-house in which meat was dressed, weighed, and money received; people were busy everywhere, and a village sprang up on the spot. Hereupon the angel said to the second brother, “Here you have what you wished for.”

Then the angel went away with the youngest brother, and whilst walking through a field he asked him,—

“And what would you like to have?”

So the youngest brother answered, “May Heaven grant me a truly pious wife; I do not ask for anything else.”

“Ah,” said the angel, “it is very difficult to find a truly pious woman. In the whole world there are only three such, two of them are already married, but the third is still a maiden; there are, however, already two suitors for her.”

Then they started again, and having walked for a long time they reached a town where a king lived who had a truly pious daughter. Having entered into the town, they went immediately to the king to ask for his daughter.

There they found that two kings had arrived before them, had asked for the princess, and had already put their apples on the table. Hereupon they also put their apples on the table by the side of the other apples.

When the king saw them he said to those who stood around,—

“What shall we do? The first two suitors are kings, and these men are mere beggars in comparison with them.”

Then the angel said, “I will tell you what to do. Let the princess take three branches of vine, plant them in the garden, and name each one after her lovers; in the morning on whose branch grapes will be found, him she must take for her husband.”

They all agreed to this proposition. The princess planted three branches of vine in the garden, and named each one after a suitor. In the morning there were grapes on the vine of the poor man. The king not knowing how to get out of this difficulty, was obliged to give his daughter to the youngest brother for wife; he took them at once to church and married them. After the ceremony, the angel took the newly-married couple to a forest and left them there, and they lived in that forest one year.

When the year was up, the angel was again commanded to go and see how the brothers were living, and to assist them if they needed it. Having descended to the earth the angel again assumed the shape of a beggar, went to the eldest brother where the wine was flowing in the stream, and begged him for a glass of wine; but the man drove him away, saying,—

“If I were to give a glass of wine to everybody that asks for it, there would be nothing left for me.”

When the angel heard this he made the sign of the cross with his staff, and the water flowed again in the stream as before; then he said to the eldest brother,—

“Riches were not good for you; go home and attend to your pear-tree again.”

Then the angel went to the second brother whose sheep covered the field, and begged him for a piece of cheese; he also drove the angel away, saying,—

“If I were to give a piece of cheese to everybody that asks for it, there would be nothing left for me.”

When the angel heard this he made the sign of the cross with his staff, and the sheep changed into pigeons again; then the angel said to him,—

“Riches were not good for you; go home and attend to your pear-tree again.”

At last the angel went to the youngest brother in order to see how he was getting on, and he found him living with his wife in a poor hut in the forest. The angel asked him for a night’s lodging, and they received him with all their hearts, and begged him to excuse them that they could not entertain him as they wished, “for” they added, “we are very poor.” And the angel answered them, “Never mind; I shall be satisfied with whatever it is.”

What were they to do? They had no corn to make bread with, but they used to pound the bark of trees and make bread of it. Such bread the woman prepared also for the visitor, and put it under an earthen cover to bake.

Whilst the bread was baking they entertained the visitor with conversation. When, some time afterwards, they looked to see whether the bread was baked yet, they found under the cover fine bread nicely baked—one could not wish for better, and it had even risen up under the cover; when the man and his wife saw it they lifted up their hands to heaven, and said,—

“Lord, receive our thanks! Now we can entertain our visitor.”

Then they put the bread before the angel and a gourd-bottle with water; but as soon as they began to drink out of it, the water was changed into wine. Hereupon the angel made the sign of the cross with his staff over the hut, and in its place there arose a princely palace with plenty of all good things in it. Then the angel blessed the man and his wife, and departed from them, and they lived happily until their lives' end.

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