



The Story of the Corn

Robert Stribling

Kids, Magic

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there lived a young boy whose ambition was to be a farmer. And he didn't want to be any old ordinary farmer, he wanted to be a great one, maybe the greatest ever.

This young boy had excellent examples to follow. His father was a farmer, as was his father's father, and so on, for generations and generations before him.

For all these generations they had plied their trades of farming, and some metal working and smithing, on their family land. And for generations, they had been successful at it. Not rich, mind you, for hardly anyone who does it right ever gets rich by farming; but they lived a comfortable life, in a comfortable house. It was a life that included the pleasures of both hard work with the comfort of traditions handed down from one generation to the next.

As the boy with the big dreams grew, he learned. He paid close attention. He learned from everyone in his family. From his parents he learned the art and science of farming. He also learned the love of cooking good food. He learned to fish and to hunt, how to recognize trees, plants, and to identify all the animals of the forest. But most of all he learned from his parents the importance of growing a variety of good foods and crops on his farm, of crop rotation, and the value of planning ahead and saving for a rainy day.

As our ambitious farmer boy grew older, he was allowed to accompany his father and grandfather to market. From one growing season to the next they went, and soon enough the young farmer boy was helping his family to sell their crops.

He caught on quickly, our young farmer. He had a knack for trading and usually got the best prices possible for everything his family had to sell. But the young farmer was especially good at selling the family's prize winning corn. The family's corn was known far and wide as the best there was. And the young farmer was good at making sure everyone knew it.

But there was a problem on their farm, as our young farmer saw it. His family would only allow him to grow corn on a fraction of their farm. Each year certain areas were set aside for corn, while other areas were set aside for crops that, although they didn't sell for as much money at the market, were beneficial to the health of the soil and ensured that the farm's crops were

balanced. And the next year the planted areas would change, rotate, so that what was planted in corn this year would be planted in something else the following year. And what was planted in something else this year, would be planted in corn the following year.

Farming had proceeded in this harmonious manner on our young farmer's land for decades, for generations, without any trouble. And why should there have been any trouble? Planting in this manner was the best way to keep the farm soil healthy and provide a variety of foods to eat and to sell. That was the way good farming was done, and the way our young farmer learned to do it.

And all was well...

Until one day...

Our young farmer asked his father a question. "Father," said our young farmer, "Why can't we plant corn on our entire farm one year, only one year. If we do that, we'd almost be rich with all the money we'd make. If we do it two years in a row, we would be rich. Then we could buy more land and grow more corn."

"Son," said the father, "only at great risk to the health of our farm would we do such a thing. Corn is a hungry crop that needs many nutrients and puts few back in the soil. Also, it is a rich food, makes us, animals, anyone

who eats too much of it fat, fat, fat, unlike oats or beans, foods that don't make us fat. They are plants that replenish the soil. No, no, son. This knowledge has been handed down for generations. It is foolish to do otherwise. And it feels like cheating.”

But our young farmer was unconvinced. He had seen, held, and counted the money from the corn crop, had seen his reflection in the coins of gold. And he wanted more. At night, in his bed, he dreamed of money. He dreamed of gold. He dreamed of making more money from selling more corn, whatever the cost. Night after night the dreams came. Month after month they came. Year after year they came. Making money became his obsession. Until, one year, after his father was of a great age and nearly blind, and our young farmer was no longer a very young man himself, but an unmarried man of middle age, beginning to gray at the temples, a man with no dreams or desires except to grow more corn to make more money, something changed.

Until that year our young farmer, now a middle-aged farmer, had been afraid to disobey his father's wishes to continue the practice of changing crops, of only growing some corn each year. But at the beginning of that growing season, our farmer decided to trick his old, nearly blind and deaf, father. He decided to plant all of their fields in corn. He even decided to cut most of their forest timber and to cultivate that land for corn.

When his father turned his clouded, blind eyes upon the fields and asked that spring, “How are the crops doing, my son?” The son replied, “As always, my father, very good.” He left it at that, not bothering, of course, to elaborate and therefore tricking himself into believing that he had not told a lie. But a lie by omission is still a lie.

Despite our farmer's deceit, the growing season progressed and the season passed and as it did neighboring farmers peeped over our farmer's fence rails to have a look and inquire as to what he was doing. But our farmer turned a deaf ear as the neighbor farmers said such things as: Mark my words, nothing good will come of this, and Foolishness, pure foolishness it is.

Our farmer must have heard some of the words, for from then on none of the neighboring farmers who said such things were allowed to pass through the fence gates to visit their good friend, the father, who was by now almost completely blind and deaf. The neighbors could only watch through cracks in the tall fence as corn grew and grew and grew until it was all taller than the average man and they could no longer see a thing but a sea of green, green corn.

By the end of that summer, many of the nay-sayers, for that is how our farmer thought of them, were being drowned out by the voices of those standing at the fence gawking at the acres and acres, as far as the eye could see, of tremendous, certainly prize-winning, corn.

It's stupendous, they said. Miraculous, they said. Never seen anything like it, they added. And, the one comment that made the nay-sayers bristle the most, I can't wait till next year. I'm going to plant all of my land in corn, too. Just look at that sea of corn. He's going to be rich. Who needs crops rotation?

At harvest time there was no doubt that our farmer's crops had produced a record amount of corn. Truck load after truck load was hauled to market. There was nothing else to take. It was all corn. And our farmer was handsomely paid for it, too. Even better, his corn crop had come in earlier than everyone else's, so that everyone else only made pittances for their corn crops. Our farmer had furnished all the corn needed for the year.

What's more, our farmer noticed, there didn't seem to be any bad effects on the soil from planting it all in corn. What a load of rubbish this crop rotation business is, said the farmer to himself as he hooked a thumb in the straps of his coveralls and surveyed his farm. He hefted a clod of soil and threw it into the air to land on the fodder littered ground. Next year, he said, I'm planting everything in corn.

True to his word, our farmer worked hard, cutting the rest of the timber on his and his father's land and cultivating it for corn planting in the spring. He also bought out most of the farms around him. The other farmers, stuck with their corn harvests from the previous growing season, were forced to sell. They could not make ends meet faced with this aggressive competition. They were sunk.

With his farm buying, our farmer became known over winter as the King Farmer. Some of the farmers he bought out stayed to work for him, others left never to return. Everything was going his way, even the nay-

sayers had stopped shouting through the fences.

When spring rolled around, the King Farmer once again planted all of his land, now four times in size, in corn. And once again, the corn crop thrived as the King Farmer predicted it would. Everywhere you could see, even from the highest hayloft window, there was corn. No one had ever seen anything like it.

Even the corn on the King Farmer's original land thrived, although, if anyone had bothered to pay close attention, and no one did, one could have seen that the corn grown on the land that was now into its third season, the fractional part that had been planted in corn the year before the King Farmer decided to plant everything in corn, wasn't doing quite as well as the other corn. It was yellowish and frail. This was only a small part now of the King Farmer's land and was hidden amongst the rest. And who pays attention to small things? Certainly not the King Farmer. He was in it for the big haul.

The King Farmer certainly did indeed get a big haul at harvest time. Every truck available in the land was needed to haul the King Farmer's bountiful corn crop to market. There were mountains of corn the likes of which no one had ever seen, so tall that children played king-of-the-mountain on them or burrowed into them, rooting, hiding. Corn got stuck in their ears and noses, but they didn't mind. This was all great fun.

There was so much corn during this harvest, that one might have thought there was too much of it. On the contrary, there was barely enough to meet the demand. For you see, there was little other food to buy at the market. There was mostly only corn. Only a few of the nay-sayers, those who had refused to be bought out, had grown different vegetables and fruits.

And there really was very little of that to choose from, because these nay-sayers had hauled their meager wares to market in modest carts and wagons, not in giant trucks. They were the ones now laughed at for their backwardness and old-fashioned ways. They were pummeled with thrown vegetables stolen from their own carts, were called names and run out of the market.

You'll be sorry for this one day, said the nay-sayers. You will be sorry.

Oh, get out of here, yelled the crowd, some of them crazy on corn liquor. Long live the King Farmer, they yelled.

And so it passed that all of the corn the King Farmer had grown that year was sold and he became even richer.

And no one held a grudge against him for it for this was progress. Even when more farmers had to sell their farms to the King Farmer they were happy to, because the King Farmer gave them jobs and wages and there was nothing to worry or think about. The King Farmer was going to take care of them. They didn't have to plan or think any more. They only had to put their trust in the King Farmer. This was easy enough. The King Farmer had proven that he could do no wrong. The King Farmer was bona fide.

That winter everyone grew fat on corn. They had corn hominy, corn grits, and cornbread. They cooked corn pone, corn muffins, corn soup, and even candy corn (the sugar imported from another country). They drank corn liquor and corn mead. By spring everyone was fat, fat, fat. And everyone worked for the King Farmer. By now some were simply calling him King.

And the nay-sayers watched through holes in the fences and shook their heads at it all, at yet another spring planting of all corn. By mid-summer they couldn't even do that because the tall corn blocked their view and their breeze, leaving them to sweat in the heat of their own hovels.

Then tragedy struck.

In the middle of that summer, the Farmer King's father, deaf, blind, and tricked, died. All of the people, fat on corn, many half drunk on corn liquor, waddled, crawled, or rode in wagons to pay tribute to the King's father, the father of the man who had so quickly revolutionized farming.

A three-day wake was held during which there was much caterwauling and wailing and gnashing of the teeth and many proclamations of love for the father of the King. And all this time the forgotten nay-sayers peeped out through their fences trying to catch glimpses of what was happening. But the corn was too high. They were surrounded. They could not see anything. So they waited.

After the third day there was a great debate as to where the King's father should be buried. Some thought he should be buried on the original land owned by the King before he became the King Farmer and then simply the King. Others said, Oh, no! We need every perch of land to grow corn.

In the end they decided on a burial at sea. The King's father was placed on a funeral raft and towed as far out to sea as they dared to go, where he was set loose in a current that would take him far away from land. By doing this they saved a speck of land six feet by four feet for corn growing.

Furthermore, it was decreed by the King (for by now king was more than a title, it was his position as everyone was doing exactly what he wanted them to do) that from that point forward all burials would be exactly as his father's had been, a sea burial.

In fact, the king decreed that all cemeteries and graveyards should be used for corn growing. So the people dug up the bones of all their poor ancestors and towed them out to sea.

And all of the citizens, fat on corn, drunk on corn liquor, agreed without complaint.

Well... not quite all. Everyone except for the nay-sayers, who complained, but quietly, inside their small enclosures.

As that summer progressed, and the harvest moon grew full in the sky, it became time, once again, to bring in another bountiful crop of corn. As expected the crop yielded more corn than even the previous year. More trucks than ever were needed to haul the corn to market. This harvest season there was so much corn it was decided that some of it would be shipped to other lands, where corn was not grown, for a princely sum in gold. The King used the gold to purchase even more land to grow even more corn.

And all was wonderful.

But if anyone had bothered to notice, and no one had, they would have seen the beginning of something, the beginning of an unravelling; for lost in the King's sea of corn was a small patch of corn that had not fared well that summer.

Because it was small in comparison with the rest of the land planted in corn no one had noticed it. This was the King's original lands, the land that was first planted in corn during the year he had decided to trick his father and plant their entire farm in corn. This was the land that had therefore now been planted in corn for three straight years. It had produced sickly looking, yellowed corn plants. That original farmland produced just enough corn to avoid notice by the casual observer.

The bad patch wasn't worthy of notice. Why bother? Everyone was happy and fat. And that winter, everyone got fatter, even if a few, a very few, were beginning to get tired of corn. Since they were in the minority, no one paid them any heed.

But the nay-sayers noticed the bad patch. They noticed the sallow stalks and puny ears on the king's old farmland. They held their tongues and waited.

Life that winter went on as usual.

But the next spring...

The next summer...

All of the King's original lands produced very sickly looking, withered and yellowed and feeble stalks of corn. This season it was noticed by everyone. At first no one had an answer as to why it had happened. Then someone, no one could say who exactly, accused the small group of nay-sayers of sabotage, of poisoning the King's crop of corn.

How ridiculous, responded the nay-sayers.

and:

Pish-posh, they said.

and:

We've done no such thing. It's your corn crop. It's killing the land.

We didn't have to do anything, explained a brave nay-sayer. You planted corn too many years in a row despite

all knowledge against it in the pursuit of gold.

Well that last comment was more than the king and his fellow corn eaters could take. As punishment, the nay-sayers were ostracized from their own land and made to leave in a boat as if they were the bones of the ancestors.

But the nay-sayers were not dead people, they were very much alive, a group of men, women, and children all huddled together on a small boat. And when they slowly sailed out of sight over the watery horizon they were never seen or heard from again by the king or his corn-loving people.

There was, of course, much rejoicing over this. The blight, as the king put it, would now go away and never return.

All that fall and winter there was much celebrating and eating of corn, for even though the king's original family farmland had produced a poor crop, the rest of his holdings, now quite large, had produced a good crop (although, if anyone had bothered to notice, not quite as good a crop as before).

And all were happy: except that a number of more people were beginning to feel that they had had quite enough of corn. Most of them decided to keep these thoughts to themselves. They did not want to end up on a small boat sailing to who-knows-where as the bones of their ancestors and the nay-sayers had done at the end of summer.

When next spring bloomed all of the land of the king's country, except, grudgingly, for small plots for houses, was again planted in corn. This year, there wasn't quite the usual giddiness of previous spring plantings. Oh, there were the usual parades and celebrations and spring festivals, but there was also an undercurrent of worry, fear even, about the blight of the previous summer's crop, small though it had been.

It did not take long to realize that the undercurrent of fear was indeed justified, for right away a large amount of the corn crop began failing and it was obvious that this summer's blighted corn crop was going to hurt. Most of the corn grown on the land purchased by the King that first winter showed right away that it was not going to fare well. It was soon obvious that there was not going to be enough corn to go around, at least, not in bounty like before.

What are we going to do? asked the people when it became abundantly clear that most of their corn crop wasn't going to produce anything and the ears of corn that were growing were stunted with snaggletooth rows of black kernels, not the healthy, robust corn of past summers.

When no one, not even the king, knew what to do, there was, of course, only one thing to do: panic!

There was much running about, with foolish recommendations tossed about like popcorn in a popping machine.

Let's build a ship and sail away, someone suggested.

Let's build a space ship and fly to another world, someone else said.

You're barking crazy, said yet another. We'll have to eat dirt.

You're crazy, said the space ship man. Your mama eats dirt! I'll eat you before I eat dirt.

No you won't.

Fists flew. Fights erupted. Finally, when everyone was battered and bruised, one of the braver, more astute citizens said, The nay-sayers were right.

You're right, said yet another. They were.

Then someone else said, Let's send for them.

Yeah, lets send for them, everyone agreed, followed by loud cheers, dancing, and waving of arms for several minutes. Then everyone stood around staring at each other. Well, someone finally said. Who's going to send for them?

There was a lot of milling about, shuffling, looking at feet and the heavens in search of an answer. After several minutes, with no one saying anything, or volunteering to go get the nay-sayers, it became obvious what had to be done. They were going to have to leave. They would have to go in search of the nay-sayers, and they were going to make the King Farmer of Corn lead the way.

These people were not sea people, even though they lived by the sea. By nature and temperament, they were land lubbers to the bone. They had only a small number of boats, and even all of them together could not carry a large number of people. But they had to do something. Their dilemma was to either leave now in a convoy of small boats, or wait until they could build one larger boat.

Not being a patient people, they decided to leave right then and there, packing the small boats with as many of themselves as they could.

With much fanfare and ceremony the dozen small boats set off on a sunny day with a light breeze to their backs. The king was in the lead boat, but the truth was, he didn't know where they were going and neither did anyone in any of the other boats. And even before they were entirely out of sight of land they began bickering, arguing over which direction to go. No one had bothered to bring along maps, for they did not have any; nor did anyone bring a compass. They did not own one of those either.

Soon the boats began to separate, to drift apart. No one had thought of rigging the boats with rope so that they would all stay together. So, with such great disparities in sailing skills from one boat to the next, the dozen boats began to separate.

As the sun rose after their first night at sea all dozen boats were so thoroughly and completely separated that it was obvious to the King Farmer that they were all now on their own. It was every boat for itself.

And there was no going back, because they did not even know which way was back.

They were quite lost.

On the king's boat, the twelve men and women, including the king, ate their pickled corn, drank their corn liquor, and waited for a miracle that never came.

It's believed that's where they remain till this day, a ghost boat, forever floating, unable to find land, unable to find any of the other eleven ghost boats.

The End

Read more fairy tales on Fairytalez.com