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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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The Two Brothers

Once upon a time there lived two brothers, who, when they were children, were so seldom apart that those who saw one always looked for the other at his heels.



But when they had grown to manhood, and the time had come when they must make their own fortunes, the elder brother said to the younger:

"Choose as you will what you shall do, and God bless your choice; but as for me I shall make haste to the court of the king, for nothing will satisfy me but to serve him and my country."

"Good fortune and a blessing go with you," said the younger brother. "I, too, should like to serve my country and the king, but I have neither words nor wit for a king's court. To hammer a shoe from the glowing iron while the red fire roars and the anvil rings—this is the work that I do best, and I shall be a blacksmith, even as my father was before me."

So when he had spoken the two brothers embraced and bade each other good-bye and went on their ways; nor did they meet again till many a year had come and gone.

The elder brother rode to the king's court just as he had said he would; and as time went on he won great honor there and was made one of the king's counselors. And the younger brother built himself a blacksmith's shop by the side of a road and worked there merrily from early morn till the stars shone at night. He was called the Mighty Blacksmith because of his strength, and the Honest Blacksmith because he charged no more than his work was worth, and the Master Blacksmith because no other smith in the countryside could shoe a horse so well and speedily as he. And he was envious of nobody, for always as he worked his hammer seemed to sing to him:

"Cling, clang, cling! Cling, clang, cling!
He who does his very best,
Is fit to serve the king."

Now in those days news came to the king of the country where the two brothers lived that the duke of the next kingdom had made threats against him, and against his people; and there was great excitement in the land.

Some of the king's counselors wanted him to gather his armies and march at once into the duke's kingdom.

"If we do not make war upon him, he will make war upon us," they said.

But some of the king's counselors loved peace, and among these was the elder brother, in whom the king had great trust.

"Let me, I pray you, ride to the duke's castle," he said to the king, "that we may learn from his own lips if he

is friend or foe, for much is told that is not true; and it is easier to begin a fight than it is to end one."

The king was well pleased with all the elder brother said, and bade him go.

"But if by the peal of the noon bells on the day before Christmas you have neither brought nor sent a message of good will from the duke to me, then shall those who want war have their way," he said, and with this the elder brother had to be content.

Day and night he rode to the duke's castle, and day and night, when his errand was done, he hastened home again. But the way was long and a strong wind had blown away the sign-posts which guided travelers, so, though he stopped neither to sleep in a bed or eat at a table the whole journey through, the early hours of the day before Christmas found him still far from the king's palace.

And to make matters worse, in the loneliest part of the road, the good horse, that had carried him so well, lost a shoe.

"Alack and alas! for the want of a nail

The horseshoe is lost; and my good horse will fail

For the want of the shoe; and I shall be late

For want of a steed; and my message must wait

For want of a bearer; and woe is our plight,

For want of the message the king needs must fight!"

cried the elder brother then; and he bowed his head

upon his saddle and wept, for where to turn for help he did not know.

The sun had not yet risen and no other traveler was on the road, nor could he see through the dim light of dawn a house or watch-tower where he might ask aid. But as he wept he heard a distant sound that was sweeter than music to his ears:

"Cling, clang, cling! Cling, clang, cling!"

"Only a blacksmith plays that tune!" he cried; and he urged his horse on joyfully, calling as he went:

"Smith, smith, if you love country and king, shoe my horse, and shoe him speedily."

It was not long before he spied the fire of a roadside smithy glaring out upon him like a great red eye, and when he reached the door of the shop he found the smith ready and waiting for his task.

Cling, clang, cling! How the iron rang beneath his mighty stroke! And cling, clang, cling, how the hammer sang as the shoe was pounded into shape!

By the time the sun was over the hill the horse was shod, and the rider was in his saddle again.

But the blacksmith would take no money for his work.

"To serve my country and the king is pay enough for me," he said; and he stood up straight and tall and looked the king's counselor in the eyes.

And lo! and behold, as the morning light fell on their faces, each saw that the other was his brother.

"God bless you, brother," and "God speed you, brother," was all that they had time to say, but that was enough to show that love was still warm in their hearts.

Then away, and away, and away, through the sun and the dew rode the elder brother—away and away over hill and dale toward the king's palace.

The king and his counselors were watching and waiting there, and as the sun climbed high and the message did not come, those who wanted war said:

"Shall we not saddle our horses, and call up our men?"

"The bells in the steeple have yet to ring for noon," said the peace-lovers; "and we see a dust on the king's highway."

"Dust flies before wind," said the warriors, "and it is likelier that our messenger lies in the duke's prison than rides on the king's highway."

But with the dust came the sound of flying hoofs.

Faster, faster, faster, they came. When the first stroke of the noon hour pealed from the church steeple the king's messenger was in sight, and the last bell had not rung when he stood before the palace gate to deliver the duke's message:

"Peace and good will to you and yours;

And to all a Merry Christmas."

Then the king sent for fine robes and a golden chain to be brought for the elder brother, and put a purse of gold in his hand, for he was well pleased with what he had done.

But the elder brother would have none of these things for himself alone.

"Try as I would, I must have failed had it not been for my brother, the blacksmith, who shod my horse on the

road to-day," he said; "and, if it please your majesty, half of all you give to me I will give to him."

"Two good servants are better than one," said the king, and he sent for the younger brother that he might thank him also.

Then the two brothers were clothed alike and feasted alike, and each had a purse of gold; and whenever one was praised, so was the other.

And they lived happily, each in his own work, all the days of their lives.