



The Two Brothers (Indian Folktale)

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Indian

*Advanced
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Once upon a time there lived a King who had two young sons; they were good boys, and sat in school learning all that kings' sons ought to know. But while they were still learning, the Queen their mother died, and their father the King shortly after married again. Of course the new wife was jealous of the two young Princes, and, as stepmothers usually do, she soon began to ill-use the poor boys. First she gave them barley-meal instead of wheaten cakes to eat, and then even these were made without salt. After a time, the meal of which the cakes were made was sour and full of weevils; so matters went on from bad to worse, until at last she took to beating the poor young Princes, and when they cried, she complained to the King of their disobedience and peevishness, so that he too was angry, and beat them again.

At length the lads agreed it was high time to seek some remedy.

'Let us go into the world,' said the younger, 'and earn our own living.'

'Yes,' cried the elder, 'let us go at once, and never again eat bread under this roof.'

‘Not so, brother,’ replied the younger, who was wise beyond his years, ‘don’t you remember the saying—

”With empty stomachs don’t venture away,
Be it December, or be it May?’

So they ate their bread, bad as it was, and afterwards, both mounting on one pony, they set out to seek their fortune.

Having journeyed for some time through a barren country, they dismounted under a large tree, and sat down to rest. By chance a starling and a parrot, flying past, settled on the branches of the tree, and began to dispute as to who should have the best place.

‘I never heard of such impertinence!’ cried the starling, pushing and striving to get to the topmost branch; ‘why, I am so important a bird, that if any man eats me he will without doubt become Prime Minister!’

‘Make room for your betters!’ returned the parrot, hustling the starling away; ‘why, if any man eats *me* he will without doubt become a King!’

Hearing these words, the brothers instantly drew out their crossbows, and aiming at the same time, both the birds fell dead at the selfsame moment. Now these two brothers were so fond of each other that neither would allow he had shot the parrot, for each wanted the other to be the King, and even when the birds had been cooked and were ready to eat, the two lads were still disputing over the matter. But at last the younger said, ‘Dearest brother, we are only wasting time. You are the elder, and must take your right, since it was your fate to be born first.’

So the elder Prince ate the parrot, and the younger Prince ate the starling; then they mounted their pony and rode away. They had gone but a little way, however, when the elder brother missed his whip, and thinking he had perhaps left it under the tree, proposed to go back and find it.

‘Not so,’ said the younger Prince, ‘you are King, I am only Minister; therefore it is my place to go and fetch the whip.’

‘Be it as you wish,’ replied the elder, ‘only take the pony, which will enable you to return quicker. In the

meantime I will go on foot to yonder town.'

The younger Prince accordingly rode back to the tree, but the Snake-demon, to whom it belonged, had returned during the interval, and no sooner did the poor Prince set foot within its shade than the horrid serpent flew at him and killed him.

Meanwhile, the elder Prince, loitering along the road, arrived at last at the town, which he found in a state of great commotion. The King had recently died, and though all the inhabitants had marched past the sacred elephant in file, the animal had not chosen to elect any one of them to the vacant throne by kneeling down and saluting the favoured individual as he passed by, for in this manner Kings were elected in that country. Therefore the people were in great consternation, and orders had been issued that every stranger entering the gates of the city was forthwith to be led before the sacred elephant. No sooner, therefore, had the elder Prince set foot in the town than he was dragged unceremoniously—for there had been many disappointments—before the over-particular animal. This time, however, it had found what it wanted, for the very instant it caught sight of the Prince it went down on its knees and began in a great hurry to salute him with its trunk. So the Prince was immediately elected to the throne, amid general rejoicings.

All this time the younger Prince lay dead under the tree, so that the King his brother, after waiting and searching for him in vain, gave him up for lost, and appointed another Prime Minister.

But it so happened that a magician and his wife, who, being wise folk, were not afraid of the serpents which dwelt in the tree, came to draw water at the spring which flowed from the roots; and when the magician's wife saw the dead Prince lying there, so handsome and young, she thought she had never seen anything so beautiful before, and, taking pity on him, said to her husband, 'You are for ever talking of your wisdom and power: prove it by bringing this dead lad to life!'

At first the magician refused, but when his wife began to jeer at him, saying his vaunted power was all pretence, he replied angrily, 'Very well; you shall see that although I myself have no power to bring the dead back to life, I can force others to do the deed.'

Whereupon he bade his wife fill her brass drinking bowl at the spring, when, lo and behold! every drop of the water flowed into the little vessel, and the fountain was dry!

‘Now,’ said the magician, ‘come away home, and you shall see what you will see.’

When the serpents found their spring had dried up, they were terribly put out, for serpents are thirsty creatures, and love water. They bore the drought for three days, but after that they went in a body to the magician, and told him they would do whatever he desired if he would only restore the water of their spring. This he promised to do, if they in their turn restored the dead Prince to life; and when they gladly performed this task, the magician emptied the brass bowl, all the water flowed back into the spring, and the serpents drank and were happy.

The young Prince, on coming back to life, fancied he had awakened from sleep, and fearing lest his brother should be vexed at his delay, seized the whip, mounted the pony—which all this time had been quietly grazing beside its master—and rode off. But in his hurry and confusion he took the wrong road, and so arrived at last at a different city from the one wherein his brother was king.

It was growing late in the evening, and having no money in his pocket, the young Prince was at a loss how to procure anything to eat; but seeing a good-natured-looking old woman herding goats, he said to her, ‘Mother, if you will give me something to eat you may herd this pony of mine also, for it will be yours.’

To this the old woman agreed, and the Prince went to live in her house, finding her very kind and good-natured. But in the course of a day or two he noticed that his hostess looked very sad, so he asked her what was the matter.

‘The matter is this, my son,’ replied the old woman, tearfully; ‘in this kingdom there lives an ogre, which every day devours a young man, a goat, and a wheaten cake—in consideration of receiving which meal punctually, he leaves the other inhabitants in peace. Therefore every day this meal has to be provided, and it falls to the lot of every inhabitant in turn to prepare it, under pain of death. It is my turn to-day. The cake I can make, the goat I have, but where is the young man?’

'Why does not some one kill the ogre?' asked the brave young Prince.

'Many have tried, but all have failed, though the King has gone so far as to promise his daughter in marriage, and half his kingdom, to a successful champion. And now it is my turn, and I must die, for where shall I find a young man?' said the poor old woman, weeping bitterly.

'Don't cry, Goody,' returned the good-natured Prince; 'you have been very kind to me, and I will do my best for you by making part of the ogre's dinner.'

And though the old woman at first refused flatly to allow so handsome a young man to sacrifice himself, he laughed at her fears, and cheered her up so that she gave in.

'Only one thing I ask of you, Goody,' quoth the Prince; 'make the wheaten cake as big as you can, and give me the finest and fattest goat in your flock.'

This she promised to do, and when everything was prepared, the Prince, leading the goat and carrying the cake, went to the tree where the ogre came every evening to receive and devour his accustomed meal. Having tied the goat to the tree, and laid the cake on the ground, the Prince stepped outside the trench that was dug round the ogre's dining-room, and waited. Presently the ogre, a very frightful monster indeed, appeared. Now he generally ate the young man first, for as a rule the cakes and goats brought to him were not appetising; but this evening, seeing the biggest cake and the fattest goat he ever set eyes upon, he just went straight at them and began to gobble them up. As he was finishing the last mouthful, and was looking about for his man's flesh, the Prince sprang at him, sword in hand. Then ensued a terrible contest. The ogre fought like an ogre, but in consequence of having eaten the cake and the goat, one the biggest and the other the fattest that ever was seen, he was not nearly so active as usual, and after a tremendous battle the brave Prince was victorious, and laid his enemy at his feet. Rejoicing at his success, the young man cut off the ogre's head, tied it up in a handkerchief as a trophy, and then, being quite wearied out by the combat, lay down to rest and fell fast asleep.

Now, every morning, a scavenger came to the ogre's dining-room to clear away the remains of the last night's feast, for the ogre was mighty fastidious, and could not bear the smell of old bones; and this particular morning, when the scavenger saw only half the quantity of bones, he was much astonished, and beginning to search for more, found the young Prince hard by, fast asleep, with the ogre's head by his side.

'Ho! ho!' thought the scavenger, 'this is a fine chance for me!'

So, lifting the Prince, who, being dead tired, did not awake, he put him gently into a clay-pit close by, and covered him up with clay. Then he took the ogre's head, and going to the King, claimed half the kingdom and the Princess in marriage, as his reward for slaying the ogre.

Although the King had his suspicions that all was not fair, he was obliged to fulfil his promise as far as giving up part of his kingdom was concerned, but for the present he managed to evade the dreadful necessity of giving his daughter in marriage to a scavenger, by the excuse that the Princess was desirous of a year's delay. So the Scavenger-king reigned over half the kingdom, and made great preparations for his future marriage.

Meanwhile, some potters coming to get clay from their pit were mightily astonished to find a handsome young man, insensible, but still breathing, hidden away under the clay. Taking him home, they handed him over to the care of their women, who soon brought him round. On coming to himself, he learnt with surprise of the scavenger's victory over the ogre, with which all the town was ringing. He understood how the wicked wretch had stepped in and defrauded him, and having no witness but his own word, saw it would be useless to dispute the point; therefore he gladly accepted the potters' offer of teaching him their trade.

Thus the Prince sat at the potters' wheel, and proved so clever, that ere long they became famous for the beautiful patterns and excellent workmanship of their wares; so much so, that the story of the handsome young potter who had been found in a clay-pit soon became noised abroad; and although the Prince had wisely never breathed a word of his adventures to any one, yet, when the news of his existence reached the Scavenger-king's ears, he determined in some way or another to get rid of the young man, lest the truth should leak out.

Now, just at this time, the fleet of merchant vessels which annually came to the city with merchandise and spices was detained in harbour by calms and contrary winds. So long were they detained that the merchants feared lest they should be unable to return within the year; and as this was a serious matter, the auguries were

consulted. They declared that until a human sacrifice was made the vessels would never leave port. When this was reported to the Scavenger-king he seized his opportunity, and said, 'Be it so; but do not sacrifice a citizen. Give the merchants that good-for-nothing potter-lad, who comes no one knows whence.'

The courtiers of course lauded the kindness of the Scavenger-king to the skies, and the Prince was handed over to the merchants, who, taking him on board their ships, prepared to kill him. However, he begged and prayed them so hard to wait till evening, on the chance of a breeze coming up, that they consented to wait till sunset. Then, when none came, the Prince took a knife and made a tiny cut on his little finger. As the first drop of blood flowed forth, the sails of the first ship filled with wind, and she glided swiftly out of harbour; at the second drop, the second ship did likewise, and so on till the whole fleet were sailing before a strong breeze.

The merchants were enchanted at having such a valuable possession as the Prince, who could thus compel the winds, and took the very greatest care of him; before long he was a great favourite with them all, for he was really an amiable young man. At length they arrived at another city, which happened to be the very one where the Prince's brother had been elected King by the elephant, and while the merchants went into the town to transact business, they left the Prince to watch over the vessels. Now, growing weary of watching, the Prince, to amuse himself, began, with the clay on the shore beside him, to make a model from memory of his father's palace. Growing interested in his work, he worked away till he had made the most beautiful thing imaginable. There was the garden full of flowers, the King on his throne, the courtiers sitting round,—even the Princes learning in school, and the pigeons fluttering about the tower. When it was quite finished, the poor young Prince could not help the tears coming into his eyes, as he looked at it, and he sighed to think of past days.

Just at that very moment the Prime Minister's daughter, surrounded by her women, happened to pass that way. She looked at the beautiful model, and was wonderstruck, but when she saw the handsome, sad young man who sat sighing beside it, she went straight home, locked the doors, and refused to eat anything at all. Her father, fearing she was ill, sent to inquire what was wrong, whereupon she sent him this reply: 'Tell my father I will neither eat nor drink until he marries me to the young man who sits sighing on the sea-shore beside a king's palace made of clay.'

At first the Prime Minister was very angry, but seeing his daughter was determined to starve herself to death if she did not gain her point, he outwardly gave his consent; privately, however, arranging with the merchants

that immediately after the marriage the bride and bridegroom were to go on board the ships, which were at once to set sail, and that on the first opportunity the Prince was to be thrown overboard, and the Princess brought back to her father.

So the marriage took place, the ships sailed away, and a day or two afterwards the merchants pushed the young man overboard as he was sitting on the prow. But it so happened that a rope was hanging from the bride's window in the stern, and as the Prince drifted by, he caught it and climbed up into her cabin unseen. She hid him in her box, where he lay concealed, and when they brought her food, she refused to eat, pretending grief, and saying, 'Leave it here; perhaps I may be hungry by and by.' Then she shared the meal with her husband.

The merchants, thinking they had managed everything beautifully, turned their ships round, and brought the bride and her box back to her father, who, being much pleased, rewarded them handsomely.

His daughter also was quite content, and having reached her own apartments, let her husband out of the box and dressed him as a woman-servant, so that he could go about the palace quite securely.

Now the Prince had of course told his wife the whole story of his life, and when she in return had related how the King of that country had been elected by the elephant, her husband began to feel sure he had found his long-lost brother at last. Then he laid a plan to make sure. Every day a bouquet of flowers was sent to the King from the Minister's garden, so one evening the Prince, in his disguise, went up to the gardener's daughter, who was cutting flowers, and said, 'I will teach you a new fashion of arranging them, if you like.' Then, taking the flowers, he tied them together just as his father's gardener used to do.

The next morning, when the King saw the bouquet, he became quite pale, and turning to the gardener, asked him who had arranged the flowers.

'I did, sire,' replied the gardener, trembling with fear.

'You lie, knave!' cried the King; 'but go, bring me just such another bouquet to-morrow, or your head shall be the forfeit!'

That day the gardener's daughter came weeping to the disguised Prince, and, telling him all, besought him to

make her another bouquet to save her father's life. The Prince willingly consented, for he was now certain the King was his long-lost brother; and, making a still more beautiful bouquet, concealed a paper, on which his name was written, amidst the flowers.

When the King discovered the paper he turned quite pale, and said to the gardener, 'I am now convinced you never made this nosegay; but tell me the truth, and I will forgive you.'

Whereupon the gardener fell on his knees and confessed that one of the women-servants in the Prime Minister's palace had made it for his daughter. This surprised the King immensely, and he determined to disguise himself and go with the gardener's daughter to cut flowers in the Minister's garden, which he accordingly did; but no sooner did the disguised young Prince behold his brother than he recognised him, and wishing to see if power and wealth had made his brother forget their youthful affection, he parried all questions as to where he had learnt to arrange flowers, and replied by telling the story of his adventures, as far as the eating of the starling and the parrot. Then he declared he was too tired to proceed further that day, but would continue his story on the next. The King, though greatly excited, was accordingly obliged to wait till the next evening, when the Prince told of his fight with the demon and delivery by the potters. Then once more he declared he was tired, and the King, who was on pins and needles to hear more, had to wait yet another day; and so on until the seventh day, when the Prince concluded his tale by relating his marriage with the Prime Minister's daughter, and disguise as a woman.

Then the King fell on his brother's neck and rejoiced greatly; the Minister also, when he heard what an excellent marriage his daughter had made, was so pleased that he voluntarily resigned his office in favour of his son-in-law. So what the parrot and the starling had said came true, for the one brother was King, and the other Prime Minister.

The very first thing the King did was to send ambassadors to the court of the king who owned the country where the ogre had been killed, telling him the truth of the story, and saying that his brother, being quite satisfied as Prime Minister, did not intend to claim half the kingdom. At this, the king of that country was so delighted that he begged the Minister Prince to accept of his daughter as a bride, to which the Prince replied that he was already married, but that his brother the King would gladly make her his wife.

So there were immense rejoicings, but the Scavenger-king was put to death, as he very well deserved.

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