

Uncle Capriano

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Italian

Intermediate

10 min read

There was once a husband and wife who had a daughter. The man's name was Uncle Capriano and he owned near the town a piece of property, where he always worked. One day thirteen robbers happened to pass that way, saw Uncle Capriano, dismounted, and began to talk with him, and soon formed a friendship for him. After this they frequently went to divert themselves with him. When they arrived they always saluted him with: "Good day, Uncle Capriano," and he answered: "Your servant, gentlemen; what are your worships doing?" "We have come to amuse ourselves. Go, Uncle Capriano, go and lunch, for we will do the work meanwhile." So he went and ate and they did his work for him. Finally, what do you suppose Uncle Capriano tried to do? He sought to invent some way to get money from the robbers. When he went home he said to his wife: "I am on friendly terms with the robbers and I would like to see whether I can get a little money out of them, and I have invented this story to tell them: that we have a rabbit, which I send home alone every evening with fire-wood and things for soup, which my wife cooks." Then he said to his daughter: "When I come with the thieves, you bathe the rabbit in water and come out of the door to meet me and say: 'Is that the way to load the poor little rabbit so that it comes home tired to death?'"

When the thieves heard that he had a rabbit that carried things, they wanted it, saying: "If we had it we could send it to carry money, food, and other things to our houses." Uncle Capriano said to them one day: "I should like to have you come to my house to-day." There were thirteen of the thieves; one said Yes, another said No.

The captain said: "Let us go and see the rabbit." When they arrived at the house the daughter came to the door and said: "Is that the way to load the poor little rabbit so that it comes home tired to death?" When they entered the house all felt of the rabbit and exclaimed: "Poor little animal! poor little animal! it is all covered with sweat." When the thieves saw this they looked at each other and said: "Shall we ask him to give us this little rabbit?" Then they said: "Uncle Capriano, you must give us the rabbit without any words, and we will pay you whatever you ask." He answered: "Ask me for anything except this rabbit, for if I give you that I shall be ruined." They replied: "You must give it to us without further words, whether you are ruined or not." Finally Uncle Capriano let them have the rabbit for two hundred ounces, and they gave him twenty besides to buy himself a present with. After the thieves had got possession of the rabbit, they went to a house in the country to try it. They each took a bag of money and said: "Let us send a bag to each of our houses." The captain said: "First, carry a bag to mine." So they took the rabbit to load it, and after they had put the bags on it, the rabbit could not move and one of the thieves struck it on the haunch with a switch. Then the rabbit ran away instantly. The thieves went in great anger to Uncle Capriano and said: "Did you have the boldness to play such a trick on us, to sell us a rabbit that could not stir when we put a few bags of money on it?" "But, gentlemen," said the old man, "did you beat it?" "Of course," answered one of the thieves, "my companion struck it with a switch on the haunch." The old man asked: "But where did you strike it, on the right or on the left haunch?" "On the left." "That is why the rabbit ran away," said the old man. "You should have hit it on the right. If you did not observe these conditions, what fault is it of mine?" "This is true," said the thieves, "Uncle Capriano is right; so go and eat and we will attend to the work." And so their friendship was not broken this time.

After a time Uncle Capriano said to his wife: "We must get some more money from the thieves." "In what way?" "To-morrow you must buy a new pot, and then you must cook in an old pot somewhere in the house, and at Ave Maria, just before I come home, you must empty the old pot into the new one, and put it on the hearth without any fire. To-morrow I will tell the thieves that I have a pot that cooks without any fire."

The next evening Uncle Capriano persuaded the thieves to go home with him. When they saw the pot they looked at one another and said: "We must ask him to give it to us." After some hesitation, he sold it to them for four hundred ounces, and twenty over as before.

When the thieves arrived at their house in the country, they killed a fine kid, put it into the pot, and set it on the hearth, without any fire, and went away. In the evening they all ran and tried to see who would arrive first,

and find the meat cooked. The one who arrived first took out a piece of meat, and saw that it was as they had left it. Then he gave the pot a kick, and broke it in two. When the others came and found the meat not cooked, they started for Uncle Capriano's, and complained to him that he had sold them a pot that cooked everything, and that they had put meat into it, and found it raw. "Did you break the pot?" asked Uncle Capriano. "Of course we broke it." "What kind of a hearth did you have, high or low?" One of the thieves answered: "Rather high." "That was why the pot did not cook; it should have been low. You did not observe the conditions and broke the pot; what fault is that of mine?" The thieves said: "Uncle Capriano is right; go, Uncle Capriano, and eat, for we will do your work."

Some time after, Uncle Capriano said again to his wife: "We must get some more money out of them." "But how can we manage it?" "You know that we have a whistle in the chest; have it put in order, and to-morrow go to the butcher's, and get a bladder of blood, and fix it about your neck, and put on your mantilla; and when I return home, let me find you sitting down and angry, and the candle not lighted. I will bring my friends with me, and when I find the candle not lighted, I will begin to cry out, and you will not utter a word; then I will take my knife and cut your throat. You will fall down on the floor; the blood will run out of the bladder, and the thieves will believe that you are dead. You" (turning to his daughter)—"what I say I mean, when I tell you: 'Get the whistle'—get it and give it to me. When I blow it three times, you" (speaking to his wife) "will get up from the floor. When the thieves see this operation they will want the whistle, and we will get another six hundred ounces from them."

[Everything took place as Uncle Capriano had arranged; the thieves paid him six hundred ounces, and twenty over as usual, and then went home and killed their wives, to try the whistle on them. The rage of the thieves can be imagined when they found they had been deceived again. In order to avenge themselves, they took a sack and went to Uncle Capriano, and without any words seized him, put him in it, and taking him on a horse, rode away. They came after a time to a country-house, where they stopped to eat, leaving Uncle Capriano outside in the bag.]

Uncle Capriano, who was in the bag, began to cry: "They want to give me the king's daughter, and I don't want her!" There happened to be near by a herdsman, who heard what he was saying about the king's daughter, and he said to himself: "I will go and take her myself." So he went to Uncle Capriano and said: "What is the matter with you?" "They want to give me the king's daughter, and I don't want her, because I am married." The

herdsman said: "I will take her, for I am single; but how can we arrange it?" Uncle Capriano answered: "Take me out, and get into the bag yourself." "That is a good idea," said the herdsman; so he set Uncle Capriano at liberty, and got into the bag himself. Uncle Capriano tied him fast, took his crook, and went to tend the sheep. The herdsman soon began to cry: "They want to give me the king's daughter. I will take her, I will take her!" In a little while the thieves came and put the bag on a horse, and rode away to the sea, the herdsman crying out all the time: "They want to give me the king's daughter. I will take her, I will take her!" When they came to the sea, they threw the bag in, and returned home. On their way back, they happened to look up on the mountain, and exclaimed: "See there! is that not Uncle Capriano?" "Yes, it is." "How can that be; did we not throw him into the sea, and is he there now?" Then they went to him and said: "How is this, Uncle Capriano, didn't we throw you in the sea?" "Oh! you threw me in near the shore, and I found these sheep and oxen; if you had thrown me in farther out, I would have found many more." Then they asked Uncle Capriano to throw them all in, and they went to the sea, and he began to throw them in, and each said: "Quick, Uncle Capriano, throw me in quickly before my comrades get them all!" After he had thrown them all in, Uncle Capriano took the horses and sheep and oxen, and went home and built palaces, and became very rich, and married his daughter, and gave a splendid banquet.

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