

## Gifts from the Pear Tree

Once there were two brothers, Peter and Ivan. Peter lived well. He had a fine house with matching property. Ivan had only a hovel with a broken-down stove and a handful of children. He worked from morning to night and could scarcely feed them. He didn't know how to free himself from misery and, on top of that, winter had set in. It was cold in the house and the children were crying. He covered his ears with his hands so as not to hear their cries and went outside. He gazed all around to find some trees to cut down for firewood. There was nothing in the yard except a single pear tree that had been growing there for many decades. In spring it spread joy with its blossoms; in summer it sheltered the children from the burning sun; and in autumn it fed the whole family with its tasty fruit. No matter how he pitied the pear tree, he had no other choice. He took an axe, closed his eyes, waved the axe and was ready to use it, when he heard the voice of the pear tree saying, "Do not chop me down, good man."

Ivan was so frightened that the axe dropped from his hands. But the pear tree continued to speak. "Climb up to the very top and break off the tallest branch from me. Whenever you need any food, just wave it three times, and repeat these words, 'Stove, heat yourself. Borsch, cook yourself.' And you will have food to eat and your house will be warm."

Though it was difficult to climb up the snow-laden tree, Ivan reached the very top, cut off the tallest branch and re-entered the house. The children wanted to beg their father for some food, but seeing the branch in his hand they became silent and huddled close in a corner. Ivan waved the branch three times and said, "Stove, heat yourself. Borsch, cook yourself." But he himself almost fell down from wonder: fire started to crackle in the stove and a fragrant borsch with meat began to boil in the pot.

His wife and children stood around the stove to get warm and waited impatiently for the borsch to be served. It was warm in the house. The mother served the food in a big bowl and everyone started to eat. They were happy and contented.

In the meantime, Peter was surprised when Ivan didn't appear that day at his place to work in the stable, even though the rich brother paid him with half-rotten straw that wouldn't burn but only filled the house with the smell of gas. Peter stepped outside and noticed that smoke was coming from the chimney of his brother's place, but he couldn't figure out where Ivan had obtained the wood or straw. His curiosity got the better of him. Feeling furious, he stepped angrily into his brother's house, slammed the door and was ready to shout. But he couldn't utter a single word from surprise. He saw that everyone was happy: they were eating borsch; the children were licking the soup bones; and it was warm in the house. And furthermore, the borsch smelt so appetizing that he felt like eating himself.

Ivan was so happy that he forgot all the wrongs caused by Peter and kindly invited him to the table. He sat down and started to eat, meanwhile saying with insincerity how happy he was that his brother's family was so well fed and sitting in the warmth. But one thought bothered him: where did it all come from? Ivan then informed him that he had a magic branch and showed him how it worked.

Peter returned home. He thought for a long time about how to get hold of the magic branch. One day he saw where Ivan had hidden it. Then he climbed up the pear tree, broke off a similar branch from the very top, hid it in the leg of his boot and began to wait for a moment when his brother was going to leave the house to go off somewhere. He didn't have long to wait. Ivan took a pail and went to get some water and the well was quite a distance off. Meanwhile, the jealous

brother suddenly disappeared into the house. He drew out the magic branch from the joist in the ceiling, and in its place put another one then hurried out of the house.

Ivan returned with the water and the children informed him that their Uncle Peter had been there. The poor brother's heart started to pound and he felt that something bad had happened. He glanced at the joist in the ceiling and saw the branch in its place, so he became calm and returned to his work.

Soon lunchtime came and Ivan entered the house. The children were already all seated at the table. He washed his hands, took the magic branch, waved it three times and repeated, "Stove, heat yourself. Borsch, cook yourself." But the stove didn't heat itself and the borsch didn't cook itself. Now Ivan understood why Peter had visited him so often.

They lunched on odds and ends. But Ivan couldn't settle down to work. He kept thinking about what he should do. Evening came and he still couldn't think of anything, so he finally went to the pear tree. He embraced it, stood for awhile, then asked the tree to forgive him because he wasn't able to guard the gift. At the same time he asked it to have compassion and advise him what to do now. The pear tree pitied the poor man and said that it had no better present for him than a special sack that he would find in the hollow of the tree. One had to repeat these words to the sack: "One, two, three: open, Sack, immediately."

He had scarcely managed to utter the last word than the sack opened up and forty little men jumped out and started to beat him. When they had beaten him soundly he came to his sense and said, "One, two, three: close, Sack immediately."

The little men again hid themselves in the sack. Ivan thought and thought about how he could use the sack. Then he took it and went straight to Peter's house. When he entered, his brother

shouted at him, wondering why he had come. Ivan quietly said that he had come to ask advice. The matter lay in the fact that this time he had a magic sack but was afraid to leave it at home because someone had exchanged the magic branch. Wouldn't Peter take it for safe keeping? The rich brother was very pleased and began to inquire what kind of sack it was and how to make use of it. Ivan informed him that he only had to say, "One, two, three: open, Sack, immediately," and he would then see what would happen.

Peter took the sack and said that he would hide it safely—the brother was not to worry. But he could hardly wait till Ivan had left the house. Ivan thanked him for his courtesy and returned home, which was just what Peter wanted. He thereupon shut himself in his room, took the sack, gazed at it for a long time and uttered these words: "One, two three: open, Sack, immediately." He hadn't even managed to finish when forty little men jumped out of the sack, started to beat him and said, "Return you brother's magic branch!" And they kept beating him. Then they started to beat whatever they saw in the house. Peter was already barely breathing but he didn't know the words to use to close up the sack, so the little men kept doing their thing. He begged them to let him so he could return the magic branch to Ivan. Then the eldest of the little men ordered them all to climb back again into the sack.

Peter himself took the sack and the magic branch and carried them to his poor brother. Nothing was said. Ivan didn't question him because he knew what had happened. Henceforth Ivan lives with his little children in warmth and plenty. And for all the various wrongs done by the rich and prosperous, he repays them with gifts from his magic sack.