

The Silver Trumpet

Once there lived an old farmer who had three sons. And since he was very old and knew he could not stay much longer in this world, he one day called his sons to him and said, "My children, I will soon be leaving you, and since I have nothing to give you but this house and this farm and what they contain, and since we have lived here together all of our lives, I want you to continue living as we have until now. Each of you must share with the

others equally. As long as you do so, you will live in peace and harmony and have good things come unto you. But if any of you ever becomes selfish and wants something that is not his, then what the result might be I cannot say."

And with those words he turned over in his bed and went into a deep sleep from which he never woke again. When the boys saw that their father was dead, they wrapped him in a linen cloth and took him to the church for a proper burial. The pastor took the coins they offered him and rang the church bell until a few people gathered. Then with a song and a prayer and a few good words about the old man they let him down into his final resting place.

But the oldest son could hardly wait until the grave was covered before he said to the second, "Look brother, this little farm we got from our father isn't worth very much, but we could eat better if there were only two of us instead of three. Let us send the little one out into the world to make his own way. Then you and I can have a better living between us."

The second one didn't think much about it but answered immediately, "That sounds good to me," and he laughed and laughed out loud, "Haw, Haw, Haw!"

When the younger one heard that laugh, his heart shuddered in his breast, for he knew that his older brothers held no good for him. Then he cried an extra tear for his dear father who had just departed them and wondered whatever he would

become in the world with no one to care about him any more.

As soon as they got home from the funeral, the older brother spoke out, "Look here, young one, life is going to be hard for us now, and we don't intend to make it any harder than we have to. I don't want to go hungry any more because this little farm doesn't make enough for us all to eat. Now get out of our way and go out into the world and let us live in peace." Then the middle brother laughed again, "Haw, Haw, Haw!" and said, "You'll do well enough, and you might even be happy some day that we sent you off. Now be gone."

So that no one could say he never gave his younger brother anything, he pulled down a sack that their father had

kept many years on the shelf over his bed saying, "He never looked in this thing, so it surely isn't worth much, but if you find any good in it, you are welcome." And with that he threw the bag so hard at the young one and gave him such a hard kick that he rolled out the door and into the yard.

Then the young one had to pick himself up, try to beat the dust off of his shirt, and go off by himself into the world. But his father's bag he held tightly to his heart without looking into it, and as he walked down the road past the church and the graveyard where his father was newly buried, he murmured softly to himself, "Oh, my dear father, if you could only see what has become of me now." And he picked a wild daisy from beside the road

and went to his father's grave and kissed the flower and placed it gently at the headstone and said quietly, "Rest well, dear Father, you have things better now than I." Then he picked up his sack again and walked on down the road.

He hadn't gone very far when an old man appeared and began to walk along quietly at his side. He wore a long flowing robe, and a dark cowl flapped around his head. His eyes were sunken deep in his face, and he had a long flowing beard. The boy thought he must be a farmer because he carried a long scythe in his hand that he tamped on the ground like a walking stick as he trod along. And even though he was a stranger, the boy was comforted and glad to share his sorrow in silence.

After several long miles the old man finally spoke, saying, "Young man, your time is not yet, and until your time comes, there is no reason for you to suffer. In that bag which you carry is your fortune, and if you do it right, good luck and happiness will come to you yet. There you will find a trumpet, which you must learn to play very well. When you have learned it, go out into the villages and the highways, and whoever gives you a penny and asks you to play a song, play for him as best you can, and he will receive what he deserves.

Then the boy lifted up his face to thank the old man for his kindness, but he was not to be seen anywhere. And he wondered about all these things in his heart.

He walked on until evening, when he came to a small brook that tumbled down out of the mountain and flowed across the road. And the brook looked so fresh and cool that he turned aside from the road and climbed up the rocks through the trees, following the brook until he came to a small high meadow where the flowers all nodded to him a friendly welcome, the brook cascading down over the rock sang a real tune that he thought he could learn to whistle, and the wind in the trees sounded like words of friendship and welcome. It all seemed so peaceful and friendly that he decided to look in his bag and see what he could find to make himself comfortable for the night.

There he found a warm blanket, a loaf of bread, a ball of cheese, a knife, and then,

far down at the bottom, a silver trumpet wrapped in blue velvet. As he unwrapped the trumpet, great joy flowed into his heart, and he put it to his lips and began to blow, and he was amazed at the beautiful sound that came from it, for he had never played a trumpet before.

Then he carefully laid the trumpet aside and set about to have his supper—a slice of bread and a piece of cheese—and he picked some bright red berries from a bush hanging over his head and had a fine dessert.

After he had eaten and rested, he took up the trumpet again. As he put it to his lips, he listened to the song of the brook gurgling down over the rocks. It was slow and graceful, but with a majestic rhythm and ornamented with grace notes about

the melody. And he listened and played, and listened and played, until he could almost make the trumpet sound the same notes as the brook sang. Then he wrapped the trumpet again in its blue velvet and wrapped himself up in the warm blanket and lay down for a good night of sleep.

When he awoke in the morning, he took out the bread and cheese again and found them whole. He could see nothing missing from either one, though he had eaten his supper from both the night before. He took his knife and cut again a slice of bread and a piece of cheese for breakfast and took again some bright red berries from the bush over his head and had some sweet water from the brook. And it was a breakfast as he imagined any king would be happy to enjoy.

When he had finished eating, he took up the trumpet again to play, and even though the brook still ran, it seemed quiet, as though waiting, without a song. He remembered the song from the night before, and in his heart he rehearsed all the majestic rhythms and the grand melodies and the grace notes around the melody, and he played and played until it seemed he had it right. Then suddenly the brook began to sing again, more loudly and more joyously than before. But the melody it sang was in counterpoint to the one he had learned. So he blew, and the brook sang, and it was a beautiful fugue they played together until the sun was high and it was time for dinner.

When he picked up the bread and cheese, they were whole as before, and he

understood that as long as he had these, he would never be hungry. Then he took his knife and ate again of the bread and cheese and berries and drank from the brook, and he knew in his heart that he had truly found his fortune and had never cause for fear.

After dinner, he heard the brook singing a new song, and he listened carefully until he knew it well within his heart. Then he took up the trumpet again and played until he knew he had it right. Then the brook joined in with a new fugue duet as it had before.

Every day he learned new songs from the brook in point and counterpoint. Sometimes he would lead and the brook would follow, and sometimes the brook would lead and he would follow. And so

he lived his days gloriously while the summer sun rose and fell, eating the bread and cheese that never diminished and the berries that every morning hung fresh over his bed, and drinking from the brook so fresh and sweet, until the day came when the dark grew as long as the light, then the brook fell silent, and a chill wind came down the canyon and the wind in the trees began to groan and to sigh, and the flowers all turned their heads as if to weep good-bye.

Thus he knew the time had come that he must depart. Into the bag he put his blanket, his bread and cheese, the knife, and last of all, the silver trumpet carefully wrapped in the blue velvet. Then slowly and sadly he went down the canyon.

When he came to the road, he turned his face into the wind, away from whence he had come a few weeks before, and smiled and said to himself, "The world is good, and I will find my way."

As the day grew into evening, he came to a farm, and he turned in at the door and knocked and said, "I will stay with you this winter and feed your flock. Only give me a place in the loft where I may sleep and be warm. And have no worry for me, for my care is sure."

So the farmer showed him to the loft of the barn where there was plenty of fine-smelling hay, and there the boy slept and lived through the winter. Every morning he rose early to feed the animals and do his other chores. But at night, when everyone was asleep, he took out his silver trumpet

and played softly the songs the brook had taught him..

One night as he was playing he became very lonesome for the brook and for the duets they had played together, and with all of his heart he wished that he could hear the brook singing in counter point with him again. Suddenly a great yearning broke forth in his heart, and in his yearning he blew, and to his joy he discovered that he could play two notes at once. And he worked and studied every night until he could play all the songs that he had learned from the brook, both parts and once, point and counterpoint, and his heart was satisfied because he felt he had the brook with him still.

Finally came the time when the day grew as long as the night, and he packed

his bag again and went to the farmer and said, "I must leave you now. The winter is past and my time is come." And he went out into the road and turned his face into the wind and walked until he came into a village. He continued on until he came to the market square where the old stone fountain gurgled and jumped. And it sounded so like his brook that he was filled again with longing. He sat down on the stone wall of the fountain and took out his trumpet and began to play, and the village people gathered around him and listened. Then one old man came forward and said, "I wish you to play a song just for me," and dropped a penny at his feet.

Then the boy lifted up his trumpet and blew a song that made point and counterpoint; it seemed the fountain joined in

with still another part, counterpoint to the other two, and he played with great joy, remembering that each who requested a song would get that which he deserved.

As he played he saw a pile of gold coins fall at the feet of the man who had paid for his song. The man was astonished and picked up the coins and put them in his pocket, except for one, which he brought forward and added to the penny which he had given before. Then he went away happy. There was great excitement, and the people pressed forward, each one wanting a song. The first one to drop a penny was a rich merchant who could well have given a guilder. But the boy lifted up his trumpet and played as grandly as before.

But this time as he played, a great swarm of bees came out of the linden tree over the fountain and swarmed around the head of the merchant and stung and buzzed until he ran screaming curses out of the market to his house, where he stuck his head in a bucket of water to escape the bees.

Then all the people were afraid, and no one wanted a song any more. Some looked like they would pick up cobblestones out of the street to throw at him. So he wrapped up his trumpet and walked on.

And so it went day by day throughout the summer in many villages that he would play for the people, and some received gold or fine silk and some healed friendships and found love. But others

were bitten by scorpions or chased by dogs. So his fame grew great throughout all the kingdom, but no one knew his name or where he came from.

Finally, after several months, when the hay was piled in the barns and the apples hung red on the trees, he came at last to his own village. There again he went to the fountain in the town square to play, but no one recognized him. The first to give him a penny was an old widow woman whom he had known before, that she was full of kindness. And as he played, gold coins showered down from the sky into her apron, and she tied up her apron and went home happy. Then he saw his two brothers come up, each with a penny, and he heard the older one say, "We can use some of that gold. Then we won't have

to work that old farm any more." And he heard the middle one answer, "We don't need to worry about the song. Nothing bad can happen to us. If we were going to be punished for what we did to our brother, it would have happened already long ago."

So they threw their pennies at his feet and sat down and smiled and waited. Then the boy took up his trumpet and wondered what would happen next. He put forth all of his heart and played with all the yearning that was within him, not only for the brook and the meadow that had been his friends, but also for his dear father whom he had lost. And as he played, he saw the older brother begin to grow a pig snout, and the middle one grew a pair of ass's ears. And as he continued

playing, the snout grew fatter and pinker, and the ass's ears grew longer and browner, until all the people began to laugh. And they laughed and laughed until the brothers put their hands up to their heads and felt the changes that had happened to them. Then they pulled their coats over their heads and ran from the village and were never seen or heard from again.

But the boy went back to his father's farm and said, "Someone needs to love this place, and I do." And he lived and worked there all the rest of his life.

But he wrapped up his silver trumpet in its blue velvet cloth, and he put it in the old bag, together with the ball of cheese and the loaf of bread that never diminished and the blanket, and he put the bag on the

shelf where his father had kept it, and no one touched it again for as long as he lived.

He had a long and peaceful life, and he married a thrifty girl and had three strong sons. And none of them ever knew that they had two uncles, one wearing a pig snout and the other wearing ass's ears.