

The Tale of a Rich Bother and a Poor Brother

Once upon a time there were two brothers who lived near each other. At first they were friends, but later they turned into enemies because the older brother became rich and the younger poor, for God gave the younger brother twelve children each one smaller than the other. Their father fed them with fish that he caught in a net. But for several days he had had no luck and had returned home with empty hands. The children used to wait for him so eagerly, he would barely step over the threshold than they surrounded him like little burrs, asking if he had caught any fish. The poor brother was worried but he promised the children that the next day he would surely bring them some fish. He rose very early the next morning, whilst it was still dark. He took a net and went off so quietly that no one saw him. He thought that when the children got up there would already be some fish steaming on the table. But this time, also, though he fished until evening, he caught nothing. He wanted to go home but decided to cast his net for the last time. He held it for awhile in the water, then started to draw it in. He pulled it in and was overjoyed because he could feel something was there. He drew out his net and in it found a large, round stone, the size of his head. He took it, turned it over in his hands and wanted to throw it back into the water, but decided he wouldn't go home with empty hands, and so dropped the stone into his bag.

When he arrived home it was already dark. The children and his wife were waiting impatiently for him. And he, poor soul, didn't know what to say. He entered the house and right away in a cheerful and loud voice told them that he had brought them a ball.

The children had never had any playthings and soon forgot about food and began to beg their daddy to let them play a little. He placed them all in a circle, sat with them and told his wife to join the children in playing. Then he brought out the stone and they started to roll it from one to the other.

This game so delighted them that they forgot about eating. They laughed heartily as they played, until they got tired and began to fall asleep.

In the morning they rose and once more went for the ball. Each one of them wanted to take it into his hands, to hold it for awhile and play with it. And thus the ball passed from hand to hand. When it neared nine o'clock it became lighter in the dark little house, and the more often the stone passed from hand to hand, the more beautiful it became. When they gave it to the youngest child, he covered his eyes with his hands because he couldn't look at the stone. Inside the house it became so radiant, so lovely, it was as if the sun shone only in that one small window.

The father entered the house, saw the miracle and told his wife that the stone was probably very precious and that the landowner would pay them very well for it. He told his wife to bring him a clean towel because he wanted to take the stone to the landlord. The children became sad upon learning that daddy was going to give their only toy away. But the father told them that he would bring them something to eat.

So off he went to see the landlord. At first the servants shooed him away because he was so tattered, just like a beggar. But he asked permission to take a gift to their master, so in the end they opened the gate. He approached the landlord, bowed low and said, "Please accept this gift from me, sir."

At first the landlord glanced at him, laughed to himself and then hissed, "Show me what you have there." The poor brother unwrapped the towel and it became so light and beautiful in the house that the man covered his eyes from fright. Then he came to his senses, grabbed the stone with both hands and began examining it—even kissing it—and hid it safely in a cupboard. Then he gave the poor man a bag of money, some bacon and flour, and a wagon to drive him home. The poor brother was so happy that at last he would have some provisions for his family.

No sooner did he arrive home than he told his wife to cook some food and he sent his oldest son to go fetch some scales from the rich brother in order to weigh his money. The brother refused at first, then became curious as to what the poor brother wanted the scales for. He smeared the bottom with tar and gave them to the boy.

The poor brother weighed the money, but some coins were stuck to the bottom. The boy returned the scales, and all night long the rich brother couldn't sleep, as he kept thinking about where his brother had obtained the money.

In the morning the rich brother told his wife to finish milking the cow. He took a whole pitcher of milk for his poor brother, which he had never done before, and went off to see him. They sat and chatted about this and that, then he said, "Where did you get your money, brother?" And the poor man, not taking time to ponder for long, replied, "I gave the master a black cat, because he is fond of them. The black ones are very scarce, so for this he paid me generously."

The rich brother sat for a little longer and then said that he had lots to do and left the house. No sooner had he stepped outside than he started to run home, afraid that someone would get ahead of him. Reaching home, he called his son to prepare to go on the road. He harnessed the horse and they drove off.

The rich brother and his son went from village to village, purchasing black cats in large numbers and throwing them into a sack. When it became full the rich brother returned home in great glee. He dressed nicely and went off with the bag to see the landlord. He told the servants that he had brought a gift for their master, so they allowed him in.

The land lord, his wife and daughter sat in the parlor talking about this and that. The rich brother entered and kissed everyone's hands. He began to discuss the terms of the reward he would receive from the landlord for his gift of a whole sackful, not just a single one like his poor brother had given. The landlord's eyes lit up and he didn't know where to seat the rich man. But the landlord wasn't so generous. Firstly, he expressed a desire to examine the gift. The rich brother went out, came back with the sack, started to untie it—and from it jumped out some half-wild cats, hungry, all of them black. With frenzied mewling they tore up the walls, they scratched the landlord, his wife and his daughter till they bled. Frightened, the three fled to a corner where they shivered as though in a fever.

The servants came running into all this confusion. The landlord screamed that they should catch the crazy rich brother who had brought all those devils into their house. They managed to catch him and gave him twenty-five hot blows with a cane. Then the landlord ordered the greedy rich brother to pay for all the damage created by the cats. There was nothing else the rich man could do: he had to pay up and thus he himself became poor.

As for the poor brother, even today he lives in peace and prosperity with his children.