

Wisdom and Fortune

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Intermediate

8 min read

Once Fortune met Wisdom in a certain place.

“Get out of my way!” cried Fortune.

At that time Wisdom was inexperienced and did not know which was to make room for the other; she therefore said,—

“Why should I get out of your way? Are you better than I am?”

“He is better,” answered Fortune, “who can do most. Do you see that peasant boy ploughing the field? Get inside him, and if you succeed better than I, I shall always, and justly, make room for you whenever we meet.”

Wisdom agreed to this proposal and entered at once into the ploughboy’s head. As soon as the boy felt that he had wisdom in his head, he began to reason within himself,—

“Why should I walk until my life’s end behind the plough? Surely, I can somewhere else and more easily make my fortune.”

He left off working, shut up the plough, and drove home.

“Father,” he said, “I don’t like the peasant’s work. I would rather learn to be a gardener.”

The father said,—“What’s the matter with you, Vanek?[1] Have you lost your senses?” But after a moment’s thought he added, “Well, if you like to be a gardener, then learn it by all means; your brother shall inherit the hut after me.”

Vanek lost the hut, but he did not care about that; he went to the king’s gardener to be taught the art of gardening. The gardener did not teach him much, and yet Vanek learnt the business very quickly. In a short time he ceased to ask the gardener for instruction, but did everything according to his own idea. At first the gardener was angry, but when he saw that everything went better than before, he was satisfied. “I see,” he said, “you are wiser than I am.” He then allowed Vanek to garden just as he liked.

In a short time Vanek improved the garden so much that the king was greatly pleased with it, and often walked in the garden with his wife and their only daughter. That daughter was a very beautiful girl, but from her twelfth year she ceased to speak, no one heard a word from her. The king was greatly grieved on that account, and announced that whoever would make the princess speak again might take her for his wife. Many young princes, dukes, and other great men applied, one after another, but as they came, so they went away, not one of them succeeded in making the princess speak.

“And why should not I try my luck,” thought Vanek; “who knows, perhaps I shall succeed in making her answer me when I question her.”

He presented himself at once before the king, and the king with all his councillors took him to the apartments where his daughter lived. That daughter had a very beautiful little dog, of which she was very fond, because it was very clever; it understood everything that she wanted. When Vanek with the king and the councillors came into the princess’s room, he pretended not to see the girl at all, but turning to the little dog he said,—

“I have heard, my little dog, that thou art very clever; I have, therefore, come to thee for advice. There were three of us companions—a sculptor, a tailor, and myself. Once, as we were walking through a forest, we were obliged to stop in it for the night. In order to be secure from the wolves we lit a fire, and agreed among ourselves to watch one after another. The sculptor watched first, and in order to beguile the time he took a log of wood, and cut out of it a beautiful girl. When it was ready the sculptor awoke the tailor and asked him to watch. The tailor seeing the wooden girl asked what it was. ‘Just what you see,’ answered the sculptor: ‘the time

lay heavily on my hands, and I have cut this girl out of a log of wood; if you find the time tedious, you may dress her.’ The tailor took out at once the scissors, needles, and thread, cut the dress and began to sew it up; when the dress was ready he dressed the girl in it. Afterwards he awoke me, and asked me to watch. I said, ‘What have you got there?’ ‘Just what you see,’ he answered; ‘the time lay heavily on the sculptor’s hands, so he cut this girl out of a log of wood, and I, for the same reason, have dressed her. Should you find the time tedious, you may teach her to speak.’ I set to work and succeeded in teaching her to speak. But in the morning, when my companions awoke, each of them wanted to take the girl away. The sculptor said, ‘I have made her.’ The tailor said, ‘I have dressed her.’ I also defended my right. Tell me now, my little dog, to which of us does the girl belong?”

The little dog remained silent, but instead of it the king’s daughter said,—

“To whom should she belong but to you? What is the use of the sculptor’s girl without life, or of the tailor’s dress without speech? You have conferred upon her the greatest gifts—life and speech,—consequently she belongs to you by right.”

“You have decided about yourself,” said Vanek. “I have given to you speech and new life, consequently you belong to me by right.”

Then one of the king’s councillors said,—

“His majesty the king will give you a rich reward, because you have succeeded in unloosing his daughter’s tongue; but you cannot take her for your wife, because you are of mean birth.”

And the king added,—

“Because you are of mean birth I will give you, instead of my daughter, a rich reward.”

But Vanek would not even so much as hear of any other reward, and answered,—

“The king promised, without exception, that whoever would make his daughter speak might take her for his wife. The king’s word is law: if the king wish that the people should keep the law, he must keep it first himself. Consequently the king must give me his daughter for a wife.”

“Guards, seize him!” cried the same councillor.

“Whoever dares to say what the king should do, offends the royal majesty, and is guilty of death. May your majesty be pleased to order this criminal to be beheaded with the sword.”

The king said, “Let him be beheaded with the sword.”

Immediately the guards bound Vanek and led him to death. When they had arrived at the place of execution, Fortune was already waiting for them there, and whispered to Wisdom,—

“See how this man, for following you, is now about to lose his head. Get out of him, and let me enter in your place.”

When gracious Fortune had entered into Vanek, the executioner’s sword broke off at the handle, just as if somebody had cut it in half, and before another sword could be procured a messenger arrived on horseback from town, blowing a trumpet and waving a white flag; he was followed by a royal carriage for Vanek. It happened thus. The king’s daughter had been telling her father at home that Vanek alone had spoken the truth, and that the king’s word could not be broken; and although Vanek was of mean birth, yet the king could easily make him a duke.

The king said, “You are right; let him be made a duke.”

Then a royal carriage was immediately sent for Vanek, and in his stead was executed that councillor who had provoked the king against Vanek. When afterwards Vanek and the king’s daughter rode together from the wedding, Wisdom stood somewhere on the road, and seeing that she must needs meet with Fortune, she bent down her head and ran away aside, as if sprinkled with water. From that moment Wisdom, whenever about to meet with Fortune, passes her at a distance.

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