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The Two Friars

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Two friars were travelling — a friar and his lay brother — far from their convent. They had been walking through cold mountain air all day, and when the smell of roasting meat drifted toward them from the inn ahead, the friar decided the time had come for a proper meal.

The lay brother had misgivings. There was the question of conscience. There was the question of the bill.

"Leave the bill to me," said the friar.

He walked into the inn with such a commanding stride that the innkeeper — a one-eyed fellow named Francesco — immediately assumed his guest was someone of great importance. Before he had time to think, the friar was ordering the finest tablecloth, the crystal glasses kept locked in the cabinet, and the silver cutlery from the strongbox.

"Francesco Guercino — what have you got to feed a hungry gentleman in this poor little place of yours?"

The innkeeper fell over himself listing the menu: broth, boiled beef, crispy fried dishes, roasted poultry, omelette, hashed turkey with watercresses — and soup that no other inn in the province could match.

"Bring us the best of what you have," said the friar graciously. "It is not for poor friars to complain."



Every dish was brought with enormous deference. And each time the innkeeper set something on the table, the friar fixed him with a look of deep spiritual significance and said, "Blessed Francesco! Blessed Francesco!"

By the end of the evening, Francesco was burning with curiosity.

"Excellency — what is it you see about me that makes you call me blessed with such feeling?"

"I cannot say now, Francesco. Tomorrow perhaps. Now show us our rooms."

Of course he gave them the finest rooms in the house.

The next morning they breakfasted just as lavishly. Again the friar called him "Blessed Francesco!" Again he deferred the explanation. When the moment came to reckon the bill, the friar made an elaborate show of reaching for his purse, and Francesco — naturally — would not hear of accepting payment from such a distinguished holy man.

The friar and his companion made their way out to the road. The innkeeper called after them:

"But the explanation, Excellency! Why did you call me blessed?"

"I cannot say it here, Francesco. Walk with me to the foot of that hill, and I will tell you from the top."

When the friars had reached the summit and were safely beyond any possibility of pursuit, the friar turned and called down:

"Lucky for you, Francesco, that when you come to die you'll only have to shut one eye instead of two!"

And they walked on.

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