

The Magic Flute

This happened a long time ago when the world was built of wood and the clouds hung overhead on golden hairs. An elderly shepherd worked for a certain innkeeper, but he was not able to get any wages from him. Once his master said to him, "Ivan, why are you so sad? Is it bad for you to live here? You have already worked twenty years for me and I'm not thinking about dismissing you."

"Why shouldn't I feel sad?" replied Ivan. "People laugh because I have nothing, and I slave away for a beggar."

The innkeeper was ashamed to know they were calling him a beggar, "Here are one hundred gold coins," he said. "Now no one will say that you work for me for nothing."

Ivan took the money and schemed how he would obtain all his wages from the miserly innkeeper. He was just walking along the road when he met an old man.

"Why do you look so worried, my good man?" he asked the shepherd.

"Why shouldn't I worry when I have slaved for twenty years and have received only one year's wages?"

"I'll sell you this flute," said the old man. "When you start to play on it you will be happy and your master will be miserable."

So Ivan bought the flute from the old man, returned to his master and demanded, "Pay me all my wages for the past twenty years or you'll be sorry."

The innkeeper became angry and said, "Ivan, since you can talk like that to me, I'll force you to return the hundred gold coins I gave you."

“I won’t return them,” answered the servant, because I haven’t got them anymore. The money was mine and I bought a flute with it. Listen, how sweetly it plays.”

He had only placed the flute to his lips than the man started to dance. The more Ivan played the higher the innkeeper jumped. He danced until his tongue was hanging out of his mouth and he was all out of breath. He kept on dancing and implored his servant, “Ivan, stop playing. You don’t have to return the money.” But Ivan pretended not to hear him.

“Ivan, spare my life,” prayed the innkeeper. “Here are the keys to my cash box.” The master threw the keys to his servant and went on dancing. Ivan saw that the innkeeper was barely alive and stopped. He took the money—the wages for nineteen years of labour—and left.

But the innkeeper complained to the police, saying that the servant had robbed him and wanted to torture him. The police caught the shepherd and brought him to trial. The court decided to hang the thief. They led the shepherd under the gallows and asked if he had any last request. He replied, “Allow me to play a little on my flute.”

The innkeeper began to say something but the shepherd had already taken out his flute. He started to play and everyone began to dance. They danced as though an evil spirit were hurling them about.

“Ivan,” begged the judge, “stop playing. We’ll hang the innkeeper and let you go free.

When the shepherd stopped playing everyone was lying on the ground and they were barely breathing. He approached the innkeeper and said, “I am sparing your life. But if you ever injure or treat unjustly any poor man, you’ll have me to deal with!”

And Ivan went into the world to play at dances for the rich on his magic flute.