

Fortune and Misfortune

Once there were two brothers: one was poor and the other rich. They sowed some grain in a single field. The wheat that grew in the poor man's section was healthy, but that which grew in the rich man's was not as hardy. However, during the night someone kept stealing the wheat from the poor man and transferring it to the rich man. The poor man guessed that his brother was stealing it so at night he went to guard it.

Suddenly he saw some kind of bird pulling up the wheat. He managed to catch it. He wanted to strangle it but the bird began to speak, saying, "Don't strangle me, because Misfortune will kill you!"

"Who in the world are you?"

"I am your brother's Fortune."

"And where is *my* fortune?"

"You don't have any Fortune because Misfortune has made his home on your hearth. But go out into the world so things will fare better for you."

So the poor man with his wife and children set off in a wagon. But Misfortune had sprung up from the hearth and started to shout, "Woe is me! So you are going and leaving me behind?"

And she took hold of the wagon, screaming, not wanting to be left behind. So the family had to drive off with Misfortune. They began to quarrel, meanwhile thinking to themselves, "and where can we go with Misfortune. No one will take us in with her around."

They stopped to rest in some woods. They climbed down from the wagon and decided to light a fire. The man went for wood and remarked to Misfortune, "Come on, you can help me chop some wood!"

He took a thick oak tree, split it and said to Misfortune, “Shove your hand here. I want to chop this oak.” Misfortune stuck both hands in, but the man let go and the oak imprisoned Misfortune’s hands. Misfortunate jumped, screamed in several tones of voices, but she couldn’t move. And then the family hitched their horses to the wagon and drove off farther, leaving Misfortune behind.

Finally they arrived at a certain village and hired themselves out to a landowner. The father served as steward, the mother as a cook, the children tended the sheep. And the landowner said to them, “If you serve me well, you will be happy here, but if you don’t I’ll just send you away.” Once when the boy was herding the sheep he killed one of them with a whip. He told his father, who said to him, “Keep quiet. Don’t say anything because the master will be very angry. I’ll bury the sheep and we’ll tell him that a wolf has devoured it.”

Then he went with the boy to dig a hole for the sheep. He was digging away when he noticed a cellar. He opened it and saw that it had nothing in it but barrels that turned out to be full of money. He ran to the master and said, “I wanted to bury the sheep and I found a cellar full of money.”

The landowner was delighted! He drove to the cellar, took eight wagons of money and said to the servant “I’ll give you all my property and I’ll take this money and use it as my pension.” So the master gave him all his property and drove off with the money.

Thus the poor man became very rich—a landowner. He wrote to his brother, “Sell off all your property and come here and we’ll live together just like lords.” The rich brother did as he suggested. He sold everything and set off. He walked the same road on which Misfortune was

caught in the oak tree. Misfortune saw him and said, "Free me from here and I'll make your brother poor again and you will become a landowner!"

So he removed Misfortune's hands from the oak tree and freed her, but she grabbed him by the throat and said, "Now I'll not let you go as long as you live!" Thus he arrived at his brother's accompanied by Misfortune. When his brother saw Misfortune he got very angry and chased him away. The formerly rich brother returned home but he suffered from poverty until the day he died.