

The Golden Wheat

Once upon a time there lived a man and a woman. They were as poor as church mice. They had so many children that sometimes they even forgot their names.

The man used to cut wood in the forest and thus earned his bread. One day he was going to work when he heard some clamour. Someone was crying for help from the swamp. The poor man had a kind heart and went to the rescue. In the swamp he saw a golden coach stuck in the mud. And in it was a golden-haired little girl. She begged him to pull out the coach. The man succeeded in doing so. The little girl thanked him, saying, "When the sun is setting, I'll bring a bag of gold to your home."

The poor man said goodbye and went off into the forest. He worked as hard as two men. He sang and danced with happiness and kept looking into the sun. The day was never as long to him as it was that day. He barely managed to wait till lunch. He threw down his axe and hurried off home. When he was already near the house he started to call his children so they should run to greet him. His wife also came out of the house and said to her husband angrily, "Why do you have to be greeted when you are coming home empty-handed?"

"Not with empty hands but with great news because I'm bringing good fortune home," replied the man. Then he asked them all to sit around him. And he began to tell them how that morning when he was going to work he had gone to the aid of a little girl whose coach had stuck in the mud. She had promised to bring him a bag of gold when the sun was setting. Everyone became very happy to hear the news.

The man then began to explain where he was going to put the money, what use he would make of it. "First of all, I'll build a big house with a very pretty porch, and on the window sills there

will bloom all kinds of flowers the whole year round. Near the house I'll plant an orchard and in it I'll make a bee-garden that will provide herbal honey. Not far in the valley there will be a pool with all kinds of fish. My wife and daughter will be clothed in rich clothes and I'll send my sons to school to get a higher education. Everyone will be engaged in doing his chosen work."

All of them listened carefully with open mouths. When the sun had almost set, the father finished. The first to come to her sense was the woman, and she said it would have been better if the man had brought the coach home so the girl would know that it was theirs, otherwise it was like hunting for the wind in a field. It was time for the girl to bring the gold, and they had wasted the afternoon. Suddenly she sprang at her husband and the children came behind her. It almost came to a fight.

But just at this moment a coach stopped near the house. From it there peeped a golden-haired little girl who said that the man should come quickly to take the bag of gold. The children started to hop around and the man stood on the spot like a post, he was so overcome. He only recovered himself when his wife poked him in the side. The man barely managed to take from the coach a tied-up bag. The coach disappeared in a wink, so fast as if the wind had blown it away. The man carried the bag into the house. He untied it and saw that in it were some large grains of wheat. Only then did the man find himself in a fix. He already couldn't stand anymore the screams of his wife and the crying of his children. He took the bag on his shoulders and went off. When he had walked a bit beyond the house he angrily scattered all of the grains of wheat hither and yon. Then he strode on to find work elsewhere.

The following year he returned home. When he started to approach his house he noticed that the wheat had grown like a forest and on every stalk there was a heavy spike that almost bent it. And

all the stalks glistened in the sun. Then he realized that this was the gold that the little girl had given. It was truly real gold.

The man was overjoyed. And once more as a year previously he ran, calling that everyone should greet him. At first they didn't want to, then later they followed him. When they saw the golden spikes that glistened so beautifully in the sun, they were very happy. The children touched the spikes with their hands, stroked and kissed them and couldn't decide what to do with them.

The man said that first it was necessary to mow it carefully and then thoroughly grind it and gather all the gold in a sack. Everyone worked with great enthusiasm and cheerfulness. They didn't even leave one spike and picked up every grain.

And so they came to love this work. Every year they sowed the golden wheat and gathered a good harvest. From that time on they lived in prosperity. And they valued fair weather and a good harvest more than a bag of gold.