

A TALE OF THREE BROTHERS WHO TENDED GEESE

There was once a old man who lived with his three sons. He was very poor, and, more often than not, couldn't provide for his family, so one day the eldest son decided he should go out to seek work. The young man told proudly told his father and brothers "*I will go out into the world to find work. You will all see how much food and money I can bring home.*" With that, and his father's blessing, he set off.

The eldest son wandered far and wide, and everywhere he went he asked everyone he met for work. But, it was all to no avail until, he arrived at the grand estate of a very rich man. This lord took pity on the youth, and decided to employ him tend his flock of geese. But there was one condition:

"You must promise me —" said the rich lord. His new gooseherd quickly agreed, but he continued "when you are out in the fields, and you hear music coming from the forest, you must never, ever, stop to listen. If you ever, just once, stay to listen to the song, then I will have to dismiss you, immediately!"

The young man swore by everything which was holy, and by everything which was dear to him that he would never, ever, as long as he lived, listen to any music coming from the forest. With that, he was sent out into the fields, happily following a large flock of fat, white geese. All morning, he stayed with his geese in the meadow, away from the trees, and, as he watched them, he was very pleased that he had found such easy and pleasant work. But, as the sun rose higher in the sky, he soon discovered that it could be very hot work.

By midday, he was already looking for a place in the shade to rest, so he wandered over to the edge of the forest. There, he found a place under the low branches of a fir tree, and lay down to continue his work from there. Above him, the branches of the tree above him waived gently in the wind. Then, he heard another sound, even more beautiful than the soft, rustling of the branches. From deep in the forest, carried on the wind, there came a soothing song which reached the deepest depths of his soul. It was as if it was the music of a heavenly choir, and so he listened. He listened, so intently, that he forgot everything else for the rest of the day.

When he awoke, the church bells were ringing for Compline, and the sun had already set behind the mountains. He would be very late returning with his flock — if he could find them. Most of the fat geese had wandered off, into the forest, across the meadow, or wherever else they fancied. Only a few remained where he had left them. He hastily ran to and fro, and then back and forth, looking for them. But it was to no avail, no more geese were to be found, however much he cursed, prayed.

The last remaining fat geese waddled happily back to their home. Behind them followed the boy, his eyes red and wet with tears. As soon as he arrived,

the rich man sent for him. Terrified, the youth climbed the steps into the house, and entered the hall. He had no chance to explain. As soon as he walked through the door, the lord gruffly told him “I took pity on you, and gave you gainful employment. In return, you have been ungrateful and disobedient.” He continued “As I warned you, we must now go our separate ways, and you must leave my service immediately.”

The boy pleaded and cried to be given a second chance, but his employer had hardened his heart. In lieu of wages, he presented him with a golden cloak pin. The boy stuck the pin into his jacket, and still weeping took his leave. He now only wished to return home to his father and brothers, and show them the golden pin.

Halfway through his journey home, when he was already tired and thirsty, he came across a road leading up a steep hill to a small farm. Thinking that maybe he could get a drink of milk — or something better — from the farmer, he turned aside. A little further up the steep path, he met the farmer, who was trying to get a little ox to pull a cartload of hay up to the farm. But, the load was too heavy for the little beast and, no matter how much he pulled its halter or pushed the cart behind it, the cart didn’t move an inch. “Help me push this thing!” cried the farmer.

The young man was nothing, if not helpful, so he put his shoulder to the cart, and pushed with all his might. Together, with the boy and the man pushing from behind, and the ox pulling in front, they eventually reached the top. When they arrived at the farm, the youth received as much milk as he could drink, before he set off again.

Long after he had left the farm, he discovered that the golden pin was no longer sticking in his jacket. He searched along the path, but could find no sign of it and so, sadly, he made his way home. When later, his father and brothers saw him sitting at home with a long face, he told them everything that had happened. He told them about the rich man; about losing the geese and his job; about being given a golden pin; and then, on the way home, losing it in a pile of hay, when he helped a farmer push his cart. Now, he had returned home with nothing.

When his younger brother, the second son, heard this story, he became angry that his older brother could be so foolish. He told him so, and continued “Never mind that you broke your promise to the rich landowner! If you had stuck the pin in your hat, instead of wearing on your breast, you wouldn’t have lost it in the hay. Tomorrow, I will go to him and ask for work. Then whatever he gives me as wages, I will wear it on my hat, and bring it safely home. You shall see!”

The second son left early the next morning, and when he came before the rich landowner, he was immediately employed to tend the geese. “But, you must promise me,” warned the rich lord, “that, when you are out in the fields, and you hear music coming from the forest, you must never, ever, stop to listen. If

you ever, just once, stay to listen to the song, then I will have to dismiss you, immediately!”

Like his brother before him, the young man swore by everything which was holy, and by everything which was dear to him that he would never, ever, as long as he lived, listen to any music coming from the forest. Every morning he went out into the fields with a large flock of fat, white geese. And, every evening, for nearly a week, he brought them waddling safely back to their home. But then, there was again a very hot day and the young gooseherd sought the comfort of the shade under the low branches of a fir tree at the edge of the forest. As he lay in the grass, staring at the white clouds drifting in the brilliant blue sky, he heard soft music, carried on the wind from deep in the forest. It seemed to be getting louder and even more beautiful. At first, he thought of his promise to the landowner, but as it became louder, it was as if it was the music of a heavenly choir were singing a soothing song which reached the deepest depths of his soul. So he listened, and he listened, so intently, that he forgot everything else for the rest of the day

It was already twilight when he awoke, and his first thought was to drive the flock home. But, most of the fat geese had wandered off, into the forest, across the meadow, or wherever else they fancied. Only a few remained where he had left them. He hastily ran to and fro, and then back and forth, looking for them. But it was to no avail, no more geese were to be found, however much he moaned and cried. With his eyes blinded by tears, he followed the few remaining fat geese on their journey home.

But, before he had even closed the door to their stall, a servant came from the house and commanded him to immediately come before the lord. With weak legs and heavy feet, the young man climbed the steps to the house, and entered the hall. As soon as he entered, the lord gruffly told him “I took pity on you, and gave you gainful employment. In return, you have been ungrateful and disobedient.” He continued “As I warned you, we must now go our separate ways, and you must leave my service immediately.”

The boy pleaded and cried to be given a second chance, but his employer was determined. “I may not, and I cannot keep you here any longer.” he told him, “But, so that you don’t leave empty handed, you may take one of my newborn lambs with you.” He then rang for the servant to escort the boy to the farmyard. The little lamb, which the boy received had a fleece as white as newly fallen snow, and wool as soft as the finest silk. The second son dried his tears, thanked the shepherd and the servant, and made his way to the gate. As he left the farm, he remembered what had happened to his older brother, and how he had lost his golden pin. So he, rather cleverly, set the little lamb on top of his hat, where it rested peacefully.

He was very nearly home, when he came to a narrow bridge across a deep ravine. As he very carefully, and slowly, made his way across the bridge, a branch caught his hat, and swept both it and the lamb off his head. As it landed, a little way below him, the lamb woke up, and wandered off into the

undergrowth. He searched the bushes below the bridge as best he could, but could find no sign of the little lamb, and so, sadly, he made his way home.

When he arrived, his father and his brothers asked him what he had brought. Between his tears, the boy told them everything that happened to him. He told them how he had worked for nearly a week, but had still lost the geese; and how he had been given a newborn lamb, and the lost it. Now, he had returned home with nothing.

On hearing this tale, his older brother made fun of him but his younger brother became angry that he could be so foolish. He told him so, and continued “Never mind that you broke your promise to the rich landowner! If you had tied a leash around the lamb and led it, instead of wearing on your hat, it wouldn’t have been knocked off your head and run away. Tomorrow, *I* will visit the lord, and ask for work. Then whatever he gives me as wages, I will lead it by a cord, and bring it safely home. You shall see!”

The youngest son left early the next morning, and when he came before the rich landowner, he was immediately employed to tend the geese. “But, you must promise me,” warned the rich lord, “that, when you are out in the fields, and you hear music coming from the forest, you must never, ever, stop to listen. If you ever, just once, stay to listen to the song, then I will have to dismiss you, immediately!”

Like his two brothers before him, the young man swore by everything which was holy, and by everything which was dear to him that he would never, ever, as long as he lived, listen to any music coming from the forest. Every morning he went out into the fields with a large flock of fat, white geese. And, every evening, for many weeks, he brought them waddling safely back to their home.

The lord was very pleased with his new gooseherd, and it appeared that he was not going to lose his position. But then, there was again an unusually hot day. It was so hot that even the geese sought shade at the edge of the forest, and the boy followed them. He found a place under the low branches of a fir tree. Before long, he heard soft music, carried on the wind from deep in the forest. It was as if it was the music of a heavenly choir were singing a soothing song which reached the deepest depths of his soul. So he listened, and he listened, so intently, that he forgot everything else for the rest of the day

When he awoke, the moon was already high in the sky, and the stars twinkled brightly against the dark, night, sky. It was very, very late, and he hurried to find his geese. But it was too late, much too late — only two fat white geese were to be found. All the others had wandered off, into the forest, across the meadow, or wherever else they fancied. He ran to and fro, and then back and forth, looking for a third, but it was to no avail.

When he returned with the two geese, the boy was immediately summoned to his master. The lord was very angry and furiously told him “I took pity on you, but you have been ungrateful and disobedient you must leave my service

immediately.” The boy cried and pleaded with him for a second chance, but he only replied “So that you don’t go hungry on the way, you may take some bread and butter from the kitchen with you.”

Still crying, the boy went down to the kitchen and told the cook what had happened. She prepared a buttered roll for him, which he gratefully accepted, before taking his leave. As he left the kitchen, he remembered what had happened to his older brother, and how he had lost his little lamb. So he, rather cleverly, took the cord from his bag and tied it around the bread roll, and dragged it along behind him. But, it was already late and after he had gone only a little way, he became very tired and needed to rest. He found a comfortable place, under an oak tree, and slept until the birds started singing in the morning. Then he set off once more, again trailing the buttered roll on its sting behind him. He hadn’t gone far, when he passed a dairy, which was being guarded by a big ugly dog, which started barking loudly before he even approached it. He passed by, keeping some distance between himself and the animal, but it wasn’t interested in him. It lunged at the thing which was following the boy and, in a single gulp, swallowed it whole.

Now the youngest son had lost his only earnings, and he too sadly made his way home, with nothing but his stick, an empty sack, and an empty stomach. When he finally arrived home, cold and hungry, his father and brothers were sitting by a warm fire, each with a bowl of hot soup. As he joined them, his oldest brother asked him what he had brought.

“Nothing” replied the youngest.

“Nothing,” repeated his brothers laughing, “then you really are just as clever as we are”. The father and the youngest couldn’t help but join in their laughter, and if they hadn’t stopped, they would all still be laughing today.