Marko Cepenkov

"So there it is, dear Reader-the story of what happened to Silvan from Malo Konyari. I know that you too think it’s just a fantasy, but I know it is true, because my father told me this story, and that’s just what he said to me when he first told it."

Marko Cepenkov

Marko Cepenkov (1829-1920) dedicated his whole life to collect and preserve for posterity the enormous wealth of Macedonian folk literature. This literature embodies the deepest layers of the Macedonian collective consciousness, wisdom and philosophy of life of a sturdy area at the crossroads of cultures, civilisations, peoples and languages.

Cepenkov collected more than 800 tales; 710 songs; 5,032 folk proverbs; 100 riddles; 389 folk beliefs; 201 dreams and their interpretations; 46 sorcery incantations; 67 children’s games, pledges, curses, blessings, folk traditions, customs; examples of secret languages; descriptions of crafts and musical instruments; personal names and surnames... 

This selection of folktales, translated by Fay Thomev, is the first more extensive presentation of Cepenkov’s work in English.

"Marko Cepenkov was a storyteller by nature... Cepenkov possessed the gift for words and the need to vent his feelings through the word as few people have ever possessed... He was not a man who entered literature obliquely as a traveler who merely stumbled upon it; he was born to retell tales. And, of no less importance, indeed inseparable from his retelling, was his creative intervention and embellishment."

Blaze Koneski

"Our self-educated revivalist Marko K. Cepenkov can be considered the most prolific collector of tales in Europe in the XIX century."

Ktiril Penusliski

ISBN 0-85837-745-4

RRP $15.00

Macquarie University Publications in Macedonian Literature, School of Modern Languages
19th Century Macedonian Folktales

by Marko Cepenkov

Translated from Macedonian by Fay Thomev
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book, the first volume in the newly founded series, Macquarie University Publications in Macedonian Literature, has been produced by the Macedonian Studies Foundation, which was set up in 1988 for support and partial funding of the Macedonian Studies Program at Macquarie University. I would like to make grateful acknowledgment to all members of the Macedonian community in Australia, especially in New South Wales, who have contributed to the development and growth of the Foundation. Without the Foundation this book would have probably not seen the light of day.

I would also like to thank Fay Thomev who has relinquished her translator's fees as a contribution to the Foundation and who was the initiator and main protagonist of this project.

Our thanks go to the dedicated team of the Design and Visual Production Unit at Macquarie University - Giulietta Pellascio, Honor Morton, Kathie Mason and Sue-Maree Baker for the enthusiasm with which they approached the cover design and layout of the book, as well as to Vlado Janevski who skilfully prepared the maps of Macedonia and to Nancy Simons for her accurate and diligent word processing.

Recognition must also be given to Macquarie University and the School of Modern Languages for having actively supported the development of Macedonian Studies in Australia.

Ultimately, however, the highest gratitude goes to Marko K. Cepenkov and to the genius of the Macedonian people who created these tales.

Ilija Čašule
Sydney, September, 1991
MACEDONIA, CEPENKOV AND THE MAGIC OF THE WORD

Macedonia - a land of hardship, a land of beauty, a land of mystery where a sturdy people have survived wars, famines, conquerors, plagues, empires, keeping alive the magic of its name. From the glorious times of Alexander the Great, through Roman and Byzantine rule, and through the great migrations of the Slavs to the South, Macedonia has been at a crossroads of civilisations, cultures, languages and peoples. Every stone, every lump of black soil breathes this turbulent history, still hiding in itself many secrets of the past. Throughout this long and rich passage of time only two peoples have chosen the name of this land to be an inseparable part of their identity - the Ancient Macedonians and the Macedonians of today, and that forges a strong bond that spans over millennia indicating the devotion of these peoples to their land. Just as the Ancient Macedonians were a separate people who later imposed themselves on the Hellenic world, at the same time spreading their rich civilisation over into vast expanses of land, so were the most courageous and adventurous Slavs a separate entity, those that went farthest from their original homeland, a compact group which was to give all Slavs their literacy, and which in an extraordinary setting of various peoples, some leaving the historical scene, some entering it vigorously, was to develop into the Modern Macedonian nation.

Before the coming of the Turks in the late XIV century, Macedonia was a land of renaissance, of fascinating art, of a rich medieval literature, a symbol of civilisation. The Ottoman Turks would push back the movement of time, and a long struggle for survival would ensue. Yet, in spite of the pillaging of the Turks, at one time the widespread Islamisation, the rigid feudal system, their belligerent ways, the hardship and suffering imposed by them, they would leave a lasting imprint on the spiritual landscape of Macedonia and the Balkans, making it the meeting place of the East and the West. They would not set to exterminate any of the peoples, in fact, measured by standards in other countries which have been subjugated in today’s world to a foreign force, they would have even been considered quite tolerant - there was limited freedom of worship for the Christians, there was a freedom of the usage of the languages. The Macedonian language of today still has some three thousand loanwords from Turkish, and not only are those words referring to archaic notions and institutions, but a considerable number of them are quite dear to the
Macedonian ear, evoking the most tender or pleasant feelings.

The Macedonian people would be under Turkish rule to the beginning of the XX century (to be precise to 1912) at the same time being under an increasing pressure to be hellenised by the Greeks who enjoyed a privileged status in the Ottoman Empire. The Balkan Wars (1912-1913) would mark the liberation of Macedonia from Turkish rule, yet they would also mark its tragic partition by Greece, Bulgaria and Serbia, and later Albania, whereby even harsher conditions and discrimination against the Macedonian people would follow. The Macedonian language was to be banned even from usage at home in Greece (in Aegean Macedonia), with severe punishment inflicted to those who dared speak it. In Serbia, which later would forge the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Yugoslav monarchy, Macedonians were denied their national identity, Macedonia was colonised, and the language restricted. In Bulgaria, in Pirin Macedonia, as well as among the numerous Macedonian émigrés who fled there after the turbulent historic events, there would also be little space for the development of the Macedonian language.

Only through their active participation in the Anti-Fascist struggle during World War II would the Macedonians achieve freedom, and at that only in one part of their territory, Vardar Macedonia, which would constitute the People's Republic of Macedonia, later Socialist Republic of Macedonia, and since 1991 the Republic of Macedonia, as one of the republics of the Post World War II Yugoslav Federation. After centuries of subjugation, a people was to tread firmly onto the scene of the XX century. The Macedonian language would culminate the process of standardisation and become the official language of the Republic of Macedonia and one of the official languages of Yugoslavia. A literature would flourish which was to attract the attention of the European and world literary scene. Yet in the parts of Macedonia still within the territories of Greece and Bulgaria, a continuous denial of Macedonian identity, language and culture would still be the dominant attitude. Massive migration, marking one of the greater exoduses of the XX century would follow, which would disperse the Macedonians throughout the world - from Anatolia to Australia, from the countries of Eastern Europe to Uzbekistan, from Germany and Sweden to Canada and the USA.

This collection of tales is a unique opportunity of getting an insight into the deepest layers of the Macedonian collective consciousness, wisdom and philosophy of life. These tales are from the XIX century - a time which signalled the awakening of the Macedonian people, the revival of the Macedonian language and its expansion into literature and education.
These stories are just a minute segment of the extraordinary wealth of Macedonian folklore, one of the richest in Europe. The XIX century saw the rise of the need and urgency to record for posterity the enormous body of oral folk literature, the artistic work of the Macedonian peasant, which had kept alive the language, the spirit, and the philosophy of the Macedonian people.

Among the numerous collectors of Macedonian folk literature, the most prominent is most certainly Marko Cepenkov (Tsepenkov) (1829-1920), who dedicated his whole life to collect and preserve for posterity the enormous treasury of Macedonian folk literature. A self-taught tailor from Kruševo, he would approach the gathering of folk material as a sacred and solemn mission. Cepenkov would passionately, profusely, and yet not without a critical selection (as one literary historian has said - there is no redundancy in his materials), record all the manifold outlets of the popular wisdom.

Cepenkov would not write down immediately the stories, poems and legends he heard - he would cherish them in his soul, reshape them, putting into them his profound humanity, talent and love for his people and only then would he put them to paper with his unique storytelling prowess. (As he points out, he had written down some of his stories even forty years after they had been told to him). His creative approach, his refined sense of the most delicate tones of the Macedonian language, actually warrant to refer to his work as the prose of Marko Cepenkov, as Blaže Koneski has rightly indicated, rather than as the folkloric materials gathered by Cepenkov.

Cepenkov collected more than 800 tales; 710 songs; 5,032 folk proverbs; 100 riddles; 389 folk beliefs; 201 dreams and their interpretations; 46 sorcery incantations; 67 children's games; pledges, curses, blessings, dirges, folk traditions, customs; examples of secret languages; descriptions of crafts and musical instruments; personal names and surnames, nicknames; tongue twisters... (See: Sazdov, T. in Cepenkov, M. 1979:18). Had Cepenkov belonged to a nation which would have had powerful cultural diffusion, he would most certainly have achieved worldwide recognition and veneration even in his time. Yet true aesthetic value is never lost, it can never fade away. Outbursts of the human spirit can find their way even from the most remote villages of the globe into the grand scheme of world artistic harmony.

This selection of folk tales, translated by Fay Tomev, is the first more extensive presentation of Cepenkov's work in English. In 1979, Macedonian Review Publishers prepared an edition in English on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Cepenkov's birth, which included an informative
introduction by Tome Sazdov, four poems, one tale, a short excerpt from his Autobiography, and one of Cepenkov’s original poems, as well as a useful bibliography (Tsepenkov, 1979).

This edition, the first volume in the series Macquarie University Publications in Macedonian Literature, includes 66 tales, carefully selected by Fay Thomev, who has in all respects been faithful to the original and true to its spirit. It includes the longest and most famous tale “Silyan, the Stork”, considered to be Cepenkov’s masterpiece and rightly valued as one of the first prose works in Modern Macedonian literature.

There is an interesting conclusion to this story:

“So there it is, dear Reader, the story of what happened to Silyan from Malo Konyari. I know that you too think it’s just a fantasy, but I know it is true, because my father told me this story, and that’s just what he said to me when he first told it”.

In this short passage lies an important clue to Cepenkov’s approach to his material. All the artistic wealth that had survived in the collective memory of the Macedonian people has a legitimacy of truth, because it has been TOLD, and in Macedonia, even today, the spoken word, the direct contact has a crucial importance. The forefathers are given all the deserved respect - and nowhere does the line “in the beginning was the Word” resound more strongly than in Macedonia. The passage also foreshadows what would be called in Latin American literature magical realism. Reality and fantasy are intertwined in the tale, yet anything imagined becomes real when it is being told, i.e. because it has been told.

In his literary work Cepenkov also imbues every passage with a benevolent humour, which finds its way to all readers. He also explores the social relations and injustice - he is always on the side of the poor, the deprived, the subjugated, he criticises the corrupt priests, officials and judges, exposes human stupidity, vanity, greed and stinginess, exalts the moral values of honesty, chastity, faithfulness, and quite calmly expounds the fatality of human destiny, in which righteousness always prevails.

Perhaps most importantly, even amidst all the hardship and suffering of his people and of his own, Cepenkov firmly believed in ultimate justice. As the Macedonian saying goes - ‘Justice and truth may thin themselves out, but they are never torn’.

In this sense may this edition of only a small section of Cepenkov’s stories be also another step towards correcting the injustice he himself endured by not having most of his work published in his lifetime.

I am certain that Cepenkov’s humanism will conquer the hearts of his English readers.

ILIJA ČAŞULE
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY


Simpozium posvećen na životot i deloto na Marko Cepenkov (1981), Prilep: Makedonska academija na naukite i umetnostite, Drustvo za nauka i umetnost, Prilep.

TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION

When I was little, my grandmother entertained me with wonderful stories that I loved hearing over and over again. It so happens that my grandmother was born in 1903 when the Ottoman Empire still reigned, in Village Lagen, Lerinsko, Macedonia. We are half a century apart in years, but ages apart in life experience. She grew up in that small, mountainous, rural village, experienced hardships, wars and the break-up of Macedonia between the neighbouring countries. The area where grandmother lived fell under Greek rule. Conditions after the Second World War were terrible, so in the early 1950s, my grandmother and indeed most of the villagers, migrated to foreign lands in search of a better life. I was born and educated in modern, affluent, urban Australia.

At home, we spoke Macedonian and the language was the same as that which my grandmother grew up with. None of our family could read or write Macedonian, a legacy of Greek government policy, and so our language stood still in time.

In 1985 my husband and I travelled to the Republic of Macedonia (in Yugoslavia). As part of our visit, we attended a three-week seminar on Macedonian language and literature, where I learned to read and write the language. In order to practise my newly acquired literacy skills, it was suggested I read some works of Cepenkov who wrote last century. Well I did, and I was astounded to find I was reading the language of my home, and to discover the familiar strains of the magical stories I had listened to in my childhood. Cepenkov is truly a master storyteller. With his own inimitable style, he captures the animation and lively expression of a really well-told tale.

Very little of Cepenkov’s large and important collection, including over 800 stories, as fine and diverse as any from anywhere in Europe, numerous proverbs, beliefs, customs and descriptive documentation of life in 19th century Macedonia, had been translated into English. I felt this was a terrible loss for the English speaking world, and so I undertook to translate those stories that I particularly liked, or which I felt were most distinctive. There are over 700 left!

I have attempted to remain as faithful to the original version as possible. This may sometimes mean that there is some repetition within stories. This is in the tradition of spoken storytelling where the listeners need to be reminded of what has happened so far.

The stories in this collection reflect the spirit and essence of generations of Macedonians when oral storytelling was a highly developed art form and a gift. I dedicate this work to my grandmother, Vasilka Massina and am glad that others may enjoy these tales.

Fay Thomiev
Melbourne 1991
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 The Wolf</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The Fox with One Hundred Ideas and the Badger with Two Ideas</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 The Tom Cat Who Became a Saintly Monk</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 The Mouse and the Frog</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The Fever and the Debt</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 It's Blocked</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Silyan the Stork</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 The Poor Man and the Lark That Ate His Millet</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 The King's Horn</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 If You Help a Wicked Man You Help the Devil</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 The Three Fates</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 The Poor Labourer Who Wanted to Live Like a King</td>
<td>87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Truth and Falsehood</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 The Filthy Loaf of Bread</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 The Lord and the 12 Apostles</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 The Man Who Invited the Archangel Gabriel to Be His Child's Godfather</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 St Peter and the Poor Man</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 The Simple Man and St Nikola</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 The Holy Hermit and the Widow</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 The Devil and the Old Granny</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 The Devil and Spase the Shepherd</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 The Devil Who Changed Himself into the Archbishop's Mule</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 The Devil Who Arranged for 40 Monks to Get Married</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 A Faithful Dog Killed in Error</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
25  The Rich Man Who Bought a Liver for a Poor Man 139
26  The Traveller Who Lent His Friend a Rug 143
27  The Aga and his Hired Hand with the Cow 145
28  The King Who Wanted to Introduce Prohibition 147
29  The King Who Wanted a Cure for Death 149
30  The Old Folks Were Taken up onto the Mountain to Die 153
31  The Philosopher and the Doctor 157
32  The Emperor and the Old Man Who Was Ploughing a Field 161
33  Drinking Like a Donkey 165
34  A Judge's Just Sentence for a Poor Man 167
35  Solomon and the Three Crooks with the Chest 171
36  Femme Fatale and the Three Brothers 175
37  The Man Who Lost 1000 Eggs to the Tax Officials on His Way to Istanbul 177
38  The Three Seers from Tikvesh with the Mule and the Judge 183
39  The Rich Bachelor Who Wanted to Marry the Wealthy Squire's Daughter 187
40  The Priest Who Used to Keep His Wife Locked in the House 191
41  All That Was - Has Passed, and All That Is to Come - Will Pass 197
42  The Young Man Who Became a Drunkard 201
43  The Rich Bachelor Who Was a Great Miser 203
44  A Woman's Craftiness 207
45  Two Millionaires - Both Bearing the Nickname 'Skinflint' 213
46  The Woman Who Bought Jewels with Lies 219
47  The Three Thieves who Murdered One Another for Money 223
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>The Man Who Had the Emperor's Permission to Murder</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Granny and Grampa Call off the Wedding</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>He's Got Two Wives - but Who Wears the Pants in the Family?</td>
<td>231</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>The Man Who Kept a Written Record of All the Female Wiles</td>
<td>233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>The Virtuous Woman with the Watermelon</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>The Man Who Came from Hell</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>You Have to Give a Bribe Before You Can Pay Your Taxes</td>
<td>241</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Caught in the Garlic</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>The Two Partners - Innkeepers</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>The Saddler Who Hid His Money in the Saddle</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>Two Tight-fisted Men</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>Nine Meatballs for a Penny</td>
<td>253</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60</td>
<td>The Simple Lad with the Broken Spade</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>The Woodcutter with the Five Donkeys</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>About a Simple Preacher</td>
<td>261</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>The Magistrate Who Planned to Be a Heavenly Judge</td>
<td>263</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>The Drunken Priest Who Fell in the Mud</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>The Master Builder Who Pushed Over the Chimney</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>The Stepdaughter Who Became Queen</td>
<td>269</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Once upon a time a wolf went out hunting in some low lands. He wandered here, he wandered there, and at first he came upon two rams that were grazing, side by side.

"Ha, now rams, I'm going to eat you", said the Wolf, "both of you".

"Ah, indeed you will eat us, Oh Wolf", answered the two. "But do you know what we'd like? For the time being, eat just one of us, because the two of us together at one sitting will be far too much for you. Leave one of us for tomorrow. You know the people's saying: 'There are more days than there are banquets'. You really should let us have our way in this matter, and do you know why? Because we're thinking of your own good. As for us, why we're only rams. Our destiny is to be served up as someone's dinner. But seeing you've found us, well, you eat us. Our owner seems to have deserted us anyway. So, you eat us and just leave our horns as a memento for him. It will serve him right! So you see, in short, our request is that you eat one of us today, and the other tomorrow. Now listen; the best method of arranging it is this. You go and stand over there on that flat piece of ground. From where you'll stand, one of us will walk one hundred paces to your left, and the other one hundred paces to your right. Then we'll race towards you. You can eat the winner of the race tomorrow, and eat the loser today. What do you say, Oh Wolf? Don't you agree it's a good idea? Come
on, let’s start the race”!

"Fine", replied the Wolf to the rams, "if it makes you happy".

The Wolf sat down on the designated spot and started to sharpen his teeth in anticipation of a juicy meal of mutton. The rams paced out the correct distance, one in one direction, the other in the opposite direction. Suddenly they began to run. They charged towards the Wolf as fast and hard as they possibly could and butted him so violently with their horns, they winded him completely and left him barely breathing.

"Aahhhhh!", gasped the Wolf. "Poor me; what a fate", and he collapsed, barely conscious.

In the meantime, the rams ran home to their owner in the village as fast as they could.

After the Wolf revived, he got up and said out aloud to himself, "What a blockhead! Why did you need to leave one ram for tomorrow? As soon as you find something - eat it, if you don’t find anything - go hungry. Since when have you been a gourmet?"

He set out on the hunt again. Luck was with him, for not far away there was a mule, grazing. The Wolf said to the Mule, "Ha, now Mule, I’m going to eat you".

"Indeed, Oh Wolf, your plan might be to eat me", replied the Mule, "except I’m afraid that won’t be possible. You see, I have been granted special royal protection. It is not permitted that I should be harassed or put to labour, much less put up with you threatening to eat me. I’m sorry, but that’s the way it is".

"Since when have you been granted such protection, Oh Mule", asked the Wolf, unbelieving. "Where’s the proof, the documentation. I want to read it myself and see if there’s any clause which says I can’t eat you".

"As a matter of fact, Oh Wolf", said the Mule, "if you’d care to step to my rear, you’ll find the decree tattooed across my hindquarters. Just go and read it for yourself and you’ll see I am telling you the truth. I swear on my life, do you hear? You really should be aware of just what sort of a mule you are dealing with by now. I pride myself on my integrity. Let me remind you of the saying: ‘No-one ever got to the top by cheating’. Be my guest. Go round behind me, push my tail aside and read the decree with your own two eyes".

The poor Wolf believed what he was told, stepped behind the Mule and pushed his tail aside in order to read what was written. Just then, the Mule kicked up with both his hind legs and struck the Wolf a blow across the jaw, so hard, that it sent him flying three paces backwards and he landed with a heavy thump on the ground, barely conscious.
In the meantime, the Mule ran home to the village as fast as he could. After a few hours, when the pain in his jaw had eased, the Wolf got up and gave himself another stern lecture, “What a blockhead, what a numbskull! Why did you need to read any royal decree? If you find something eat it, if you can't find anything - go hungry. Now at least you'll know for next time.”

He set out on the hunt again, and because he was very hungry he took risks and came quite near a village. Luck was with him, for not far away, there was a donkey grazing.

“Ha! Donkey, I'm going to eat you”, said the Wolf. “You've no idea how hungry I am”.

“By all means, eat me, Oh Wolf”, agreed the Donkey. “But isn't it the custom that a wolf leaps three times over the donkey it intends to eat? That brings good luck, doesn't it”, queried the Donkey.

“As a matter of fact, Donkey, I'm in the right condition to leap over you not just three times, but six times if you like. I can jump as high as can be because I'm so thin and light from hunger”.

The Wolf started leaping over the Donkey and he leapt up to such a height that all the vicious dogs in the village saw him and came running after him, ready to tear him to pieces. As he was fleeing away to safety, he bumped into a sow, and figuring he'd eat her, he said, “Ha, now Sow, I'm going to eat you”.

“Go ahead, Oh Wolf, and eat me, but please just grant me one last request. Let me play a melody for you on my bagpipes. If you grant me this last wish, I'll happily give my life over to you”, pleaded the Sow.

“Alright then, play me a tune”, replied the Wolf, “but hurry about it Sow, because I'm so hungry. Good God, I'm positively starving. I haven't tasted food for three days”.

The sow straightened her posture, took a huge breath and then deafened the district with her raucous notes. It was as if she was being slaughtered!

“Squeal, Squeal, Oink, Grunt”. Luckily for her, the swineherd heard her performance and came running to her rescue together with his hound. As soon as the hound spotted the Wolf, he started chasing him, ready to rip him to ribbons. The Wolf sped off to safety and the Sow was saved in the nick of time by the swineherd.

He ran on and on a little further. His luck was good, for who should he meet but Lady Fox. “Ah, Lady Fox, you're just the one I've been looking for”, said the Wolf, menacingly. “I'm going to eat you now. I've eaten nothing for the last three days, so just come along with me”.

"Ooh, Mr Wolf", simpered Lady Fox. "To think that I've spent the last three days wearing my feet out searching for you. I've finally found you and look at the thanks I get for my trouble - you want to eat me! You've no idea, my dear Wolf, just what good fortune has come your way. If you knew, you'd reward me!"

"Well, are you going to let me know, or what", snapped the Wolf.

"Let me tell you, Mr Wolf", replied the Fox. "I've been searching for you to invite you to be best man at a wedding. I had a lovely apple to do the honours with, but unfortunately it went rotten and I had to throw it away. Because you know, I said to myself, it just wouldn't be proper to present him with a rotten apple when you invite him to be best man at a wedding. Though thank heavens I've found you. Now I can invite you personally. Please do me the honour, Mr Wolf, of being best man and witness to the union of two young people. Ah, and with God's good grace, this year we'll have the wedding and next year a christening. Come, come with me and I'll lead you to the wedding party and sit you in the place of honour at the head of the table."

"Listen Fox, if you're lying to me, just like those two sneaky rams that knocked the wind out of me, just be warned. The devil will have nothing on me", threatened the Wolf!

"Ooh, my dear Wolf! Such language!" replied the Fox. "As if I would lie to you? After I've worn myself out for the past three days searching high and low for you. Because you know, I'll be your partner there, sitting at your right hand at the head of the table, or at least that's what the bride's father who's inviting you told me. "Please do me a favour, Lady Fox, and go and invite Mr Wolf to be the best man, and tell him", he said to me, "that I've roasted the two rams that butted him, and we're waiting for him to come and eat them. When he arrives, I shall crown him right here on his forehead, and the whole village will be assembled for a big welcome ceremony. To show their respect, they'll shower him with gifts of precious stones and wooden artefacts". And may God be generous to that bride's father; for when he saw me off he gave me a morsel of roast ram to sample. When I tasted it, dear Wolf, why words fail me. The flavour was superb; the meat was sweeter than sugar; why to this moment I've still got that delicious taste in my mouth. Though I don't know why I am telling you all this. Listen, there'll be no harm done if you come along and be the guest of honour".

The poor Wolf wasn't as clever as Lady Fox, and believed what he was told. So they set out for the wedding. As soon as they neared the village, the villagers spotted the Wolf and grabbed handfuls of stones from here, wooden clubs from there and assembled to welcome him. And what a
welcome they gave him: Whack, whack, whack. They broke nearly every bone in his body - he barely escaped alive.

In the meantime, Lady Fox, who had been trailing a respectful distance behind the Wolf, ran away and hid in a mill. It so happened that the miller had cooked himself a potful of porridge and had left it out to cool. Lady Fox greedily ate most of it, smeared the remains all over her head, and ran off home to the mountains. The Wolf had been searching for her all this while, and when she knew he was close by, she pretended to limp and started to wail horribly.

"Oh woe, woe, poor me! Oh woe, woe, poor me! Oh they broke my skull! Oh poor me! I shall die! What a dreadful thing to have happened to me".

The Wolf heard her wailing and approached her. "What are you wailing about, Fox", he said. "What's the matter? What's ailing you, pray tell? I'm not complaining even though most of my ribs are cracked, yet listen to the noise you're making. Why, they didn't even do anything to you!"

"What do you mean they didn't do anything to me, dear Wolf. They smashed my skull! Look, look at it! My head's turned inside out! Oh have pity, dear Wolf. Carry me to my house so I can die there in peace".

The Wolf lifted her onto his back and carried her a little way after which the Fox started to yell out gleefully, "Make way for the injured! Make way for the injured!"

"What are you yelling that out for, Oh Fox", demanded the Wolf.

"I can't help it, Wolf. I'm yelling from the pain", replied the Fox, untruthfully.

As soon as the Fox had been carried to her doorway, she leapt nimbly off the Wolf's back and pulled a face at him. It was only when she was squeezing through her front door that the Wolf realised he had been tripped, so he grabbed her by one of her hind legs.

The Fox began to shout, "let go of the stick you're holding Wolf, grab my leg instead. Drop the stick Wolf, grab my leg!"

The poor Wolf became confused by what the Fox was shouting so he let go of her leg and instead grabbed hold of a stick that was nearby. The Fox slipped inside her lair and started to poke fun at him, "Nya, nya, nya, nya", she sneered, poking out her tongue and pulling faces.

So there was Mr Wolf, furious but helpless, outside her doorway. He glared in at her threateningly. He wanted nothing but to destroy her. But he couldn't. The doorway was too small, and try as he might, he couldn't fit through!
“Ah, I'm a poor fool”, moaned the Wolf to himself. I found two rams to eat - and they talked me into judging which one should be eaten that day, and which the next. They tricked me and nearly killed me into the bargain. Why, oh why, you idiot, did you have to be a judge? When you find something - eat it, when you don't - go hungry. I found a mule but I had to read the Royal Decree. The mule nearly kicked out my teeth! What on earth did I have to read any royal decree for? Surely, when you find something - eat it, when you don't - go hungry. I found a donkey and had to leap over it. Since when have I ever had to do that? When you find something - eat it, when you don't - go hungry. I found a sow. She wanted to play the bagpipes. Why did I have to listen? When you find something - eat it, when you don't - go hungry. I found a fox. The fox wanted me to be best man at a wedding. Why in heaven’s name did I have to go and be best man and get all my bones broken by clubs and stones? I needed to eat! When you find something - eat it, when you don't - go hungry. Instead I've starved and I can't go on anymore."

After saying those words, the poor Wolf rolled himself into a ball and died from hunger.
The Fox with One Hundred Ideas and the Badger with Two Ideas

Book 2, Story 7

A fox developed a desire to eat some chickens and set out to find some. While searching one night, she heard a cock crowing from near a henhouse, so she approached it hoping to find some hole through which she could enter and feast on the hens. Well indeed, but neither was there a hole, nor was there any way she could climb in.

She thought hard and paced up and down, wondering how to break in, when finally she struck upon a plan. "It strikes me", she thought to herself, "that I should go and pay a visit on a badger and persuade him to tunnel underneath the gate. Then I will be able to slip through the tunnel, attack the chickens and have a good feed!"

That was the gist of her thinking, and so what she did was find a badger, talk him into being an accomplice, lead him to the scene of the crime and encourage him as he burrowed underneath the gate. The Fox then slipped into the enclosure, followed by the Badger and they both gorged on chicken till they couldn't eat another mouthful, after which they went about their separate business.

The next morning, when the unhappy farmer saw the ground carpeted with feathers, he immediately realised that some fox was responsible. That evening, he set a trap at the end of the Badger's tunnel so that he'd catch the
culprit fox when next she came.

A few days later, the Fox again developed a desire for chicken, and taking the Badger in tow, she arrived at the henhouse gate. The Fox said to the Badger, cunningly, “It’s your turn to go first, brother Badger, because I went first last time”.

“It’s all very well for you to tell me to go in”, he replied, “but what if there’s some trap set and I get caught? Who will free me then?”

“I’ll free you, brother Badger, because I’ve got 100 clever ideas circling around my mind; You’ve got absolutely nothing to worry about”, said the fast-talking Fox.

“To tell you the truth, sister Fox, I don’t feel at all inclined to go in. If you want to eat poultry, you go in first. You’ve nothing to fear seeing you’ve got 100 ideas”, said the Badger stubbornly.

Given that, the Fox grew bold and slipped through the tunnel. Just as she took a step or two into the enclosure, she tripped on the trap and...CLANK...both her forelegs got caught. She yelled out to the Badger to come in and rescue her.

“Please, oh please brother Badger. Tell me what I can do to escape. Give me an idea”, she begged.

“How can I help you, Fox, when I only have two ideas and you have 100? Think out some solution for yourself so you can escape”, replied the Badger.

“Oh, but brother Badger, I can’t think straight because of the horrible pain I’m in. Tell me one of your two ideas so I can get free”, she pleaded.

When the poor Badger saw that the Fox was completely befuddled, he said to her, “You, sister Fox, pretend to be dead when the farmer comes out. He’ll give you a few kicks, release the trap and throw you aside. That’s when you should get up and run away”.

The next morning when the farmer came out to see his chickens, the Fox played dead. As soon as she was spotted, the farmer yelled out gleefully, “That’s the way I like to see you, Mistress Fox, caught by both legs. You enjoyed eating chickens? Ha, now you’ve got what you deserved. I’m going to remove your hide and sell it. It will pay for the chickens you ate, and more!”

Saying this, the farmer released the handle on the trap, removed the Fox and threw her aside. He ran inside triumphantly to boast to his family that he had caught the fox that ate his chickens. At the same time, the Fox nimbly sprang to life and ran away to safety, giving thanks to the Badger for the brilliant idea he gave her.

After another week or so, the Fox again developed a desire for chicken.
She took the Badger along with her and they arrived at the henhouse gate.

"It's your turn to go in now, Oh bosom brother", she crooned, "because I've been first twice".

"I can't go in, Princess", he replied, "Seeing I've only got one idea left and if I get caught I'll be in trouble".

"As long as I am alive, you can rely on me to free you. You've nothing whatsoever to worry about", said the Fox persuasively.

But no matter how she tried to convince him, the Badger wouldn't be talked into going in. Seeing there was nothing else to do, the greedy Fox went in first again and again got caught in the trap.

"Badger, now how will I escape. Give me an idea otherwise I'm done for", whimpered the Fox.

"I've only got one idea, Fox", he replied, "and if I tell it to you, I won't be able to ever save myself if I get caught. Seeing you've got 100 ideas, use one of them and free yourself".

What with all the Fox's pleading and begging, the Badger finally told her his idea and again she was saved. That idea was that when the farmer came to release the trap, she would act tame and be friendly towards him, just like a dog.

As soon as the man came, the Fox started to nuzzle him and behave in a friendly, gentle way. The man's heart softened and he released her from the trap. The Fox trotted after him, rubbing herself affectionately against his legs and jumping up to him excitedly as though she had known him for years. When she found the right moment, she quickly ran away, giving thanks to the Badger for this brilliant idea as well.

After some further time had passed, once again the Fox took the Badger along to the chickens. This time too, the Badger didn't want to go in. That was all very well, but the Fox finally persuaded him by calling on his masculine pride and swearing on her life that if he got caught in the trap, she would rescue him with one of her hundred ideas.

The Badger was feeling uncomfortably close to being humiliated, so believing her promises, he entered the tunnel. He had barely taken one step out, when CLANK - the trap; and his legs got caught. He hollered out to the Fox, "Dearest sister Fox, give me one of your ideas, because I'm caught in this cursed trap".

"Oh ho, indeed, bosom brother Badger. If I really knew any ideas, I would have been able to free myself when I got caught instead of having to rely on you for ideas! I'm afraid you'll have to figure out an escape plan for yourself because I haven't got a clue. It's pointless asking me!", replied the ruthless Fox.
When the Badger heard her reply he was thoroughly shocked, but quickly, quickly he worked out a clever scheme. He said to the Fox, "Ah, if that's the case, sister Fox, come here and I'll tell you one last idea that I have that I was saving for an emergency. It's how to make yourself invisible, except unfortunately it doesn't work when you're caught in a trap. You might as well know it now. At least you'll be able to say 'May that Badger rest in peace' for this idea."

On hearing that, the Fox ran up to the Badger to learn the secret of invisibility, but the Badger insisted that the Fox bend over closer so that he could whisper it in her ear. The Fox tilted her head towards him and ...SNAP... the Badger locked his teeth into her ear with no intention of ever letting go. This way at least, the Badger figured that justice would be done. When the farmer came out to kill him, the Fox would be there to receive her punishment as well, seeing she had refused to help him when he needed it.

For the entire time that the Fox was caught by her ear, she pleaded for the Badger to let her go. That was all very well, but the Badger didn't take the slightest notice of what she said because the Fox had proven herself to be a terrible liar and a faithless friend.

When the farmer approached the trap next morning, what should he see caught in it but a badger! And not only that, but a badger who had captured the fox and was holding her fast by the ear.

"Hold on tight badger, and don't let go of that damned fox, because she's eaten all my chickens". He grabbed the axe and hit the fox on the head, killing her instantly. As for the badger, he rewarded him by giving him his freedom and sent him off on his way. So you see where the saying "The clever fox in the middle of the trap" comes from.
Because there was a Tom Cat who was a great hunter, virtually all the mice in the district had been wiped out. When the local rats saw that the Tom Cat’s hunting skills would soon put an end to the mice, the elders went to the Head Rat to ask how they could liberate themselves from the Tom Cat. 

“What shall we do O Wise Rat, about a satanic Tom Cat who has nearly annihilated our cousins, the mice, and now has turned around and started to eat us? Everyday we do battle with him under the granaries. But, up to now, not one of us has been victorious. He always triumphs! Oh curse, curse him! May his sharp claws wither”, said the delegation of rat elders to the Head Rat.

“You are young and silly rats, and I can see that you are very foolish! As if an ant could fight with a bear...and you think you can go to war with a Tom Cat. You don’t need to be a sage to predict the outcome! There is no solution for you, my friends, other than to stay hidden in your rat holes. Stay hidden and raise big families. Then afterwards, if one or two of your disobedient children should happen to get eaten by the Tom Cat because they wander out-of-doors - well that’s nothing much to worry about. Maybe one in ten might get eaten so what! And so you came to me for advice and I’ve given it to you. I have no more to say on the subject”, concluded the
Head Rat regally.

The rats thanked the Head Rat for his wise words and returned to their various quarters. They told all their friends and relations that no-one was to leave their holes for I don't know how long.

The Tom Cat waited that day for a mouse or rat to come out...nothing! All the next day...nothing! All the day after...nothing. So eventually, one day, he sat in front of one of the mouse holes in hopeful expectation that a mouse would make an appearance. As soon as one mouse saw the Tom Cat through its doorway, it retreated as far back as possible to escape any danger and called out, “You can wait and wait at my door Tom Cat, for a whole week if you like. Our rat friends have told us not to go out-of-doors, so you won’t be able to eat us any more. Is that clear, smart Tom Cat? Did you follow what I said? Be certain, you’ll never taste mouse again!”

As soon as the Tom Cat realised that the rats had taught the mice to keep indoors, and after many days of hunger, he thought up a strategy to outsmart them. From somewhere he found a priest's hat and a long black gown; he dug up a long string of black rosary beads, longer than he was in fact, and off he went to the granary near the church, where all the church's wheat was stored. This was an area where many mice and rats lived and stopping in clear sight of all their holes, dressed up in all that garb, he started to repeatedly make the sign of the cross; he knelt down and made repeated bows, raising his paws from the floor to heaven; he counted off the rosary beads one by one, and shouted with all his might, “God have mercy, God have mercy, God forgive me, Oh, Hear me God for I have sinned greatly”.

Many of the rats and mice heard the Tom Cat’s chanting and prayers, and they ran to their doorways to see what all the noise was about. When the Tom Cat saw them gathered on their front porches, he started to drool and lick his lips, just as he used to do in the past before he tucked into one of them. But, in a display of supreme self-control, he fell to his knees, prostrated himself flat on the floor then, lifted his paws high above his head and rolled his eyes to heaven (as one does when praying to God), tugged on the rosary beads and shouted, "God have mercy".

When the rats and mice observed this, they ran to tell all the others, young and old, that the Tom Cat had become a Servant of God.

“Oh, Oh children. Don't, don't run out-of-doors, because that Tom Cat is not to be trusted for a moment. Do what you will, but stay inside”, warned the elders.

All the rats and mice thronged to their doorways to watch the Tom Cat’s sacred ceremonies. They were amazed at his apparent transformation, and finally one of the mice, risking life and limb, cautiously ap-
proached the Tom Cat to see whether or not he'd attack.

"Good morning, your Holiness Tom Cat", it said as it neared him.

"May God grant you goodness", replied His Holiness Tom Cat. "Come, come, my child and kiss the right paw of your Reverend Father and grant me forgiveness. For I have been to a monastery and I want to join the Holy Order. While I was there, I went to confession. In order for my sins to be absolved I must follow these strict pronouncements for as long as I live: I must never eat meat again as long as I live; eh, eh I must spend all my waking hours prostrating myself and bowing before God; eh, eh, I must never cease counting off the rosary beads and chanting the prayer 'God have mercy'. But the first and most important thing I must do is seek forgiveness from all the mice and rats. After I am granted forgiveness, I may take my vows and give up all worldly things. So you see, my dear, you see, my lamb, do tell all the other mice and rats; tell them to come and kiss my right paw and grant me forgiveness and I welcome them to come and smite me for my wicked past when I constantly chased them away from their rightful place in the granary and made their lives a misery. So you see how it is, my child? Come, kiss my right paw again, then go with God's good grace. But first, help yourself to some wheat; and then go and give my sincerest best wishes to everyone. Let them come and forgive me, so that my sins will be absolved and when I die I won't roast in hell. But if they don't come...the sin will be theirs. I will wash my paws of them and the sin will be left on their conscience".

The mouse who had kissed the paw of his Most Reverend Holiness Tom Cat ran back to the other mice and rats who had all been watching from their holes and told them that the Tom Cat had given up eating meat and what's more, was seeking their forgiveness!

The mice and rats held a large meeting to decide whether or not they should venture forth from their homes to dine on some wheat and grant forgiveness to His Holiness, or whether to stay put as they were. Some said this, others said that, and finally they decided it was best to send another three or four scouts out to him to see if he had really repented. The selected few marched out bravely and approached His Holiness Tom Cat and kissed his right paw.

"Forgive me, my children", wailed the Tom Cat, "for I have much sinned against you. God have mercy. God have mercy". He prayed and chanted and prostrated himself and counted off the rosary beads and kept his eyes rolled to heaven all this while. But what he really thought to himself was, "Just come out all of you and just you wait! You'll find out what sort of a holy meatless fast this Holy Tom Cat is on; I'm eating greens, like it
or not, because there's been nothing else to eat!"

After they had pardoned his evil past ways, the scouts crunched away on a mound of wheat and then ran off to tell all the others that indeed it was really true. The Tom Cat had reformed!

Another big meeting was held where the rats and mice all agreed to present themselves to His Holiness Tom Cat to grant him forgiveness. It was also decided that they should each prepare a vegetarian dish to present to His Holiness in order to pay reverence towards his Holy State. Everything was made ready and they all respectfully paid attendance to His Holiness Tom Cat, leaving their donation of food and kissing his right paw.

When the Tom Cat saw that all the dishes were meatless, he innocently asked, “Oh lambs, why did none of you bring me a donation of roast meat?” “Because you’re fasting, Reverend Father, that’s why” they replied politely.

“Ah well, in that case, let me see you all join paws in a big circle and have a dance”, he said, “to show that you really have forgiven me”.

So all the mice and rats formed a large circle around His Holiness Tom Cat and started to dance. One of the older rats chanted softly under his breath, in a sing-song fashion, “Dance, brothers, dance...but keep your eyes on your front doors”.

As the dance progressed, the Tom Cat just couldn’t hold out any longer. He sprang on the rats and mice, and devoured the lot of them!
The Mouse and the Frog

Book 2, Story 29

There was one mouse who used to constantly beg one frog to ferry him across to the other side of the river, as the Mouse had heard there was an abundant amount of grain waiting to be eaten over there. The Mouse asked the Frog over and over again to do him that favour and take him across. That may have been, but that Frog was particularly unco-operative and wouldn't be bothered.

Once, when the Frog was in an atrociously bad temper, it happened that the Mouse yet again asked to be conveyed to the opposite bank of the river.

"Oh, alright, you good-for-nothing Mouse. You've driven me mad with your nagging. I'll take you across, but hurry up and find a long piece of thick string so that we can tie ourselves together leg-to-leg, then I can tow you across so that you won't drown."

The Mouse excitedly ran off and found some string, totally ignorant of what the Frog was planning for him. He tied one end of the thread around his leg, the other end around the Frog's leg and said a brief prayer to God imploring that their crossing would be safe and successful.

The Frog started swimming across the river, all the while thinking to herself, "I'll really give you a big treat now, Mouse, seeing you caught me in just the right mood. I'll take you swimming alright, underwater to the
riverbed!"

When the Frog reached the very centre of the river, she dived towards the bottom, with the intention of drowning the Mouse.

As soon as the poor Mouse realised that the Frog was dragging him down under the water and would drown him, he mustered all his energies in an effort to remain on the surface. Death was imminent, but life is sweet, so the Mouse began to struggle furiously through the water, like some hooked fish. With all his might he fought against the Frog's downward force. Splash - he leapt into the air. Splash - he was pulled down again. Such was their deadly struggle.

Just at that moment, a stork happened to be gliding by and spotted the Mouse as it catapulted out of the water. The stork cruised low over the water, snatched up the Mouse in its beak, then flew back to its nest with the tied Frog dangling at the end of the string. At first, the stork gobbled up the Frog, then later, the Mouse.

Don't dig a grave for someone else lest you fall in it yourself!
The Fever and the Debt

Book 2, Story 41

In the beginning when the Fever and the Debt first met one another, they fell into a conversation about their work. Each boasted that they were more harmful to people than the other.

The Fever proudly told the Debt, "Why, when I get inside someone for only one day and give them the shivers and the shakes, they'll be sickly for the whole year. If I visit them for two or three days, it will take two or three years for them to recover properly. You see what expertise I have, my dear friend Debt". The Fever went on to explain further, "And not only that, but I leave a brand on my victims so I can recognise them for life!"

"I believe you when you say a person doesn't easily recover from you", replied the Debt, "but the part about branding your victims so you can recognise them for life, I find rather hard to credit, Sister Fever. What sort of a mark do you leave? I can't possibly imagine. Something like a spot on their face, or what?"

"Ha, ha! A spot on their face! A spot! That's very clever", exclaimed the Fever, laughing. "Actually, I rinse them with my favourite colour - yellow - and whoever sees them knows for a fact they've been sick with me; I bequeath to them a lifelong cough so they're forever coughing and spitting", explained the Fever. "Those are the marks I leave so that not only I, but any slightly intelligent person will be able to recognise my work."
When my victim coughs, everyone nearby will say to them: 'That cough must be as a result of some fever or other, dear friend.' There's lots of other diseases I can prepare them for too, but it's essential that they catch me first, then all the other ailments follow easily. Have I made myself clear, dear Debt, or not?"

"Perfectly, Sister Fever, and I acknowledge you as a professional. Nevertheless, the work I do is much more harmful than yours. Why, the effects of your efforts pale into insignificance when compared to mine. As a result of a single thought I implant in their brain, you can recognise my victims on sight, day in and day out", stated the Debt boldly.

"I don't believe friend, that your work can injure more than mine", countered the Fever, annoyed. "To date, I've never heard that a debt can have side effects that are so bad. Whereas every doctor and enlightened person is aware of what I am capable of. In the event of my taking on the management of some person's health, off they run to a doctor for fear of what I'll do. The doctor or some other concerned party will warn: Look after yourself, friend, and make sure you shake off that fever completely. Don't let it get a good grip on you or it will turn into jaundice or a tubercular cough.....That is what is said about me, my friend Debt. Do you understand now that I am much more harmful than you, or don't you", insisted the Fever.

"But are you aware of what the people say about me, Sister Fever?", questioned the Debt.

"No, what do they say? Pray tell", invited the Fever sceptically.

"They say: Do what you will, but never get into debt, because there's nothing worse than that", explained the Debt. "If you come down with a fever, sooner or later it will pass, but if you haven't got the money to pay back a loan, you'll be tied and a slave to the person you borrowed from. Whenever you see him you'll feel embarrassed. Whatever he commands, like it or not, you'll have to obey. Every opinion he utters, you'll feel obliged to agree with. Even in your sleep, you'll have nightmares about him. These and other troubles will plague you and you'll be constantly gloomy and depressed. Nothing will please you. Till your dying day you'll be forever thinking: I must pay off this debt before I die. Nothing else matters..."

"That is what the people say about me, Sister Fever. And ordinary people are a hundred times more terrified of me than you. Now do you understand that I am much more harmful than you, or don't you?" concluded the Fever.

"I do, dearest Debt, and indeed you are as bad as me and worse in fact!
Heaven help those poor people whom I visit, and Heaven help them even more when they get involved with you! There’s no denying the truth of this”, exclaimed the Fever.

From that day onwards the Fever and the Debt became the best of friends, and they still are to this day. Heaven help anyone who has both of them!
A poor man set out to explore a great mountain. On and on he went for so many days till he reached the summit. On reaching the summit, what should he see but a great field - so vast that it stretched out far as far as his eyes could see. And such was the glorious scent from those beautiful flowers that his heart became heavy and he felt as if he might weep. On he went through those glorious flowers, though he was so touched by their beauty, he felt sorry to step on them. But as there was no path, he had little choice, and walked on through the flowers and the beautiful lush grass. He gazed ahead, he gazed to his right, he gazed to his left across the field and saw that all around, one next to the other, were innumerable drinking fountains. There were so many fountains that it would never have been possible to count all of them. Their numbers seemed infinite, just like the stars in the sky. That's how many fountains there were. It was amazing, friend, amazing!

The man walked over to the fountains and watched how this one and that one flowed. One was gushing forth, like a mighty river; the next flowed with less force than the first; the third with even less force than the second, the fourth with less force than the third... and so the amount of water coming out was graded from one to the next, all along, so that the water only dripped out of the second last one with great difficulty and the last one didn't even
drip at all - it was completely dry!

No matter how he tried, the man couldn't even begin to think of an explanation for those numberless taps. He wandered up and down and around them, musing to himself, "What can be the reason for all these fountains out here in this lonely spot? I wonder who could have built them? How extraordinary it all is".

As he was thinking these thoughts to himself, he heard a man's voice calling to him from the middle of the field.

"Hey you!", it called. "Why are you so amazed by the drinking fountains? Come over here and I'll tell you about them".

The voice belonged to an old man who sat still in the middle of the field, as though he were guarding the place. He had a long white beard which grew right down past his waist.

The old man's voice cheered up the poor man. He was relieved to find he was not alone in that vast field, and immediately, ran over to him. They greeted one another and chatted for a while. Then the poor man asked the old man to explain why there were so many fountains; who made them; why did some flow so much and others only a little, to the point where they had dried up.

"Ah, seeing you ask me friend", answered the old man, "I will explain the mystery to you. But you must promise that you won't begrudge me for what I shall tell you....God made those fountains and they reflect people's various fortunes. I made as many fountains as there are people in the world - one fountain for each person. The amount of water flowing from each fountain shows the amount of luck that person has. So you see, that's why I made the taps, my friend", concluded the old man.

After listening to those words, the poor man became convinced that the old man was God. "I beg you, God", he pleaded pitifully, "if it is allowed, would you show me my fountain so I can see my luck?"

"Indeed my friend", replied God. "Follow me and I'll show it to you".

The poor man followed God to the fountain that was his. And in a flash, the old man vanished from before his eyes. If the poor man had any doubts left about the old man's identity, he was now absolutely certain that he must indeed be God. He turned his attention to the fountain before him. Out of its wretched mouth, from time to time, dipped a few little drops of water!

It was a torment to him that his fountain only dripped. He began to closely examine the back of the fountain in case he might find some handle that he could turn to make the water flow more. There was none. All the pipes from all the fountains disappeared into a smooth and solid block of rock. Once he realised that there was nothing he could tinker with at the
back, he concentrated on the front opening and began poking a stick into the
mouth of the tap hoping to dislodge whatever was preventing the water from
flowing.

Poke, poke...but nothing budged - not even a grain of sand was freed.
He started to poke and prod more energetically and rather angrily,
when...SNAP...the stick became jammed and broke deep inside the open-
ing. Now, not even one drop of water could trickle through. The poor man
realised that he would never be able to clear the pipe. Just like the stick, his
mind snapped, and thereafter he could think of nothing else. In a wild frenzy
he ran away, shouting "It’s blocked, it’s blocked, it’s blocked!"

Ranting these words, he wandered from town to town and one day
reached Istanbul where the authorities confined him to the insane asylum.
After some time, he recovered and became himself again.

It was the custom there that when the patients were released, they had
to present themselves to the king and satisfy him that they were fit to be
freed. So, that being the way it was, they presented the poor man to the king.

"Ah, my dear man", said the king, "now that you’re well again, won’t
you tell me what you meant by those words - it’s blocked"?

"Certainly, your majesty", replied the poor man and told the king his
story, right from the beginning when he set out up the mountain, about the
vast plain with the drinking fountains, about the old man who was God,
about his fountain and how the stick had broken in it while he was trying to
clear it.

After the king heard the poor man’s story, he said, “As if something
like that could have driven you mad! It must have been a dream, nothing
more. A person holds their fortune in their own two hands. If they want to,
they can become rich; if not, they can be poor. Now in order to completely
cure you of your fantasy, I will make you a rich man. Then you have to
believe that what you saw was only a dream, and not real”, announced the
king. “Here, take this cannonball and throw it as far as you can out of the
window. You can collect all the rents and taxes and other proceeds from all
the houses and shops that the cannonball flies over and live like a lord. Thus,
I will remove the stick that’s blocking your fountain! And it won’t just drip,
rather it will gush and gargle! Come on, friend, muster all your strength and
throw!”

When the poor man heard what goodness the king was bestowing on
him, he took the cannonball in his hand and took a running start some
distance from the window. However, when he swung his arm up to throw
the cannonball, he misaimed and sent it flying towards the windowsill.
Because he’d thrown it with such force, the cannonball bounced back and
hit him square in the middle of the forehead, killing him instantly. The poor man fell down stone-dead at the king’s feet.

“This poor man’s luck really ran dry”, spluttered the king. “He didn’t even have the chance to become a wealthy man from all these houses and shops I offered him”.

So there is the old Turkish saying: “What is written must be fulfilled”.

In the village Malo Konyari, lived a good and gentle man named Bozhin. He had only one son, called Silyan; he also had a daughter. Silyan was very spoilt by both his parents because he was the only boy out of the many they had borne, to survive. So for that reason, they let Silyan do as he pleased - they even let him marry when he was only sixteen years old. By the time Silyan was seventeen, he had a son named Velko.

Because Silyan was so spoilt and immature, he tried his best to avoid having to do any of the work that is needed in a village - the tasks of ploughing the fields, digging the vineyards, harvesting the crops. Threshing and looking after the sheep and other livestock were left to his father Bozhin, and to his mother, Bozhinitsa. Neda, Silyan's wife, together with Silyan's sister, looked after the housework. Silyan himself most enjoyed going off to the town market. He liked the idea of being a trader, and if he could have, he would have hung around the market in Prilep every single day, buying wine and brandy and other delicacies.

In fact, every time he went to the market, Silyan would barely dismount from his horse before he rushed directly to the bakeries where he would buy himself a warm loaf of the finest, whitest and sweetest bread. Then he would accompany this with a purchase of the best halva, and dine in style on these luxuries.
and Silyan hopped off to the market and bought a bit of this and bit of that; they more or less got organised and set off early next morning to collect alms for the Holy Land.

All that summer and autumn, Silyan and the Holy Man travelled around. On St James' day they arrived back in Prilep. The Holy Man took out the agreed amount of money to pay Silyan. Indeed, that may have been, but Silyan refused to accept the money - he wanted to go to the Holy Land with him instead.

"Please, most Holy Father, I beg you; take me with you on your pilgrimage. I want to be a pilgrim too, so that when I die, I'll die in peace". That was how Silyan pleaded with the Holy Man and he begged with tears in his eyes to be taken along to the Holy Land. But the Holy Man was not at all keen to take Silyan, because the money Silyan earned would not cover his passage and costs. The innkeeper got into the act as well and pleaded on Silyan's behalf. He argued that all the Holy Man need do was let Silyan sail with him to the Holy Land, and once they got there, Silyan could fare for himself. So in the end, the Holy Man was persuaded.

They arrived at Solun (Salonika) and boarded the boat. The boat sailed along as it did, straight and true, but after a few days, a fearfully strong, unfriendly wind bore down on them, driving the ship willy-nilly across the vast waters. It seemed to fly like a kite over the ocean breakers. Any moment now it appeared the boat would capsize there, it would sink. For a whole week, the boat was lashed and driven by the storm and finally one morning it was hurled towards an island. The boat was smashed on the treacherous rocks; smashed into tiny pieces. All those aboard, save Silyan, were drowned. Silyan found himself clinging to a plank and was tossed to and fro by the waves before being dumped onto the shore.

For a long time after he was grounded, Silyan remained clutching tightly onto the plank for it seemed to him that he was still being thrown around in the ocean. Finally, he realised he was on dry land. He stood up, made a sign of the cross and said a prayer of thanksgiving to God for rescuing him. He stood and waited at the edge of the water, staring out towards where the ship had broken up, hoping that perhaps the Holy Man might surface from the depths; but his wait was in vain, for not only the Holy Man, but every other passenger, had perished. When it became clear to Silyan that no-one was coming, he set out to explore the island. He walked on as far as he did, and found a freshwater spring and drank. Next to the spring was a tree, laden with fully ripe fruit, so he ate. A little way up from the spring, he discovered a cave. He went inside planning to spend the night there. Well, if you had to spend the night there, you'd be as likely to sleep
as well as Silyan did! The whole night he turned over and over in his mind thoughts about where he’d been and what had happened to him and now here he was in this wilderness where neither a cock crowed nor a dog barked.

“Ah mother! Ah father! Ah my darling son Velko and my dear sister and my precious wife! Will you perhaps have some dream tonight where you see that I was saved from the wild sea that nearly drowned me? Will you see a dream where I am in a desolate land where no cocks crow? Oh, I’d rather have been killed by a bullet, mother, and at least had died at home and been buried in our village graveyard. Then at least I know, mother, that you would have come to visit my grave and would have lit a candle for my soul. But here, mother, I will die in this desolate wilderness and the eagles and crows will peck my bones clean. Ah father, father; why did you curse me so harshly, that I should come to this wilderness?” Silyan spent the night with these thoughts, and it was finally towards dawn that he managed to close his eyes and snatch a few winks. When he awoke, the sun was shining brightly.

“Thank you God, thank you for making the sun shine from the sky in which it set. This will surely be a strange land”, he said to himself. “Perhaps it is the underworld! Alas, poor me. There will be no salvation for me from here and I will never see my village again. Ah, oh precious village; ah, oh precious town Prilep. Will God ever grant that I should visit you again? If God grants me that, I swear that for three years I will pay homage to the Virgin Mary at the Treskavec Monastery. Oh, poor me. I am only deluding myself. How can I ever go home? Look at Uiat ocean. It’s water for as far as the eye can see. There’s no way that I can return there ever again. My bones will rot here, nothing else”.

Silyan decided to investigate the land he’d found himself in to see what there was and what there wasn’t. In order to recognise the place, Silyan fashioned a cross from some dry sticks and perched it high in the tree. He figured that if he found no human traces, he could return to the spring and live off the fruit on the trees. He picked up a piece of wood, shaped like a walking stick, to have at hand in case he should have to defend himself, and set off up the hill. He had walked about an hour when he spotted another spring, and on his walk through the countryside he found lots of wild strawberries to eat. The only thing that was bothering him was the lack of any sign of a pathway or road, or some other human mark. But, despite that, Silyan walked on with high hopes that he would find some sign of civilisation. At about noon, he had reached the summit of the hill, and when he looked over in a particular direction, he saw some flat, open country.
encircled by hills and mountains, which looked just like the landscape
around Prilep.

"Praise the Lord", Silyan said to himself. "Is it possible that I am on
our local mountain and they are our plains that I can see over there? Or am
I dreaming? I don't know. But there must be people living on these plains
because I can make out fields and meadows".

Silyan set off down the mountain in the expectation of finding people.
At about 10 o'clock, he came to the edge of the plain and found a footpath.
"This is a sure sign that people live here", he thought to himself. "But then,
who knows what sort of people they will turn out to be? If they are MY
people - that'll be fine; we'll be able to understand one another. But what
if they are strangers, foreigners? How will we manage to speak to one
another?"

Silyan walked along his footpath. It wound through some meadows
full of wild spinach, which he picked and ate heartily. He'd been walking
for nearly half an hour when he reached a small mound. He climbed on top
of it and heard some voices, but he couldn't understand a word of what was
being said. It seemed to him that it sounded like the klacking song of the
stork. Poor Silyan became awfully scared because he thought that maybe
the noise came from some fierce animals. He cautiously hid himself behind
some briars and from there he peered out and saw two people, a man and a
woman who were mowing the meadow. Silyan wondered what he should
do. Should he make himself known to them, or should he return from where
he came that morning?

"Oh poor me", he thought to himself, "whichever way I turn it's all
hopeless. If I return, what am I returning to? If I make myself known to
these people, I'm scared that they might hurt me. Maybe they're some
savage types from the underworld! What should I do, oh God in Mercy?
No, I'll make myself known to them, and what will be will be. Either way
I reckon I'm done for!"

Silyan emerged from behind the bushes, and with his hands crossed
and tears in his eyes, approached the couple. The moment the man and the
woman laid eyes on Silyan, they dropped their scythes, said a few clacks
to one another, then laughed heartily. Silyan thought to himself that it
would be best if he remained silent and just bowed to them, seeing he hadn't
understood a word they'd said. "How would these people understand", he
thought to himself, "even if I said as much as a good evening to them in my
own language". So, he just bowed low before them, keeping his arms
crossed over his chest and his head lowered. He didn't even open his mouth.

"Hey! Why don't you say something Silyan! What about a 'good
TALES FROM MACEDONIA

"evening" or "God keep you!", exclaimed the man to Silyan. "Or maybe you lost your voice in the ocean when you were swimming!"

"I wanted to speak, Sir, but I didn't think you'd understand me. And yet, not only do you speak the same language as me, but you even know my name", replied the astounded Silyan. "I beg you Sir, how do you know me; how do you know my name? I'm sure I've never seen you before, neither in any village nor town. During the summer, I accompanied a Holy Man through all our district, but I didn't meet anyone who even vaguely resembled you! Please, sir, I ask you again, won't you tell me how you know me?"

"Seeing the wind blew you to our land and you are the first man to ever come here", he answered, "I'll tell you what you want to know. You should realise that you were lucky to bump into me. I know you and I insist that you stay as a guest at my house. But, in the meantime, sit down and eat a little bread and cheese and when it gets dark, we'll go home and I'll answer all the questions you have, and you can answer ours".

When dusk fell, the man and his wife finished off their work and collected Silyan and led him back to their house. As soon as he entered the yard and the children saw Silyan, they started to yell excitedly and happily, "Ooh, ooh, here's Silyan from Malo Konyari. Here's Silyan! He's come to visit us!"

"In heaven's name! Can this be for real or am I dreaming? Even the children recognise me and know my name too! What sort of miracle can this be?" thought Silyan. "Ah well, the mystery will soon be revealed, God willing".

Silyan entered the house and the family followed, greeting him warmly. For dinner, they prepared the finest dishes, as is fitting for any special guest, and Silyan dined in style. He couldn't overcome his amazement at who these people might be and what this place was. Once he calculated that maybe he was somewhere near Prilep, maybe in the Struga or Ohrid region, because there was a lake there and maybe the ocean had brought the ship into that lake and maybe that's where the ship had broken apart and he landed. But he reconsidered, "No, I'm sure it can't be Ohrid or Struga, because no-one there looks like these people. None of those people have such long pointy noses and such long, thin legs. No, these people are quite different from the people back home", he thought to himself. "But then if they're so different, how come they all know me, young and old alike?"

Silyan had been left in the room by himself because all the family were busy with their chores, attending the animals and the like. All the time that
he was alone, Silyan’s mind was occupied with his thoughts. After some
time, the family returned, bringing with them a few neighbours as well.
They began to chat, “Hey, Silyan, how’s your father’s health?”, queried his
host. “And your mother Bozhinitsa and your wife Neda? And how is your
sister Bosilka and your son Velko? All well and thriving I trust? And you
Silyan, how are you getting on with your father these days? Better than
before, or are you still giving him trouble?”

“You might say that I’m still giving him trouble, sir, rather than being
a good son. And it’s because I didn’t listen to him that God has banished
me to your land!” Silyan continued his story to the end, and told the people
all the wrong things he’d done and how he’d upset his mother and father.
Strangely enough, they seemed to know most of what he told them. After
he had finished talking about himself, Silyan begged them to tell him how
they knew him, and how was it that they knew everything about him and his
family as if they had seen it all with their own eyes.

“You see, Silyan, my dear”, said the elders, “We’ve been settled in
your village Malo Konyari from before you were even born. We’ve been
living on top of your house and in your plains. That’s how we know you
and your family. In some ways, we are part of your family. We know every
inch of your house, we know it probably better than you do! Do you follow
what we’re saying?”, they asked, “And although you might find a lot of
what we’re telling you hard to believe, once you hear the entire story, you’ll
believe us”.

Silyan just sat there amazed at all he heard. What could it all be about?
People he’d never seen and never heard of telling him all about his house
and about everything that happened in the village.

“Please, friends, tell me what this is all about?”, cried Silyan. How can
you know all about my home? Are you Angels from heaven perhaps, who
visited us, or maybe saints? Or perhaps you’re birds that flew over our
village. Whatever you may be, beg you; please tell me; let me know! My
head is bursting and whirling from what you’ve told me so far!”

“This is how we know everything”, they replied. “It’s because we live
on top of the houses in the village. We are the storks who nest there and who
fly throughout the whole region”.

“But how and when do you turn into storks”, exclaimed Silyan. “You
are people”.

“Yes, it’s because we started off as people that we are in the shape of
people now. The reason we turn into storks is because of a curse that our
forefathers, generations back, put on the people of this island. That curse
prevents us from having human children on this island”, explained his host.
"Won't you tell me about the curse?" asked Silyan.

"Well, it's like this", said his host. "In the old days, a saintly old man used to live on the island. In those days, the children here were awful. They never obeyed their parents. In fact, their parents didn't bother to even try to control them. The children caused no end of trouble and destruction. Only the old man tried to keep order and he tried to teach the children and their parents to live in a better way. He feared that something terrible would happen to them otherwise. Once, the old man was telling off a group of children just on the outskirts of town, underneath a big tree. Because the children were so savage, they punched the old man and knocked him to the ground. Something inside him burst, and in his pain the old man cursed all the people on the island - "God will judge you for killing me while I tried to teach you sense. I hope that you will be stricken by some deadly plague and all perish; children like you don't deserve to be born here. If your parents want children, they'll have to swim the oceans black and white, and bring their offspring here from distant places. God will judge all, for I am dying". After saying those words, the old man died, and the islanders buried him under the tree. On the third anniversary of his death, two springs welled up at the site - they still flow to this very day. And it really came about, Silyan, that the old man's curses came true, for a few years later all the children on the island died from smallpox. The place was like a ghost town; everyone was in deepest mourning.

But God in his mercy didn't want to wipe out the entire population, so he appeared in a dream to the old man's widow and told her what they had to do. In the dream, he instructed them to go and bathe in one of the springs. The water would turn them into storks, and they could fly across the oceans, white and black, to our land. There, the little storks could be hatched and raised and when they were big enough, they could all fly back home and bathe in the other spring which would change them back to people again. And so you see, that's what we've been doing for thousands of years, and that's what we'll do till the end of time. So Silyan, that's the whole story", concluded the host and all the others.

"Praise the Lord; praise you too sir! I'm amazed at how curses can be so powerful", said Silyan to them rather overcome. "My father used to tell me about two birds that live near our village - Lark and Hark. He used to say that they were a terrible son and daughter, and that as a result of their parents' curse, which was to turn them into birds and always search unsuccessfully for one another, they really were changed into birds and really do live in our plains, forever calling to one another, but never finding one another. I never used to believe him, but now after what's happened to
me, and after what you’ve told me, I do believe it. He spoke the truth! Though, what am I going to do now? How can I get home? There isn’t a ship that comes here, is there, that I can sail home on? You said you know all that goes on here, sir. But please, might I know your name?

"My name, Silyan", said the host, "is Lord Klack Klack, boy. And I’m sorry to say that a boat is about as likely as laughter at a funeral. Silyan, it’s not possible for a boat to approach our land because of the craggy cliffs and rocks, and dangerous seas. But seeing I’m quite an important person here - my position is a bit like your Mayor in your region, I’ve circled and explored our island completely, high and low, and I can assure you that no craft can land here. But, seeing you’re my guest, don’t worry. I won’t desert you, and I’m sure we will be able to figure out some way of getting you home. Listen! This is what we’ll do. When the time comes for us to fly to your land, you too must bathe in the spring and change into a stork. You can carry a container full of water from the other spring around your neck, and then when we arrive, you can pour the water over yourself and change back into a man. So you see, Silyan, we’ll get you there! You don’t have to worry about that, at least. And until then, you can live at my house as my guest - eat, drink and be merry", said Lord Klack Klack, the eminent citizen.

Once they finished their discussion, they went to bed and slept. The next morning, Lord Klack Klack took Silyan to show him round the town and to show him the two springs.

"If you don’t believe that a man can be turned into a stork", said Lord Klack Klack, "I’ll prove it to you".

Lord Klack Klack dived into the waters of one of the springs and really, he turned into a stork. He flew here, he flew there; he sang a few klack klacks; then he immersed himself in the other spring and became a man again. As fast as he could, Silyan tried it too, and changed himself into a stork, then back into a man again. Now Silyan was convinced that he’d eventually make it back home.

Silyan stayed on the island for several months, during which he helped with all the field work. Could this be the same Silyan that never worked at home at his father’s? Here, he worked bareheaded in the burning sun, with boundless energy and enthusiasm.

The time neared for the storks’ departure, and preparations started to be made. Lord Klack Klack sent messengers to all the young couples asking them to come and change into storks. Over the following few days, everyone took turns at changing into storks, and waited at the edge of the sea till everyone was ready. There was an extensive marsh there, where lived hundreds and thousands of frogs and other little creatures; a perfect
banquet for the storks.

Silyan filled a bottle with the water which would turn him back into a man, and tied it around his neck. Then he turned himself into a stork, and together with Lord Klack Klack, joined the rest of the storks. After they had all eaten their fill of frogs, his Lordship gave the order, and they all flew higher and higher, ascending to the very clouds themselves. From there, they steered their direction straight for Silyan's land. They flew for exactly twenty four hours and landed for a rest and a feed at another island.

While they were eating their frogs and worms, two great sea-serpents struck out towards the storks, threatening to eat them. At their approach, the storks quickly whirled into the sky, climbing high to safety. Once they had risen above the clouds, they again set course for our land. They flew as far as they did, and approached our coast where they landed, rested, and nibbled on a few blades of grass, seeing that was all there was to eat. Again, they then took to the air and flew towards the regions where their nests were, each stork heading off to its own particular area. Silyan, his Lordship, and a few others headed towards Prilep. When they approached the village called Pletvar, near the pass, Silyan saw the entire Prilep landscape before him, with all its familiar landmarks. Silyan became terribly excited and started to descend quickly, planning to land near some boulders, pour the water over himself to change back into a man, then walk home from there. But, you know the old saying 'a person shouldn't get too happy or too sad, because trouble is guaranteed'. And that is just how Silyan from Malo Konyari, was plunged from great happiness into great sorrow. His landing was very heavy and clumsy and the bottle around his neck was flung against the rocks where it shattered into tiny pieces. The water flowed out over the rocks. Silyan rolled himself over the spilt water, but most of it had seeped into the cracks. There wasn't enough - Silyan didn't change into a man; he stayed as a stork. He began to cry bitterly, thinking that he'd probably end up spending the rest of his life as a stork and even dying as a stork.

"Serves me right, I suppose, for not obeying my parents and now suffering under their curse! I'm grateful at least to be in my own land. I won't be that upset if I die here". Thinking these thoughts, Silyan flew sadly from Pletvar to Malo Konyari and settled himself in Lord Klack Klack's nest.

"Silyan", said his Lordship. "I don't want you to take offence for you are a good friend, but I'm afraid you cannot stay in my nest, for my nest is my bed too! It would be a better idea if you built yourself a house on the other end of the roof. Have no fear. I'll guide you back to our land, then back here again next year so you can return to your human form. It would
have been better if you hadn't broken the bottle, but what's done is done - there's no use in crying over spilt milk. So long as you stay healthy, everything will work out”.

Silyan realised that Lord Klack Klack was quite right, so he settled himself on the opposite end of the roof. Because it was still early in the morning, most of the household was still sleeping, and only his father was to be seen in the yard. Silyan wept from the grief that flooded through him when he first saw him. After a little while, all the family appeared, busy with their tasks. His mother began to milk the cows, his wife went to milk the sheep; his son herded the pigs, calves and donkeys out to pasture, his sister started to sweep the house and put out the rubbish. In the past, Silyan had managed to get out of doing any work, and now that he longed to help, he couldn't; anyway, there didn't seem to be any work for him to do. But, despite Silyan's wishes, it had been fated for him that he must live through the pain of his parents' curse.

The date was 9th March, and Silyan spent much of it crying over his family. He watched them, but he was unable to speak to them, even though he wanted to badly. With a heavy heart, he flew from the roof and across the plains to inspect his fields, meadows, vineyards and pastures where the cattle were grazing. He wheeled over the entire Malo Konyari plain and even as far away as the Gurgling Brook, on the edge of the marsh, where he fed on frogs, black beetles, grasshoppers and lizards.

“Ah, poor me”, thought Silyan to himself. “Fancy eating frogs instead of roast pork and crackling like I used to eat; fancy eating lizards and black beetles in place of the delicious fish and eels I used to order in the shady inns of my beloved Prilep. It serves me right! I made my bed and now I'm lying on it, as my father would say. And you know, he was right. He used to say that his words would ring in my ears, but it would be too late - and that's just how it is. Ah, Mary and Jesus, please let me live long enough to become a man again so that my mother and father can take me back in and I will show them how hard I'll work and how obedient I'll be”.

Whenever Silyan the Stork dwelt on these thoughts, he'd become forgetful of his circumstances. Once, perched on the roof, he saw his wife milking the cows and thought he'd like to go and pet them because they looked so pretty. He flew down into the yard and started caressing them gently with his beak. That may have been so, but how on earth was his son Velko to know that the stork meant no harm, and in fact was his father! Velko happened to be holding a stick in his hands and when he saw the stork rubbing its big, long beak over the calves, he grew worried, thinking that the stork was going to injure them. He yelled out with agitation to his mother:
“Mother, look at the stork. It’s going to peck the calves!”

“Storks don’t eat calves, son, though if it’s bothering you, shoo it away”.

When Velko heard his mother’s reply, he threw the stick at the stork and hit him on the head, stunning him. Silyan wasn’t able to fly away immediately, so Velko rushed towards him to collect his stick, and with both hands, grabbed Silyan around the middle and called to his mother:

“How, mother, I caught the stork!”

In the meantime Silyan’s mother had arrived to help milk the cows, and Velko boasted proudly about how he threw the stick at the stork, and now he had it trapped. It was only then that poor Silyan remembered that he was a stork, and that his son could torture or kill him. Fortunately for Silyan, however, Velko’s mother insisted that the stork be set free, thus saving him. It could have been quite possible for Velko to have chained Silyan by one leg and played with him, just like the boys play with birds and crows they have captured. He probably would have died!

“Let him go, Velko, son; let the stork go”, said Velko’s mother. “It’s cruel to keep him. He’s just a poor widower, like me, without your father. Do you realize it’s been nearly two years since Silyan left. Ah, what bad luck I’ve had to have been left a widow so young!”

Velko reluctantly released the stork, and Silyan fled onto the roof of the house. He panted and panted. He could barely get his breath back from the fright he’d felt when Velko grabbed him.

A few days later, Silyan decided he’d like to fly out to the sheep pens to look at the newborn lambs. As he strolled around the pens, Foxy, their dog, spotted him and silently crept up behind him and sunk her teeth into his tail feathers. If Smille, the shepherd hadn’t ordered the dog to let go, Silyan would have lost all his feathers!

“Let go, Foxy! You’ll pluck the poor stork clean! Poor and lonesome stork”, said the shepherd. And so this time, too, Silyan escaped from death.

A few weeks later, Silyan’s father harnessed his bullocks and set out to plough a field. He took Velko with him, to do the job of guiding the team. Silyan was keen to join them too, to watch the ploughing. They turned over one or two furrows, and Silyan positioned himself at the lower corner of the field, inspecting their work. As he was looking at the furrow, he noticed some small, red worms wriggling in the newly turned soil.

“Mmm”, thought Silyan. “I’m very hungry. Some worms would be rather nice to eat”. So Silyan stepped into the furrow and started pecking at the worms. He walked up the furrow pecking and because his steps were wide and fast, he came close behind his father. I don’t know what made
Velko turned around just then, but he did and saw the stork was only a few feet away.

“Grandpa! Grandpa! Look behind you! There’s our stork”, he cried.


They ploughed another strip and again Velko glanced round, and because he was only a little boy, he shouted out to his grandfather again:

“Grandpa! Grandpa! Here’s the stork behind you. Turn around and see him!”

“Come on child, just guide the team and stop wasting time because we have to have the work finished by lunchtime”, said his grandfather.

They ploughed a little more and because Silyan was following them closely along the furrow, happily pecking worms and imagining that his father was feeling fondly towards him, he forgot that he was a stork. The third time that Velko said to his father: “Grandpa! Grandpa! Look at the stork! It’s next to you!”, his grandfather angrily replied: “I’ve had enough of that damned stork!”

As he said those words, Bozhin cracked his whip at the stork and hit him hard on the right leg, breaking it. Silyan reeled from the pain, and flew off in a mad frenzy, like a horsefly, and landed on the roof of the house. He stood on his left leg and cried loudly in pain. I don’t know how many days he suffered until his leg healed.

That evening, while they were having dinner, Velko told the family how the stork had been following them in the furrows, and how his grandfather had whipped him.

“That’s terrible! The poor stork!”, exclaimed Neda. “Fancy hurting him. It’s sad enough that he’s alone and a widower - like me - without you going and injuring him as well”.

“Yes, I hurt him, and hurt him quite badly”, mumbled Bozhin. “I broke his leg with the whip, but it’s all Velko’s fault. He kept staring at the stork instead of guiding the bullocks properly. After I hit him, I felt awful, but it was too late. May God forgive me for my hot temper. No matter how hard you try to be good, you still make mistakes”. While this was being said, Silyan was squatting near the chimney, and heard every word that was spoken.

It so happened that Silyan’s sister was engaged to be married. One day, she was sitting on a rug in the yard, stringing a necklace of coins to wear at her wedding. Everyone else in the household was at work in the fields. She was quite alone. At one point, she got up from her rug and went to check that the pigs weren’t up to any mischief. Just then, it occurred to Silyan to
fly down into the yard, steal the necklace and hide it in his nest on the roof. After a short while, Bosilka returned and sat down on the rug. When she went to take up her necklace, it was gone! She searched and searched. She couldn’t find it anywhere and cursed terribly.

Not a few weeks later, Silyan’s wife was left at home by herself and she too was sitting outside on the rug in the yard, embroidering a widow’s blouse with black thread. As she sewed, she wept, thinking how unlucky she was to be left without her husband.

"It wouldn’t have been quite so bad", she wailed, "if Silyan had died here. At least I’d know where his grave was and could tend it. But it’s so much worse not knowing anything. He might have been drowned on that bleak pilgrimage”.

Silyan heard his wife’s lament, and his heart ached with sorrow.

Neda rose to fetch something from in the house, and Silyan flew down from the roof and took the reel of black thread, together with her needle, and hid them in his nest, making sure they were well concealed. When Neda returned to the rug, she couldn’t find her needle and thread. She searched, she became bothered, she swore; but no, they were nowhere to be found; not anywhere.

"Why are you pulling such a long face?”, asked her mother-in-law who just then arrived home from work. “What’s gone wrong? Tell me and let me be the judge of whether it’s worth being so upset about”.

Neda told her what was missing, and explained that someone must have stolen it while she was inside.

“And I’m glad that someone stole it”, she replied. “You’re sewing mourning clothes and forcing yourself into widowhood without good reason. Our Silyan is probably on the pilgrimage with the Holy Man, and you’re carrying on as though he’s dead and buried. It’s a poor way to behave; it’s as though you didn’t want him back! You should be praying for his safe return, not weeping and mourning! Anyway, last week Bosilka lost her necklace too. It’s not worth worrying about, I say. Why, people die and life goes on. But you, fancy crying and carrying on over a lost reel of thread!”

Not long afterwards, the wedding preparations for Bosilka got well under way, seeing the engagement had lasted a while already. Originally, they had meant to delay the wedding till Silyan returned, but the groom’s side had grown impatient and insisted; either the wedding was on, or the engagement was off! Apart from this pressure, no-one wanted to spoil things for Bosilka so it was decided that the wedding would go ahead...
TALES FROM MACEDONIA

regardless. Silyan’s family invited as many guests as would fit in the house and all was made ready for the following Sunday when the groom and his relatives would ceremoniously come to collect the bride.

On Sunday, the groom’s party came in procession from the edge of the village. The best man was in front carrying a staff in his hands. Following him was the groom and all his family; then came the musicians with the bagpipes. They arrived at the bride’s house with great ceremony. Guns were firing. The groom and his men were mounted on horses and they came to a halt at the front door. They made such a fine sight in their white breeches; on their heads they wore fancy white turbans; they were decorated with all sorts of arms, and their feet were in bright red boots. They were all young and handsome, and it was a joy to behold them. The bagpipes rang out till it seemed the very walls shook and the dust fell from the rafters. All the villagers had gathered in the yard to watch the fun; everyone was laughing and happy. Only Silyan the Stork, high on the roof of his father’s house, hung his head gloomily as he watched the festivities.

“Ah, curse the hour when I disobeyed my parents and they swore that I should become a stork and nest on the house”, thought Silyan. “Oh, if only I was a man now, I’d be able to join in the party and welcome the guests. I could have been laughing and happy like everyone else”.

All the guests went inside for lunch, except for Neda, who took Velko by his hand and climbed up into the barn. There she sat and cried and waited because she missed Silyan.

“Don’t cry, mother; don’t cry for father”, said Velko. “He’ll be home for Easter after his pilgrimage.”

Silyan heard their conversation and was flooded with such despair that he felt like throwing himself into the well and drowning. But, life is precious and he reconsidered.

Time had flown by, what with the wedding and all, and the moment approached when the storks had to return to their own land. All the young storks had been practising flying high in the sky, and Lord Klack Klack sent word to all quarters that St Panteleymon’s day was the day of departure. He also told Silyan to get ready to leave too. During the few days that were left, Silyan flew over the entire Prilep plain, covering every hill and valley. He visited his own fields; he circled his house and finally flew as far as the Treskavec Monastery which is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. There, perched high on the dome of the church, he prayed fervently, asking protection for his journey to Storkland and praying that if he should come back and become a man again, he would give his services to the monastery for three years. From the monastery, he flew back to the village and on St
Panteleimon's day, the storks departed and arrived safe and sound on their island, as was God's wish.

For the entire summer, Silyan worked hard in Lord Klack Klack's fields, and they in turn looked after him as though he was part of their family. Again the time neared for the storks to fly to our land, and Silyan took pains to find a small flask. He filled it with the 'people water' and tied it around his neck when the day for their journey to our land started.

The storks flew across our land, following the same route as they had when Silyan first made the trip. There had been a recent battle in our land so when the storks reached that point where they normally separated into smaller groups to fly to their various quarters, the ground was strewn with corpses. Lots of eagles had gathered to peck at the bodies. There were as many eagles, you might say, as there were storks. Near the hill where the bodies were, there was a small plain hopping with giant grasshoppers - perfect food for storks. The storks landed there to eat, but as soon as the eagles saw them, they got angry. The birds began to quarrel and soon war was declared. The older eagles and storks made the situation worse by trying to hold a peace summit - all they did was make the quarrel worse! (As the saying goes, the devil neither ploughs nor digs, but people quarrel). The fighting began and the birds swooped after one another on that damned hill. For three days and three nights the battle raged, and the plain flowed knee-deep with blood.

Silyan took no part in the war, as Lord Klack Klack took him under his wing, insisting that as he was a guest, he should not participate. Besides, the flask Silyan had tied around his neck helped him, because the eagles were frightened by it. Silyan spent most of the time in a cave he had found. Finally the battle ended, and the storks took to the air and made their way to our parts. Each stork family was very happy to be flying into their own quarters, and Silyan and Lord Klack Klack and his family made it safe and sound to Malo Konyari.

This time, Silyan took more care and flew into the barn, where he undid the flask from around his neck and poured the water over himself. Lo! there he was a man - just the same as he was in the past when he lived with his mother and father, wife and son. He climbed down from the loft in the barn and made towards the house. It was still very early and the weather was raining and windy. All the household were inside warming themselves in front of the fire, staving off the chills of Granny March. The dog, Foxy, was lying on the front porch and at first didn't recognise Silyan, so barked at him angrily, "Woof, woof, woof".

"Hey, Foxy, fancy barking at me", said Silyan.
“Ooh, mother! That was Silyan I just heard speaking on the veranda”, yelled Neda to Silyan’s mother. They all jumped up and ran to the door to greet Silyan. Tears flowed as they kissed and hugged him and welcomed him. Silyan kissed his parents’ right hands respectfully, and begged them to forgive him and let him loose from the curse which held him. His mother quickly put a potful of brandy to warm on the stove, and Neda brought the most comfortable armchair in the house and sat Silyan down in it. After that, she took off his shoes and washed his feet, then dressed him in his best Easter clothes. Velko rose from sleeping and Silyan embraced him lovingly, cuddling him in his arms.

The news of Silyan’s return from his pilgrimage spread throughout the entire village. Everyone was delighted that Pilgrim Silyan had returned and they ran over to see him and welcome him back. The house overflowed with villagers, mainly older folk, and they all said to him, “Welcome back Pilgrim Silyan, welcome back!”

“Please don’t call me Pilgrim, friends”, replied Silyan. “I didn’t have the luck to go on the pilgrimage because our boat was lost at sea, and the Holy Man drowned. And not only that, but I’m hardly able to tell you what I saw and what has happened to me in the past few years, and I’m sure you’ll find it hard to believe too. Though, I deserved all that I got, I didn’t believe what my parents told me about curses and spells. But you, you, how are you friends? How has life been in the village?"

“Well, the village has continued as it was, Silyan, Praise the Lord”, they replied. “But how did you manage in a foreign land? Tell us about your trip. Tell us about all the marvellous things you saw that we have never seen!”. "How did that poor Holy Man get drowned?”, asked Silyan’s father.

Silyan told them: “This is how. After we boarded the ship in Solun, a terrible wind blew up and the waves pounded the ship. For a whole week the sea boiled around us and at the end of the week, the boat was hurled up against some rocks and broke apart completely. I was saved because I had the good fortune to cling onto a plank and floated to shore. I found some fruit trees and freshwater, so I spent the night there. The next morning, I thought I’d explore the island and headed inland. I found lots of strawberries and managed to stave off my hunger with them. I walked for the entire day and at noon reached a plain where a man and his wife were mowing a meadow. I was glad to see people, but they were strange looking people – they looked quite different from us. They had really long, thin legs, and their noses were at least twice as long as ours. But, as soon as they saw me, they called me by my name and took me home where I was treated as a
special guest”.

“But how did they know you? Where did they recognise you from?”, exclaimed the villagers. “And they gave you such a warm welcome!”

“Those people are our very own storks that nest here, friends”, he replied. “In their town, there are two springs. If you bathe in one, you become a stork, and if you bathe in the other, you turn back into a person. How and why those people become storks - I’ll tell you some other time”, said Silyan, “but for the moment it’s enough to tell you that I too became a stork twice. I nested here, on the roof of our house last summer. Mind you, I suffered for it. But something tells me that you don’t believe me”, concluded Silyan.

“Ha! Who would be silly enough to believe that story, Silyan!”, cried the villagers. “As if you could have been a stork! Ha!”

It occurred to one old lady to say: “Listen, brothers, listen. Silyan is well travelled and he’s seen all sorts of strange lands; he’s seen the sea; he’s met all sorts of people; and he’s learnt these wonderful tales and stories to tell us too!”

“Of course! That’s it!”, replied the others. “God grant him a long life. He’s certainly learnt lots of clever ideas on his travels. He’s probably got lots of stories to tell us!”

“No! I’m not telling you stories”, protested Silyan. “I’m telling you what really happened to me and what I went through. I repeat - I was a stork, and I lived on the storks’ island for two summers where I worked Lord Klack Klack’s fields. Lord Klack Klack and his family are the storks that live on top of our house! I know it might sound far-fetched; but I swear it’s the truth. If I have to, I’ll prove it to you, and you’ll have to believe me. Listen, when I came here as a stork, I didn’t want to be a stork, but I had no choice. I was under the force of my parents’ curse - just like the birds Hark and Lark who didn’t obey their parents”, explained Silyan.

“Yes, we know all about Hark and Lark; how they were a naughty brother and sister who turned into birds”, said the villagers. “But that was in a different time, when God and the saints walked the earth and the people really listened to them. But nowadays, it’s the devil that walks the earth. No, you can’t expect us to believe that you were a stork!”

When Silyan saw that they didn’t believe him, he began his story right from the beginning again. He told them about the awful things he did to his father; about how his father lectured him, but he didn’t listen; about his arrangement with the Holy Man; about how he ended up in the middle of the ocean; about how he thought he’d landed in the Underworld; about his conversation with Lord Klack Klack on the first evening; about the old man
who was murdered by the children and how he had cursed them; about the two springs that appeared after all the children had died from the smallpox plague; about how he became a stork and tied the bottle round his neck; about the flight from the island across the wide ocean; about how he’d arrived at Pletvar and broken the bottle and had remained a stork and lived on top of his father’s house.

Silyan was aware that the villagers still thought it was all a good story, so he started to tell them about all that had happened to him while he was a stork; and all that he saw and did.

“Ah, father and you too mother. Why don’t you believe me when I tell you I was a stork and nested on the far end of our house”, said the exasperated Silyan. “Was there or wasn’t there a single stork there last summer?”

“Well, there was, son; but so what if there was”, they replied.

“That was me, father! I was that stork on the house”, cried Silyan. “Listen mother, and you too Neda; remember when you were milking the cows and Velko hit me with his stick because he thought I was going to peck the calf. Remember, that’s when Velko grabbed me because I couldn’t fly as the stick had stunned me. Velko didn’t want to let me go!”

“Good Lord! You must have been watching from somewhere, or someone told you about it”, said his mother.

“Alright, let’s say someone told me about that. But what about when Foxy nearly plucked me clean and would have done except that Smille the shepherd saved me?”, announced Silyan. Then he turned to the shepherd and said: “That’s what happened, isn’t it, eh Smille?”

“That’s right, that’s how it was Silyan”, replied the Shepherd. “Foxy would have torn the stork apart - the single stork that nested on this roof”.

“Ah, go on! Someone from town has told you all about these things that your’re teasing us with”, said his father.

“Ah, I see you still don’t believe my story, father”, said Silyan. “But what about when you were ploughing the big field? Velko was guiding the bullock team, and I was feeding on worms in the newly dug furrows - remember? Two or three times Velko wanted you to turn around and look at me. You got angry and cracked the whip at me and broke my leg. I was ill for quite a few days until it healed. That evening, Velko told the family and everyone, including you father, felt sorry for me. Isn’t that what happened?”

“Yes, it was like that, Silyan”, replied his father. “But I still can’t believe that you could know about it any other way except by having been told by someone. Or maybe you saw it in a dream”.


"But how can you believe the story about Hark and Lark, father, but you won't believe what happened to me", said Silyan. Then he took off his right shoe and sock and showed them the bright red scar on his leg. "Here, look at this father. This is the scar left from where you broke my leg!"

All the people, including Silyan's father were amazed when they saw his leg, but even so they still weren't totally convinced that Silyan had been the stork.

"Though, who knows? Everything you've said and shown us makes me wonder. Perhaps you really were a stork", said his father, wondering.

"It is true! It is, father. It is, all of you", exclaimed Silyan. "What happened to me sounds fantastic - a trip to the Underworld - Storkland - where no person had ever been before or will ever go again. You must believe me! There is no reason why I should lie to you! It's not as if I'll make some profit by hoodwinking you, or anything. There's no reason for you to be sceptical. Besides, there's something else I've just remembered. One day my sister Bosilka was sitting on a rug in the yard making herself a necklace, and it disappeared. Not long after, Neda was embroidering a blouse in the yard, and her needle and thread disappeared too. That's what happened, isn't it?"

"Yes, exactly", replied Silyan's wife and sister. "Though we still don't know who it was that stole them."

"Ha! It was me! I took them", declared Silyan. Then he turned to Smille the shepherd and said to him "Climb up on the roof and poke around in the stork's nest. You'll find the missing items hidden in the straw. Bring them down so that everyone can see them; then you'll believe what I've been telling you." Smille climbed up on the roof, found the necklace and the needle and thread, then brought them down so that everyone could see them. All the villagers were astonished.

"Good Lord! It really must be true! The impossible has happened! Who could ever imagine a man being a stork!", they all exclaimed. Everyone in the village was quite convinced that Silyan had been the stork, and to this very day, the storks are spoken about as though they are people.

"So there it is, dear Reader - the story of what happened to Silyan from Malo Konyari. I know that you too think it's just a fantasy, but I know it is true, because my father told me this story, and that's just what he said to me when he first told it."
The Poor Man and the Lark
That Ate His Millet

Book 3, Story 74

A poor man had a small paddock behind his house which he sowed with millet. Despite its small size, he still hoped to be able to grow enough grain to feed his children over the coming year. Though, if that man’s luck had been good, he wouldn’t have been poor, would he?

As soon as the millet ripened, a huge flock of larks and other birds descended to eat it. It seemed that every single bird from the entire district had gathered in his millet and within a matter of a few days, they had all but pecked it clean. When the poor man saw that extraordinary sight, he leapt into frenzied activity, chasing and shooing the birds away, but as soon as he’d shoo them away from one side, the birds would merely move to the other side. They pecked and pecked, and before long, the millet was eaten.

“Oh oh oh oh”, he moaned to his wife. “What bad luck we’re having. We planted a little millet to harvest and keep us for the next year, but those blasted birds have eaten it all!”

“Don’t worry”, replied his wife. “Every cloud has a silver lining - from evil comes good.”

His wife’s answer seemed to comfort the poor man a little and he wandered out to view the remains of his millet. As luck would have it, an audacious lark had flown down and was swallowing the last grain. As soon
as he spotted the bird, the poor man took his hat in his hand, crept up slowly behind it and with one swift throw, trapped it under his hat. He ran up quickly and picked the bird up in his hand.

"Now, my pretty little lark", he said, "which would you prefer? Should I slay you or tear you apart? You do realise, don't you, that you shall be the one to pay for all my millet. No matter how I chased you away, you kept coming back; I wore myself out running, and here you are again!"

"Please, Mr Man, please don't harm me", pleaded the lark. "I'm the daughter of the Lark King. Take me to him and tell him you captured me in your millet. He will give you a large reward, so that till your dying day, you'll be able to live like a lord. But, if you kill me, you'll get nothing for your trouble!"

Those words convinced the poor man and so he went to the Lark King, where he was welcomed with great pomp and ceremony when it was observed that he held the Princess Lark in his hand. Once the King had understood that the poor man had caught his daughter red-handed, but had restrained himself from punishing her, the King produced a wand which he presented to the poor man.

"Here my friend. Take this wand", he said. "Whatever you need, just tap on the ground with the wand and say 'I want...* and it will immediately appear."

The poor man accepted the wand and in exchange handed the Princess over to her father. As he walked along the road, he couldn't wait to test it to see whether it would really work. He thought of something he'd been wanting for ages, and as soon as he tapped the wand and said the words - it appeared!

"Ha! Well I'll be! I'll even be able to invite our King to dinner now that I've got this wand", he thought to himself.

He made his way home, where he put the wand to work. His wife was astounded and wanted to know where he'd got it from. He explained how it all happened and from that day onwards they lived very well. Everything they needed and wanted was provided by the magic wand.

Some time passed, and the poor man kept turning over in his mind the idea of inviting their King to dinner so he could show off his wand. "My dear", he said to his wife, "I'd really like to have our King to dinner. In fact, I'm determined to ask him. Once he sees how we live, he'll be left speechless."

"In my opinion, you'd be well advised to let well alone", replied his wife. "Don't say a word to anyone! What do you want to invite the King here for? Once he sees the wand, it's possible he'll create some trouble, and
"Then you'll be sorry!"

"That just goes to show how little you know!", he snapped. "As if the King would create trouble for me! That could never, and will never be!"

He refused to listen to his wife's advice and invited the King to dinner one evening. The King was taken aback and couldn't figure out why on earth that poor man should invite him for a meal at his miserable house. In precaution, the King packed his own food and went to the poor man's for dinner, so that he wouldn't be seen to be disappointing one of his subjects, especially one of the poor ones.

The poor man welcomed the King with all his heart and settled him comfortably on a chair in one room. They chatted for quite some time until the King started to feel hungry and suggested that the dinner be served.

"Certainly, your majesty", replied his host. "Everything will be ready in a flash! Missus, give me the wand", he called "so I can produce the dinner."

His wife handed him the wand and after he listed all the delicacies he could think of, among which were some that even the King couldn't afford, he tapped it on the ground.

When the King witnessed that wonder, he thought to himself, "I must get my hands on that wand, by hook or by crook." The King surreptitiously beckoned to one of his guards and instructed him to go out and find an identical looking wand and to figure out some way of exchanging it with the real one. It didn't take long before the guard had replaced the genuine one with the substitute. The King stayed only a few minutes longer, then set off home with his stolen property.

The next morning, the poor man took the wand and tapped it on the ground as he wanted something. He tapped once - nothing happened, he tapped twice...three times - still nothing.

"Ooof, my dear", he cried. "The wand's not working. What can have happened?"

"Well, I warned you not to invite the King to dinner! See what he's done. You should go and see him straight away and demand your wand back."

The poor man ran to the palace and asked the King for his wand.

"Is that why you invited me to dinner?", thundered the King, "so that you could accuse me of being a thief. Get out of my sight, ass, or I shall have you tortured. You'll be tied up and the soles of your feet will be beaten to a pulp."

When the poor man heard the King's threats, he became very frightened and galloped home as fast as he could. So there he was - poverty-
stricken again and suffering awful hardships in quest of a crust of bread. Finding himself in such difficulties, he decided to go to the Lark King and beg him for help. He arrived at the palace entrance, called out, and the Lark King emerged.

"What's happening friend?", he chirped. "Why are you calling me?"

"By your life, royal majesty, nothing has happened except that our King stole the wand you gave me when I had him to dinner. Now I'm in great trouble. I beg you, noble King, could you give me something else so that I may live a little more easily."

"Eh, well I'll give you this donkey. You can cart firewood with it and every time you slap it on the rump, a gold coin will drop out of its tail. So there's an easy life for you", answered the Lark King.

The poor man took the donkey after thanking the King profusely and started for home. Every time he prodded the donkey's hindquarters, a gold coin dropped from its tail. And so the poor man had again found a means of living comfortably, for the time being at least.

But it seems that the poor man didn't learn from experience. Now he took it into his head to take the donkey to the bazaar to have it shoed. His wife tried to dissuade him, but he took no notice of her and rode the donkey to an inn where there was a blacksmith. On dismounting, he told the blacksmith to shoe the animal. After the work was done, he prodded the donkey's rump and a gold coin fell out of its tail. He gave it to the blacksmith in payment for his services and received the change that was over. When the blacksmith saw all that, he became determined to make that donkey his own. After they finished their business, the poor man tethered his donkey at the inn, gave it a little hay and headed off to the market to buy some goods for home. The blacksmith had just enough time to swap the donkey with another that closely resembled the original one in colouring. After the poor man finished his shopping, he rode the donkey home without noticing anything different. As soon as his wife saw the donkey, she recognised that it was a different one.

"Oh dear, Oh my", she said in a frightened voice. "The donkey's changed."

"What do you mean it's changed", he answered. "That's impossible! Watch! When I hit it, a gold coin will drop out of its tail." But neither a gold coin nor anything else fell from its tail! Only after he'd struck the poor animal many times, was he convinced that it wasn't his donkey and back he went to the blacksmith. Indeed, but instead of getting his own donkey back from the blacksmith, he got a good beating instead and came home crying.

He managed for a while, then again went begging to the Lark King. He
knocked and called at the King's door, and the King emerged to see who it was.

"So, you've come again," said the King. "What news is there? What is troubling you?"

"I have many troubles, your highness," he answered sorrowfully. "I went to the bazaar to shoe the donkey, and the blacksmith swapped it with another. Now I'm struggling for some bread to eat. I beg you, noble King, please give me something else to make my life easier."

"Eh, I haven't got anything else to give you, friend, except this mace which you can have," he replied. "Go to your King's palace and strike the mace on the ground as hard as you can. Three terrifying genii will appear and they will do whatever you command. You should order them to grab hold of the king and not let go till he returns your wand. After that, go to the blacksmith's and repossess your donkey. Then go home and I don't ever want to see you on my doorstep again!"

The poor man clutched the mace and headed off to the King's. He hit it hard on the ground and out came the three genii. They put a headlock on the King and started to torture him until, quaking and shaking in terror, he gave back the wand. From there, he went to the blacksmith's and reclaimed his donkey. And there you are - once again the poor man became even richer than the King.
The King's Horn

Book 3, Story 75

A certain King was born with a great big horn growing out of his head. Nobody except his mother knew and for a long time he remained in hiding so that no-one would find out his secret. However, the time eventually came when he had to see a barber for a haircut and shave. As is fitting for a King, the best barber in town was summoned to the palace.

"Listen here, Barber!", thundered the King. "I have put myself into your hands and you are the only other person who knows about my horn. I forbid you to speak of it to anyone. Be assured, if you as much as open your mouth about it, I will chop off your head! Do you understand?"

The barber bowed and swore solemnly that he would not utter a word to a single soul. That was all very well, but that barber was a talkative chap and he couldn’t bear not being able to tell anyone about that amazing horn. Time passed, and as the number of shaves the barber gave to the King increased, so did his desire to tell someone about the horn. The barber grew twitchy and nervous. He lost his appetite and couldn’t sleep. Finally, he decided to journey out to the countryside to try and relax. In his nervous state, he happened to pass by a cave, so he decided to go inside it and explore. There was no-one and nothing around for miles, so being certain that he was quite alone, the barber knelt down, put his mouth to the ground, and whispered to the earth that the King had a horn. He felt a tremendous
relief at having spoken the words, so he got into the habit of going to that cave after every visit to the King and telling the earth about the King's horn. But you know the old saying, 'the truth will be revealed.' And truly, the words that the barber whispered to the earth were revealed!

This is how. In that cave, some miraculous reeds began to sprout. They grew tall and their stems thickened and hardened, so that when some shepherd boys and other children stumbled on to them, they decided to pull a few down and chop them into pieces to make flutes for themselves from the hollow reeds. Every time each child put one of the flutes to his lips, the flute would sing the words, 'The King has a horn.' It didn't matter what tune or melody was being played - the flute always sang the same words, 'The King has a horn. The King has a horn.'

Everyone that heard was astonished that the children should play such music. Many people scolded them, lest the King find out and punish them. But the children told them the truth - that the flutes themselves were singing the words.

Days passed and the word got round till it even reached the King's ears. When he learnt that even the children in the alleyways seemed to know about his horn and were singing about it, what's more, he was mortified and came to the conclusion that the treacherous barber had blabbed! He immediately sent for the tattletale with every intention of punishing him mercilessly. 'You! Barber! How dare you! You have gone and told the whole world that I have a horn. Let me remind you that I told you I would chop off your head if you even as much as opened your mouth. But you've gone so far as to even tell the children and now they're singing in the streets that I have a horn. Your explanation had better be good, barber!'

When the innocent barber heard those angry words from the King, he became afraid for his life and replied, 'Your royal majesty, please believe me. I'll tell you the truth. Since I saw your horn and since you ordered me not to tell anyone, I couldn't get the idea out of my mind. I like to talk, your majesty, but I didn't tell a living soul, I promise. What I did was to journey out to a certain cave. I whispered to the earth in that cave, your majesty, that you had a horn. Some reeds sprang up in that very spot and the children have made flutes out of them and it's the very flutes themselves which are singing the words, 'The King has a horn'.

That prompted the King himself to travel out to the cave, chop down one of the reeds and make it into a flute. And really, it did sing those words. It was then that the King realised that what God reveals, no man can conceal.
If You Help a Wicked Man
You Help the Devil

Book 3, Story 93

As a rich man lay on his deathbed, he beckoned his son near to him so that they could farewell one another. The son realising that his father’s end was near, began to weep as he kissed him. His father took hold of his son’s hand, held the boy close and embraced him.

“Listen, my dear child”, he whispered, “I am dying and leaving you in my place. Please be a responsible and good son. I want people to respect you as they did me. I would like everyone to say, 'May that lad’s father rest in peace. He was a good man and his son does him proud'. Above all, I want you to promise that you will keep away from bad people - as I kept away from them. Avoid such folk son, and even if they offer to help you along, you keep your distance and refuse their help. Don’t be tempted for a moment - refuse to have any dealings with someone who’s reputation is shady. Mind you, I’m not asking you to do injury to bad people, but just don’t do them any favours either, because a corrupt person is like the devil, only worse. You’d be much better off being kind to snakes and other wild animals who will appreciate your help. Believe me son, I am speaking the truth. I’ve lived for 80 years and I’ve learnt that bad people are not to be trusted. They won’t thank you for your help - they’ll spit in your face. But if you do a good turn for an animal, I guarantee that you’ll be well rewarded.”
TALES FROM MACEDONIA

So promise me son, that you'll be kind to animals. That is my last request, and now say farewell, because my end has come." Those were his last words, and the kindly old man died, happy that his son had vowed to follow his wishes.

After several months, the youth swung his rifle over his shoulder to go hunting, as it was one of his favourite hobbies. He roamed over the mountains and came to a particular spot where he saw a snake, writhing and convulsing in pain from a great wound in her belly. A hoard of ants and flies had attacked her and were eating her alive. She was defenceless. Once the youth saw her terrible suffering, his father's words came to his mind and so he approached the snake in order to help her somehow.

"I beg you lad", wailed the snake, "if you have a heart, please help me. Carry me away from here and put me in some hole, or bury me, so that I may be freed from these horrible ants and flies."

The boy immediately unbuckled his bag, and lifted the snake into it, saying, "I'm not going to put you in a hole or bury you. Instead, I'm going to take you into town to a doctor who can make you better, because I promised my father I would be kind to all animals."

"If only there was some way I could get out of this", thought the boy to himself, "because I can just imagine how this snake will reward me. She'll probably give me a poisonous bite on my foot!" But, he carried her into town in his bag and went directly to the town's best doctor.

"How much will you charge to cure my snake, doctor?", asked the lad.

"We can easily come to some arrangement about the cost", replied the doctor, "but what on earth do you want to cure a damned snake for? If you want to do good in the world, why don't you try and help the poor. They'll say 'God bless you' a thousand times over, but this snake that you want to help will probably bite you, rather than thank you. Why don't you kill it instead. Smash its skull and throw the snake away where no-one will accidentally stand on it!"

"What I do is none of your business", replied the boy. "All I asked is whether or not you can restore the snake's health. I'll worry about whether what I'm doing is good or bad".

"Alright then", answered the doctor curtly. "I can cure the snake, but it will cost you one thousand gold coins."

"If you want one thousand gold coins, I'll give you one thousand coins, said the wealthy man's son. "But tell me how long the treatment will take? When should I come back to collect the snake?"

"You can pick it up in fifteen days", said the doctor.

Once the arrangements were finalised, the youth went home and the
doctor began treating the snake and restored her to perfect health. It was a
delight to see! Then he placed her into a large tank where she swam about
like some energetic fish. When the youth returned to collect her, he found
her happily splashing about in the water, obviously fit and healthy. He was
very pleased that he’d carried out his father’s wishes and he settled the
account eagerly. The lad took the snake to his house, so that she could sleep
there for the night. She was treated to a lavish dinner and the next morning
he carried her back to the exact spot where he found her.

“Cheerio, snake”, he called and headed back to town.

“Goodbye and take care, lad. Look after yourself”, called the snake in
reply. “And rest assured that I will repay you thousands and thousands of
times over for the goodness you showed me.”

After another month or so, the lad went out duck hunting in some
swamp lands, as he loved the taste of duck. He fired one true shot, but the
noise from the gun startled a sick stork. It flew off in panic to try and escape
the danger, but what could it do with its torn wings and broken leg which
were all stuck over with leeches. The stork was a total mess, heaven help
it! It made a very sorry sight trying to fly, and after a few yards it started
to fall uncontrollably and crashed to the ground where it flapped its wings
sorrowfully.

“Oof, poor me”, cried the stork. “As if I wasn’t sick enough already.
Now I’ve smashed myself to pieces.”

The wealthy man’s son immediately remembered his father’s words,
and quickly picked up the stork and started to comfort it.

“Don’t worry stork. I’ll help you and make you well again.”

“Oh my dear boy. If you do me that good, you need never trouble
yourself with giving alms to churches or monasteries, because you will have
already done more than your fair share”, answered the stork. “And I
promise that for as long as I live, every day I will bring you a present”.

“A present from a stork! Imagine! It’ll probably be a lizard or some
frog”, thought the boy to himself, but he nevertheless carefully picked off
the leeches that had infested it and carried the bird to the doctor.

“Doctor, do you think you’ll be able to heal my stork too, sir”, he asked.

“Heavens, I cured your snake so why shouldn’t I be able to cure your
stork too”, exclaimed the doctor. “That’s not the problem. The problem is
why you should want to spend so much money on animals when you could
spend that money much more usefully on the poor. I already told you once,
that the poor will say ‘God bless you’ a thousand times over.”

“Doctor, I also told you that it was none of your business if I wanted
to use my money to help wild creatures. Just tell me whether you can cure
my stork and how long it will take. Name your fee and I'll even give you extra if that will help", replied the boy.

"Alright then", said the doctor gruffly. "The stork will cost one thousand gold coins as well and come back in three weeks to get it."

Once the business was settled, the youth went home and the doctor attended to the stork. After three weeks the boy returned and he found the stork cheerfully flying and leaping about in the doctor's yard. He thanked him profusely and carried the stork back to his home to be his guest for that night. The next morning he took the stork back to where he'd found it.

"I will never, not ever, forget the help you've given me", declared the stork.

"Heavens! Just look after yourself now stork", answered the boy. "I don't want you to feel obliged to me. And without the stork hearing, he muttered, "I only did it because I promised my father. Between you and the snake, God knows what you'll do to me!"

Early the next morning, the youth rose and glanced over just in time to see the snake sliding out of the room and slithering down the stairs.

"I hope you will be pleased with the present I've brought for you", called the snake. "I left it on the sofa, and I'll bring you many more like it".

Curious, the youth walked into the room where he was dazzled by a sparkling, priceless gem! He was delighted and put it safely away, when lo, the stork flew onto the balcony and presented him with a slain wild duck, his favourite food.

"I hope you are pleased with this gift I've brought", said the stork, "and I'll try to bring you something like it each day".

"Thank you. Thank you very much, stork", he replied. "But really, I don't want you to go to so much trouble"

"Until my dying day I shall do my utmost to repay you for saving my life", swore the stork.

As a result of the snake's and stork's show of gratitude, the boy often mentioned his father, and how wise he had been in advising him to be kind to animals.

One day, as he was walking along out of town, the lad saw a poor man, bleeding and injured, collapsed in a ditch. The youth felt he should help him but he remembered his father's warning about bad people. He sat down and wondered what to do. The man was whimpering and screaming, so the youth gave in and waded through the bog and helped the man back to solid ground, where he left him, intending to continue on his way. The injured man yelled out, "Please, lad. Don't leave me here to be eaten by wolves and foxes and eagles. Please. Take me into town at least where someone might take pity.
That's how the man begged and he wept tears of blood. The boy's heart nearly broke and he forgot all about his father's words, lifted the man onto his shoulders and carried him into town, straight to the doctor. Everyone who saw was touched that a rich man could be so kind and that he'd even got all his clothes muddy in helping the man. And the doctor positively leaped up and down with joy when the lad carried the man in.

"Ha! Now you’ve finally come to your senses and done a proper good deed", he cried jubilantly. "You deserve the highest praise for this act. Forget about snakes and storks!"

"Enough, doctor", stated the boy flatly. "Whatever I do, I do for my own reasons. Now attend to this man and let me know how much I’ll owe you and when to come and collect him".

"Come in a month’s time and he’ll be completely well", said the doctor.

The youth went home and the doctor set to work so that in exactly one month’s time the man was totally cured and in excellent health. The lad invited the man home for the evening as well, just like the snake and the stork. But first, he dressed the man in a complete new suit of clothes, handed him one hundred gold coins to see him through, then put him up in the best room in the house.

The man rose early the next morning and strolled out of his room, just at the time when the snake came slithering past carrying a priceless jewel in her mouth. Fear overcame him, so he concealed himself behind a pillar to see what would happen. The snake slid into the room and dropped the gem onto the sofa, then left. The man cautiously peered into the room and was almost blinded by the gem's dazzling glare. In bewilderment, he wandered out into the yard. It happened to be just at the time when the stork flew onto the balcony and left his offering of a rabbit. In disbelief, the man returned to his bedroom and waited there till it was completely light, after which the youth escorted him back to the ditch where he had first found him.

"Now, friend, I’ve accompanied you to this point in accordance with the promise I gave my father on his deathbed, which was to be kind to all living creatures. Even though my father, may he rest in peace, warned me not to get involved with bad people, I rescued you, because how can anyone possibly tell whether a person is good or bad just by looking at them? People aren't like flowers that you can identify from their smell! So, because of that, I took pity on you and helped you. So the rest is up to you now. You can choose one of two paths. Go where you will and maybe one day we will meet again. Goodbye".
“Thank you, lad”, said the man, “for the goodness you showed me. And if I can, maybe I will be able to show my gratitude in some way”.

They shook hands and farewelled one another, then went their separate ways. The youth went out hunting, while the man turned back towards town.

“Maybe I should do some good deed for this young man who saved me”, thought the man to himself. “But, I could just as easily say maybe I shouldn’t! One way or the other, I’ll have to do something, so if I don’t do him good, I’ll do him some harm instead! I think I’ll just go and find out where that snake gets those jewels from. Then later, I’ll thank that young man as nicely as I thanked my father when I pushed him off the bridge to drown in the river!”

Harbouring those evil thoughts, the man made his way into town and proceeded to go from inn to inn, from coffee house to coffee house in order to try and find out whose precious jewels were being stolen. One morning, as he was sitting in the most expensive coffee house in town which was patronised by all the nobility, he overheard the following conversation.

“What’s to be done my lord”, said one gentleman to another, “if the King can’t recover the jewels that are missing from his treasury. I’m scared he’ll hang the lot of us! We’re the prime suspects, you know”. The other gentleman agreed, “Yes, we’re really in for it if they’re not found soon”.

As soon as he heard that, the man leapt up from his coffee and, hey ho, went to inform the King about who was stealing his jewels. It didn’t even cross his mind to consider that his life had been saved by the one he was about to dob in. He was immediately granted an audience with the King.

“Your majesty”, he said, “I heard that your precious jewels have gone missing. I know where they are! If you want to recover them, go and search through so and so’s place”, he said, giving details of the lad’s name and address. “I’m so certain you’ll find them there that you can chop off my head if you don’t!”

Acting immediately on that information, the King sent a troop of soldiers to surround and ransack the youth’s house. They searched everywhere and found the missing gems hidden in a chest. Instantly, they tied the youth’s hands behind his back and hauled him off to be tried, but when the King learnt that the jewels had been discovered in his possession, he ordered that the trial be waived and that the youth be hung at once. The troops escorted the unfortunate lad out of town to the gallows, and as they were walking, the youth called out for one last request. Wouldn’t they allow him to appear before the King so that he could tell him the advice he’d been given by his dying father? That this advice was worth more than any
precious jewels.

On hearing such a strange request, it was decided to grant it to him. When he was presented before the King, the youth bowed low and said in a sorrowful voice, “Your Majesty, why wasn’t I first tried? If it can be shown that I am in any way to blame for your jewels being in my possession, then I will happily go to my death”.

“Well, go on”, mocked the King. “Tell me how you stole the jewels so that I can judge your case and then hang you”!

“Good. Here is my story, your Majesty”, began the lad. “Several years ago when my father lay dying, he called me to him and made me promise with a solemn vow that I would be kind to all animals, but to show no kindness towards bad people because it would come to no good. After my father died, I went out hunting one day and I stumbled across a wounded snake. I took it to a doctor who cured it. I kept it overnight at my house as a guest and the next day I returned it to where I found it. The snake was very thankful and promised to repay my kindness one thousand times over. And that’s what really happened! Every single morning that snake brings me a jewel. If you don’t believe me, come to my house this evening and watch for yourself when the snake delivers the jewel. Some time later, I found a sick stork in the forest which I took and healed. In order to repay my good deed, your Majesty, every morning that stork brings me either a wild duck or a rabbit or whatever. And if you don’t believe this either, again I urge you to come and watch for yourself. A while later, I came across a man who’d been badly injured, probably by robbers. He was lying in a muddy ditch. He screamed to the heavens for me to help him. He wept and begged for me to pull him out of the mud. It was then, your Majesty, that I remembered my father’s warning, but seeing I couldn’t tell whether he was a good or a bad man, I helped him. I waded into the bog and in the end carried him into town because he wouldn’t let me leave him there. The doctor patched him up and then I invited him home to be my guest for the evening and the next morning escorted him back to where I’d found him. Not only that, but I gave him one hundred gold coins to help him on his way. And it must be that man, your Majesty, who told you about my jewels. He must have seen the snake delivering them. I ask you to interrogate that man, and if it is him, I reckon my father must have been a saint for making me swear that deathbed promise.

The King was seized with curiosity over the story and decided that he would go to the lad’s place to check its truthfulness. And truly, the next morning he was amazed to see the snake sliding in with a jewel in her mouth, followed by the stork arriving with a duck.
After he had been quite convinced about these unheard-of happenings, he embraced the lad warmly and to show his respect for such an extraordinary person, invited him to come and live at the palace and court his daughter, the beautiful princess. The King then called together the entire court to question the man whom the youth had found wounded in the ditch. At first he lied totally but when it became clear that the King had seen the snake, he eventually admitted everything from start to finish. He told them about how he'd been a thief and a murderer, about how his gang had mutinied and left him injured on the road, about how the lad had rescued him from the swamp and carried him to the doctors, then had invited him home and given him money and clothes, about how he had betrayed the youth. The King immediately ordered that horrible man to be hung instead of the youth.

So you see how true the dying father's words were and still are! And it is also true that although a bad man may not thank you for helping him, neither will you perish from it. The truth may bend, but it does not break.
There was a poor man who was so badly off that he couldn’t manage to even provide a roof over his head. Driven by this, he hiked out to some mountain, found a good spot near the main road and built himself a little cottage in which he settled with his wife and children.

A very rich man was travelling on horseback along the road and was overtaken by darkness just near the cottage. As he rode along, he got more and more frightened as his saddlebags were full of money. He happened to peer towards the little house where a fire was glowing invitingly and decided to see if he would be able to spend the night there. He backtracked, deciding to first find out what sort of people lived in the house, and if they seemed decent, he’d stay, and if not, he’d continue on his way. Scared or not, what else could he do on that lonely mountain? When he looked in through the window, he saw that a man and his wife with numerous children were warming themselves around the fire.

“Thank goodness”, said the rich man to himself. “This is a family home, just what I was hoping for”. He called out, “Good evening, friends”.

“Good evening to you”, replied the poor man.

“If it’s possible, would you be able to put me up for the night as it’s too dark to travel”, he asked.

“Of course, friend. There’s no problems about that, but I’m sorry I
can't offer you any dinner. There's no food in the house - we've eaten all we had. But as far as sleeping goes, you're welcome", offered the poor man.

"I don't expect you to provide me with food. I have plenty with me. I only want somewhere to lie down", said the rich traveller. "Thank you for your offer". With that, he tethered his horses and took his things into the house and sat close to the fire to thaw out from the bitter cold outside. From his saddlebags, he shared out the food he was carrying and together with the family, ate his dinner.

"It's as if you've been sent from heaven, noble sir", said his host. "You've arrived with all sorts of fine things to eat on this, the third night after the birth of our son. Hopefully, it's a good luck omen. We don't want him to suffer as much as we have".

"Congratulations. I hope it is for the best and that God grants him a good life", said the traveller.

They sat for a while, then, when the time came, they lay down to sleep. All of them dozed off, except for the rich man who just couldn't sleep. He suspected the poor man might rob and kill him during the night. So he was wide awake at midnight when the three Fates appeared to determine the new baby's destiny.

"What do you think, sister", said the first Fate to the second. "What future should we write out for this baby, this son of a poor man?"

"What should we write? Why, we should say that he should only live for forty days. Otherwise he'll be another burden on his poor father", she replied. "That's what we should do".

"But wouldn't it be better if we decided that he should live, and when he grows up, he should marry the daughter of this rich traveller who's staying here overnight?" suggested the third.

"Most fitting! What a good idea", chorused the others. "Yes, let's do that". They opened their 'Book of Destiny' and wrote, 'This boy will become the rich man's son-in-law and inherit all his property'.

The rich man heard all that the three Fates had said and he became so agitated that even by morning, he hadn't closed his eyes to sleep. He just lay there thinking up ways of getting rid of the baby. "Ha! The chances of this yokel's son becoming my son-in-law and getting his hands on my property are zilch!" he thought.

Morning arrived and the rich man started preparing for his departure. As he did, he said to his poverty-stricken hosts, "Listen friends. Why don't you give me the baby boy to adopt seeing I have no children. I've got more assets than I know what to do with! Why, you already have four other children, long may they live".
“Oh no!” they exclaimed. “What mother and father can give up their baby no matter how poor they are? You can’t expect us to do that!”

The rich man then tried to convince them with money. “It’s true that no parents would willingly give up their child, but somehow I think I can change your minds. Look, here’s one hundred gold coins. They will enable you to buy a house in town where you can live comfortably. And your boy will live in even more comfort at my place.”

When they heard that proposal and saw the gold, they reconsidered. They found some rags in which they wrapped the baby, gave him a fig that he could suck on like a dummy and handed him over to the rich man to adopt. The rich man mounted his horse, cradling the baby in his arms and took to the road, thinking all the while about how to do away with the poor child. He considered maybe murdering it by hurling it against some rocks, but that was too cruel. He wondered about just leaving it abandoned on the road, but he was worried lest someone find it. On he rode, thinking these thoughts, when he spied a cave off the road. He carried the baby into it and abandoned it there, believing that it would die alone without anyone knowing a thing.

That cave happened to be a bear’s den and in it there were two small cubs. When the rich man dumped the baby, it tumbled and rolled right across to where the cubs were. Because it was crying, the little cubs were taken aback and started to play with it, one throwing it to the other and back again. Just then, the mother bear returned from grazing to find the baby crying. She felt sorry for it, so fed it and nursed it to sleep. When fate wills it, see how a child can survive despite all odds! What with today, tomorrow, the bear nurtured the infant and raised it to a toddler. It too started to wander out with the bear family in search of food, such as wild apples, berries and other things that grew on the mountain.

One day, as the boy was climbing a tree to gather the fruit, he was spotted by some goat herders and coal merchants. They were amazed and wondered where that naked boy who roamed around with the mountain bears could be from. They started to track him to discover where he hid and lived. After many days, they saw him as he entered his cave and resolved to capture him. Many villagers equipped themselves with whatever they could find and concealed themselves around the bears’ den. When the mother bear headed out, the boy followed and the villagers started to chase him. He ran - they pursued, till finally they grabbed him and took him to the village. But who should look after him? Who? They came to the decision to give him to a childless widow. She accepted him and raised him as her own till he grew into a young man and she found him a job with an important businessman in town.
"But what's the boy's name, Granny?" asked the businessman.

"His name is Bearboy, sir because we found him living with the mountain bears", she explained.

Bearboy had just settled in to his new job when, in order for the pronounced destiny to be fulfilled, the rich man who had 'adopted' him came in. He was in town for a few months on business and sat down to discuss some deal with Bearboy's employer.

"Bearboy, go and order some coffee for our visitor", instructed his boss.

Bearboy ran off on his errand and some dim memory prompted the rich visitor to ask, "Why do you call your apprentice 'Bearboy'?"

"His story is quite incredible", replied the businessman.

"Why? What's so incredible about it? Tell me!" insisted his visitor.

"Alright. This lad was found by some villagers living in the mountains with the bears. Apparently, there was a bears' cave near the main road and that's where he was trapped. They gave him to a widow who looked after him and because she didn't know his name, she christened him Bearboy. So that's why I call him Bearboy too".

After hearing that story, the rich man was quite certain that Bearboy was the one and same child that he had thrown into the cave. He immediately figured out a plan to destroy him.

"Would you mind sending your apprentice to deliver a very important and urgent letter for me? It has to go as far as my house in the village", he said.

"Of course! He can take it at once", replied Bearboy's employer.

The rich man sat far over on the other side and composed the letter for Bearboy to deliver to his house. Bearboy rushed the letter there and luckily for him, the rich man's wife was out so he gave it to their daughter instead. When she opened it to read, you should have seen what he'd written! The rich man had instructed his wife to kill Bearboy because he claimed that Bearboy had caused him so much damage that they were nearly ruined. When she read those awful words, the daughter was overcome with hatred for her father and filled with love for Bearboy. She decided to outsmart her father and win Bearboy for herself. It seemed that fate would run its course.

She grabbed another sheet of paper and wrote rather a different message. "Dear wife. The bearer of this letter is the finest and most intelligent man I've ever met. Accordingly, I want you to build a grand new house on our property and arrange that our daughter marries him. And the sooner the better because it seems that we have been destined to be united with a young man, so remarkable, it would be impossible to find his match..."
She sealed the letter, not a moment too soon, for her mother arrived and Bearboy handed the new letter to her. On reading it, the woman was delighted. She was taken with the handsome, young Bearboy, so straight away she summoned the builders and lost no time in organising the marriage between Bearboy and her daughter.

Some three or four months later, the rich man finally was able to return to his village. He couldn’t wait to find out how Bearboy had been fixed. As he neared his estate, he saw a brand new house had been built.

“What’s this new house doing here?” He stormed up to his wife and demanded an explanation.

“But it’s all in accordance with what you told me to do in the letter you sent with Bearboy. I did exactly as you said. I built the house and arranged for our daughter to marry him”, she said.

When he heard that, the rich man was flabbergasted. “Ah, the devil take him. I’ll fix that dog, just wait. That bastard will soon find out what I have in store for him”, he threatened under his breath. Nevertheless, he pretended to his wife that indeed she had followed his instructions to the letter and praised her for carrying them out so well. “Yes, that’s right! You’ve done everything perfectly”, he lied.

“I know what I’m doing”, she answered. “It’s all been so wonderful”.

The rich man entered his house and was greeted by his daughter and her husband, Bearboy, as well as his own son. They each shook his hand and welcomed him warmly. The rich man kept up his pretence, making out he was ever so fond of Bearboy and congratulated him heartily for everything.

The next day, even before dawn had broken, the rich man headed out towards his sheep pens. He did this without anyone knowing. When he arrived there, he bullied the shepherd into digging a grave and gave him the following order. “Listen here, Shepherd. There’s a job I want you to do, and once it’s done, you can depend on me to look after you for the rest of your days. This is what I want done. Tomorrow morning, a young man will come here asking you for a ram to roast. You are to kill him and bury him in this grave. Don’t say a word to a soul about it. You don’t know a thing, right? Is that all clear?”

“You can count on me, sir. I won’t let you down”, replied the Shepherd.

The rich man returned home and persuaded his wife to throw a big celebratory dinner. The idea was for Bearboy to go and see the shepherd early the next morning to pick up the ram for roasting.
Even before the sun had risen, the rich man's wife tiptoed into Bearboy's room to wake him for his errand, but he was fast asleep in her daughter's loving arms. She waited a little while, but decided she couldn't disturb him, so instead she went and woke up her own son and sent him in place of Bearboy. The lad went off and as soon as he asked the shepherd for a ram, he was grabbed and given a lot more than he asked for. The shepherd rammmed his staff against his throat and... He dragged the body over to the grave and pushed it in.

Later, the rich man rose from his bed and asked his wife whether she'd sent Bearboy off for the sheep.

"No, I didn't send Bearboy in the end, because I felt sorry to wake him so early", she replied. "I sent our boy instead, because really, he's so much better at that sort of thing".

That reply had the same effect as a snake bite would. The rich man rushed to the sheep pens to see what the shepherd had done.

"What happened, Shepherd? Did my boy come?"

"He came alright and I finished him off good and proper sir!"

"Good. You did well", said the rich man through his tears, and he sobbed all the way home. "Ah, you cursed Fates. Will what you said really come true? Will all my efforts come to nothing. Will that yokel's son end up with my money?" he muttered. Then he changed his tune, "NO! NO! Just wait and see what I'm going to do to him now!"

With that, he hired a trained assassin for I don't know how high a price. The agreement was that he should shoot Bearboy as he was passing by a particular spot on the road. The rich man said to his wife, "Listen, let's all go out to dinner to such and such a place tonight, but I think it would be nice if Bearboy and his wife went early so they can have some time to themselves. We'll follow later to arrive just before dinner".

"Yes dear, what a good idea", she agreed.

The rich lady told Bearboy and her daughter of the plan, so the young couple got dressed and off they went. However, they got hot walking in the afternoon sun and decided to turn off into a field to rest under the cool shade of the trees. Both Bearboy and his wife stretched out and before long they fell fast asleep. Several hours later, as dusk was falling, they awoke to the sound of a gunshot nearby on the road. It was the sort of bang that a gun makes when it's fired into a piece of wood.

"I don't like the sound of that shot, dear", said Bearboy. "It sounds to me as though someone's been hit".

They hurried along the road, when suddenly they came face to face with the rich man's wife, who was crying and running for all she was worth.
“What’s happened? Why are you running mother?” asked her daughter.

“Oh, it’s too dreadful”, she cried. “Your father has been shot. He’s dead!”

“He dug a grave for Bearboy but fell into it himself”, she replied unmoved. Only then, did she tell her mother all about the original letter that Bearboy had delivered. After that, the rich man’s strange behaviour became as clear as daylight to his widow.

See, everything happens according to what the Fates decree.
The Poor Labourer Who Wanted to Live Like a King

Book 3, Story 136

Somewhere in some kingdom, the King had ordered a bridge to be built over a river. Amongst all the other tradesmen and labourers there was one whose job it was to deliver loads of sand to the site with his two donkeys.

Every single day the king would go to inspect how the work was progressing. This labourer was fascinated and noted just how the king behaved and all the ways in which his attendants paid him homage. After a few weeks of observation, the labourer said to himself, "The devil take it! I, too, am going to start living just like the king. You'll see, tonight I'll start the ball rolling."

He went home that evening and bawled to his wife, "Woman! Bring me my throne and support me until I am seated!"

"Ha ha ha ha!" laughed his wife, and she said, "What do you want a chair for, dear? You have to go and feed the donkeys in the barn before you can relax."

"From now on, wife, I have no further use for the donkeys!" he declared. "I have decided that henceforth I shall live like the king...and, furthermore, with God's help, my ambition is to become king! You know, I've been working all this time on the king's bridge, and every day the king comes to see how the work is going. Listen wife, I've realised that the king..."
is merely a man, just like me. I used to think goodness knows what such a thing as a king was. But he's an ordinary man! The only difference is that a train of people follow him and bring him his throne to sit on, light his pipe for him and serve him coffee! There, that's all the king does, and from now on, I intend to live that way too. So now, take me by the arm and assist me to be seated; prepare my pipe and bring me a coffee! But be quick about it or you will earn my royal wrath! Have you understood my order, wife, or haven't you?"

"Ha ha ha", laughed his wife again. "Yes, I heard you dear, though it seems to me that you might be losing your mind rather than anything else! How can you go on about wanting to be a king and live in a royal style? Isn't it obvious that I've just shaken the last bit of flour out of the sack and tomorrow you'll have to find the money to buy more if you want us to have bread to eat this week! And you're prattling on about living like the king as if you had the royal mint at your disposal!"

Regardless of these arguments and all his wife's reasoning, the labourer wouldn't budge from his position. In the end, to show his determination, he intimidated the poor woman with a few slaps, so like it or not, she hopped to and fetched the broken three-legged stool and supported him while he balanced himself onto it. Then she brought him his pipe and a coffee to sip, exactly like the king's when he sat by to watch the bridge being built.

The woman could barely restrain herself from laughing, or crying for that matter, as she watched her husband behaving just like the children in autumn when they played king of the castle on the heaps of dry leaves. That may have been so, but there was nothing she could do seeing he threatened to beat her.

A day...two...three...five...ten passed and all the time he remained seated on his stool, just like the king on his throne.

To add to this absurdity, it so happened that some workman discovered a buried treasure of gold coins as he was digging sand. He called in at the kingly labourer's to see if he could borrow his donkeys to transport some sand, but really to transport the gold, which he kept quiet about.

The wife of the kingly labourer nagged her husband, "Listen, won't you get up and do a little work or do you still imagine you're a king?"

"No, I'm certainly not going to get up, woman. Definitely not! I intend to be a king, and that's final", he replied.

The woman was desperate for some money, so she decided to take the matter into her own hands and hired out their precious donkeys to the workman who had asked to borrow them. The workman led the donkeys
off to the sandpit and loaded them up with the gold coins he’d found. Disastrous for him, but fortunate for the royal owner of the donkeys was the accident that followed. It so happened that a few gold coins were still lying on the ground. The workman bent down to collect them when calamity struck. The entire side of the sand pile collapsed, swallowing him up and ending his life.

The fully loaded donkeys waited and waited. Finally they moved off and plodded home by themselves. They stopped in the yard. The wife spotted them and went out to see what they were carrying that weighed them down so heavily. When she saw the gold coins, as big as saucers, she hastily ran and bolted the gate, calling out to her husband. “Come here! Come here! Get up you good-for-nothing. The donkeys have brought us a treasure. Get up and help me unload them, then later you can go back to playing king”.

“Hmph”, he replied. “I am a king and I will be a king. I’m afraid, my dear, that kings do not stoop to loading and unloading donkeys! It is only proper that you unload them and place the treasure before me”.

Like it or not, the poor woman strained and heaved to unload the gold. She dragged in the sacks and placed them at his feet.

“So, I hope you have now realised, you silly ass”, he said, addressing his wife, “that I will be a king. You see, I did discover the formula—it’s simple—sit on a chair with a cup of coffee and a pipe of tobacco and a king’s fortune will appear! Whereas if I’d slaved away delivering sand with the donkeys, I’d have worked myself into the grave for peanuts!”

“Yes”, sighed the wife. “Maybe you were right after all. But anyway, get up and help me hide the gold”.

“I refuse”, he replied indignantly. “No. I will not get up. I shall be a king”.

That was the last straw! The woman lunged towards her husband, snatched the pipe out of his mouth and hurled it into the fire. She pushed him off the stool onto the floor, and with all her might, forced him to hide the money.

So there you have it! That was the fable where the man became regal—the impossible happened!
Once upon a time, Truth was left without work. She didn’t have enough money to even buy some bread to eat, and for three days she’d been starving.

She wandered here and there hoping to find something to eat, but was unsuccessful. The poor thing cried out, “Oh, poor me. What’s to be done? I shall probably die of hunger as there’s no-one who will feed me!”

Falsehood heard her and stepped out in front of her. “What’s the matter, my dear. What are you moaning about”, asked Falsehood.

“Oh, my dear sister. How can I not complain”, replied Truth, “seeing that for three days now I haven’t had a bite to eat. I’ve been surviving with a little water!”

“Heavens, there’s no need to despair any longer! Come along with me and I’ll treat you to a banquet!” offered Falsehood.

“Thank you, my dear sister. If you do me this good turn, now in my suffering, I’ll never forget you for it”, swore Truth gratefully.

Poor Truth set out after Falsehood in quest of nourishment to restore her flagging spirits. On and on they went and Falsehood stepped into an inn, followed by Truth. They sat down to lunch in that respectable establishment. Falsehood called to the owner and ordered him to bring all kinds of dishes and the best quality bread. The meal was brought and Falsehood
invited Truth to eat and drink to her heart's desire; and Falsehood would pay the bill.

After the dinner, Falsehood called the proprietor for the account. He calculated the bill to exactly twenty grosh.

"Yes, that's fine", answered Falsehood. "Now let me see. You want twenty from me; but I gave you sixty for payment in advance when we first arrived; so if you give me forty change, the account will be settled and we'll take our leave".

"What sixty are you talking about?" exclaimed the proprietor. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself for telling such lies!"

When Truth saw and heard what was happening, she scurried off and hid behind the door. She felt dreadfully embarrassed because of the lies her friend Falsehood was concocting.

Falsehood and the innkeeper were right into the thick of the quarrel. Heaven help us! Falsehood was screaming in whatever ugly language came into her mouth, as if the man had murdered her father. All those passing by stopped to see what the argument was about. Everyone that heard judged Falsehood to be right, probably because she yelled the loudest!

Like it or not, and in order not to create further trouble, the innkeeper gave over the forty grosh. As he did, he cried out, imploringly, "Ah, Truth, Truth, where are you?"

"Here I am brother, behind the door", croaked Truth. "But what can I say, seeing I sat at the same table with Falsehood? I'm guilty by association and my name has been dragged through the mud!"
There was a righteous man who was an awful miser. He was so tight-fisted that he wouldn’t give a handkerchief to a man with a runny nose! But on the other hand, neither would he deliberately harm anyone. Thus, he passed his life and the day came when he had to leave this world for the next one. As he had lived lawfully, an angel of God appeared to him in all its heavenly splendour and announced to him:

"Do you know why I have come?"

"No, I don't know, heavenly angel", replied the man. "Tell me".

"I have been sent by God to lead you into the next world to Paradise. Now, how would you prefer to travel, with your body or should I just transport your soul?"

"I want to stay in one complete piece! Though I beg you, tell me whether there is food and drink in Paradise", asked the man.

"Whatever anyone takes with them that’s what they’ll have in Paradise", explained the angel.

"Ah good! Seeing everyone will eat whatever they take, wait for me to at least buy some bread to have at hand, and maybe there’ll be other things to eat once I get there."

That’s what the righteous man thought and he loaded up the biggest wagon he could find with loaves and loaves of bread, and set out for
Tales from Paradise. As he was rumbling along the highway, a hoard of beggars crossed his path, pleading for a crust of bread. That might have been, but as he was so stingy, he refused to even part with a crumb, much less a crust!

He travelled on and came to a fearful dip in the road where one of the loaves tumbled out of the wagon and rolled into the mud, getting smeared all over. He picked it up and wiped it and wiped it, but he was loath to put it amongst the others, so he held it in his hand. As luck would have it, lo, another beggar ran up to him and started to wail and beg for some bread. "In God's name, give me a piece of bread. Upon my life, just one bit, and it will be returned to you in the afterlife", pleaded the beggar.

"As if you're in any position to bless me or tell me that I'll see it in the afterlife when I, my friend, am taking this whole load there with me! Get out of my way", he shouted in anger threw the filthy loaf of bread at the beggar, who blessed him for it, and resumed his journey to Paradise.

He travelled on as he did along the ground men veered towards the sky road and finally reached the gates of Paradise. He rapped on the gate and St Peter emerged to see who was knocking. After just one glance at him, he recognised him as a righteous man and invited him to enter Heaven.

"Be my guest, good man, be my guest. Step into Heaven", he invited. "Thank you St Peter", replied the man, "but I have brought this wagon-load of bread with me too!"

"What! A cartload of bread! It is impossible for bread to cross these gates! You can only enter Heaven in the same state as when you first breathed on the earth - with no worldly possessions. That's all there is to it! If you like, you can come in as you are, but the bread must stay where it is!"

"Show mercy, St Peter", he cried pleadingly. "Let me bring my bread, for I am a good man! Do me that favour!"

"If you're coming in friend, come in only as you are; if not, just tell me so I can shut the gate. There is nothing more to be said", snapped St Peter rather angrily and he began to close the gate.

When the man saw that his load of bread would not be permitted, he abandoned it and stepped into Paradise and handed himself over to St Peter who in turn introduced him to another angel who would guide him to his place in Heaven. You might say how he made his bed is how he would be sleeping. The angel led him through Paradise towards his designated spot and everywhere they passed he observed families seated around numerous tables overflowing with all kinds of delicious foods. When the man saw those feasts, he felt wonderfully happy, because he thought to himself that he would no doubt be seated before some lavish spread as well. However,
when the angel had directed him to his spot and had announced 'Here you are friend, this is where you’ll sit'. To his dismay all that he saw in front of his seat was the filthy loaf of bread!

"But surely you can’t expect me to stay in this spot?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, here, right here friend!" said the angel.

"But do you mean I have only got this filthy bread to eat?" he asked.

"Yes, only that, seeing that’s all you gave in God’s name, and now God is setting before you. If you had been generous to the poor, all that you gave them would now be set before you to have. See, over there is another stingy man just like you. He’s only got some chunks of bread too, because that’s all he gave to a beggar. You should know, that whoever gives aid to the poor, that which he gives will be returned to him."

Whatever you do in this world, that is what you’ll get in the next one.
When the Lord wandered across the land with his twelve apostles, he would be invited to dinner by the wealthier citizens of each new town he entered.

There was a poor man whose entire possessions amounted to one chicken and two or three pounds of flour. Once, this poor man said to his wife: "Do you know what? I want to ask the Lord to dinner. We can roast the chicken and make a loaf of bread with the flour. You look after the cooking and I'll go and invite him".

"Good, my dear", she replied.

The woman prepared the meal while he hurried off and invited the Lord to be their guest for dinner. However, he made sure to only invite the Lord and not the twelve apostles, seeing he didn't have enough food.

That evening, the Lord with all the twelve apostles in tow arrived at the door. The poor man and his wife began to wring their hands in despair, wondering how they would all eat. Well, they needn't have worried because the food was blessed and the dinner multiplied astoundingly.

After they had all eaten their fill, St Peter nudged the poor man and said to him: "Hey, why don't you ask the Lord for something, seeing he's here in your house".

"But I don't know what to ask for". exclaimed the poor man, taken
"Ask him for a rag-sized spot in heaven, so that when you die, you'll have a guaranteed place to sit on up there".

The poor man asked for what St Peter had suggested and it was granted to him. But again, St Peter urged him on to ask for something else as well, so the poor man thought for a while, then asked that nobody should be allowed to steal apples from the tree in his yard. As it was, everyone who passed by just helped themselves so none remained for him to pick and sell.

The lord blessed the apple tree like this. When anyone closed their hand around an apple to steal, they'd get stuck to it and the only way they'd be able to get unstuck would be if the poor man commanded it.

The poor man was very pleased, but yet again St Peter egged him on to ask for something more. It took him a lot of thinking, but finally the poor man asked the Lord to bless his pack of cards, so that whenever he played, he'd win. His request was immediately granted.

The next morning, the poor man went off to a gambling den. He sat down to play and won every round, emptying everyone's pockets in the process. He knew for a fact then that his cards had really been blessed. He went on to prosper and thrive by means of his newly acquired luck.

A great many years passed and eventually the angel of death came down to take his soul.

"Come on friend, get ready", said the angel. "I have to take your soul".

"No! No! Please don't", pleaded the poor man.

"I'm afraid that begging will get you nowhere", replied the angel. "Just get yourself ready. I'll give you a few minutes".

"Ah, in that case, would you mind picking me an apple from my tree. After I eat it, I will be ready to come with you", said the poor man.

The angel went over to the apple tree and tried to pluck an apple, but instantly, his hand became stuck to it. He was trapped and yelled out, "Help me! I can't get my hand loose. What can I do?"

"I can set you loose", said the poor man triumphantly, "but only on condition that you let me have another twenty years".

The angel had no choice and agreed to the deal. The twenty years passed and again the angel returned to collect the man's soul. As soon as the poor man saw the angel, he tried to trick him into picking an apple again. Well, you can fool an angel once if you're lucky, but certainly not twice!

"Oh, no! You're not going to trick me this time", said the angel. "Just get ready because your time is more than up. I am taking you".

When the poor man heard that ultimatum, there was nothing he could do, but he did ask his wife for his blessed pack of cards which he slipped in
his breast pocket. He set out after the angel. As soon as they had left the
earth, their path took them past hell where a hoard of devils ran out and
collared the poor man to drag him into the pit with them. The angel took
a firm grip too and he pulled with all his might in one direction. The devils
pulled in the opposite direction. Finally, the poor man in the middle roared
out, "Oh you blasted devils. So you reckon you've got a claim on me do
you? What say we play a game of cards and if you win - take me. If I win,
I will take one of you".

The devils thought this was a good idea and agreed enthusiastically.
They sat down to play the first hand. The devils lost and so one was handed
over to the poor man. The devils pouted and frowned and called for a
second, third and fourth hand. They ended up playing twelve rounds and
the devils lost every time and so the poor man wound up with twelve devils.
He herded them all together and towed them along to the gates of paradise.

"Open the gates, St Peter, so I can come in. You know I have a spot
reserved here for me".

"Yes, you do have a small spot but the regulation is that it is only for
your private use. I'm afraid you'll have to leave your twelve companions
outside", said St Peter.

"Ha! Maybe you've forgotten, St Peter, that when I invited the Lord
to come to dinner at my house, he arrived with twelve friends. And now I
have arrived at his house with my twelve card playing partners. I'm merely
returning the favour".

So, like it or not, St Peter opened the gate and let them all in.
The Man Who Invited the Archangel Gabriel to Be His Child’s Godfather

Story 166, Book 4

A baby boy was born and the child’s poor father wanted to find a godfather for the christening, so he set out to search for one along the crossroads. As luck would have it, an old man appeared on the road and just as the baby’s father was overtaking him, the old man said:

“I wish you health, good fellow. God grant it. Might I ask where you’re off to?”

“May you keep well too, old man”, replied the baby’s father. “I’m off to find a godfather to christen my son. I’ve decided to do away with the old godfather because none of my children have lived. Every single one that we’ve had has died. So maybe if I change godfathers, maybe this child will live”.

“That’s not a bad idea”, answered the old man, “though I doubt it was the godfather’s fault that your children died. Look, if you like, I’ll be the new godfather”.

“Good”, agreed the man. “I found what I was looking for, but firstly, you have to tell me who you are and what you do. After that I’ll decide whether or not you should be the godfather”.

101
"I am God", stated the old man. "So you won't find anyone better than me!"

"So you're God, are you? Get away. Get away from me. You're a horrible old man", yelled the baby's father, "full of spite and grudges. I've had so many children and every single one of them has died. But look at other families - every child lives and thrives. And not only that, you've granted pots of money to some really awful people and other good folks have been left penniless and suffer terribly for a crust of bread. Why, look at what you've done to me, for example. I've missed out on both - I have neither riches nor children. That's why there's no way that I'm going to let you be the godfather!"

The man walked off and a little further on God approached him again in a different guise. And he tried again for a third time. But on each occasion, his identity was discovered and the man refused.

The baby's father walked on even further, and lo, he met a young man on the road.

"I wish you health, God grant it" said the young man. "Where are you off to? You look awfully worried".

"I'm on my way to find a godfather to christen my son, because I've decided that I need a new one. Every child I've had up to now has died and the old women told me that if I swapped godfathers, this baby would live", explained the man.

"If you like, I'll be the godfather", offered the young man.

"It's all very well that you offer, but I need to know who you are and what your work is first. If I like what I hear then by all means, be the godfather".

"I am the Archangel Gabriel and my job is to collect people's souls", said the young man.

"Ha! That's perfect. You're just what I had in mind. I know that you don't hold grudges - you just do your job. You are most welcome to my house. Come with me there now", said the man happily and he led the Archangel home. The christening took place and Gabriel was treated to a big dinner and showered with presents.

As he was leaving, Gabriel said to the man, "Listen here! I'll tell you something that will make you a rich man. From now on you should set yourself up as a doctor. Whenever you hear that somebody is dying, go and pay them a home visit. If you see me standing at their head, don't even try to cure them. But if I am standing at their feet, take on the case. Give them whatever treatments and drugs you like because you can be certain they'll recover. Your fame will spread far and wide and you'll become very
The man followed Gabriel’s advice to the letter and in the space of three years, he had amassed a fortune. One day, as he was sitting alone in his room and deliberating on how he could become even richer than the richest man in the town, the door unexpectedly swung open and in strode the Archangel, wielding a naked sword in his hand.

“Good morning, friend. Well, get ready, because I’ve come to collect your soul”, said Gabriel.

“Oh no! Please, won’t you reconsider, godfather”, pleaded the man. “Does our relationship mean so little to you? Did you have to choose me to be your victim? Surely there’s no shortage of people in the world, so why should you single me out to die? Please, I beg you, let me have another five years so that I can enjoy the money I’ve earned. Let me have a little pleasure so that when I do die, I won’t have any regrets”.

Gabriel hesitated. He shuffled his feet and finally, but reluctantly, agreed to come back in five years time.

After the five years had passed, he returned as promised to take the man’s soul. Again, the man pleaded and begged for more time - another three years is what he wanted. But Gabriel flatly refused. Finally, in desperation, he begged for just another three hours so that he could see all his friends and say his last goodbyes. Gabriel consented to that and the man rushed off to town. Do you know what he did? He brought himself a complete new set of foreign clothes, quite different from those normally worn in that town. Dressed in this disguise, he went along to a cafe frequented by tourists and blended himself into the crowd there. Three hours passed and he had still not returned home but sat sipping coffee.

The Archangel Gabriel traced him to the cafe. “Get up friend, come home. Your three hours are up”, he said.

“My good man, surely you have made some mistake”, said the man. “I am a stranger here. Can’t you tell by my clothes? You must have me confused with someone else. No, I’m not the person you are looking for - try looking somewhere else”.

Gabriel strode forward and stepped on the man’s chest, releasing his soul. Everyone in the cafe was astounded at how suddenly the man died. As they say, there’s nowhere you can hide from death.
Once upon a time there was a poor man clothed in tattered rags, barefooted, hungry, thirsty. Indeed, he couldn't have been poorer. As he was trudging home one evening exhausted from work, his teeth chattered and he shivered like some leaf in the freezing wind. The streets were deep with mud and slush and he wore no shoes. As luck would have it, the poor man chanced to bump into St Peter, who was also making his way home.

“Good evening St Peter”, said the poor man. “How are you? Well I trust? In good spirits?”

“May the Lord grant you goodness”, replied St Peter. “I’m fine, thank God. How are you?”

“Well St Peter, as far as health goes, I can’t complain, but I’m so poor that I can barely manage. You can see for yourself what a state I’m in - dressed in rags, mud up to my knees. I’ll go to bed sopping wet and I’ll get up sopping wet”.

“God takes care of us all, including the poor”, stated St Peter.

“Well, if that's the case and He really does care about us”, returned the poor man, “do you think you could go to heaven and pay a call on Him and ask Him at least make the weather stay fine, so that every day will be like summer? That way, at least we poor folk will be able to work in the fields and earn enough to keep our families. We’re not asking for property and
riches. We're only asking that the weather be warm. That's all we want. Please, oh please St Peter, won't you go and ask God to change the weather so that it will always stay hot, and never get cold". As he was saying this, the poor man broke into sobs and he pleaded and begged, showering both of St Peter's hands with kisses.

St Peter was overcome with pity and immediately dashed off to some high mountain peak. There he fell to his knees and fervently prayed to God to grant warm weather for the poor people. His prayers were for a perpetual summer. He prayed and he prayed for three whole days and three whole nights, until God answered him.

"Peter, Peter. Why are you pestering me so much to change the weather? Of course, I am quite capable, you know, of making it summer all the time, but let me remind you that you will be worse off if I do. Think carefully about what you're asking, because I will be very annoyed if you come running back begging me to change the weather back to how it is now. Consider your request very carefully. Make sure you're doing good, not more harm!"

"Yes, indeed", answered St Peter. "I'm sure you are quite right and your words couldn't be truer, but I really must press you to do me this favour because I promised the poor man that I'd see to it. For the time being at least, let me have my wish so that the people won't go round saying that you take no notice of me".

"Oh well, seeing you're going to keep nagging, Peter, then I'll make you happy and do what you want. But be warned that if no good comes of this weather change, you and your family could well be the ones to suffer most because of it. So you can run along now, because I've just blessed the weather for it to become beautiful and summery".

And wonder of wonders, the weather immediately changed. From being cold and wet it became deliciously warm. From day to day, the weather continued to warm up till finally it settled into a continuous summer.

When the poor people realised that the summer was there to stay, they were jubilant. Their prayers of thanks and long life for St Peter filled the skies, seeing he was the one responsible for the change. St Peter, too, was absolutely delighted as he listened to how the poor praised and blessed him.

The summer continued for several years in a row and the poor prospered and would say, "Ah, what wonderful weather, what good harvests. Ah, this is how it should have been from the very beginning of time - always warm so that the poor people wouldn't have to suffer so much".
It was not only the poor who were pleased either. The rich people were even more pleased because their fields, meadows and vineyards were producing such high yields. All living creatures revelled in that glorious warm climate as well.

Everything began to breed and multiply astoundingly, and none died. There were countless snakes, vipers, lizards, goannas, frogs, cockroaches, wolves, bears, foxes. In fact, every single beast you’d care to name. And as for the flies and wasps and mosquitoes! Their numbers grew so large that the air was black with them. All day long, every single person had to defend themselves with a swatter. They couldn’t put it down for even a minute! And during the nights - the buzzing and biting was unbearable. Life was made a misery for the people and animals as well.

Not only that, but the entire land became overrun by frogs and toads. Not a square inch of earth remained free of them. The ground was carpeted with their round blobby bodies. Horrible! Horrible! Horrible! As the old Macedonian saying goes - you might end up losing your ears because you wanted a pair of horns.

The frogs grew and grew till they became the size of large geese. And as for the King Toad, why he grew to the size of a house! He had a pair of eyes that were as big as pumpkins and he was terrifying to look at. Everyone who saw him gasped in horror and couldn’t believe that such an ugly sight could exist.

The people stirred themselves into action, dearest reader, and started to kill the frogs that had invaded their yards. That might have been, but the frogs were tough and fought back. Besides, the attacked frog would bellow so loudly that all of its friends and relations would hop to the rescue and start up a hair-raising chorus of deafening croaks and grunts and gurgles. The people found themselves in a ghastly situation with no solution in sight.

“Come on citizens, let’s go and see St Peter and beg him to ask God to get rid of all these vile bugs and frogs and toads so we can get on with our work”, said the people. Many times, they petitioned St Peter, but he was too embarrassed to go begging to God. But, listen to the scrape St Peter got into...

One morning, St Peter’s daughter was in the yard shovelling out the frogs to try and tidy it up a bit. Just at that moment, the King Toad happened to be passing by and he spied how she was hurling the frogs about.

“Hey you! How dare you treat those frogs like that”, snapped the Toad.

“Ha, why shouldn’t I? Or do you expect me to lay out a red carpet for them?” snarled St Peter’s daughter. “Look at the way they’ve cluttered up the place, nasty filthy things that they are!”
“Ooh, if that’s the case”, threatened King Toad. “Just you wait and see! You’ll soon be eating your words miss. Who do you think you’ve been so rude to”, snapped the King Toad angrily, and he continued on his way.

That evening, King Toad organised for matchmakers to visit St Peter to demand his daughter’s hand in marriage for him. When St Peter and his wife heard the matchmaker’s proposal, their hair stood on end and they tried their best to talk their way out of it.

“Please, dear sirs, it’s wrong for the Toad to want our girl to be his wife, for she’s our only daughter”, reasoned St Peter lamely. “You should try and find him a bride from a family with lots of daughters. So, send him our best regards, but we beseech you, by all of heaven and earth, to look elsewhere”. St Peter’s wife then had her say, “Please, and I too beg the Toad with all my heart, to leave our daughter with us. Why, he would scare the wits out of her. She’s been raised in the lap of luxury and beauty. Don’t you see that she would be totally unsuited to be the Toad’s wife”, wailed St Peter’s wife. In the end, they gave the matchmakers a nice tablecloth to take to King Toad as a present, along with their due respects, but without their permission for the marriage.

The matchmakers took the cloth and returned to the Toad to report all that St Peter and his wife had said.

“Humph! If they think they can fob me off with one lousy tablecloth, then they’re wrong”, fumed the King Toad. “I have made up my mind. St Peter’s daughter is to be my wife and that’s all there is to it! I don’t care if I have to pay with my life”.

Immediately, King Toad began to make preparations for the wedding. He despatched messengers with invitations to all the following guests: the snakes, vipers, lizards, goannas, frogs, toads and a host of other creatures.

All the guests eagerly thronged to King Toad’s palace. The sound of festive drums and music filled the rooms and the guests began to dance for all they were worth, leaping and squealing and crashing about.

King Toad then sent a messenger to St Peter with an order to have his daughter ready and waiting because he and his party were on their way to come and claim her. When St Peter received that message, he began to howl and pluck out his beard while his wife tore at her hair. As fast as he could, St Peter ran to the top of the mountain and fell to his knees and yelled to God with all his might.

“Please God, help me! Save me from that Toad who is going to grab my girl!”

“Ha, you see, St Peter, how bad things have become since I changed the weather?”
"Yes, I was wrong God. Please forgive me", blubbered St Peter. "The blame is all mine, not yours!"

"Well, in that case, you run along now St Peter, and take care of yourself. Don’t worry about a thing. I’ll save your daughter".

When St Peter neared his house, what should he see? Millions and trillions of frogs and snakes and serpents had surrounded his home. The King Toad had his daughter clasped in his great hands and was lifting her into a wagon drawn by two oxen who were harnessed with living bridle of snakes and adders. St Peter watched in dismay as the entire wedding party began to move off towards the palace.

In the same sudden way that the weather had become warm, it began to change again. A freezing violent wind blew up. It was so cold and fierce that the land froze to a depth of nine feet. It was a blizzard the like of which had never been seen before. Every living creature caught in its path perished on the spot, including the King Toad, who was the last to die.

Once everything had been frozen solid and as hard as a rock, the weather eased and St Peter’s daughter ran home safe and sound. Her parents were so overcome with joy they didn’t know where to put themselves.

"There, see how we’re better off with the weather the way it is", agreed all the people. "Even though it’s cold some of the time, at least we can live happily".
The Simple Man and St Nikola

One market day, a simple villager was passing by a church on his way to the market. He noticed there was a huge crowd of people jostling and bustling around an ikon vendor who had his wares on display near the church door. Seeing so many people were fighting to buy the ikons, the naive man thought that perhaps he too should acquire one, but he decided to take the precaution of first finding out why he should buy one. He asked the ikon seller, "If I buy one of these ikons, friend, how will it be of use to me?"

"It will be of tremendous use to you friend", exclaimed the salesman enthusiastically. "Once you hang it in a corner opposite a window, all you need to do is place a burning candle before it every evening and pray to God morning and night, and you will have complete protection from thieves and all other evils. So you see how indispensable an ikon is, my friend", concluded the vendor.

On hearing that explanation, the simple villager was quite overcome and hastily purchased not one, but two ikons to be doubly protected - one was of the Virgin Mary and the other was of St Nikola. He raced off home and mounted them on the wall in a corner. Because he didn't have a candle in the house, he set a lamp, fuelled by pine cones, before them.

One evening the villager and his wife had been invited out somewhere
so he lit two enormous lamps before the ikons, one for each, and set out to
go visiting without locking the door. His wife loudly insisted that they
should lock up but he was so completely certain and totally confident that
the ikons would guard his property that he even more loudly insisted that
it was quite unnecessary to do so. Finally and reluctantly, the woman gave
into his arguments, so they left the house as it was and headed off.

It so happened that a very spiteful neighbour had overheard their
quarrel. So during the night he hopped to and helped himself to all their
household goods. The next morning the simple man returned home to find
his house had been stripped clean!

"Oooh, husband, when I told you and told you to lock up, you wouldn't
listen to a word I said. You thought the ikons would guard the place. Now
that we've been robbed I hope you're satisfied", snarled his wife.

Stinging from the attack, the man grabbed a cudgel and with a
menacing frown strode threateningly to where the real culprits of the crime
lay and belligerently began:

"I want an explanation from you, Mother of God! Just how is it that
you failed to guard my house and let the burglars take everything? Do you
mean to tell me that you just sat there and watched the whole thing without
even saying one word? And you can't defend yourself by saying it was too
dark to see - I made sure you had a lamp. I've a good mind to give you a
sound thrashing and maybe next time you'll keep your eyes open!"

"Listen here, husband", interrupted his wife. "The Virgin's not to
blame. Why she's got her hands full looking after the baby. She might have
had to change Him, or perhaps she took Him for a stroll outside, or was
feeding Him. I'm certain she would have been too busy to notice any
burglars!"

"Yes, maybe you're right, wife", he replied. "Maybe Mary was too
busy with her work, as you say, but what about this old fellow? I'd like to
know what he was doing that stopped him from seeing! Why, he's an old
man and I would have expected him to keep wide awake and look after the
place. What does he think I gave him that huge lamp for, which is as round
and fat as his head, if he'll pardon the expression! Hmph, he's made himself
comfortable in that chair like some pampered sultan and doesn't even want
to know us! Listen here, you old codger. I won't beat the living daylights
out of you right now, but you've got just twenty four hours in which to find
those thieves, get back all our property and put it back exactly where it
belongs! Otherwise, I swear by the souls of my mother and father, that if
you fail, I'm going to get stuck into you with a stick! Three hundred strokes
for starters! So, you've been warned, old man! It won't do you any good
to pretend later that you didn’t know or that I didn’t tell you, because I’ve just spelt it out to the letter right now!”

After the simple man had ranted and roared at the ikon of St Nikola, he set about his usual daily chores and left St Nikola with that problem to solve. St Nikola felt mightily uncomfortable in his predicament, so that night he visited the dreams of the robber who had plundered the house. The vision he presented was fearful. He loomed large over the thief, swinging a great rusty sabre and swearing viciously that he would chop him up piece by piece if he did not return all the goods he had stolen from the poor man’s house and replace them exactly as they were.

The robber was terrified and he leapt out of his sleep on the stroke of midnight and hurriedly returned all that he had taken.

When day dawned, the simple man found all his goods arranged perfectly in the house. “Hey, wife”, he happily cried. “Look! St Nikola has recovered everything that was pinched!”

“I can see, husband”, she answered rather overawed, “and now I believe. You must climb up the mountain and collect a huge load of pine cones so that we can keep the lamp burning before St Nikola so that he’ll continue to protect us!”

The poor man went off and collected the pine cones and they kept the lamp burning before the ikon for who knows how long.
For all of 30 years, a very zealous hermit had lived a solitary life of continual fasting and prayer on some lonely mountain. Morning, noon and night all he did was bow and pray and bow and pray, beseeching God to grant him forgiveness and make him a saint. The hermit became positively obsessed with the wish to meet his equal in holiness on earth (though he doubted such a person existed). He deafened God with endless prayers asking to meet this person. God decided to let him have his wish, so in the early hours of dawn one morning when the hermit had ventured from his cave and was just raising his arms and eyes to heaven in prayer, he saw a brilliant star shoot through the sky and come to rest above a certain house. Simultaneously, the unearthly voice of God rang in his ears -

"Hermit, for ages now you have wanted to know if there is someone who is your equal in saintliness. Well, today I have marked with a star the house of a certain widow with five children. They are very poor and under hardship, but if you like, pay her a visit and compare her saintliness with yours. Hopefully then, you'll stop pestering me".

Once he'd gotten over the shock, the hermit set out to see the widow. He walked to town and headed straight for the house marked by the star. On entering, he found the widow sitting bareheaded at her loom, weaving at a furious pace. After a few introductions and greetings, the widow left her
work and received her guest as generously as her poverty allowed. She washed his feet and bid him welcome to their house and invited him to join them for their dinner of bread and salt. Then she took up her spindle and set to spinning. Her five children gathered round her, all washed and combed and cleanly dressed, so that it was a joy to look at them. From her lips came gentle words of praise when one of the children told her something good like how he'd helped his brother, or the neighbour or someone else. She spoke to another child about the need to be better behaved and not such a show-off. All told, their exchanges made the hermit wonder.

The time came for sleeping, and the hermit began to pray. He made the sign of the cross and bowed and crossed and prayed and bowed and crossed and prayed for a good hour before he went to bed. The widow continued to work on with the lamps turned low so as to save on fuel. When she finally got too tired, she tiptoed past her children, crossed herself a mere three times and lay down to sleep.

All this time, the hermit had deliberately kept wide awake just so that he could find out how long she spent saying her prayers. He thought to himself, "How can this be? How can this widow be as holy as me? She hardly said any prayers at all. Well, I'll wait until tomorrow and ask her a thing or two. Maybe then I'll be able to find out why she's considered to be as holy as me".

The hermit dozed off with these thoughts and the next morning he got up very early and began to prepare for church because it was Sunday. It was barely light and at the same time the widow rose, but instead of saying prayers, she merely crossed herself a few times and sat down at the loom to weave. When the hermit saw that she intended to work on a Sunday, he was horrified and said to her in a stern voice:

"Do you mean to tell me that you work on a Sunday!?"

"Yes, I certainly do. I work so that I can finish weaving this cloth that's been ordered. With the money I earn I'll be able to buy enough food for us", she explained.

"But aren't you going to church?", he exclaimed.

"Oooh, I'd like to go but I'm just overrun with work. Easter and Christmas are the only times I can manage it", she replied.

"Good heavens", thought the hermit. "This woman barely does anything. Why if she were to keep all the saints' days and go to church and pray properly, there's no telling what she might achieve. She could really become a saint". The hermit figured that he'd been sent to that house on a mission - to help the woman become a saint, so he decided to give her the
benefit of his wisdom.

"Listen here. What you must do from now on if you want to lead a good life is this. You must never, ever work on a Sunday, or any of the other holy days. Not a stitch, mind! You must start going to church as often as you can and praying for as long as you can. And of course, you'll have to start doing some good deeds if you want to lead a perfect life".

The poor widow took to heart the hermit's lecture and started to do as he'd said. Time passed and lots of days were spent idly in church. The widow found herself completely penniless and destitute. Many was the night when she and her children would go to bed hungry and they were even forced to go out begging.

The star that once shone so splendidly above her home began to fade. The hermit watched as it slowly dimmed and he began to understand its meaning and what damage he had done.

"Oh, I have done so much harm", he lamented to himself. "I shall probably go to hell! It was as a result of my visit to that saintly woman that she's given up working so hard and instead spends all her time in prayers. To think that she was just about killing herself with work and I made out as though she was living a bad life. Who knows what a horrible time the family is having now. I must make amends. I'll go and see her again and tell her how wrong I was and plead with her to resume her old way of life".

When he called on her again, he really did find her desperately poor - too poor to even be able to buy a piece of bread. He begged her to go back to her former ways.

The widow heard him out and was happy to know that what she had been doing in the past was right, and again she began to devote most of her time to working and only a little to worshipping. In that way her five children thrived and she became a saint.
There was once a man and his wife. They loved one another beyond measure. In fact, the whole world was overawed by their love. That was all very well, but you know the old saying - "the devil neither ploughs nor digs, but wrecks havoc on happy homes!"

During the night time when Satan called all his devils together to deal out the following day's evil work of hoodwinking people and wrecking their lives, he delegated one particular devil to the task of destroying that happy couple's love.

That devil took up residence on their doorstep and threw himself vigorously into his appointed task. Every day he would engineer some unpleasantness that he hoped would lead them to quarrel. But, no matter what and how he tried, he was unsuccessful. Satan was mightily displeased and punished that devil mercilessly for failing in his duty. One night he got so mad that he beat him black and blue!

One day, when that miserable devil was skulking along the back streets, he happened to run into an old granny who was appallingly evil. Why, if every devil were to perish, rest assured, before long they'd be overrunning the place again, courtesy of that granny! That most wretched of devils burst into tears before her and wringing his hands, he howled long and bitterly for all he was worth.
"Dear, oh dear! Why all these tears and wringing of hands, my child?" asked the granny in soothing tones.

"Oh granny, oh mother! How can I not weep and despair when tonight my father is going to beat me", whimpered the unhappy devil.

"But why, why my child? Why should he beat you? What wrong have you done?" she asked.

"It's because he sent me out on a mission to create a quarrel between that husband and wife who love one another so much and I haven't been able to do it. That's why he'll beat me tonight".

"My dear son, if you promise to buy me a pair of nice red shoes that I can wear at Easter, I'll go there right now. I guarantee they'll be at each other's throats by dinnertime", offered the granny.

"I promise to buy them for you, granny! I'll even swear an oath on it, just so long as you make them fight and save me from my father", replied the grateful devil.

"Ah well, if that's the case, you run along and buy my shoes, then take a seat opposite their house so you'll be able to see how it's done".

The devil scampered off and bought the bright red shoes, then went and sat down to watch and take notes about how the granny would fulfil her end of the bargain.

The old woman took herself off to pay a call on the unsuspecting wife. She pretended to be some ancient and distant aunt of her husband. She begged the young woman to cook her some rice, explaining that she was terribly ill and yearned for rice but because she was so very poor she couldn't afford to buy any for herself. She continued her tale of woe, describing how she had dragged herself to their house, hoping for a little boiled rice, in the name of charity.

The poor wife immediately boiled the rice. She entreated the old woman to wait a little so that they could eat together with her husband who would soon be back from the store. The old lady would not be persuaded to wait and instead begged the wife to lay out the food so that just the two of them would eat, for she said she would be embarrassed in front of her nephew.

Like it or not, the poor wife placed the big communal bowl of rice to the centre of the table. The cunning granny then asked if she might please have two spoons to eat with, as she managed much better using both hands, explaining that, anyway, it was a custom that would help restore her health. So with two spoons the granny ploughed into the rice, leaving two big holes in the mound. A third hole was left from where the wife ate.

After a few mouthfuls the old lady got up and hurriedly took her leave.
because she heard that the husband was nearing the house for lunch.

As she was scuttling out of the yard she bumped into the husband who demanded to know what business she had there.

"Oh my dear", answered the sly old granny. "I came to visit the young man who lives here and he and his wife insisted that I join them to eat some rice for lunch. Well, I ate what I ate and took my leave and now I am on my way home. Young lovers like that should be allowed to finish their lunch alone. Long may they live!"

When he entered the house, he immediately noticed that there were three spoons on the table and three holes in the mound of rice. He became furious beyond reason, snorted loudly through his nose and began to turn the house upside down in search of his wife’s lover. Finally, in exasperation, he grabbed his wife by the hair and started beating her....And so ended their love.

When the devil witnessed that the old granny was infinitely more devilish than he would ever be, he was frightened out of his wits. He ran off quickly and found a big, long pole and tied the promised shoes round one end. Only then, and keeping as far back as he could, did he extend the pole for the old woman to take her shoes.

"Here granny, here are your shoes! Untie them from the end of the pole but I beseech you, don’t come near me because you are three hundred times worse than any devil. I’m scared you might do me some harm", called the devil, and then he ran away as fast as he could.
"Good morning Spase", said the devil.
"My mornings are never wont to be bad", answered Spase, "so you've no need to make them good".
As I was on my way here, I passed by your house, Spase".
"The road brought you that way, so that's why you passed my house".
"But I saw your wife, Spase".
"Blind - you're not, so of course you saw her. That's why God gave you eyes".
"I heard when your wife bore a child, Spase".
"Deaf - you're not, so how could you not hear? My wife lay with a man, that's why she bore a child".
"Eh, and she bore two children, Spase, and both of them boys".
"Brother followed brother, that's why two were born".
"But one of them, Spase, died".
"The Lord giveth and he taketh away again".
"But and the other, Spase, died".
"Brother after brother came, brother after brother went".
"But your wife too, Spase, died".
"Even if she did, God rest her soul, life will still go on. I can find another wife".

*SPAS means SALVATION in Macedonian. (Translator's Note)*
"Eh, and your dappled bull died, Spase".
"He died, yes. Living creatures bear human burdens. They too nourish souls".
"The head of the bull, Spase, they left for you to eat".
"The head of the house will eat the head".
"Indeed, but the head got eaten by the bitch, Spase".
"Yes, she ate it, yes. Misfortune follows on the heels of poor housekeeping".
"But then they killed the bitch, Spase".
"What she gave - she got".
"They threw her onto the dung heap, Spase".
"Actually, that was where she always liked to lay".
That was as far as the devil could think of to harass Spase. There was nothing more he could say! In frustration, the devil burst like a roasting chestnut out of its skin.
Once there was a poor man, who because of his hard work and industry, had saved up one thousand gold coins. Finding himself in possession of so much money, the poor man became scared lest he be robbed and left penniless again. He learnt from conversations with many people that the Archbishop was a completely honest and righteous man, that no matter what was left with him for safekeeping, its owner would be free from cares and could even go there at midnight to reclaim his property. From all that he heard, the poor man became convinced that there wasn’t a more decent and trustworthy man than the Archbishop, so he gave him his one thousand gold coins to mind.

Because the Archbishop was a good man, as was the poor man, the devil, that evil one, became filled with envy and spite. He began to stalk both of them - he first planned to bring about the Archbishop’s fall, then the poor man’s. What with today and tomorrow, the devil successfully implanted into the Archbishop’s mind the idea that he should deny that he’d ever received any money from the poor man. Simultaneously, the devil made sure that the poor man failed miserably at any work he did, and prodded him into thinking that he should go and ask the Archbishop for his money back.
One morning, the poor man went to see the Archbishop to request his money.

"Just what gold coins are you talking about, you good-for-nothing", snapped the Archbishop angrily, and he pushed and shoved the poor man out of the room.

Sobbing, the poor man returned home and told many of his friends that the Archbishop had pinched his money. Not one single person believed that it was possible for the Archbishop to do such a thing, for all of them knew him to be above suspicion. There was nothing the poor man could do in the face of their convictions. He was left with no alternative but to keep his mouth shut - that's all! He became poorer and poorer, till finally he was reduced to begging for a crust of bread.

One evening as he was going home empty-handed, he came face to face with the devil, who very magnanimously handed him some money so that he could buy some food.

"God bless you for your charity. I don’t care whether you really are a devil - or a saint, let me repeat, God bless you for your charity. My family won’t go hungry tonight".

That very same night, the devil went to pay a call on the poor man.

"Hey, old chap", said the devil fiendishly. "How’d you like to get your one thousand gold coins back from the Archbishop?"

"As if I wouldn’t want them back", cried the poor man. "Tell me how, I implore you".

"Well, all you have to do is agree to a pact with me, then listen to what a scheme I have in mind: I’ll turn myself into a beautiful mule, and you are to ride me up and down past the Archbishop’s palace. I guarantee he’ll take a fancy to me and will want to buy me off you. One thousand gold coins is the price you should demand. He’ll try and bargain, of course, but he’ll pay it, then you can just sit back and enjoy the show. Watch how I heap disgrace upon disgrace over him", enticed the devil.

The poor man didn’t need much persuading and he willingly agreed to the bargain. The devil promptly changed himself into a wondrous mule, and the poor man proceeded to ride it up and down past the Archbishop’s windows. When the Archbishop spotted that beautiful, pedigree creature, he immediately wanted to own it himself. He called the poor man and made him an offer for it. Eventually, the price of one thousand gold coins was agreed to, and the Archbishop hastily took possession of the beast. He was so determined that he even went as far as to get the poor man to sign a statement saying he’d legally sold the mule and that he wouldn’t ever try to repossess it.
The Archbishop was delighted with his new means of transport, and
looked after the mule very carefully. One morning, he instructed his groom
to prepare the mule for him to ride in a procession. The groom combed and
brushed the beautiful animal, he rubbed it down carefully, then went to fetch
the saddle.

While the groom’s back was turned, the devilish mule lay down and
rolled and rolled around so that it was covered in filth from top to toe. The
groom was horrified and quickly seized hold of it and began to clean it.
Indeed, but the mule refused to stand still. It became quite uncontrollable,
so that the groom grabbed hold of a whip to beat it.

But, seeing the mule was the devil, there was no way it was going to
hang around for a whipping. As soon as the groom brandished the whip, the
mule threw off its bridle and, right before his very eyes, disappeared into a
little hole in the wall, like some mouse. Only its tail remained swinging
outside. The groom’s jaw dropped open, but keeping his wits about him,
he grabbed hold of the mule’s tail and started to pull! He pulled and pulled
and pulled, but it was impossible to pull the mule out of the wall. Just then,
the Archbishop turned up and what a sight met his eyes! There was the
mule, hidden in the wall with only its tail hanging out.

“What’s this?” he demanded.

“What? What indeed you may well ask, your holiness”, exclaimed the
excited groom. “The mule went and hid in the wall! Quickly, come here
and grab hold of its tail and help me pull it out!”

The two of them together seized the tail and they heaved with all their
might. Suddenly, something gave, and they both tumbled over backwards
- but all they had done was rip off the mule’s tail! It seemed the rest of the
mule was still hidden in the wall so the Archbishop ordered the groom to
knock it down, brick by brick. The groom set to and wrecked the entire wall,
but the mule was nowhere to be found! The Archbishop was furious; his
mule was lost; so he sent a messenger out to summon the poor man who had
sold it to him. When he arrived, the Archbishop began:

“Oooh, you blighter! That mule you sold me disappeared into the wall.
Look, here’s its tail as proof - we ripped it off accidentally when we were
trying to pull it out of the wall. I had the entire wall knocked down, but my
mule wasn’t there. It seems to me that there is some sort of devilish trickery
involved here. Give me back the one thousand gold coins I paid you for it,
or I’ll haul you through the courts!”

“Indeed, you might have paid one thousand gold coins for some mule
and now it’s run away - that I quite believe seeing you came by that money
dishonestly; but as far as me being the one who sold it to you, you’d better
not believe it”, said the poor man.

On hearing those words from the poor man, the Archbishop immediately demanded an audience with the king to vent his complaints. After he had told him his version of the events, the king called in the poor man and questioned him:

“Is it true, you fellow”, boomed the king, “that you sold a mule to the Archbishop and that the mule vanished into the wall? Just what sort of a business is this; I’d like to know!”

“Neither did I sell him any mule, your majesty, nor do mules disappear into walls. The Archbishop is lying, that’s all”, said the poor man.

“So! I’m a liar, am I?” thundered the Archbishop. “I happen to have proof. Here’s the bill of sale that you signed”.

The Archbishop thrust his hand into his breast pocket, took out the document signed by the poor man and passed it to the king. But the devil instantly transformed the papers into a stack of playing cards.

When the king glanced down to read, instead of a bill of sale, he saw a pile of cards!

“Are you trying to make fun of me or something, Archbishop”, asked the king, annoyed.

When the Archbishop saw the cards, he became fearfully embarrassed, and in order to save face, he at once drew out the mule’s tail from his pocket to give to the king to prove that there really had been a mule.

“Here’s the mule’s tail, your majesty, that we ripped off when the mule hid in the wall. Here, take it and see for yourself”, said the Archbishop. He passed the tail over to the king, but in a flash the devil transformed it into a twelve string mandolin! The king became furious when he clapped eyes on the mandolin.

“Disgraceful”, he muttered. “Just what sort of a game are you playing? Did you think you could belittle me in this way?” Without waiting for any answers, the king called to his guards, “Take him away and throw him into the dungeon”.

And that’s how the devil finished off both the Archbishop and the poor man.
Nearby to a monastery there was a drinking fountain which had been built by the monks so that every traveller who passed along the road would be able to refresh themself with a drink of water. Next to the drinking fountain was an ancient tree which had grown there from time immemorial. In the monastery lived forty pious monks who did countless good deeds for the people—not only had they built the fountain, but they had also performed other great works of charity and goodness. You might say that all the forty monks were on the verge of becoming saints.

Every night, all the devils would gather at the old tree near the fountain to engage in contests about who had done the most evil during that day.

"Hey you, what evil did you perpetrate today?" demanded the head devil Beelzebub of one of them.

"Today, I caused two brothers to quarrel and one of them got so wild he scratched out his brother’s eyes. He got thrown into prison. Now I’m working towards getting him hanged and leaving his six young children fatherless."

"Bravo, well done. You’ve earned yourself a pair of horns. Give him a chair to be seated", he commanded to the other devils, "and a pipe of tobacco to smoke. He has earned our respect."

The Devil Who Arranged for Forty Monks to Get Married

Book 4, Story 235
"And you?", Beelzebub asked a second devil, "what did you achieve today?"

"I engineered a terrible fight between a father and his son. The son murdered his father and then because he felt such grief and guilt, he hanged himself."

"Bravo, my son", said the chief. "Why, you're even more talented than the first devil was. Quickly, bring him an armchair and a hookah. Let him smoke, for he is truly worthy."

"And you", he queried a third, "what wickedness did you undertake today?"

"I sent the bishop out whoring, and he got caught and was arrested and thrown into gaol. He was so humiliated and embarrassed that he gave up his faith and asked to be converted to Islam!"

"Bravo and congratulations, you sly one you", exclaimed Beelzebub with delight. "You've done a capital job. Bring a throne for him, so that he too can be seated in honour of such meritorious work. And give him a cigar and coffee to boot!"

"And you, what did you do today?" he questioned a fourth.

"I urged a drunkard to beat his wife to death, and now he has no-one to restrain him from drinking and he'll drink away everything he owns."

"Bravo and a good effort, but you haven't quite earned the privilege of being seated yet", replied the chief.

In this manner, the head evil one asked all the devils in turn about their evil achievements during the day and rewarded them each according to the extent of the mischief they'd done. Every single night this ritual was repeated and the Beelzebub would urge them on with rewards of lavish gifts and honours. Because of this, the devils were emboldened to compete fiercely amongst themselves for who could do the most harm and receive the most prizes.

Amongst all the devils, there was one older one who had an earnest wish to do some terrible harm which would astound even Beelzebub because of its extreme wickedness, and for which he would be rewarded with a throne of honour to sit on, just like the other successful devils were receiving. He thought and schemed about what evil he could do. Finally, it occurred to him to take up residence at the nearby monastery, which was inhabited by the forty good monks. There, he would join their ranks with a view to becoming their abbot, seeing the former one had recently died, and then after that he would wreak havoc and manipulate the monks into getting married and thus sinning unforgivably.

The devil transformed himself into the most holy monk imaginable.
with a long flowing beard and a voluminous black cassock, so long and
chaste that it even trailed along the ground behind him. His demeanour was
humble, peace loving; he kept his eyes modestly downcast, never raising
or turning them beyond that which was absolutely necessary - like some
blinded horse; he was so virtuous that it pained him to tread on a blade
green! That is how he presented himself in the monastery, and because
of his saintly manner all the monks felt it was only appropriate and proper
that he should be declared the new abbot. And not only that, but he
demonstrated to them such a profound knowledge of the holy laws,
counting them off on his fingers with infinite ease, and much better than any
of them could. After five or six months in the monastery, it had become
quite clear to all of them that nobody knew more than him about the
monastic life. At every meeting that was held regarding some ecumenical
issue, nobody was more able to clarify and resolve the matter more
learntly than the devil. The monks revered the disguised devil’s wisdom
and goodness so much, that one day they decided unanimously that he must
take up the abbot’s position - and nothing less would do! Actually, that is
exactly what the devil wanted and he hopped into the job with alacrity.

After he had taken control of all the monastery’s activities and had
started to direct each of the forty monks in their respective labours, at every
gathering round the table for lunch or dinner, he would relate some parable,
as though it were to the Glory of God. That may have been, but seeing he
was a crafty devil, after all, he started to present some very unorthodox
interpretations of the Scriptures. He would preach on and on that this or that
was a mortal sin; that something else was according to the gospel, till
finally he got round to sermonising that they should get married; that they
should each take a wife in order to prevent them from falling prey to the
devil’s temptations. He proved to them from countless references in many
weighty tomes that it was their duty to be married and for each of them to
have a wife who could thus also become a nun!

“If I were not an old man, reverend brothers”, he would pronounce
solemnly, “I would get married myself in order to save you from your
shame, but old age has beset me and I have been rendered helpless. Help
me brothers, and save your souls”.

With these and many other pleading words, the abbot worked towards
persuading the forty almost sainted monks. And from day to day, the spark
of desire grew fiercer in the bosoms of the younger monks, and besides, the
older brothers didn’t seem to show much unwillingness either. And so it
came to pass that the day finally came when the monks themselves did
nothing less than begin preaching among themselves that, yes indeed, they
should get married. So you see how powerful the devil, that evil one is. He completely scrambled the minds of the forty monks, all of whom were on the brink of sainthood, and brought them to the point of total and utter disgrace before the eyes of the entire world!

Once the monks were convinced that indeed they should be wed, they pleaded and begged with the abbot that he too should take a wife, even if she was an older lady, for their sakes, as it would be more fitting and seemly. As if he hadn’t already done enough, the devil reluctantly agreed, but mind you, only so that they would not be disappointed!

They held a meeting to decide who should go out to find all of the brides. With alacrity, the devil accepted the task of arranging the matches.

"Here, I agree to go and organise the matches, my lovesick brethren, but you should know that I intend to go to forty separate villages, and from each village I will secure a young and beautiful virgin for you. Do you know why I want you to have partners from forty different villages?"

"No, we don’t, reverend Abbot", they chorused.

"Well, this is why", he said. "So that you will have friends and relations in all those villages and you’ll not be like some fruitless, hollow and echoing trees, all alone and worthless”.

With these and many other clever and eloquent phrases, he roused in them a fanatical conviction that they must be wed, and soon.

One morning, the devil rose early and set out on his mission to the villages. The brothers saw him off with great pomp and ceremony; they even accompanied him in procession right to the bottom of the hill beneath the monastery.

He proceeded to travel from village to village, and being the devil he was, easily fast-talked the parents of each girl into allowing her to become the wife of a monk, so that she too could become a nun. And so he secured promises from forty girls to marry one of his brothers. Many fathers and mothers made enquiries at the monastery to find out first-hand whether indeed such a thing could be, and on having their questions confirmed, they returned home and told all and sundry about how the matter stood. Everyone who heard was amazed that the monastic vows should permit a monk to be married! But, the devil had done his work thoroughly and breathed his evil everywhere, so that all who heard quickly ceased to be amazed and immediately began to state that really it was a good idea.

Thus, the devilish spiritual leader returned to his monastery and proceeded to inform the monks about their partner-to-be - what her name was and all her points of excellence. On hearing the details from the abbot, the monks went into ecstasies of rapture and delight, and gratefully bowed
A short time passed and the devil called the monks to attend a further meeting, at which he requested them to donate some money for the purchase of gifts for their betrothed, as this was the custom at that time in the villages. The monks eagerly handed over their money, and the devil went to town and bought whatever item had been mentioned in the talks with the girls’ folks. He returned to the monastery with his load of fineries where he selected the older and trustworthy monks to deliver the gifts to the villages - each girl must receive the agreed token: a shawl for one, earrings for another, a necklace, slippers, a belt, a fur jacket, a petticoat; in short, whatever the devil abbot had sworn to give was to be delivered to each betrothed.

The next day, the old monk loaded his horse with the presents, and rode off down the road towards the valley and the villages. Not only was his task to safely deliver the gifts, but to inform each family that the weddings were to take place in forty days, so to make the required preparations for when the monks would arrive to claim their brides.

The old monk crossed himself and set out with his load. So far, so good, but some other devil who was ignorant of the devil-cum-abbot’s doings spotted the old monk as he made the sign of the cross. And because, as you know, every devil despises monks, he concocted a plan to sweep the old monk off his course. In the twinkling of an eye, the old monk found himself trotting along an unfamiliar road, with his horse under the ruthless hold of the devil. For a good many hours till dusk fell, the devil led him on a merry ride; up and down and round and about, never for one moment allowing him to resume his original path. Finally, the devil pranced the horse alongside a filthy quagmire, whereupon he shoved both horse and rider in, then vanished as suddenly as he’d appeared.

When the old monk finally got his breath back and realised that his horse was stuck fast in the bog, he couldn’t quite believe it. Alone, he valiantly tried to save his horse from the mud’s sticky hold, but the harder he tried, the more the horse became bogged, seeing the mud was deep and treacherous. He waited, desperately hoping that help would arrive, but to no avail. He considered trudging back to the monastery and rousing the brothers to come to help, but oh, he was too ashamed. Eventually, it occurred to him to return to the great old tree by the drinking fountain near the monastery. He thought he could spend the night in its lofty branches, safe from wild beasts. It seemed a good idea, so he hurried to the tree, whereupon he climbed up it and concealed himself in its dense canopy of leaves, invisible to all.

As happened every other night, this night too the devils gathered round
the tree and Beelzebub began his usual round of questions about who had done what evil during that day. Each devil related their trickeries, and when it came to the turn of the devil-abbot, he too told them of his great success: about how he'd taken up the abbot’s post; about how he'd bamboozled the monks into getting married; about how that very day he'd sent a monk off to deliver the presents and tell the villagers to be ready for the weddings in forty days time. When he proudly finished his tale, Beelzebub could barely find sufficient words to praise him. He congratulated him heartily, seated him on the most imposing chair and handed him the finest cigar, all with extreme delight and pleasure.

“Bravo, oh you wicked one you”, exclaimed Beelzebub, “for having manoeuvred such a disgraceful catastrophe - getting forty monks married! Though, I want to ask you one thing”, continued the chief, “how on earth do you manage to survive in mass when they chant ‘Glory be to the Kingdom of God’?

“Ah, I’ve found an easy solution for that”, replied the devil-abbot. “Before it comes to the part when that is sung, I slip outside, and then once it’s over, I take my place in the church again”.

“Bravo, bravo indeed. If you succeed in your venture, you can rest assured that you’ll find yourself the proud owner of two big horns”.

Just as those words were spoken, the particular devil who had tumbled the horse with its load of gifts into the quagmire, urgently interrupted, well before his turn. He told them himself that he had run that old monk amok and planted his horse in the mud.

“What! Were you blind or something! All my efforts may come to nothing”, screamed the abbot. “How dare you interfere with my monk’s journey!”

When Beelzebub heard what treachery that hapless devil had enacted, he immediately ordered a host of other devils to go and pull the horse out of the mud, wash it down and put it to pasture in the monastery’s fields. Then, he commanded another group to grab the unfortunate devil who had done the deed, tie him down and give him five hundred lashes across the soles of his feet in order to ensure that next time he would think twice before he acted.

By the time these affairs had been attended to, the first cock crowed and the devils vanished clean out of sight. The old monk, hidden in the foliage above, had heard all and was in a state of terrible agitation. Even before the sun had fully risen, he scrambled hastily back to the monastery where he related all that he’d witnessed. It was only then that the monks bit their lips and thought to themselves, “Oh my, oh dear; we wicked sinners. What a
shocking thing we were about to do! We would have brought shame and disgrace on ourselves before the whole world; and God would have condemned us to eternal torture in hell!"

They hid the old monk and his horse well out of sight and not long after, the devil-abbot entered the church for the morning mass. Just as the service approached the point when 'Glory be to the kingdom of God' was to be sung, the abbot discreetly made for the exit; indeed, but the monks had locked all the doors and windows of the church, so there was no way out. As the chanting 'Glory be to the kingdom of God' commenced, he begged, then demanded to be let out, but the forty monks stood firmly before all the entrances and refused to budge. When the devil found himself in that awful predicament, with the smell of incense filling the air, its sickly perfume overpoweringly strong, for the monks had taken the precaution of burning great piles of it that day; with the incessant chanting 'Glory be to the kingdom of God', the devil ran round the church frenziedly, hopping up and down helplessly on one foot, till suddenly he burst with all the noise and stink of a firing cannon...BANG.

So that was how the poor monks saved themselves from Satan's sharp claws, and for years after, they fasted and did penance till they attained sainthood.
A Faithful Dog Killed in Error

Book 5, Story 244

A shepherd owned a hound that was so brave, so fearless, that it would unhesitatingly attack even a pack of twenty marauding wolves. One evening the shepherd had to go home to change his clothes, and finding his wife out, he decided to wait for her. By the time she returned, by the time he got changed and had eaten dinner, he was away much later than he had expected. You might say that it was midnight by the time he returned to his flock of sheep.

In the meantime, a pack of twelve wolves had come savaging the sheep, but the hound had fought them bravely, and had destroyed them all. That may have been so, but while the dog was locked in combat with one wolf, the remaining ones would savage and kill many sheep.

On the shepherd's approach, the hound greeted him with great jubilation, wagging his tail excitedly. When the shepherd noticed the dog dripped blood all over, he was taken aback. Then he neared the flock and saw dead and wounded sheep everywhere, his very hair stood on end. Without a moment's hesitation, he drew his pistol from his belt and shot the hound.

"That's what you deserve, you damned dog. I left you to guard the sheep from the wolves, and instead you turned into a wolf yourself and killed half of them".

"Awooow", whimpered the hound and fell down dead on the spot, like
some overripe pear. The shepherd went to tend the injured sheep, and what should he discover but twelve wolves lying around, dead and disembowelled.

It was then that he realised that the wolves had been responsible for the bloodbath, and the hound had done his utmost to defend the sheep and kill the attackers.

"Aaaah, merciful mother! What a mistake I have made. Fancy killing my trustworthy hound after he did his duty faithfully! I no longer want to live!"

He took out his other pistol and shot himself because of the great remorse he felt for killing his innocent dog.
The Rich Man Who Bought a Liver for a Poor Man

Book 5, Story 248

One carnival day, a poor man went along to the butcher to buy himself a liver so he could celebrate the holiday. That was all very well, but the liver cost one grosh and he only had twenty pari. As he was standing in front of the butcher, wondering what to do, he was spotted by a squire who asked him to deliver the whole lamb to his house, with the offer of suitable payment for his effort.

On hearing those words from the Squire, the butcher interrupted with: "There's the perfect solution for you friend, in what the Squire's saying. You deliver the lamb to his place, and in exchange, the Squire can pay for your liver, seeing as it is, you can't afford to buy it".

Following that sensible advice from the butcher, the poor man and the Squire agreed to the deal. And so the poor man hoisted up the lamb with one hand, took the liver in his other hand; the Squire carried a huge cigar in his hand and positioned himself a few paces in front, and off they marched along the street towards his house. They had advanced to some point or other, when lo, they bumped into another Squire, who after they had swapped greetings said to his counterpart, "Where have you been off to?"

"I called in at the butcher's friend", replied the Squire, "and bought this lamb for tonight's festivities, and as well as that, I bought this poor beggar..."
that liver so that he and his children would be able to celebrate too, and give a few words of thanks in my direction. I did well, don’t you think?”

“Yes, you certainly did well Squire, in buying them that liver. Why heaven alone only knows whether this poor blighter has even tasted meat from the day he was born! Isn’t that so, hey you fellow? Admit it, haven’t I hit on the truth?” he bellowed, fixing his gaze on the poor man.

The poor man was amazed that the two Squires were capable of saying such stupid and thoughtless things, but he only shrugged his shoulders and remained silent. Well, the two Squires parted company, and just a little further on, they met yet another noble man, and the performance was repeated, with the Squire boasting about having bought the lamb and the liver for the poor fellow as well. And again, in front of this noble man, the poor man only shrugged his shoulders and said nothing. They met up with still many more gentlemen on their way and to every single one, the Squire vaunted aloud about his tremendous act of charity in buying the liver for the pauper, embellishing his version of the tale with each telling. The poor man listened to the Squire trumpeting loudly to the whole world about how he’d saved him from starvation by buying him the liver, and he felt like dying from shame. But, be that as it may, he had joined in the dance and had to see it through to the end, as the saying goes.

Well, what happened - happened, and they finally arrived at the Squire’s house. The poor man swung the lamb up to hang it on a meat hook, and needing both arms for the task, the Squire relieved him of the liver he had been carrying in one hand, and held it for him until the lamb was hung. The mistress of the house noticed the Squire holding the liver, and she cried out indignantly, “Really, sir! Since when have we ever stooped to eat liver? What could have possessed you to buy it? Offal! Humph, let the poor eat that! Our refined palates call for lamb or poultry!”

“As if you could really be thinking that I bought the liver for us, mistress! Why, I bought it for this poor beggar here so that he could dine well tonight and say “God bless you”, he retorted.

“Indeed, did you really buy it for him? Well, if that’s the case, just hang that liver up on the hook as well”, she ordered, and get that chap to chop up a few dry logs for me so I can light the fire!”

“Haa, of course! Why indeed shouldn’t he do some chopping. His hands won’t drop off, no indeed”, exclaimed the Squire. “Isn’t that so, my friend?” he asked the poor man.

“Well, even if it isn’t, Squire, let it be that way. It seems I must go and chop some wood, that’s all there is to it”, muttered the poor man through his teeth. So he took up the axe, split a pile of kindling, then re-entered the
house to collect his crummy liver.

"Back! Back! Keep your hands off that liver", screeched the mistress at the poor man. "First just run and empty this basket of rubbish onto the dung heap, then after, you can take your liver".

The poor man grew thoughtful after listening to that order, and he began to swear and curse the liver they proposed to 'donate' to him, but his fury was vented in a whisper so that the Squire and the mistress could not hear.

"Ah, cursed poverty", he mumbled to himself. "Why are you so cruel? To get one worm-infested liver I've had to slave half the day".

Like it or not, the poor man heaved up the basket of rubbish and threw it on the heap. As he was picking his way back, he was waylaid by the mistress who was carrying two empty jugs. She thrust them at him and told him to fill them with water.

"Just one more chore for you, you fellow. Trot down to the well and fetch some water. This is the way to insure yourself you know! If ever you find yourself in need of assistance from the Squire, he'll look after you. Why, this morning he was good enough to buy you a liver; tomorrow he might favour you with some tripe; the next day with some intestines! Isn't that so Squire? Aren't I right?"

"Of course. That's just how it is", agreed the Squire heartily. Why if the poor pay proper homage to the rich, they'll be well looked after. If our brother here", he announced righteously, pointing to the poor man, "if our brother here was to be of some service today, he earns a liver; tomorrow he'll make himself useful somewhere else and there he'll get some tripe: at a third place - intestines! Why, before you know it, his whole family will have dined on meat!"

Because of the anger that flooded through him, the poor man did not allow the Squire to finish his lecture. With murder in his heart, he fired forth, "Damn and blast your squiredom and your so-called charity, with its worminfested livers and stinking, rotten tripe and intestines! You've made me labour half the day for one lousy liver worth one lousy grosh, and I've lost a whole day's wages because of it. There, that's the whole of the good you've done for me, Squire! Woe, and bitterness to the poor if they have to depend on the sort of help you give!"

After the poor man finished his angry outburst, he kicked over the jugs, spat with disgust in the yard, then strode out through the gate, forsaking his liver. He went straight to his friend's house, where he borrowed some money and purchased all the meat and other goods he needed to celebrate the holiday properly.
The rich Squire was left humiliated and disgraced with the poor man's words ringing in his ears.
The Traveller Who Lent His Friend a Rug

Book S, Story 252

One traveller who was riding from one town to the next met a fellow traveller on the road, so they decided to ride together for company's sake. As they trotted along, great black storm clouds gathered in the sky and the rain began to pelt down fiercely. Seeing the storm seemed to have set in, the first rider asked his companion to lend him a rug to wrap around himself so that he wouldn't get soaked to the skin. His companion readily agreed and so they splashed their way along a little further. Soon, the weather cleared with neither of them being too much the worse from the storm.

"But if I hadn't given you that rug, friend", declared the second rider, "you'd be dripping wet".

"Yes, and thank you for lending me the rug, otherwise I really would be soaked", he replied.

They went on a little further, and again the second traveller reminded the first of the favour he'd done him. On a little further, and again a reminder of his good deed. They travelled on in this way till at last they came to a river. They made their way down the bank in order to rest a little under the trees, together with the many other travellers who had stopped to rest at that popular spot.

On sitting down amongst the company, the second man immediately began to boast about how he'd lent his friend the rug, and how it had saved
him from getting soaked in the storm. And then be told everyone the same thing again. And again. And still one more time. And yet again, till finally his companion got so annoyed that he jumped up from where he was sitting and dived into the river, getting wet through and through.

"There, you, you fellow! You've driven me mad with that blasted rug of yours. 'If I hadn't given you my rug, you'd have got drenched; if it wasn't for that rug I lent you, you'd have been dripping wet'", he mocked nastily.

"Well, do you reckon I'd have got any wetter than I am now, hm, you good-for-nothing? I hope now that you will finally shut up with your stupid bragging".

After saying that, the dripping wet man hopped on his mount and furiously galloped off on his own so that he wouldn't have to listen to another word from his tiresome companion.
A certain Aga employed a hired hand to work his land, and this employee happened to own a mad cow. Now in a fit of frenzied madness, this cow gored one of the Aga's cows which promptly died. When the god-fearing worker saw his master's cow lying dead he stood up and took himself into town to tell the Aga about it.

He presented himself before the Aga, and they exchanged the customary greeting: "May you be granted many years, Aga", he said.

"Long may you live, lad! What news is there from the fields, Marko? What has or hasn't happened?" asked the Aga.

"All is well and thriving, Aga. By your life, there's nothing to report except that my cow went mad and wounded yours, then it died. There, that's all that's happened", explained the hired hand.

"Oh well lad, there's not much we can do about that! Animals will be animals", said the Aga with a sigh.

From the Aga's reply, the worker realised that the Aga had misunderstood. He obviously believed that his toiler's cow lay dead, whereas it was his, the Aga's cow, which had been killed. So the worker had to explain the true situation.

"But it was your cow that was gored by mine, Aga, and it is your cow..."
that died", he said.

When the Aga heard that, he immediately changed his tune. With great rage, he fumed:

"Ah Ha! I see! Well that makes it quite a different matter altogether! You will have to pay me the price of my cow, you idiot! Maybe that will teach you to keep your eyes open".

So that's the oppressor's justice for you! When it was the worker's cow that lay dead - it was an unfortunate animal accident. When it was the Aga's cow - it had to be paid for!
There was a king who, when meeting with his advisors would frequently start arguing how much better it would be if all the inns were closed down and alcohol was banned in his kingdom. Regardless of his eloquent speeches, the king and his advisors could not reach an agreement, as there were some who insisted that it was not a good idea to close all the inns; that at least a few should be allowed to operate. The king maintained that drink was the source of untold harm for his people, whilst his stubborn opponents maintained that some people, especially the poor, benefited from it.

Eventually, the king decided to disguise himself as an ordinary citizen and set off on a round of the inns in order to see what possible good could come of drinking. He crawled from pub to pub, and he entered one where three miserable men were sitting down to lunch. One of them had a bandage over his eyes, the other had both arms in slings, and the third was dressed in the most tattered old rags imaginable. The king pulled up a chair to join them for the meal, and to see what the results of the wine would be on these three, seeing the waiter had just brought a jugful to the table and they had started to empty it. After they had drunk rather too much, and were really quite drunk, they began to quarrel amongst themselves (because wine and spirits change from their peaceful natures and become aggressive when
they are removed from their home in the barrel and resettled to a person's inwards).

The one with the bandaged eyes insulted the one with his arms in the slings, who was his friend and guide. The retaliation was swift:

"Oh shut up! Otherwise I'll get up and hurl you through the ceiling", snapped the man with the broken arms. "Do you know who you're picking a fight with, or don't you? Why, you'd better say a few prayers, because if I let loose, you'll spin through that sky like a top for starters, and then for dessert, I'll give you a good beating! How'd you like that, eh?"

"Ah, go on", said the man with the bandaged eyes. "You'll have to catch me first! You make me so mad, I feel like running out right now and reporting you to the king. I don't give a damn about you, I could happily wring your neck like a Sunday chicken. I can see with my own two eyes that you're asking for a thrashing. Just consider yourself lucky that I'm not in the mood, but by golly, when the mood strikes, just you wait! I won't be held responsible for what I do to you!"

"Go on! Hit him!" urged the one dressed in tatters. "Finish him off, and don't you worry about a thing. I'll fix up the lawyers' fees! There's nothing I'd rather spend all my money on than helping out a mate. Go on, I want to see you! Hit him!"

The king was amazed at how the wine had worked such a transformation. The man with the bandaged eyes could see; the man with the broken arms could fight, and the one in tatters became rich. Maybe the king's advisors were right after all!
Some king summoned all the curers in his kingdom and demanded from them a potion which would stop him from dying. He was prepared to pay a fortune for the medicine. Despite this, however, the doctors merely shrugged their shoulders and all of them declined to take up his offer because they knew it was an impossible request. God himself has decreed that whoever is born will one day die.

"Honourable majesty", they chorused. "You can squander the entire treasury, sacrifice all your armies, consult every doctor from the four corners of the globe, but no matter what you do, you will be unable to prevent the inevitable from happening. When your time comes you will die!"

The king grew furious at their reply and angrily banished the lot of them from his sight.

The news that the king was seeking the elixir of life spread all around, till it reached the ears of some ageing quack.

"Ha! Just wait! I'll go and see the king", he said to himself with delight "and I'll be the one to claim that fortune, because I know exactly what he should do so that he won't die".

He presented himself before the king and solemnly announced:
"It has come to my attention, honourable majesty, that you are seeking the cure for death. Well, it so happens that it is within my power to be able to grant you your wish, for I have discovered the secret of immortality. You will be pleased to know that it does not involve nasty medicines and poisonous drugs, for the secret is in what you eat."

The king became terribly excited on hearing that, at last, his wish was to be granted. He swore to reward the old man very generously if he would accept the post as his personal physician and start the treatment at once.

Of course, that was just what the fraudulent quack wanted, and he immediately agreed. The first thing he ordered the king to do was to have lunch, after which he promised to write out the regimen he should follow as a cure for death.

"Honourable majesty", said the impostor. "In this first and most vital lunch, you are to have placed on your table every variety of food and drink that you have ever eaten - entrees, soups, main courses, sweets, wines - everything that you are accustomed to having."

The king gave the order and before long the table was loaded with an assortment of dishes and bottles. Before allowing the king to eat, the charlatan made a great show of weighing every single dish and bottle that was on the table and noting down the results on a sheet of paper. Then he urged the king to eat and drink to his heart's content, which he promptly did, while his 'physician' looked on, declining all offers to join him in the meal. Once the king had finished eating, the charlatan set to reweighing the remains of the lunch, and calculating exactly how much of each item the king had consumed. The entire procedure was repeated at the evening meal as well, after which the 'physician' closeted himself away to write out the detailed and precise regimen the king was to follow for ever more.

"Honourable majesty", he said as he presented the list to the king, "here is the regimen that I have prescribed for you. You are to eat and drink in strict accordance to what I have written down. Everything, whether it is bread, or main courses, or wines or whatever, must be carefully weighed and you are to consume neither one dram more than the stipulated amount, nor one dram less. If you follow this routine faithfully, you will not die. If, on the other hand, you deviate from it in the slightest, then I cannot be held responsible for the consequences!"

With a happy heart, the king embraced his new regimen and ordered that all his lunches and dinners be carefully prepared and weighed in accordance with the written instructions. The impostor was rewarded with piles of money and a mansion, so that he, too, could live in royal style.

All the doctors in the kingdom couldn't quite believe how easily the
Icing had been duped. But the king ate and drank and rejoiced because he believed he would not die. As for the quack, why, he rejoiced even more!

Years passed, and I don’t know how it came about, but one day the king got up feeling very poorly, with no appetite. His private physician was urgently summoned to attend to him.

“I’m just not hungry. I can’t eat a thing, doctor. I feel terrible”, moaned the king. “Do something! Give me some medicine!”

“I told you, your majesty, that you had to eat and drink only what I listed, and only in that amount. If you break that regimen by undereating, or by taking medicines, then death is possible”, said the charlatan decisively.

The king grew terrified on hearing those words and from day to day his condition grew worse till he was on the brink of death. In fright, he called in all the town’s doctors to help him. Well, that may have been so, but there was nothing they could do seeing he had reached his last allotted day. The king knew he was dying; he could feel his soul departing, so as a last gesture he called his counsellors together and proclaimed his son the new king.

“Listen, son”, he gasped. “It is clear that I am dying, and you will be king. I want you to promise that you will arrange my funeral to be like this: I want the entire treasury to be loaded into wagons, which are to lead the cortège. The wagons are to be followed by all the town’s doctors, and behind them, I want all my armed forces to march in procession. The coffin is to come last. I want it to be a huge and splendid parade so that everyone who sees it will marvel”.

These were the last words he ever spoke. His son carried out his last wishes faithfully, sparing neither cost nor energy to ensure that it was the most lavish funeral parade that had ever been.

After it was all over, and the young king had taken up the throne, he mentioned to the oldest and wisest counsellor that although he had fulfilled his obligation to his father by arranging such a showy funeral, he nevertheless felt it had been a rather unnecessary extravaganza.

“Noble king”, replied the sage. “That wasn’t an unnecessary extravaganza. Your father wanted to make a point. He wanted it to be a lesson to you and to others. His idea was to let you know that if it were a matter of money to keep a person from dying - he had wagonloads of money; if it were a matter of doctors - there were all the town’s doctors; if it were a matter of soldiers being able to snatch a person from the jaws of death - there were all his armed forces! But the truth of the matter is that when the day of death comes, nothing, but nothing can prevent it from happening - neither wealth, nor medicine, nor armies, nor even the quack’s regimen. Your father
wanted his funeral to show all that, so it would be remembered in ages to come. Whether we live or whether we die, we are not our own masters.

Psalm 127, verse 4: ‘Except the Lord build his house, they labour in vain that build it’.
In olden days, it was the custom in a certain kingdom, that when people grew too old to work, their children would carry them up on to a certain mountain and leave them there to die of hunger. One son, hoisted his old father onto his shoulders to carry him up the mountain, and on reaching a certain spot, he lowered him onto the ground.

"I beg you, son", entreated the old man. "Don't leave me just here to die. Carry me a little further".

"Oh! What's wrong with this spot, dad?" asked his son.

"As if I could like the site of my own father's, your grandfather's, grave! When I was your age, I too carried my father here when he grew old and left him to die of hunger, just as I will die now. There, that's why I don't want to be left in this particular spot. Please son, do as I ask you just one last time. Carry me a little further".

In response to his father's pleas, the son lifted up his father again to take him higher up the mountain. That may have been, but as he walked, with that weight on his shoulders, his father's words preyed on his mind. He thought to himself, "Curse whoever it was that invented this horrible custom. Fancy leaving these poor, old people up here to die of hunger. Wasn't it obvious that their turn, my turn, would come? When I grow old like my old father, my son will bring me here to starve to death too. I can't
let this happen; it mustn't go on. I will take my father back home again and look after him until he dies his own death. Perhaps by doing this, I may be able to destroy this awful custom. But, I don't want my friends and neighbours to laugh at me! I know, I will take dad home in secret and keep him hidden and look after him without telling anyone!"

After he had reasoned thus, he carried his father back home under the cover of night and installed him in one room which he sealed off, and proceeded to look after him like a loving son should.

Nobody, but nobody knew that the young man had his father hidden in the house. Neither were his neighbours, nor his friends, given the opportunity to mock him about it.

Every evening, when the son returned from town, he would have discussions with his old dad about things he'd seen and heard during the day. The old man was always able to add something important to the conversation, so that the young man looked forward to his evenings and was always a bit wiser after their talks. He was well pleased that he had not left his father to starve on the mountain.

It so happened that the king who reigned at that time disapproved very strongly of the treatment the old people received - the way they were deserted on the mountain. But seeing it had been going on for generations, it was difficult to think of a way of showing the people how wrong it was. Nevertheless, the king constantly thought about what he could do to put an end to the custom. Finally, he lighted on an idea. He ordered all the young people to gather together on a certain day, and when they had all assembled, he said to them:

"Listen here, you youngsters! I order you to make a chain out of sand. You have three days and three nights in which to accomplish the task. If you succeed, well and good. If not, every one of you shall be beheaded!"

The children all bowed after hearing the king's speech, and set about their task. They gathered in a large sandpit and began, supposedly, to make the chain of sand. They strove and sweated, but it is impossible to make a chain out of sand! A day, two, passed, and still they had achieved nothing.

During both those two evenings, the young man who had brought his father back from the mountain, had not spoken a single word.

"Son", said the old man, "what's wrong? I can see you've been very unhappy these past two nights".

"There is so much to be unhappy about, dad", replied the young man. "I only have one more day left to live! You see, the king is going to execute all young people tomorrow because we haven't been able to make him the chain of sand he ordered".
"Ah, if that's what you've been worrying about, have no more fears. Leave it to me", said the old man. "Listen, this is what you must say to the king tomorrow: 'Your majesty, we started to make the chain of sand you ordered, but we couldn't agree about the design of it. We don't want all our efforts to be in vain. What if you don't like the pattern we've woven into it? So that's why we've come to ask you to show us exactly how you'd like it to look, and we'll have it ready for you by tonight. Would you like the chain to be thick, or thin, or what?"

The lad did as his father suggested, and when the king heard such a clever defence from such a young man, he asked him to step forward from the crowd and began to question him.

"How did it occur to you to give such an answer, boy? Tell me the truth. I want to know", ordered the king.

The young man felt very uncomfortable, but decided he had nothing to lose, so he admitted to the king that his father had advised him to speak out like that.

The king was delighted, and began to interrogate him in detail, asking how was it that his father was still living. The young man explained that while he'd been taking his father up the mountain to die, it had become clear to him that it was a dreadful thing to be doing, and that it would happen to him one day. So he decided to save his father, and kept him hidden at home, and if it hadn't been for his father, he wouldn't have been able to give that answer about the chain of sand. In the end he said, "so you see, your majesty, I've learnt a great deal from my father".

That was precisely what the king had been hoping would happen as a result of his order for the chain of sand. He knew this was the turning point that would mean the end of the custom where the old people were abandoned on the mountain. He turned to the crowd.

"Eh, you youngsters! Did you hear? Did you hear how one old man saved your lives? See how valuable the old people are! So that is why, from now on, you must respect and care for your old parents until they die naturally. After all, their existence is vital: it is as necessary to you as are the foundations for a house".

The young people needed no more convincing. From that hour onward, the custom of deserting the old people was abolished and has never been practised again.
The Philosopher and the Doctor

Book 5, Story 264

A philosopher and a doctor were travelling companions and their journey brought them to a village, where they sought shelter for the night in one of the local houses. In that house, there lived a man with his two young sons. One of the boys was gobbling up a cucumber that appeared to be bitterly green through and through, whilst the other child was devouring an unripe watermelon. With their mouths full, both of them stopped to stare at the strangers with wide and curious eyes.

"My friend", exclaimed the doctor to their father, "Don't you see what your children are eating? - Green cucumber and unripe watermelon. If you allow them to eat their fill of those, why you can be certain that they will die during the night! Are you fully aware of the situation, or aren't you?" he demanded.

"Neither was my father aware of it, doctor, nor do I even want to be aware of it", answered the villager.

"Well, it's precisely because of that attitude that so many of you people die before your time", said the doctor gruffly.

After that exchange, the guests expressed a wish to sleep outside beneath the stars, seeing the weather was fine and clear.

"Please, gentlemen. I must strongly advise you against sleeping out of doors tonight, because it's going to rain heavily", warned their host.
“Ha ha ha”, laughed the philosopher on hearing that. “Really, my good fellow, it appears to me that not only do you think you’re a doctor, but you also want to set yourself up as a meteorologist who is bent on predicting bad weather!”

“And it appears to me, sir, that you are mocking me, but tomorrow we’ll see who has the last laugh”, retorted the villager, and he remained sulkily silent for the remainder of the evening.

At bedtime, the two travellers made themselves comfortable in the yard and fell asleep. And wonder of wonders, during the night a violent storm blew up and the rain belted down. The doctor and the philosopher were wrenched out of their sleep by the great drops of water which splashed down on their faces, and were forced to retreat indoors for the rest of the night.

“Well how’s that, eh buddy”, said the doctor to the philosopher provocingly. “The peasant’s prediction came true”.

The philosopher’s pride was rather ruffled by that comment from the doctor but he said nothing, preferring to save his revenge till later.

The household was already up and about by the time the two guests appeared from their room the next morning. The two children were to be seen each voraciously biting into a green cucumber for breakfast.

“Oh ho, your doctorship! There’s proof of your medical know-how! Weren’t you lecturing their father last night that if the children gorged themselves on those foods, they’d die without fail? Well, here they are, bright eyed and bushy tailed and downing green cucumber for breakfast, no less”, said the philosopher triumphantly.

“Touche! It seems that I too was wrong, but you’re hardly in a position to talk, seeing you, who profess to know all about nature, didn’t believe our host when he warned us that it was going to rain last night”.

On realising that the peasant had made fools of them both, they decided to approach him and ask.

“Hey, my friend. I’d like to ask you something, if you’d be so kind as to tell me”, began the philosopher rather sheepishly, “how did you know that it was going to rain last night? I don’t believe you know how to either read or write, so how did you manage to make such an accurate prediction?”

“Yes, you’re right that I’ve never had any schooling, friend, but I can tell from the animals. Yesterday, I noticed how the calves and pigs were playing up, and so I knew that a storm was on its way”, explained the villager.

“Well, my friend. It’s obvious that we’ve no right to go round feeling superior because of our education, seeing that even simple folk know some
things that we don't", said the philosopher to the doctor, and they proceeded on their way.
Once upon a time, some emperor disguised himself as a humble traveller, and together with a few high ranking advisers in his court, set out to journey through their towns and villages to see what their subjects were up to and to learn what was being said around the town.

As they were wandering along, the road led them past an old man who was ploughing his field. They turned their horses back and trotted up to him so as to inspect his work and to ask him a few questions.

"Ah, grandad. Why are you wearing your old body out with ploughing?" asked the emperor. Surely you must have children who could help you out? Old age is a time for rest",

"My children", replied the old man, "are helping the world, and as for me working in my old age, others will reap the rewards, not I. Because up to now, my house has been twice plundered by thieves, and I know they mean to rob me yet again. So that is why, my friend, I must toil and labour in my old age".

"But how are you with the two? Near or far?" asked the emperor.
"I'm very close with the two, friend", answered the old man.
And how are you with the thirty two?" asked the emperor.
"Not prospering, I'm afraid, because if you were to add twenty eight,
I’d have thirty two”, was the old man’s cryptic reply.

“But what about your two pack horses? Do they serve to carry your load at least?” continued the emperor.

“I’d rather you didn’t even mention the horses, my friend, seeing I’ve made the two into three, and they still barely manage the weight”, returned the old man.

“And if I were to send you some geese, grandad”, enquired the emperor, “would you be able to pluck them clean?”

“As for plucking geese, my friend”, said the old man, “I am an expert just so long as they fall into my hands”.

After the emperor and the old man finished their exchange, the emperor commanded the party to return to the palace. There he began to recount to the entire court much of what they’d seen and experienced on their travels. He then turned his attention to those senior advisers who had accompanied him, and demanded to know whether they had understood the conversation he’d had with the old farmer. They promptly repeated, like parrots, word-for-word the entire encounter. That was all very well, but the emperor impatiently silenced them by saying he didn’t want to hear a verbatim quote of what had been said, but he wanted them to explain the real meaning of their exchange.

“Listen here, you old fools”, he growled. “If you can’t manage to decipher the real nature of the conversation I had with that old man, be assured that your heads will roll! I’ll give you just three days and three nights to think about it”.

On hearing the emperor’s order, the senior officials all solemnly bowed then dispersed to their various quarters to try and solve that riddling conversation. They thought and they debated and they pondered, but they couldn’t make head nor tail of a single phrase. In the end, they concurred that it would be wisest to actually go to see the old farmer and beg him for the solution. They armed themselves with piles of money, and rode out to the old farmer in his field.

“Hey, old man. Yesterday, when we were here with our friend, and you had a chat with him, what exactly did it all mean? We beg you; please won’t you explain because we’ve arranged a bet with him about it and the stakes are awfully high”, they said.

“Hmph, indeed friends. You don’t surely expect me to give away my secrets for free”, he exclaimed. “I want to be paid one hundred alans* per word, and only on those terms will I agree to co-operate!”

The senior officials were mightily discomforted on hearing that demand. My, how they twisted and turned and cajoled, but to no avail.

*alan - a gold coin
because the old man was fully aware that they had been sent to him for plucking. They found themselves left with no option, so reluctantly they agreed to his price and counted out one hundred altans for every word he uttered.

"Listen well, my friends, and now I will tell you what your friend asked me yesterday. His first question was didn’t I have any children, that is sons who could help with the ploughing, and I replied that I had children, but they were all daughters and the duty of the married ones is to help their husbands and families, not me. In regards to the two times I’ve been robbed and my expectation that the thieves will come yet again; that meant that I’ve paid for two weddings and provided large dowries for my two daughters already, and my third girl is planning to marry soon so I’ll have to part with enormous sums for her too, when the time comes. And that’s what I meant when I said “others will reap the rewards, not I”. By asking about the ‘two, near or far’, your friend referred to my eyesight, was my vision any good? I’m near-sighted, you know. And the question about the thirty two was about my teeth. I told him I only had four. As for the two pack horses that he asked about, he was asking whether my legs can still carry me; I explained that even with a walking stick, I find it hard going. Eh, eh and regarding the geese which he offered to send me for plucking, why, you’re the geese and I’m plucking your money! So friends, now you know what our conversation was all about yesterday, and I must say that your friend is indeed a clever fellow for putting his questions the way he did”.

After the high ranking officials had learnt all the answers, they set off home. “We should be thoroughly ashamed of ourselves”, they said one to the other dejectedly. “We’re not fit to be the emperor’s advisers when we don’t know as much as one clever peasant”.
One man had been invited to his daughter's in-laws, and during the lunch, the host plied his visitor with generous quantities of wines and brandy. Well, the visitor drank up what they gave him for as long as he enjoyed the taste, but enough was enough. However, his host insisted that he should drink more.

"Come come, drink up! Help yourself! Have another! Let me fill your glass! You're welcome to what we have! Here, let's have a toast! Come on! Cheers! Drink up", he exhorted.

But, the visitor really didn't want to drink another drop, regardless of all the urging. So he stayed for as long as he did, and seeing he was only a visitor, the time came for him to leave.

He unhitched his donkey in readiness for his journey home. His host, clutching a jug of wine to his bosom, insisted on seeing him off a little way down the road. They plodded down the hill, towards the river, and once they reached it, the donkey leaned down to drink. After it had drunk its fill, it drew back. Well, the donkey's owner, the visitor, seemed to be upset by that, and tried everything he could to force the donkey to drink more water. He pulled and pushed and yelled and pleaded with the beast.

"Hey, forget about that blasted donkey", cried his host impatiently. "Don't waste your time with it! Look after yourself instead! Here! Take
the jug and have a swig”.

The visitor declined his offer, but yet again, his host tried to persuade him to have another drink.

In the end, the visitor got fed up and said:

“Eh, stop nagging, will you! Do you think I’ve got less brains than my own donkey? You saw how I tried to make it drink, but I couldn’t budge it! The least we can do is show that we’ve got more sense than a donkey and, for a start, not drink any more than we want!”

The host heard out his visitor. He had seen for himself that when the donkey indicated ‘no more’, it had meant ‘no more’. From that moment, he became a reformed man! No longer did he harass his guests to keep drinking and he too started to drink less!
A Judge’s Just Sentence
for a Poor Man

Book 5, Story 289

A poor man and his wife removed themselves to another town in search of work. On their entry into the town, the poor man accidentally stumbled across a small drawstring pouch, crammed full with gold and silver coins.

"Ha, my good man! Fortune has finally smiled upon us. It seems God destined for us to become wealthy in this town", exclaimed his wife.

"No, it’s not our fortune, missus", replied her husband. "We didn’t sweat to make this money and that is why we must return it to whoever lost it".

That was the essence of their conversation until they reached the town centre. There they found some cheap rooms to rent and settled themselves in.

The following morning, the man strode off to the marketplace in a bid to find some employment. As he walked among the stalls and shops, he heard the town crier announcing a large reward to whoever handed in a lost pouch full of money. The poor man acquainted himself with the owner’s name and address, then he made his way back home to pick up the bag and deliver it to its rightful owner. The husband and wife had a dreadful row over it, seeing his wife didn’t want to part with it, whereas he maintained he wanted nothing to do with money that was dishonestly come by. In fact, he barely was able to take possession of the pouch.
"Do you know, my good woman, that I am much happier with my own hard-earned egg than with a stranger's chicken, as the saying goes. I'll be more pleased with the reward that comes with the contents of this bag", and so saying, he snatched it out of her hands.

He found his way to the address he'd been given and handed the bulging pouch over to its owner.

"I am pleased to be able to return this money which you lost, sir. I found it, so please give me the reward", said the poor man as he passed the bag across.

The rich nobleman clutched hold of his property without saying a word. He only nodded his head and disappeared into an adjoining room to check the contents, which turned out to be intact. That was all very well, but in order not to part with any reward money, he assumed a ferocious expression and stomped back out of the room.

"Ha, you fellow. I know your type only too well", he snarled. You've helped yourself to five hundred altans out of the bag, and now you've got the nerve to ask for a big reward for bringing back the remainder. Listen here. Either you restore the missing money, or I'll drag you through the courts!"

On hearing that deplorable torrent of words from that despicable nobleman, the poor man's hair quite stood on end.

"Upon my word, sir", he protested, "I'm not the sort of man you're accusing me to be. Look, count your money one more time, because I swear I didn't take so much as a single coin. I beg you - recount it, because mistakes do happen. However, as far as the reward is concerned, I insist that you give it to me".

"How dare you 'insist' on anything, you good-for-nothing", fumed the nobleman. "Right, let's go and see the judge, because you're not going to get away with this so lightly".

And he grabbed the poor fellow by the collar and pushed and pulled him along towards the courthouse, hoping to frighten him into relinquishing his claim on the reward. Indeed, the poor man had a clear conscience, so he didn't flinch in the slightest at the prospect of being judged. When the nobleman observed that the fellow was not in the least perturbed, he decided that nevertheless it would make for a good joke, a good laugh, and so he presented him before the judge to be tried.

The judge first heard the nobleman's version of the events, then the poor man's, and he realised that the rich man had it in for the poor one.

"Sir, first I'll ask you to bring that pouch of money here, so that I can see it for myself", declared the judge, "and then I will deliver my verdict on
this matter. In any case, I do not believe that you, Sir, could be guilty of any deceitful practice or misconduct. No, that would be impossible”.

Because the nobleman felt so flattered by the judge’s praise, he immediately ran off and fetched the pouch, his one and only motive being to deny the poor man of his rights because that nobleman was one of the stingiest and tight-fisted men in all the land.

The judge took the pouch and emptied out all the money, then carefully counted it. He poured the coins back inside and tightly drew the string and patted it down smoothly so that it looked just as it had been.

“Sir, how much money was in the pouch when you lost it?” queried the judge.

“One thousand karagrosh and one thousand altans”, answered the nobleman.

“By my calculations, there are only one thousand karagrosh and five hundred altans in this bag”, said the judge.

“Well, your worship. My pouch originally contained one thousand of each, and as you have seen for yourself, now there are only five hundred altans. It’s obvious that this man stole the missing money”, said the nobleman accusingly.

“Hmmm. Sir, I’ll trouble you to do one more small chore, if you’d be so kind. Would you mind just bringing me another five hundred altans, and then after, I’ll be able to give my final verdict and settle this dispute”.

The nobleman again dashed off and returned with five hundred altans. The judge took the coins and tried to poke all of them into the pouch indeed - but not even one hundred would fit, seeing the pouch was quite full!

“It is quite evident as you can see, sir, that this pouch cannot possibly be yours”, proclaimed the judge. “It is far too small. These five hundred altans don’t fit. Therefore, this particular pouch must belong to somebody else, and yours is yet to be found. The law dictates that this lost pouch must remain in my custody for the next three months. All due effort will be made to locate its owner, but if after three months the search has been unsuccessful, that’s just their bad luck I’m afraid, and the money will legally become the property of this man who found it. There is nothing further to be said, Sir. The hearing is now closed”, concluded the judge.

“Eh, you’re not to blame, your honour”, said the nobleman remorsefully. “It is my own fault that I lost my ears in quest of a set of antlers, as the saying goes”.

When the three months were up, the judge summoned the poor man and presented him with the pouch of money.

“There”, he exclaimed to his wife. “You see how the truth served to
make this money mine and where the saying 'A miser will always end up paying twice' comes from? And so saying, the poor man was transformed into a very wealthy one.
Solomon and the Three Crooks with the Chest

Book 5, Story 291

Three crooks were discussing how they might fleece one wealthy woman who was the proprietress of some inn. That woman, apart from being very rich, happened to be one of the most law-abiding people in that town. Every businessman who stayed at her inn would leave all his valuables with her for safekeeping, regardless of how precious or costly they might be. She was completely trustworthy and had the people’s total confidence.

Being aware of her wealth and her integrity, the three pitiless crooks perfected their plan. They acquired a small empty strongbox and securely fastened it with three padlocks, whose keyholes were sealed with wax and stamped with their three individual seals. Carrying the box, they arrived at the inn for a stay of several days.

"Seeing we’ll be staying here for a few days", said the three crooks, "can you please guard our strongbox until we leave? But mind, you are only to return it to us if all three of us are together to claim it. Do not make the mistake of giving it back if only one or two of us are present, because we’ve each deposited two thousand pounds in that box".

"Very well", replied the proprietress. "Even if it contained millions of pounds, it is your money and it is safe with me".

They passed over the strongbox and went to attend to business,
supposedly.

Some ten days passed, and one morning one of the crooks asked the proprietress if she stocked any combs, as he needed one. As she turned to open some cupboards, the crook rushed to the other end of the foyer in response to his partner's urgent calls. The three of them seemed deep in conference as they wandered out of the front entrance of the inn, when the one who had asked for the comb came flying back and now asked for their strongbox.

"Listen, we need our strongbox please. Can I have it at once", he cried, giving the impression that important business was to hand. "We have to settle a deal we've just made".

"I'm sorry Sir, but I can't. Remember you told me not to hand it back unless all three of you were present. That is what your instructions were, weren't they?" she replied.

"Yes, yes! But look, my partners are waiting for me just outside the door. Ask them if you like", he offered, pointing in the direction of the front entrance where his two friends had positioned themselves strategically so that they could listen and spy on the exchange, without being seen themselves.

"Is it OK to give your friend the strong box?" called out the proprietress in a raised voice to the two unseen companions.

"Yes, give it to him! Give it to him!" they shouted in reply and she could see their arms waving and beckoning impatiently from behind the door. "Hurry up, or we'll be late for our appointment", they added crossly.

On having her question confirmed both in words and with a show of hands, the proprietress was satisfied and passed over the strongbox. The crook grabbed it and disappeared off to the prearranged hiding place.

Towards evening, the remaining two crooks returned to the inn where the proprietress greeted them chattily in the foyer with, "I hope your deal went smoothly. You certainly did seem to be in a rush this morning - didn't even have time to come inside out of the cold to help your friend carry the strongbox! I hope you weren't late for the appointment".

"What!" they gasped in mock shock. "Our strongbox! Help him to carry it! Do you mean to say that you gave it to our partner? Do you mean to say that you fell for that trick? What's to be done now? He's probably fled with our money!" With increasing anger they snarled, "Look lady, you'd better find him quick smart, or you're in real trouble!"

The proprietress reeled on hearing those ugly words. Terror swept through her and she was lost for words. It was no joking matter! That strongbox contained six thousand pounds. She'd have to sell everything she
owned in order to replace that money. Immediately, the proprietress despatched people to the four corners of the town in pursuit of the thief, and alerted all the officials as well.

Investigations and searches were made by both the proprietress' employees and the police, but the crook was nowhere to be found. In the end, it was uncovered that the man already had a long criminal record, and it was unlikely that he'd never be traced.

That being the case, the two remaining partners opened a lawsuit against the proprietress with the outcome that she was ordered to make good their loss - four thousand pounds. Appeals were useless. She had to pay and that was all there was to it.

In her anguish, the poor proprietress decided to go for a stroll around the town, hoping that a walk might ease her tension. Her wanderings brought her before a group of children who were playing marbles, and she paused, absentmindedly watching their game and listening to their childish squabbles. One of the boys had just lost all his marbles, so he ran up to her begging her for a few coins so he could buy some more.

"Don't pester me, child. I need someone to give me money, so how can I give you any?" she said sorrowfully.

"Oh? Why? Did you lose everything in your game too? Tell me, what happened?" asked the lad. "I'll help you".

"Please leave me alone! The rising sun didn't shine on me, so it's not likely that the setting sun will", she answered.

"No, really. Tell me and you'll see that I'll help you. Then after, you can give me ten coins, not just one", persisted the boy.

In spite of all her troubles, the proprietress couldn't help but smile, and she said, "Here, this is my problem child. Three crooks came to my inn and they left me their strongbox to mind. It was securely locked and they told me to only give it back when all three of them were together. Well, they tricked me into giving the box to one of them who has vanished clean away. Then the other two took me to court and now I have to sell everything I own to pay back the money. There, that's my problem, son. It would have been nice if you could have helped me, if anyone could have, but my luck is black".

"Ha! But that's easy, lady", exclaimed Solomon. "All you have to do is go back to the judge and tell him you've found the strongbox, and that you'll give it back when all three of them come together to claim it, like they told you".

When the proprietress heard that answer from Solomon, she realised that, of course, that was the solution that would save her. She hugged
Solomon and showered him with kisses and money and virtually ran all the way to the judge and told him the strongbox had been recovered. The judge quickly summoned the two crooks and informed them that when they located their missing partner and all three presented themselves to the inn, the proprietress would return their strongbox.

The crooks were nonplussed by that instruction and it dawned on them that their villainy might be uncovered and their plan had come undone. They fled as fast as they could towards their hide-out, and never ever set foot in that town again.

So that was how one person was saved by Solomon's wisdom.
There were three brothers - all rich; all bachelors. The oldest brother carried off a huge load of expensive goods from their shop and journeyed to the town in which Femme Fatale lived, thinking that perhaps he'd be able to drum up some business there. Before he had disposed of any goods, however, he went to pay a call on Femme Fatale. He wanted to feast his eyes on her beauty, and as well, to show off his riches so that maybe somehow her heart would soften and she might accept him as a suitor.

"I'll accept your proposal, young man, on one condition", she said enticingly. "It is my custom that we must have a bet. We shall play a game of cards right throughout one night - until the following dawn. I have a cat which will sit up straight on the table holding a lighted candle in its front paws until the sun comes up. The deal is that if the cat does not drop the candle, you shall become my slave together with all your property. But if the cat does drop the candle, I will marry you and everything I own shall be yours."

When he heard Femme Fatale's proposition, the eldest brother immediately consented and they plunged headlong into the game of cards. All night long, they played the game, and all night long the cat sat perfectly erect, without even blinking an eye, providing them with light from the
burning candle it held in its front paws. The next morning, Femme Fatale claimed all his goods and hurled her newly acquired slave into a deep, dark dungeon.

After seeing that his brother was not going to return, the middle brother thought to himself that he too should go and pay his respects to Femme Fatale and ask her to marry him. He gathered together a mountainous stack of valuables and went to see her. That may have been, but Femme Fatale bewitched him into playing cards as well, and the cat held the candle. So he too was enslaved, just like his older brother.

The youngest brother waited and waited for a very long time for both his brothers to appear from wherever it was their business trips had taken them. Finally, he learnt of their sad fate; that Femme Fatale had made them her slaves.

He grabbed a few necessities and departed for her house. She welcomed him in, and suggested they play cards, explaining the details about the cat, and that whoever lost would become the slave.

Once the youngest brother had understood the terms of her wager, he briefly went to the marketplace, and when he was quite ready, he returned to her house to play the game. Well, they played, and the cat held the brightly burning candle, sitting totally motionless, until at some point in the night, the young man opened a small container which he had prepared earlier in the day, and pulled out a mouse. He released it and it scampered away behind the cat's back. As soon as the cat detected the mouse, she turned her head around towards it.

"Keep your eyes fixed to the front, cat", commanded Femme Fatale, "or otherwise I'll throw you to the snakes if you drop that candle".

The game continued for a little while longer, when the young man released five or six mice all at once. The cat found herself surrounded by the scurrying rodents, her natural prey, so she flung the candle down and jumped off the table to chase them.

There was nothing Femme Fatale could say after the cat had done that except: "You've won the bet, young man, together with me and all I own".

The youngest brother freed his two older brothers as well as the numerous other young men who had been trapped by her. He was left with the prize of Femme Fatale for their story to be told.
The Man Who Lost One Thousand Eggs to the Tax Officials on His Way to Istanbul

Book 5, Story 305

A poor man heard it talked about that in Istanbul eggs sold at one grosh each, so he made up his mind to take a load of them there. He made extensive enquiries and finally located a dealer who had one thousand eggs to sell, so he bought the lot for twelve and a half grosh. Though, I don't know how it came about, but a certain trader who regularly did business in Istanbul became interested in buying the eggs, so he offered to make a deal with their poor owner. They set to bargaining, slap-bang, and the trader bought the lot for two hundred and fifty grosh. The poor man was overwhelmed by the massive profit he'd made without even stepping out of his front door. The news of his windfall spread far and wide through all the towns, and even as far as Istanbul itself.

But his luck soon ran out, for although he again managed to get his hands on one thousand eggs for the same low price, not a soul was interested in buying them. Seeing that was the case, the poor man decided to take them to Istanbul himself to sell. He packed them carefully into two giant baskets, loaded them onto his donkey and set out on the journey. As soon as he reached the outskirts of his own town, he was stopped by the local tax
official on border duty there, who demanded to know what he was carrying. "What's in them baskets?" snapped the official. "Open them up so I can have a look".

"All you'll see Aga, sir, are eggs", replied the poor man. "I want to take them as far as Istanbul to sell. That's all I've got, sir".

"Aha! So you're the chap that everyone's been talking about. You're the one who bought one thousand eggs for twelve and a half grosh and resold them for two hundred and fifty grosh. Right! Unload quick smart and hand over one hundred eggs; taxation purposes you know; otherwise you will not be permitted to proceed any further".

"Please, have pity", pleaded the poor man. "It can't be right that I have to give you one hundred eggs", he groaned long and loudly. "What will be left for me to sell afterwards? I know you officials like to be given a little something. Here, have this nice cigarette lighter instead. Take it, as a present from me, and let me go on my way".

"I repeat, infidel", snapped the official crossly, "unload and hand over one hundred eggs; that is if you don't want to be flattened!"

"Please, I beg you, in the King's name, don't rob me like this. You know that such a thing is illegal. Here, come on, take this lighter and let me pass".

"Ooooh! Damnation! Listen to him will you! You tell him one thing and he just turns around and tells you the opposite", mocked the exasperated official. "Listen and listen well! Either you give me one hundred eggs or else go back to where you came from; and you can make as many complaints to whoever you like and wherever you like for all I care!"

Because the prospect of parting with the one hundred eggs (which would go straight into the official's pocket) was too irksome, the poor man retraced his footsteps into town and went directly to the town hall to lodge a complaint with the judge about the official wanting one hundred eggs. Well, that might have been, but neither would the judge listen to him, nor would any of the councillors trouble themselves to read his complaint. All that happened was the town hall keepers had a good joke at his expense and pushed him out the door with their laughter ringing in his ears.

"Damn and blast", swore the poor man to himself. You can get away with murder in this place and no-one would give a damn. No-one bothers to read your complaints - neither the judge nor the councillors. The only way around it is to play at their own game it seems. Oh, well, it looks as if I will have to part with one hundred eggs if I want to get to Istanbul. Anyway, I'll still have nine hundred to take there and I should make nine hundred grosh from them. It's no small amount of money to make, then
when I come back I'll be able to set myself up in some good business.

Thinking this to himself, and prodding his donkey along with the switch, the poor man arrived at the official's post and gave him his one hundred eggs so he could proceed on his way to Istanbul.

As he drove his donkey along, his mind was constantly occupied with the riches that would soon be his - nine hundred grosh from the nine hundred eggs, without for a moment knowing that all the eggs would be confiscated by the tax officials; and that he would arrive in Istanbul with two empty baskets!

All that day he walked on and eventually reached another town. As he was about to pass the tax official on duty at the border, he fished out a lighter to 'grease his palm' with, but there was not a way that official was going to be fooled off with a mere lighter either, when he could get one hundred eggs instead. Oh my, how the poor man objected, my, how he pleaded and wept hot tears, but it wouldn't have mattered if he'd had one thousand objections and buckets full of tears. It made no difference. He had to hand over one hundred eggs and that was that! Otherwise, the official simply refused to let him go. In anger and indignation, the poor man rushed to the town's judge to complain, but the judge considered that the matter didn't even bear thinking about. And the poor man was dismissed. He left the judge's chambers weeping bitter tears and muttering curses under his breath, and took to the road for Istanbul with eight hundred eggs.

"Oh well, I hope my mission flourishes with these eight hundred eggs", he thought to himself. "I'll take them to Istanbul and sell them. Why, eight hundred grosh is no trifling amount of money. Eight hundred grosh is a handsome fortune". The poor man plopped on, quite ignorant of the fact that he would reach Istanbul with two empty baskets.

He arrived at the third town, and there they took another one hundred eggs. He arrived at the fourth town - and there they took another one hundred eggs. He arrived at the fifth town - and there they took another one hundred eggs. And every town that he passed through the same thing happened, so that when he finally did reach Istanbul it was indeed with two empty baskets. The poor man was in a raging fury towards those greedy officials who had stolen his property, so he went straight to the Ministry to vent his anger and let them know what injustices he'd been subjected to. He barged into the building, dragging his donkey behind him, swept his hat off his head, and began to yell and scream out whatever came into his throat, while at the same time he ripped at his hair. When the minister was blasted with such a fiery torrent of abuse, he immediately summoned his aides who gave the poor man a good beating and threw him outside.
“Outside, you good-for-nothing”, roared the aides, as they slapped and thumped him and nearly strangulated him. “How dare you come here and disturb the Minister, you rascal, you rabble! How dare you interrupt the peace with your lunatic ranting and raving! Outside you wretch or you’ll soon find yourself drafted into the royal navy where you’ll spend the rest of your days plating ship’s ropes and rigging”.

“Please, effendis, sirs. Don’t throw me out. I demand to see the Minister. He should know what I’ve been through”, he cried. But do you imagine that the aides ever listen to a poor man’s plea? With shoves and punches they pushed him out of the Ministry, and flung him right out of the door.

With tears in his eyes, the poor man headed to the outskirts of the city so that at least his donkey would be able to graze. He figured he had no choice but to sell it, for what else could he live on till he found work. At the edge of town, he drove his donkey into the graveyard which was overgrown with grass. The donkey ate, while he propped himself up against a tombstone, with his elbow on his knee and his head cradled in his hand. He thought and thought about the corrupt officials and the corrupt judges and the corrupt councillors.

“I wouldn’t have believed there could be so much corruption. It’s clear to me that there is no justice in this place - you just have to grab what you can get. Feast if you can get away with it; cough up if you can’t!” Suddenly, he straightened himself up as an idea occurred to him. “Hey, I’ve just thought of something that’ll earn me a handsome living too! I’ll just appoint myself as the official keeper of this graveyard. Why not? Nobody seems to be in charge of it, so from now on, I’ll charge a fee for everybody that’s brought here for burial. People will pay - they’ll have no choice. They can’t complain to anyone - they’ll just get the same treatment I got! Now, I’ll need to fabricate some sort of permit - a few scribbles and scrawls on this piece of parchment will do nicely. If anyone objects to this burial charge, I’ll just wave this permit under their nose and claim it’s got royal approval; and I’ll give my heartiest congratulations to anyone who manages to prove it’s a fake! I know I’m going to rake in a fortune and no-one will as much as query what I’m doing, seeing in this place, business is just a free-for-all”.

The poor man did exactly as outlined. For a few days, people protested against the burial fee, and they made a big song and dance about it. But, the poor man merely unrolled his permit and waved it at them. Try as they might, they couldn’t make head nor tail of the scribbles and scrawls - why the devil himself couldn’t have been able to read it either! Besides, they were usually too upset to be quarrelling with the graveyard keeper. They
simply handed over their money so they could get on with the funeral.

Once the first few days were over, and word spread through the city that there was a burial fee, the problems stopped. People just accepted the fact that they had to pay, and nobody said a word about it.

Many years passed in which the poor man made a fortune from his job as self-appointed graveyard keeper. Everyone assumed his post was an official one and that the money went to the State.

The poor man proved that crime did pay, and he built himself a comfortable home and even hired a few assistants to keep watch on the cemetery to make sure no one tried to sneak in a body without paying.

What with this and that, the time finally came when the Prime Minister’s wife died. When the cortège arrived at the graveyard, the Prime Minister was astounded to learn he had to pay.

“And who gave you permission to interrupt funerals to collect a burial fee?” demanded the Prime Minister of the poor man.

“Just pay up, effendi, then summon me to the Ministry if you want to learn who gave me permission”, was the poor man’s audacious reply.

The Prime Minister stared, as though pricked with a knife. But he paid his money and buried his wife. When he returned to headquarters, he ordered his secretary to hunt through the records to find out the date when burial charges had been introduced. The secretary sweated for three days and three nights but could find no evidence of any burial fees at all. The Prime Minister himself then even went as far as to ask the Emperor about it, just in case permission had been granted without the Ministry’s knowledge, but the Emperor didn’t know anything about it either. Given that, the poor man was summoned to appear before the entire court and explain himself. The poor man, together with his assistants, presented themselves at once, and the cross-examinations began.

“Are you the keeper of the graveyard who demands payment per corpse”, queried the Emperor.

“I am he, honoured majesty”, replied the man.

“And would you mind telling us how and where you got the authority to hold that position?” questioned the Emperor further. “Well, I don’t see why I need any permission if I can do the job without permission, your majesty”, explained the poor man. “Besides, I have carried out my duties, even though I’m not strictly official, more compassionately than all your other officials posted in your various towns, because I have only charged a small fee, unlike them. Though, leaving that aside, the fact remains that I have been the graveyard keeper for years on end, right in the middle of Istanbul, and I’ve made plenty of money; for that I’m grateful. Neverthe-
“Less, I’m sure you want to find out why I’ve done it. I’m happy to explain”,
“Come on then! We’re all ears!” replied the Emperor.

“Very well. This is what happened. Many years ago in my own town, I bought one thousand eggs for twelve and a half grosh and resold them for two hundred and fifty to a trader who said he’d sell them here for one grosh each. Well, I got myself another one thousand eggs and decided to bring them here myself to sell them. I loaded up my donkey and had just reached the outskirts of my town where I had to pass by the tax official. He insisted I give him one hundred eggs or else he wouldn’t let me by. Well, I went back to complain to the judge about it, but he didn’t want to know. Instead I was beaten up! So I ended up handing over one hundred eggs to the official, thinking it wouldn’t happen again. I thought the other officials would be happy with the usual payment, you know, a cigarette lighter or something like that. That was all very well, but things never work out as we plan, do they? The next official wanted one hundred eggs as well! In fact, every place I passed through cost me one hundred eggs, so that when I finally got here, I had nothing. I made complaints at each place on the way, but was ignored or driven away. I thought that here in Istanbul, at least I’d get some justice, but I was wrong. Instead of being given a fair hearing, I was beaten up! So I wandered to the graveyard at the edge of town so my donkey could graze, and it occurred to me while I was there, that I should set myself up as the keeper. I hadn’t got anywhere by being honest - I figured I’d get somewhere by being crooked, and that’s what really happened. Do you realise I’ve been there for years and this is the first time I’ve been asked to explain myself. So, now you’ve heard my case. If you think I’m at fault, punish me”, concluded the man.

“Allah! Allah!” cried the Emperor as he clutched his beard and began to tug on it. “It seems there is no justice in my Empire! You are not to blame, my good sir. In fact, you are free to go and continue your work, with my blessing. The blame is all mine and I will have to open my eyes and ensure that justice is done”.
The Three Seers from Tikvesh with the Mule and the Judge

Book 5, Story 306

Three cunning chaps from the town of Tikvesh formed a partnership and invested their joint funds in the purchase of a pedigree mule, which they planned to resell at a profit. As they were on their way to the distant market town of Negotino, they were forced to camp overnight. They put the mule to graze in a paddock, whilst they stretched themselves out to sleep. Well, somebody stole their mule. Once the sun had risen, they frantically searched high and low, trudging through mountains and gullies; indeed, but the mule was nowhere to be found, seeing the thief had probably long since reached Negotino with the stolen animal.

After their fruitless search, the three decided to use their clairvoyant powers to identify the culprit.

"Oh, my brothers", chanted one to the others in a mystical voice, "cast before your mind’s eye a portrait of that pig who stole our mule. Who did this deed?"

"Who did this deed?...I see a vision. I see a man, a short man", intoned the second.

"Yes, yes! If that swine be a little fellow, then I say his hair is yellow", crooned the third.

"If that short male be pale, then verily brothers, he resembles a hog with the teeth of a dog", droned the first.
After the spell was broken, they had no doubts at all that the culprit had been revealed to them, so they strode off to Negotino to look for the ugly, short, blond man with long teeth, that thief.

While prowling around the market and shops, they spotted such a fellow and grabbed him, demanding their mule. The man struggled, professing innocence, and tried to free himself from their clutches, but they held on tightly and dragged him to the court to be tried. The judge listened to their accusation that this man had stolen their mule, then demanded to know what evidence they had to support their claim.

“Our evidence, your honour, lies in the words of our prophecy. We are seers and it was revealed to us that this man is the culprit. It is our gift to see and know all, your worship”, proclaimed the three wise plaintiffs.

“In a vision, I saw that the one we sought was short”, said one.

“And if he was a little fellow, then for a fact his hair was yellow”, said the second.

“And if it was that male be pale, he would resemble a hog with the teeth of a dog”, concluded the third.

“Look at him, your honour! He is the living image of our words”, they cried.

After considering this evidence, the judge ordered an interval of one hour. During the recess, the judge found a rooster and hid it in a cupboard, locked a walnut inside a small box and slipped a lemon into his pocket.

The trial resumed and the seers and the accused re-entered the courtroom.

“So, you claim to be seers, do you?” queried the judge.

“Allah be praised, your worship. Indeed we are”, they swore.

“Well, seeing you profess to have such powers, tell me, what living thing is in that cupboard?” commanded the judge.

“If it be a living thing, it must have two legs, two wings”, said the first.

“If it has two legs, two wings, it bears a crest upon its head”, said the second.

“If it has two legs, two wings and bears a crest upon its head, it can be nought but a rooster, your worship”, said the third.

“You’re right, it is a rooster”, exclaimed the judge. “Let it out of the cupboard”.

When the cupboard was opened, there indeed was the rooster which the judge had hidden. The man who had been apprehended by the seers for stealing their mule just sat and stared in amazement, wondering how they managed to guess the right answer.

“Be aware you three”, stated the judge, “that this rooster will serve as
evidence in your favour. Now, let’s see if you can reveal the contents of this box!

The three seers concentrated deeply, and one uttered the first sentence, “In that box, your worship, is something small in the shape of a ball”.

“And if it is small in the shape of a ball, it will crunch”, predicted the second.

“And if it is small in the shape of a ball and will crunch, it is a walnut”, concluded the third.

On hearing that last word, the judge cried out, “Allah, Allah, what is this wizardry? They got the walnut right as well! Unlock the box and take it out so that everyone can see it”.

The walnut was duly removed and the judge held it up for all to see.

“Listen here, you seers”, he stated. “You have proven your powers with the rooster and the walnut which both stand as evidence in your favour, but in order to completely substantiate your story that this is the villain who took your mule, you must guess what I have in my pocket. Come on, I’m waiting. What’s in my pocket?”

“My senses reveal, your honour, that it is something in the shape of an egg”, announced the first.

“And if it has the shape of an egg, it bears the colour of the sun”, predicted the second.

“And if it has the shape of an egg in the colour of the sun, it must taste tangy and...it is a lemon”, announced the third.

When the judge heard that they had correctly named the lemon, he immediately pronounced that the accused man was guilty of stealing the mule. Turning to him, the judge stated, “You have witnessed the evidence for yourself, prisoner. You are hereby sentenced to gaol and I order you to hand over the mule to these three or a sum of money equal to its cost”.

In the face of the judge’s verdict, there was nothing left for the accused man to do except pay the three seers the price of the mule, and bribe the judge handsomely so that he could get out of being thrown into gaol like some common criminal.

So with their amazing skills, the three seers succeeded in fleecing an innocent man.

Cepenkov writes, “I was told this story on numerous occasions by old folks, because the events above did really happen. The truth of the matter, however, is that the three ‘seers’ had been hired by the judge who had planned the entire thing in order to wring some money out of that ugly, short, blond man who happened to be exceedingly rich”.

185
The Rich Bachelor who
Wanted to Marry the
Wealthy Squire's Daughter

Book 5, Story 317

A tremendously rich young man fell helplessly in love with the wealthy Squire's daughter, whose family happened to be even richer than the young man's. As the days passed, it became apparent to the Squire that this particular young man was wooing his daughter and wanted her for his bride. The Squire's wife, too, was alive to these developments and she was thrilled by the prospect, especially as the prospective son-in-law had a fortune at his disposal.

In the end, as was only proper, the rich young man organised for matchmakers to call on the Squire and formally put the proposal to him. The Squire's unexpected reply to the matchmakers was that he wished to speak to the young man in person, and only after that, might an agreement be reached.

When the love-stricken bachelor was told of this request, he decided to go along, in spite of the awful embarrassment he felt at such unorthodox procedures. But, he was after all, head over heels in love.

"Is it true, my lad", asked the Squire, "that you wish to marry my daughter?"
“Yes, most definitely it is true”, replied the young man with feeling.

“Good. Good, very good, my boy, and I’d be delighted to have you join our family too. However, there is one thing I will ask of you, and if you succeed in fulfilling this demand of mine, I will give my consent to the marriage; of that, be absolutely certain”, stated the Squire. “This is what I want of you: For one month you are to walk around the suburbs hawking pears. You must do exactly like all the fruit sellers do - carry the pears in a basket on your head and shout out loudly - ‘Pears for sale here! Pears! Make me an offer! Pears!’ - That is how you must advertise yourself. And every day for the whole month that you are selling pears, you must make sure to pass my front gate with your load of fruit and cry out your wares. Perhaps I might decide to buy some; or maybe my wife or daughter will. The moment the month is up and you have done your task, I will happily give you my daughter’s hand in marriage. On this you can depend. And to assure you even further as to my sincerity, here is my written promise. Take it. But if you are unable to do what I’ve just outlined, even were you to sprout talons like an eagle, you would still never, never be able to wrench my daughter away from me. So now that I have made my feelings perfectly clear, I won’t keep you any longer”, concluded the Squire and he showed the young man out politely.

Once the young man reached home, he shut himself away in a private room where he sat down and mulled over what to do; should he undergo the humiliation of selling pears for a month, or should he relinquish his love? Rationally, the options were clear enough, but desire held him in its maddening grip, so how could he do anything except that which would win her, regardless of how bizarre it was. He thought and thought but it didn’t make any difference. Finally, he said to himself, “Blow it! Not only will I sell pears, but I’d be prepared to go into slavery if it meant I could win that jewel!”

The next morning, equipped with a basket, a set of scales and weights, the young man stocked up on pears and began to sell them round the town. Everyone who spotted the new pedlar was flabbergasted. They all speculated that the family must have been suddenly ruined for the son to be reduced to hawking pears; others who were more familiar with the family’s circumstances thought that the young man must have gone round the bend. Why else would he sell pears? After all, he was as rich as the richest sultan, the owner of countless assets and it really was not fitting for him to be wandering about with a basket of pears perched on his head. The town gossiped and gossiped, but nobody knew what that young man was really experiencing.
Although he might have been burning with shame and embarrassment, the young man passed the month as a pear vendor and won the Squire’s daughter.

“Eh, son, have you worked out why I drove you to sell pears for a month?” queried his father-in-law.

“So you could enjoy watching me suffer - what else”, replied the young man.

“No, I didn’t want to watch you suffer, son, rather I wanted you to know what it felt like to swallow your pride”, explained the squire. “Because this world is like a staircase. Today you are climbing to the top with riches; tomorrow you might come tumbling down to poverty. But now that you’ve overcome your pride, you’ll always be able to cope, come what may. You’ll never feel too ashamed to accept whatever work you might find - and there’s the key to your livelihood. There, son, that’s why I forced you to sell pears. It wasn’t to watch you suffer”, concluded the Squire.
Some priest had a ravishingly beautiful wife. On every occasion that he was required to go out to church or to attend to other priestly duties, he would lock his wife in the house, thus ensuring that no-one was able to cast eyes on her and start to spread evil gossip or rumours about her.

This went on day after day, so that a long time passed in which the priest acted as jailer to his wife. The poor woman could only contemplate bewilderment that she was being treated like some murderess; imprisoned in the house; unable to set a foot out-of-doors or to chat with any of her companions. She protested to her husband, "Listen to me, my dear. The longer I sit here, the more your behaviour astounds me. Why do you keep me locked in this house like in some prison cell? What wrong have I done? Please, in the name of your holy calling, won't you explain why you act like this?"

"What else can I possibly do?" snapped the priest, "given that you are the most beautiful woman in the town?"

"But just because I am beautiful, it hardly follows that I should be kept under lock and key! Which other men lock up their wives? I, too, am a person with needs. I'd like to be able to go outside; to visit the church just like all the other women do; to be able to chat with my girlfriends". She grew more heated. "And if you think that by locking me up like this that you
will be able to prevent me from indulging in some mischief, seeing that you can think of apparently, then free your mind from such a stupid idea. Because I assure you that if I wanted to, I could deceive you, right under your nose, from within these four walls, and you wouldn’t be aware of a thing! I swear on my father’s soul, that if I had a mind to, I could drive you into the wilderness in disgrace and shame. Of this be certain! I warn you. Think hard about what you are doing to me while I am still prepared to say ‘Yea’, because once I have said ‘Nay’, you will be very sorry”, stated his wife with determination, and she rose to leave him alone to consider her words.

“Ha, wife! Do you really think you can convince me with that silly speech not to keep you safely locked up, but to let you roam idly like some lost cow? As long as my head remains on my shoulders, I will never permit you to go wandering the streets where the people will ogle and despoil you, because you are my beauty”, he declared.

“Oh, don’t be a fool! So what if the world sees me and spits on me? So what if they curse me? It doesn’t amount to anything. My clothes are chaste as those of any virtuous women; indeed I am an honourable woman! There is no reason to be afraid. People may look - their eyes may be full, but their hands will be empty! Come to your senses. Do not keep me imprisoned, or you will be sorry”, she reiterated, then fell silent.

“Sorry or not, I shall continue to keep you locked up and I don’t want to hear another word about it”, commanded the foolish priest.

The priest’s wife, being a very intelligent woman, decided to carry out her threats. She devised a plan which would enable her to find another more suitable marriage partner and rid herself of the priest. Nothing less than that would do!

The man she had in mind had wooed her when she was a maid, and it happened that he had been recently widowed. Although the priest’s wife had loved him dearly, her father, who had religious inclinations, had wished for his daughter to marry an even more pious man than he was himself, and so had forced his daughter to wed the priest.

Knowing that the widower would still desire her, despite the fact she was married to the priest, and taking advantage of the fact that this widower happened to live in the house next door which was separated from theirs by only one wall, the wife began to dig. She dug and dug away at the dividing wall until she had dug out an opening just wide enough for her to squeeze through into her lover’s house. She hid the rubble and the dirt from the excavation under the carpet, without her husband noticing it. In front of the hole in the wall, she arranged a stack of cushions.
One day, the widower was very surprised to find the priest's wife in his house. After much embracing, the wife showed him how she had gained entry and what she planned. The widower was delighted, and agreed to do all she said so that their goal would be achieved.

A few mornings later, the neighbour selected a fine large apple and paid a call on the priest who was sitting at home with his wife. He wished him good day; they exchanged greetings; then the neighbour stood up, swept off his hat, kissed the priest's hand, reached into his breast pocket for the apple (a customary gift for invitations) and handing it to the priest, he said, "Please do me the honour this evening, father, of dining at my house and marrying me to a widow who has consented to be my wife".

"Congratulations neighbour! Congratulations! Oh, I hope there'll be many more occasions to celebrate too! How long have you been engaged? Where's the bride from? I hope she's a good woman, and will keep your house in order! It's not a matter of having to get married, I hope!" said the priest.

"No, there's nothing improper about it, father", replied the neighbour. "She's a wonderful woman, and excellent housekeeper, and as for her appearance - there's not another to equal her! Her face, her body, her eyes, her brow, her youth... Why, in fact, she's the very image of your wife, father, and I hope my marriage will be as long and happy as yours", he added. "Though, it makes me marvel, father, that God has been so kind to me. Do you know that suitors were quarrelling over her and it was inevitable that one of them would sooner or later abduct her, but instead she chose me! Only a few nights ago, we agreed to elope, and now she is at my house. That is why I beg you father, to come as quickly as possible to marry us, because if my rivals find out where she is, they will be here in no time and try to force her away from me. Please come as soon as you can father, and look, I will pay you double if that will help. But don't breathe a word of this to anyone! Oh, and father, keep in mind that I've stocked up on your favourite vintage wine!" concluded the widower.

The priest was delighted by the large sum of money he'd been given, and edged on by the prospect of a lavish dinner to be washed down with generous quantities of his favourite wine, the priest could barely wait for the neighbour to take his leave. As soon as he'd gone, the priest leapt to his feet, grabbed his bible and prayer books, locked his wife in the house and trotted off to the neighbour's to perform the marriage and enjoy himself.

In the time that it took for the priest to walk to his neighbour's house, his wife squeezed through the hole in the wall and stood in a dim corner of the neighbour's room, near the landing. She positioned herself so that her
arms were folded and her head was bent down modestly, giving the appearance of a bashful and shy bride-to-be.

The priest was invited in and took a seat near the fire, where he could watch the many pots of delicious food bubbling and boiling for dinner. He was offered a glass of the finest brandy, and after toasting the bride, the priest raised his glass and gulped it down. As he was swallowing it, his eyes fell on the blushing bride, who was standing modestly in the distance, and he was immediately struck by her appearance. "Good Lord", he thought to himself, "surely this woman is my wife! Just wait a moment and I'll go and check to see whether she's locked in".

By the time the priest reached his own door, his wife had squeezed back through the hole and was sitting calmly knitting socks, just as she had been when the priest first left. It was as if she had never moved from her task. The priest arrived at the porch and peered in through the window. "Well, I'll be! This is an odd business", he muttered to himself. "My wife is here alright, locked in the house knitting socks. Oh, well, it can't have been her! Silly me! I'd better get back to the wedding!"

His wife squeezed through the hole and took up her spot in the corner as before. The priest came into the room, and he just couldn't keep his eyes off the bride. He sat there like one stunned, and again the thought raced through his head, "Good Lord. This woman must be my wife. I can't be mistaken! Should I ask my neighbour? But how can I? I'll make a complete fool of myself if it's not her! Wait a moment, I'll go home again and double check that my wife is still there". He quickly thought up an excuse and said, "Neighbour, excuse me again for a moment. I've got to go home and fetch the proper text for marrying widowers. This one I've got here is only for bachelors!"

"By all means, father", agreed the neighbour. "But please be quick because I'm scared my rivals will arrive any moment. Besides, dinner is waiting for us!"

The priest sprinted home and again he found his wife in the same spot, knitting. And for a third time he made some excuse to go home, except this time he unlocked the house and went inside to speak to his wife. "Oh, my dear", he exclaimed. "I can't get over the woman our neighbour is marrying!"

"Why? What is there to be surprised about? It's not the first time you've had to perform a marriage. What's so special about the neighbour's?"

"I can't help but be surprised when that woman is the spitting image of you!" he exclaimed. "Even down to her very clothes...her body...why,
everything. I even imagined that it perhaps was you and this is the third time I've come home to see whether or not you were here”.

“What! You'll make yourself a laughing stock if the neighbour ever suspects what you're doing!” replied his wife, apparently taken aback. “Don't you remember that he himself mentioned that the woman resembled me? You seem to think that God only created one pretty ass - but he made thousands! And it's the same with women. Many resemble each other! So stop being silly but hurry back and marry them and enjoy the celebrations. There will be good food and fine wine! You needn't trouble yourself about me - when you know that I'm here at home, locked in with two strong padlocks”, she exhorted.

After those assurances from his wife, the priest decided that really, the new bride and she could not be the one. He rummaged around and collected some other papers to show to his neighbour, seeing he had gone home ostensibly for that reason, and he returned and married the young couple. After the service, the new wife busied herself serving up the dinner. The priest was plied with the most potent brandy, and then the long-awaited wine. And being the glutton he was, the priest drank and drank until he was quite drunk - in fact till he collapsed onto the floor, dead drunk!

The neighbour and his wife then grabbed a razor and...shaved off the priest's distinctive beard and snore off his long hair. They transformed him something shocking! They removed the priest's cassock and stovepipe hat and dressed him in some white homespun pants and shirt; a common cap was popped onto his head; a red sash was tied around his waist; a host of weapons were secured about him; leather sandals were put on his feet and he was dragged outside and left to sleep under some verandah, dead drunk to the world and dressed like a dreaded rebel fighter.

The drunken priest slept as he did until dawn, when he awoke as he was accustomed to rising early to go to church. He sprang up from the ground, and without realising how he looked, ran off to the tap in the yard to wash his face before going to church. He took off his cap and hung it on a nearby peg, cupped his hands together under the flow of water, splashed it over his face and rubbed his palms down past his chin to wash his beard. He looked at his hands - but they held no beard! He tried again and discovered that not only did he not have a beard, but he had no hair on his head either!

“Merciful mother”, he swore, “Last night, I know I had a beard and long hair, like a priest. How come I don't have them now? Gracious, can it be that I am not the priest?” Thinking these thoughts to himself, the priest glanced up and saw his cap where it hung and then had a good look at all he was wearing. When he observed the pistols in his sash, he nearly died
from the shock. "What's happening to me? I am the priest, aren't I?", he muttered shakily. "As if I couldn't be the priest! But, if I am the priest, where is my beard, my hair, my cassock, my hat? And how did these pistols get into my sash?" His mind was turning somersaults! "But, perhaps I am a rebel fighter? Look, even my cap has red ribbons on it! Yes, yes, I must be a rebel fighter! But how? I'll just go and ask the neighbour and see what he has to say. Perhaps he can tell me whether I am a priest or a fighter?"

At that moment, the neighbour and the priest's wife were gaping through the window to watch what the priest would do. As soon as he approached their door and rapped on it the neighbour began to shout, "Help! Help! People! Neighbours! God have mercy! Is there not a living soul to help me? A brigand is on my doorstep! He'll rob me! Help! Help!"

When the priest heard that shouting, he took to his heels in fright. "Oh my, oh dear! I really must be a rebel fighter", and he fled through the gate. He went a little way down the road, and then decided to turn back and make his way to his own front door. He knocked desperately on it, but instead of opening it, his wife began to scream for help. Angry villagers began to emerge from their houses and strode menacingly towards the priest. He was terrified by their shouting and threats and it became clear to him that indeed he was a rebel fighter now, even if he didn't understand how or why. He ran off and escaped into the mountains where he met up with the other fighters and was never to return again.

He'd been asking for his medicine - and was given a double dose!!

---

All That Was - Has Passed, and All That Is to Come - Will Pass

Book 5, Story 344

It came to pass in the order of things and by God's decree that a once very wealthy man was reduced to the direst poverty. This rich man had a son who was very good and pious. Reflecting on his family's penniless state, the boy said to his mother and father:

"Why should we suffer so much from this wretched poverty and be starving for a crust of bread? Here, listen to me. Take me to the marketplace and sell me to some rich person; the money you receive will enable you to live decently, and I'll be given meals by my owner. I beg you. Do as I say, and the sooner the better because nought else awaits you".

When the parents heard what their good son had to say, they became very upset and downcast. But, be that as it may, their gnawing hunger pangs blinded them, and they led their only child to the marketplace where they sold him to a rich Squire, who lived in a village close to the town.

After several months, the mother yearned to see her beloved son, sold into slavery. One morning, she rose and made her way to the village to visit him. She called at the Squire's house, but his boy was not there, seeing he was out ploughing the fields. She trudged all the way to the distant fields to see him, and when she arrived she found him at work, guiding and prodding a pair of harnessed oxen.
"Oh, oh my child! As if I brought you up for this? Driving oxen, wearing peasant sandals and peasant clothes; being baked by the hot sun all day long! As if I could have even imagined such a thing could be. Oh, my poor child!" she wailed.

"Never mind mother, never mind", he soothed. "All that was - has passed, and all that is to come - will pass".

After she had kissed and embraced him lovingly, the lad resumed his ploughing and his mother tearfully turned back for home.

Some time later, the mother wanted to see her darling boy again. Once more she made the journey, and once more she found him in the field, except that this time he was in the harness, pulling the plough in place of the oxen. His mother burst into loud screams and sobs, clutched him to her, kissed him, then untied him from the harness.

"Oh, my child! You have broken my heart! As if I raised you to plough in place of an ox! Oh woe is me! Poor me! Oh why, oh why did I sell you?"

"Never mind, mother, never mind", said the boy. "All that was - has passed, and all that is to come - will pass".

The poor woman cried all the way home and told her husband what had become of their son.

At that time, it happened that the king of the nation died. A new king had to be chosen, so all the men and boys were summoned to gather in a huge field, and among them was the lad who had been sold into slavery. The custom in that kingdom was that a pigeon was released into the gathering, and the person on whom the pigeon landed would be proclaimed the new king. As luck would have it, the pigeon lighted on the enslaved boy, and he thus became the new king.

In the meantime, the boy's mother had told her husband that their son was pulling the plough in place of an ox. They were both wracked with anguish at the thought of their son suffering so much hardship - but there was nothing they could do about it, seeing he had been exchanged for money! They were constantly preoccupied with thoughts of their son, and one day, the boy's father lost his temper and decided they should go and see the squire who'd bought him. Not only would they be able to plead with the squire to not work the boy so hard, because it was cruel, but they'd be able to see their child as well. They arrived at the village, but their son was nowhere to be found.

"Your son, my friends", explained the squire, "has gone a long way since you were here last. He's not my slave anymore; rather he's been crowned the new king! You'll have to go to the palace to see him. Enjoy it!"
With great delight, the boy’s parents set off for the long journey to the palace. When they arrived and found their son sitting majestically on the throne, they threw their arms around him and cried:

“Thank God, son, thank God for freeing you from the bonds of slavery and choosing you to be the king! It is a miracle”.

“Yes, it’s true - it is a miracle, but remember, all that was - has passed, and all that is to come - will pass”, he said.

After a few days in the palace, the new king’s parents became restless for their own home. The lad tried all he could to persuade them to stay, but they were old and homesick, and wanted to go back to their own town. In the end, the lad realised that he should not hold them, so he presented them with rich gifts so that they would be able to live in comfort for the rest of their lives.

Many months and years passed, and the lad’s parents felt the wish to go and see their son again. During that long time, however, their son had fallen ill and on realising that his end was near, he had ordered that a tombstone be placed on his grave, bearing the following inscription: ‘All that was - has passed, and all that is to come - will pass’. When his parents eventually arrived to visit him, they were surprised to find that the guard at the palace gate refused to let them in, and in answer to their protests explained that the king they were seeking had passed away some months ago and was buried at such-and-such a place.

Grief stricken, the old couple made their way to the grave. When they looked, they saw that on the tombstone was written: ‘All that was - has passed, and all that is to come - will pass’.

“Oh my son”, sobbed his father. “What else is there for you to pass, now that you’ve passed death? There are only trials while we live”.

They cried and lamented for a while at the grave, and then they went home. A year later, they returned to the king’s town to pay their respects at the grave and to light a candle in memory of their son. Once they reached the site where they remembered the grave to have been, they looked and they looked, but the grave was nowhere to be seen. They searched here, they searched there, but it had vanished! In desperation, they went over to the cemetery keeper and asked to be shown where the royal grave was.

“The royal grave, old people, was demolished by the new king”, he explained. “You see, he was outraged when he found that the old king, your son, had been a slave before he became the king, so he ordered for it to be smashed and burnt. There is nothing but dirt and ashes now”.

It was only then that they understood the real truth of their son’s words: All that was - has passed, and all that is to come - will pass. The old father
shook his head and his parting words were, “And this too will pass; nothing will remain as it is”.
The Young Man Who Became a Drunkard

Book 5, Story 355

There was once a young man of exemplary habits, despite being an only, and therefore, spoilt child. It came to pass that he was forced to seek work away from his native town where jobs were scarce and opportunities few. After working hard for some time in a distant town, he became quite well-to-do. Every itinerant worker who returned to his native town would congratulate the young man’s father on having such a fine son, who had both wealth and good habits to his credits.

The young man’s father positively leapt with joy on hearing his son praised so highly.

However, the young man soon fell into bad company in his adopted town. The so-called friends who attached themselves to him led him off the straight and narrow and initiated him into their vices - that is gambling, womanising and drinking.

Some time later, some labourers returned from the town where the young man dwelt, and the young man’s father called to enquire after his son.

“He’s well and happy, old man”, said the labourer. “His business is thriving and he’s raking in piles of money. Really, he’s got only one fault as far as I can see, and that is he gambles at cards”.

201
“Oh well”, said the young man’s father, “he’s found himself with money to spare and no doubt all his friends like the odd game, so that’s why he plays too. I know it’s hardly a praiseworthy habit, but I’m sure he’ll eventually give it away”.

After another six months, another worker returned and again the young man’s father went to visit him and asked:

“My good man, did you happen to see my son who was working there before you left? How is he? What’s he doing with himself? Is his work going well?”

“He’s fine, Sir. Happy; healthy; you couldn’t ask for more. His business is brisk and the turnover is high. But there is one thing that will lead him into trouble - he chases women! Other than that, he’s a model of perfection”.

“Oh well”, replied the old man, “that’s a bad thing indeed. Though, I’m certain that once he passes his prime and settles down, that habit will be left behind and forgotten”.

A little time later, yet another fellow returned and the old man hastened to ask about his son.

“Welcome home, friend”, said the old man. “How are you going? Are you well? And have you got any news of my son?”

“Yes, I saw him recently”, replied the man. “He’s as well as can be, except he’s taken to drinking, and quite a lot I’m afraid”.

“Oh no?” groaned his father. “When does a drinker ever give up drinking? Oh, Oh! Poor me! I’ve lost my son forever”.

The old man made his way home, slowly and mournfully and said to his wife, “We may as well write our son’s name down amongst all the other dead people we used to know! He’s become a drunkard - and it amounts to the same thing. He may well be buried alive. All the other bad habits he had didn’t really matter. I knew he’d come good. But as far as that cursed drinking goes, there’s no point in holding out any hope! Although he’s alive and breathing, he’s as good as dead and suffering like in hell. There, my dear, now you know how matters stand”.

202
A rich young bachelor was very miserly, and because of his extraordinary stinginess, he wasn't able to find a wife. You see, he wanted a woman who could live without eating anything, not even a piece of bread.

There was an unmarried lady; she was unmarried because it was said firstly that she'd passed the ideal age for marriage, and secondly because she was also very poor. It came to her attention that there was a rich and miserly young bachelor who was searching for a wife that could live without eating. So she persuaded some friends to convince the man to marry her. There were comings and goings, a few untruths told and before long the rich young miser was married to the lady who supposedly didn't eat.

For the first few days of their marriage, the rich young miser was convinced that his wife did not eat. He tempted her with food, he pleaded with her to join him at dinner in order to see if she'd eat - but she was the very devil - she used to eat in secret so he wouldn't see her.

"Ha", he said to himself, "I've found my ideal woman. Why, if she ate, she'd reduce me to poverty and I'd die of hardship!"

One morning as soon as the miser shut the front door behind him on his way to work, his wife threw the frying pan onto the stove and cooked up three panfuls of pancakes. I don't know what the miser forgot that morning,
but he returned home and on returning he found his wife gobbling pancakes.

“You said that you didn’t eat anything, not even a piece of bread!” he yelled angrily. “Just what are you doing right now?”

“This isn’t bread. I’m eating pancakes!” she replied to her husband.

“And why have you made three panfuls?” he cried.

“One for me, one for you and one for my father. From now on I shall always make three lots; there’s no need to make more than that”, she said flatly.

“Stop talking nonsense”, he snapped, “I married you because you didn’t eat, not because you ate three panfuls!”

“Good or bad, that’s the way it is”, she said. “One for you, one for me and one for my father. I shall always cook that amount every day from now on!”

“Oh, Oh, woe is me! You’ve ruined me! You’ll be the death of me! There’s nothing else for it”, and so wailing, the miser lay down to die. “Say you’ll change your mind”, he snapped. (You see he wanted her to say she would never cook pancakes again and stop eating from that moment on).

“Oh I’ll drop dead right now and that will teach you!”

“One for me, one for you and one for my father”, she said.

“Alright then, if that’s the case, call the undertakers because I’m dying, he proclaimed.

She called the undertakers. Again he asked whether she’d persist with her folly, and again she gave him the same answer. He instructed the undertakers - the grave was dug, the coffin was made ready.

“Now what do you say? Should I die? Or will you change your mind?” he queried from where he lay in the coffin.

“One for me, one for you and one for my father”, she replied.

“Right brothers, heave me up and take me to the graveyard”, he ordered.

They took him to the graveyard and placed him near the grave.

“Now will you change your mind or should they throw me into the grave?” he threatened.

“Oh, Oh, my dear”, she said as she bent down to kiss his face. And as she did she whispered in his ear, “One for me, one for you and one for my father”.

He yelled to the undertakers, “Into the grave”. They lowered him in and once more he asked his wife if she would change her mind. Her reply was just the same. So he ordered the undertakers to close the coffin and bury him. But before they closed it, he tried to persuade her one more time,”Say that you’ll change your mind, or I’ll be buried alive”.

204
“Don’t be a fool”, she said. “I really don’t want you to be buried alive, but it’s still one for me, one for you and one for my father”.

“If that’s the case”, he insisted, “bury me and you can throw the first shovelful of dirt!”

So they filled the grave with dirt, leaving a small opening so that he could breathe. Through the opening she called to him, “Do you want us to take you out?”

“Only if you change your mind”, he persisted.

“All I can say is I don’t want you to die. But one for me, one for you and one for my father”, she said.

“Get away, get away from here. I’d rather die than be ruined by your appetite”, he yelled.

So seeing her husband stubbornly insisted on dying because of his stupidity, she went home. The next morning she felt sorry for him and returned to the graveyard to see if he was still alright.

“What do you say, do you want us to take you out?” she called.

“I do, I do”, he cried, “but only if you change your mind”.

“Oh my dear”, she answered, “I don’t want you to die, but it’s still one for you, one for me and one for my father”.

“If that’s so”, he replied, “I’d rather die than watch you eat”. And after muttering those words, he gave up his soul.

The lady was left to eat up all the miser’s fortune!
A Woman’s Craftiness

Book 5, Story 364

One young villager went off to seek his fortune in some town, and he proceeded to look for work up and down the market place. He stopped and made enquiries from shop to shop and arriving at a barber’s window, he paused to admire his reflection in the large mirror that was inside. The nosy barber, being idle at the time, invited the young man in for a chat and began to ask him particulars like who he was and where he harked from. The young man unfolded his tale that he was from distant parts and had come to this town in search of fortune and employment.

After the barber had squeezed out every last drop of information he could from the youth, he came to the conclusion that the lad was not too bright, and that being the case, he reckoned he’d be able to easily hoodwink him and benefit handsomely at the lad’s expense.

After looking him up and down and all around, the barber schemed up a plot in his mind. Because the young man was in the prime of his life, with the physique of a champion athlete, with a handsome face that glowed like a perfect apple, in flawless tones of red and white, with eyebrows as black as the fleece of the blackest ram, the barber exclaimed:

"Hey, young man! Look here, you’ve come all this way to find a job, and you’re prepared to do any kind of work; right? Well, if you’re wise, you’ll listen to me. I can fix it so that you’ll have a job that’ll pay very well..."
with next to no effort on your part. But, make no mistakes, the deal is that I get 50% of whatever your takings are each day. And for my part, I’ll deck you out in the finest clothes money can buy. Come on lad, take my advice. You won’t regret it. Rather I’m sure you’ll bless me for it!”

“Well it’s fine by me sir”, answered the rather stupid young man. I’ll do whatever you say, just so long as I can earn a little money to send to my poor old mother in the village”.

“Oh, well if that’s the case... wait, just wait and you’ll see what bags of money will come our way. Now first just sit down here so I can give you a haircut and a shave, then we’ll go shopping for those clothes I promised”, announced the barber gleefully.

Well, the barber spruced him up, he decked him out in the smartest suit, so that all said and done, the young man was transformed into Prince Charming. He was a delicious sight to behold! Indeed, if he had been handsome before, after the barber had finished grooming him and dressed him in that expensive garb, there was not one man in that town who could vaguely be called his rival. Heads turned and hearts fluttered wherever he passed!

The barber took his protegé in tow and led him to a particular well where he draped him elegantly over one of the rocks used by the women to wash their clothes.

“Sit here, young man”, ordered the barber, “and fix your gaze on each woman who arrives to fetch water. Stare deep into her eyes, but pay attention and keep alert, for when one of them signals you discretely with her hand, you must furtively follow her home. There, once she makes her desires known to you, you must valiantly exercise restraint and self-control until you have first received two fistfuls of money as payment in advance. Then, do what you will!”

After the young man had perched a while on his rock, the women began to emerge, each of them gazing longingly at his handsome features. At the same time, he stared, unblinking, into their admiring, passing eyes.

It so happened that one of the women waved her hand meaningfully at him, and so the mischief began. The young man rose and stealthily entered her house, where he earned himself a huge handful of money. He happily made his way back to the barber’s shop, where they divided the spoils.

“Ah, my lad. Didn’t I tell you we’d make a killing? But tell me, what did the woman say to you after she’d done with your services?” asked the nosy barber.

“She asked me to go back again tomorrow and promised to give me another pile of money”, replied the young man.
"Her house, sir, is next to the bakery - on the right hand side when you're going in".

"Oh! Tell me, describe to me what the yard was like, son", asked the barber somewhat uneasily.

"Well, there was a big grapevine on a trellis and under it, there was a fountain with two spouts. But it was dry", explained the young man.

When the barber heard that, he spat gall, because according to the description just told, it was none other than his own house and it was none other than his own wife who had so richly rewarded the youth!

"Ah, what a cursed woman you've turned out to be", thought the barber to himself, "but just you wait and see what's in store for you when I catch you in the act".

The next morning, he sent the young man off to keep his appointment with the woman, and the barber himself trailed a safe distance behind. When the young man approached the barber's house, and then turned into it, the barber was left gasping, because he had believed his wife to be the most virtuous woman in the whole town. He angrily ran to the front door and tried to push it open. But it was locked, so with all his force, he knocked violently on it. When the wife heard that terrible crashing on the door, she rapidly rolled up the young man in a carpet, and dragged it and its contents into a corner, warning him to stay deathly still.

"Don't utter a sound, my love", she hissed, "until I have got rid of this unwelcome guest".

After these precautions were taken, the woman hurried to open the door. The furious, raging barber barged in, slammed the door behind him and turned the key in the lock. He grabbed hold of a stout length of wood, and began searching everywhere throughout the house. He turned the place upside down, and when he couldn't find his quarry, he became bathed in sweat from the sheer frustration he felt.

"Oh, my lord", protested his wife. "What on earth is the matter with you today? What are you looking for? Tell me. Maybe I know where it is".

The barber remained stonily silent, and continued to rampage through the house, but it did not occur to him in the slightest to look in the rolled up carpet. Finally, he started to believe that perhaps he'd been wrong; perhaps the young man had gone into a different house. Without saying a word, he marched back to his shop and waited for the young man to return and report on his day's doings.

After seeing her husband off, the barber's wife unrolled the carpet and farewelled her lover with yet another fistful of money.
“There, young man, you see how the money just rolls in from this business I set you up in”, boasted the barber to the youth when he returned to the shop.

“Yes, indeed, sir. Thank heavens for that at least”, gasped the young man. “But if you only knew what trials I endured today”.

“What trials were they, hey? Do tell. I want to hear”.

“It was terrible, sir. Though I can vouch that this woman is the very devil. Soon after I arrived, there was an awful banging on the door, so she quickly, quickly rolled me up in a carpet and stood me in the corner. “Hide here”, she said, “until I get rid of this guest”. Well, the guest turned out to be her husband, and he was as mad as could be. He was carrying a big stick and hunted high and low through the house. He left no stone unturned. But luckily, he didn’t think to look in the carpet. By God, if I’d been discovered, I reckon I’d be cat food by now. My, how he searched, but he didn’t find me and so he went off in a huff, then his wife unrolled me from in the carpet, gave me a great pile of money, and told me to come back again tomorrow!”

When the barber had heard the story, he reeled as though blasted by a gun shot. But not one single word escaped his lips. In grimly silent meditation, he schemed how he could avenge himself on his wife.

The next morning, again the barber sent the young man off to keep his appointment, and again he trailed him in order to see whether he really was going to his house. And when he looked, yes, it really and truly was his house. He rushed to the door and hammered loudly on it. As soon as his wife heard, she stuffed her lover up the chimney, and ran to let her husband in, and again he began to search. How he raged and fumed! He ripped through cupboards, poked under the beds; the house was reduced to chaos, but not once did he think to look up the chimney.

“Oh my lord”, appealed his wife. “What are you doing? Why did you tear up the house yesterday, and again today”.

“What do you mean what am I doing, you hussy, you! Where is the man who came in here just a few minutes ago, hm?”

“Oh God, dear God, in your wisdom. Why have you seen fit to derange my husband’s mind? My dear husband, my soul. Oh stop behaving like some jealous lad. Do not fall prey to such sin, and drag me down with you! Can you really believe that I would do such a thing, my lord? Stop behaving like a fool. You’ll only end up dragging my name through the mud and we’ll become the town’s laughing stock! Don’t you know that’s what your enemies are all hoping for! - that you’ll ruin your own good reputation. And then just you wait for what will follow. That’s why I must urge you - go back to your shop and...see no evil, hear no evil”.

210
Although far from satisfied, the wretched barber returned to his store.
The barber's wife extracted her lover from the chimney, showered him
with money, and asked him to come back again the following day.
The young man wended his way back to the barber and handed over the
money that had just been given to him by the barber's wife. With a sigh he
said, "Here you are, sir, here's the money the woman gave me, though her
husband showed up again today. He surely must have an informant to be
chasing me like this. He searched everywhere except in the chimney, so I
was saved again today, because if it had occurred to him to peer up it, he
would have had me trapped, and I dread to think what a beating I'd have got.
God help me!"

"But, when it was time to leave, son, didn't the woman say anything
to you?"

"Yes, she asked me to go back again tomorrow, sir!"
The young man went along again on the following day, and on hearing
her husband's knock on the door, his wife concealed her lover in a trunk.
The barber marched in and started to hunt. He searched and he searched;
not a corner was missed, but he never thought to open the trunk.

"Ah", he moaned. "Can it be that my wife has led me blindly by the
nose to this point? If I have to, I will burn down the whole house, but this
debacle must end!"

He dashed off to the barn and grabbed piles of straw and set them alight
all around the house. His wife screamed to the heavens, tore at her hair and
cursed her husband.

"You madman! You maniac! Have you completely lost your senses?
Burning our house down for no reason at all! Alright then, I don't care if
you burn everything that's yours, but why are you destroying all my things?
What about my glory box full of clothes and materials from my parents?
Come on, may you be struck blind and crippled, come on and at least help
me save my clothes; at least let me rescue my dowry otherwise I'll send you
out tomorrow to buy me everything from scratch!"

On hearing those threats from his wife, the barber quickly ran to her
assistance and together they heaved the great trunkful of clothes (and the
young man inside) to safety.

After the house had been reduced to ashes, the barber thought to
himself smugly, "Ah, I might have burnt down my house, but at least I've
shown my wife who's boss! Let her make one false step now, if she dare!"
The barber returned to his shop, and stretched himself out, feeling
totally pleased and self-satisfied. Not a moment later, lo, there came the
young man. When the barber saw him, his jaw dropped open in shock.
"Oh my, oh master. I just barely escaped with my life", stammered the young man. "I'd have been burnt to a cinder if the woman and her husband hadn't carried me out of the flames in a trunk after her husband set the house on fire!"

"Oh, young man, go back to where you first came from. I've gotten more than I deserved", was all that the despondent barber could utter.
Two Millionaires - Both Bearing the Nickname 'Skinflint'

Book 5, Story 368

There were two wealthy millionaires. One resided in one town, and the other in another town at about a day's distance from the first. Their reputations had spread far and wide, so they knew of one another by name, but had never had the pleasure of meeting.

The houses in which both lived immediately attracted the attention of the passer-by, for both were foul and disgusting, in a state of filthy decay. Ever since they had first been built, not once had any effort been made towards their upkeep. The chimneys were crooked and collapsing; the roof tiles broken and slipping; bare patches showed on the walls where the paint had long since peeled off; the windows were stuck over with old, dirty sheets of paper salvaged from rubbish bins in the place of glass; many broken trellis frames hung down alarmingly; the rafters were laced with cobwebs; the verandas had never been swept nor mopped; every step in its place on the staircase, you might say, was broken, so that if you were to climb it at night, you must surely fall; a broom had never been used beneath the covered ways or courtyards and the yard housed an entire rubbish dump; everywhere weeds and nettles grew wildly; snakes, lizards and frogs abounded in vast numbers; the front door hung askew from its hinges and was impossible to close so that at night it was propped shut with an old stick;
right around, the stone fence was tumbling down. In a single word, their houses were putrid, as too were the rags their owners wore - putrid. Both millionaires dressed themselves in whatever they could get from second-hand dealers; they wandered round in flimsy heelless scuffs, their feet never knowing the comfort of a sock in winter or in summer. Neither did they shave, nor comb their hair. Bits of straw stuck to their beards and locks. Their complexions were smeared in dirty hues of yellow and green, resembling mould, because they never bothered to wash. Only rarely could smoke be discerned rising from their chimneys, for they never cooked. Not a soul was to be seen either in their yards or on their balconies or within their rooms; a dim light filtered through the windows so that inside it was as gloomy as some underground cavern; their wives and children just barely managed to peer through the darkness. Their entire families were dressed in cast-offs, and their faces too, seemed mouldy. You could not distinguish them from paupers.

One of these Skinflints, observing how all the other townsfolk were eating their fill, drinking heartily and bedecking themselves in fine attire, was gripped by such a gnawing, swelling anger, that he felt like bursting from annoyance. And from day to day, his impatience grew as he waited hopefully for signs of their ruin and fall. Indeed, but the people continued to live their pleasurable lives; it was only those Skinflints who lived more poorly than the most sorrowful tramps.

"What with these ridiculous mansions and those frivolous excesses", he would mumble to himself, "their bankruptcy must be imminent, and then I will buy all, all they owned. And then, and only then will it dawn on them just who I am, and even from afar when they see me, they will salute me like a Sultan, even if I am not dressed in glitter and gold. And it will be then that I will make them flinch with my cutting words and thumps across their noses", daydreamed the Skinflint. "Though, it seems extraordinary to me that there is not one other single person in this town who practices similar good habits like me - economy and thrift. There is one person like that I've heard of, but he lives in a different town. Really, I think I should go and pay him a visit so that we can get to know one another and I'll be able to see whether he really does deserve to have his name and reputation linked to mine. Yes! Yes, I will definitely call on him. Tomorrow morning, God grant me health, I will get up early and walk there. If I go at an easy pace, I'll be there by nightfall. My accommodation will be free; bread - I'll take from here; I'll wheedle a little salt and pepper out of the grocer and I'll go and see that frugal fellow whom they've named Skinflint, just like they've nicknamed me. Though, I mainuaia, 'If granddad was worried by the birds,
he'd have never sown any millet".

The next morning, even before dawn broke, this Skinflint set out on foot for his counterpart's home. First, he removed his shoes and tied them to his belt, in order not to wear away their soles needlessly, and slowly, slowly he trudged along so that by evening, he loomed as large as life right before the second Skinflint's home. There had been no need to ask any passing citizen for direction to the place as he easily recognised it on account of its filth and decay: indeed, it was the spitting image of his own home.

He pushed the door to open it seeing there had been no answer despite all his knocking, and the door fell down to one side as one latch had been loose and the other had just broken. When the door came away and crashed to the ground with a deafening sound, the man of the house quickly emerged. On spotting the broken door, he was mightily upset and yelled at his visitor in the same rough tones he used to frighten beggars off his premises.

"What did you break my door down for, damn you, you cursed beggar", he screamed angrily, and he lunged towards him so as to shove him out of the doorway.

"There's no need to lose your temper with me, brother, because I'm not a beggar. In fact, I am your friend. I am Skinflint and I'm from the Regret clan: you know, my father was that famous pilgrim. I have come to visit you. I've spent the whole day walking here, purely and solely to be able to exchange a few words with you. As far as food goes, I've brought my own bread and salt. I wouldn't dream of causing you any expense! And don't worry in the least about the latch on the door... I've got an old one at home that I found on the dung heap. I'll have it sent to you so you can repair the damage. Here, in the meantime, all you need to do is put a little solder here, give it a few blows with a rock there so that it'll bend into the right shape and see, the door will hold".

When the host Skinflint heard those words, my, how he softened up and bid his guest welcome. As they were picking their way up the staircase, the visitor noted that his friend's stairs were even more rotten than his own, so in congratulatory tones he said, "Bravo, Bravo!"

"What makes you say bravo, friend?" queried his host.

"The stairs. Why they're ever so much more tumbledown than mine!"

They made themselves comfortable, more or less, on a decrepit divan which creaked and sagged down to the naked floorboards, the planks of which were all old and splintered and buckled. After they exchanged greetings, the host Skinflint questioned his guest:
"But how did you get to know about me, friend?"
"From your nickname. It's the same as mine!"
"And how did you locate my house in a town this size? No doubt you asked someone?"
"No, that wasn't necessary. I was able to recognise it because it looks just like mine, so I figured that you must live here".
"But tell me friend, do you realise how rich I am?"
"Not only do I know all about you, but I know about your father too. Cut-throat was his name, wasn't it? And is it really true they call you Skinflint?" asked the visitor.
"Too right! That's how it is! But praise be that the Lord brought you to me so that we can get to know one another. Come on, let's nibble on a few crusts of bread and salt for dinner, now, while it's still light. Do help yourself, be my guest and eat some of the bread you brought. Would you like some salt? Ho, you've brought your own, I see. Well, I'll be! You certainly do know how to live stylishly! Why, I only ever eat plain dry bread; I don't fancy paying good money over for salt or pepper!" exclaimed the host.
"Eh, well said", agreed his visitor. "Giving money in exchange for salt? Impossible! Why, I go begging to the grocer for it. Do you know what my old father used to say? He said, "Son, beg with humility, then feast with zest". Yes, I follow that advice and get lots of things that way".
"Bravo! Bravo! You've shown yourself to me more skilful than me", said the host. "Wait just a minute and I'll light the lamp because it's getting too dark to see".
"What!" exclaimed his visitor. "Don't be ridiculous! Running up bills for nothing! In any case, the moon will soon be shining and we'll be able to just make one another out. Though, hang on", continued the visitor, "let me take off my jacket so the elbows won't get any more ripped, because you know, that'll mean more expenses".
"You'd do well to take off your trousers too", advised his host. "I always strip down to my underwear at night. By the way, how much did that suit cost you friend? I bet you bought it second-hand, eh? I always buy used clothes for me, my wife and the children".
"Of course, I do just the same", agreed the visitor. "I wouldn't think of buying clothes from anywhere else. And I wear them day in and day out for all of three or four years. You know the old saying: 'With patching and patience, three villages can get by for three years'. And that's the way it is, isn't it my friend?"
"Yes, indeed. That's certainly how it is, friend. It hardly needs to be
said that that is the way to save money. When we’re old, we’ll have our little nest eggs, unlike these fools all round us; nothing but spend and splurge, but in the end mark my words, they’ll end up beggars!” said the host, shaking his head.

“Indeed they will”, agreed the visitor with feeling.

“Though, thank heavens we’ve had the good fortune to meet and share a few ideas”, stated the host.

“Do you know what I’d like from you now, friend?” asked his visitor, “Nothing would make me happier than if you were to come to my place to see how cheaply I manage to get by, and not only that, but to spite all my neighbours whose envious eyes will be watching us! Did you notice today how a crowd formed, as if around a bear fight, when the door fell down? And I’ll tell you why - those people came because they’re all jealous of our wealth!”

After they chatted for a while longer, the two Skinflints slept and early next morning, the son of the Regretful pilgrim wended his way home. It so happened that within a matter of a few days of his journey, he died. His wife’s wish had come true!

A few months passed, and the Cut-throat’s son, that Skinflint, remembered his friend’s invitation, so he set out to visit him. He roamed round and round the town, but nowhere could he spot a house that resembled his own. Finally, he asked for directions, and the house was pointed out to him. Having scrutinised it, he was left in a state of disbelief, because in fact, the dearly departed Skinflint’s widow had had it totally renovated.

The walls were gleaming with bright new paint and a continual stream of people were coming and going, all smiling and happy. He doubted whether this could be his friend’s house, so he made further enquiries. Everyone he asked confirmed that it was, so he made his way in and spoke to the woman of the house. It was only then that he learnt of the death.

“Come friend”, she motioned to him, “and see the grave of that damned husband of mine. Although we were surrounded by water, he wouldn’t give us even a drop to drink”.

When he looked across, his glance froze on the two hefty hired men who were pummelling the dead Skinflint’s grave. They wielded great big sticks which rose up, then came crashing down brutally onto the grave. This posthumous beating was the Skinflint’s punishment for living like a pauper instead of the millionaire he was.

“Hmph, and that’s how much misers deserve to be treated, friend”, declared his widow with a significant nod.

On hearing those ugly words and seeing that horrible sight, the visiting
Skinflint’s hair stood on end and instantly a new feeling surged through him, such as he’d never experienced before. He excused himself hastily and ran off to purchase a fine horse. Instead of travelling on foot, for the first time in his life, he rode home on horseback. But before he reached his house, he detoured and stopped in at a large shop where he bought the most expensive clothes money could buy, not only for himself, but for his wife and children too. He spent money like one possessed; sugar by the crateful, coffee by the bagful and every other necessity and luxury available. The goods were loaded onto wagons and despatched to his home.

When his wife opened the door to the carters and saw all those goods, she was overwhelmed and found it difficult to believe that it could have been delivered under her husband’s orders. She exclaimed to the delivery men:

“I’m afraid you must have made some mistake. These things cannot possibly be for us!”

“They’re for you alright, lady. Look, your husband is coming right behind us to settle the bill”, insisted the shopkeeper and his men.

Not a moment later, the Skinflint himself materialised. He related to his wife the grisly tale about his friend, the other Skinflint; about how his wife took out her revenge by publicly beating his grave; about how the experience had jolted him into changing his ways. He promised that from that day onward, he too, intended to live like a normal man.

And from that time onward, Cut-throat’s miserly son proceeded to live like the man of wealth he was. By the way, his nickname ‘Skinflint’ soon became just a bad memory. ‘The Millionaire’ became his new title.
The Woman Who Bought Jewels with Lies

Book 5, Story 371

A cunning woman wanted to acquire riches by deception, her victim being some jeweller. She schemed and designed just what shape her exploit should take. In the end, she devised a clever plan and the wheels of the intrigue were set in motion.

The woman hired an elegant carriage and ordered to be driven around in it all day, especially up and down the main shopping streets of the town. She clothed herself in the most expensive garments, creating the illusion of ostentatious wealth, and to crown it all off, she adopted for herself the surname of the town’s most renowned and wealthy surgeon.

The carriage pulled up in front of the jeweller’s shop and the lady imperiously stepped through the shop doors and sat herself on a chair with a show of supreme self-confidence, lounging back and crossing one knee over the other. Then clearing her throat, she impressed the shopkeeper with, “You do know who’s wife I am, don’t you?”

“Begging your pardon, madam”, he said with servility, “but I don’t believe I’ve had the pleasure of your acquaintance”.

“Dr So and So is my husband. Need I say more?” she returned.

“Hat Of course! Who hasn’t heard of him”, exclaimed the jeweller. “Why, in fact, I remember that a good friend of mine told me that your
husband was treating his sick father”.

“Most likely. But I am glad that you obviously do know of him”, said the lady. “That means we can get down to business with no further hesitation. Would you please prepare for me the following selection of jewels: 2 rings, 2 pairs of earrings, 2 bracelets, 2 necklaces and 2 tiaras. I want one of each to be the very best you have, and the other can be less showy. It would be most convenient if your assistant could accompany me home with all of these, and there my daughter can choose whichever of the jewels she likes, and my husband will immediately settle your account in cash. Oh, he’ll need to have a list of all the jewels and their prices, please”.

The jeweller rubbed his hands gleefully at the prospect of the huge profit he’d make, and of course was totally co-operative. How could it be otherwise with the false lady’s honey coated words?

Together with the jeweller’s assistant, a youngish lad, the woman boarded her coach and they drove straight to the doctor’s door. The lady insisted on seeing her so-called husband alone, at first. As she swept into the house, she slipped the packet of jewels into her bosom, then presented herself to the surgeon.

“I beg you, doctor sir”, she said as though deeply concerned and agitated, “please, I hate to trouble you, but would you go outside and call in my son who’s waiting in the carriage. Maybe you will be able to help him. For the last six months he’s been behaving so strangely; it’s hard to believe. He’s become obsessed with money: ‘Give me the money or I’ll be late; give me the money because my master is waiting; I’m not sick, there’s nothing wrong with me; give me the money’ and on and on and on he goes. It’s been a terrible trial doctor. Won’t you please call him in. He won’t listen to me. Here I’ll give you an advance payment for the consultation and while you’re examining him, I’ll just nip off home to get some more money for the drugs and things he’ll need. You see, I can’t touch my money that I have hidden at home because he just about goes wild ‘Give me the money, I insist, give me the money’. He rants and raves non-stop! So, I’ll run along now and see you shortly”.

As the doctor had received a very generous payment for the consultation with promise of more to come, he accepted the case with alacrity and ran outside, beckoning and calling to the lad who was loitering near the carriage.

“Come here son, come on and we’ll give you the money”.

The lad quickly trotted up to the doctor who showed him into his surgery, sitting him down on the patient’s couch. At the same time, his so-called mother scurried out of the building, into the carriage, and
disappeared. So the jeweller’s assistant and the doctor were left to try and work one another out.

The doctor got on with his job. “Here son, give me your hand so I can check your pulse, and stick out your tongue so I can see it, and then later we can easily fix you up for the money you want”.

“There’s nothing the matter with me doctor”, cried the lad. “I don’t need to have my pulse and tongue checked. Just give me the money so I won’t be late. My master is waiting for it, you know”.

“Yes, the money. It’s because of the money you’re here. But first I must examine you, and don’t you worry about a thing. We’ll get to the bottom of it”, answered the doctor.

“There’s no need for an examination. I just want the money”.

On and on they went in this fashion until the jeweller’s apprentice began to think they were playing some practical joke on him. He got fed up and told the doctor to stop and related to him the whole story from start to finish.

“Doctor, sir. I really don’t think it’s fair that you should be making fun of me and carrying on as though I was sick. Your wife said that your daughter had to see the assortment of jewels that we prepared for her first, and then you’d pay me the value of whatever she chose according to this itemised account here. Call your wife and stop this silly game.

On hearing those words from the lad, the doctor rapidly realised that far from being unwell, there was certainly nothing wrong with the young man. Quickly, quickly, he summoned his wife to the consulting rooms.

“Here is my wife, boy”, exclaimed the doctor. “Is this the woman who took the jewels?”

“No! She’s not the one doctor”, gasped the lad. “She was an older lady”.

“Glory be, lad! exclaimed the doctor. “You’ve been had by that woman! She’s robbed you! You’d better find her or that’s the end of your business, I’d say!”

The lad ran back to his master as fast as he could and explained to him how all their efforts had been for nothing, and they set out in search of the lady. And they still might be looking for her even to this day, but I doubt that they’ll ever find her.
The Three Thieves Who Murdered One Another for Money

Book 5, Story 360

A partnership was formed by three thieves and they set to plundering along the highway. No-one was spared - rich men, poor men - it made no difference. They robbed everyone clean, right down to their last halfpenny. Their only concern was to amass enough money to see them through the winter which they planned to spend snug in their own homes, with wining, dining and merrymaking.

They thieved throughout the entire summer, then one day all three of them sat down together to count the loot at the spot where they had buried it. On counting, the total amounted to just over six hundred pounds, that is about two hundred pounds each when the spoils were divided. Before the money was dealt out, each of the thieves turned over in their minds the desirability of possessing the entire six hundred, so each of them hatched up a plan that would enable him to grab the lot.

"Ah now, brother", said the first. "Look, when the money's divided, we'll get two hundred each, and there'll be a little left over. I reckon we should treat ourselves with this money that's over. Whoever goes into town should buy a whole roast lamb, bread, brandy, wine and whatever else he can think of to eat. We should first feast heartily, and then split the money and go our separate ways".
"That's an excellent idea", agreed the second. "Give me the money and I'll go and buy everything we need for the party".

They gave him the funds and he hopped off to town. He bought all the delicacies that he could possibly imagine, and as well, he bought a few pennies worth of poison which he mixed into the wine, seeing he never drank that beverage himself. His scheme was to poison his mates and get all the money for himself.

On the other hand, the two remaining thieves had come to quite a different arrangement for getting their hands on his share of the loot. As he was riding back, they ambushed him on the road, murdering him in the process.

They scurried off with the lunch and ate their fill and drank deeply of the wine. Not a second later, the poison took effect and they both died.

Thus their wretched greediness brought all three of them to that miserable end. Never more would they be able to enjoy their ill-gotten gains. After the last amen, it happened that a desperately poor woodcutter passed by the spot, and seeing all the money, he gathered it up for himself and happily rushed home. It enabled him to provide for his five young daughters and to marry them into the richest homes and live like a lord till he died.

So you see for whom it had been bespoken to have all the money which had been hoarded during one long summer by those ill-fated thieves.
Somewhere in some town, in some cafe, a discussion unfolded between some gentlemen about whether or not the local judge accepted bribes. The majority felt that it was not possible for that judge to be corrupt, but there was one among them who claimed that if he bribed that judge, he could even get away with committing murder in the central marketplace and not ever see the inside of a gaol! Their exchanges became more heated, so that in the end a fight broke out between the man who insisted that the judge took bribes, and one of the others who believed in the judge’s integrity. The former was much stronger and much richer than the latter, and he beat his opponent to a pulp, then he kicked and trampled all over him, right before the eyes of the entire crowded cafe. After creating that spectacle, he went on his way, while the beaten man staggered straight to the judge with his complaint. Instantly, the judge sent his officer out after the culprit to inform him of his impending trial.

“Go and tell the judge”, drawled the basher to the officer, “that I have a decree from the Emperor which spells out in forty detailed paragraphs, my right to attack whoever I like and wherever I like, even in the central marketplace! Make sure he receives my message. And as for the hearing tomorrow, I’ll be there, but for the moment I’m busy, so just send him my
The officer dashed back to the judge and relayed to him that the man had permission to murder in the market. When the judge heard the details, he was almost inclined to believe the story, but somewhere in the back of his mind, it occurred to him that it could all be a set-up leading to a bribe, seeing he'd discovered the culprit was exceedingly rich.

Next morning, the judge was forced to send his officer out to bring in the criminal, who had not felt disposed to bother rousing himself from his rooms. The basher arrived and on entering the courtroom, he purposely and dramatically positioned himself on the right side before the judge, with his victim standing on the left side.

"You, sir, are the one who should be standing on the left side," announced the judge to the culprit, "and the other gentleman who's making the complaint should be on the right. That is the law!"

"True, that is the law Your Worship", agreed the basher, "but as I am the holder of the royal decree, I choose to stand on the right".

"Here, give me a look at that decree", ordered the judge, "so that I can read it through."

At once, the basher removed a booklet of bound papers, wrapped carefully in three oilcloths, one over the other, from his breast pocket and handed it to the judge. The judge took it in his hands, and became aware of how unusually heavy and bulky it seemed to be. It struck him then, that it must contain something more tangible than words! With much pomp and ado, the judge unwound the covers and opened the booklet at page one. Nothing less met his sight than a brand new gold coin, stuck on the page. It was then that he realised with what style he was being offered a bribe!

Indeed, but the judge proved to be no less stylish in the matter than his client. Like a true professional, he made out as if he were reading the decree, mulling over the absorbing particulars of each paragraph. He read silently, only moving his lips as if reading the imaginary words of the text, and his face seemed to express wonder at certain phrases. In this manner, he pored from start to finish through the entire forty pages of the decree, the total sum of whose contents amounted to forty altans.

With a quick movement, he closed the pages and bestowed a noisy kiss on the front cover of the booklet. Then he placed it on his head to indicate what reverence was owed it, after which with dignified solemnity he rewrapped it in the three oilcloths and placed it safely into his own breast pocket.

"Truly, my good sir, you have indeed been granted a royal decree", announced the judge, "and it is a full forty paragraphs long!" The judge
turned to face the beaten man and stated, "You should thank God that this gentleman didn’t kill you on the spot, because with this decree that he was been granted, why, if he were to attack even me, I would have absolutely no legal recourse! The clauses within it are completely watertight, and bear the stamp of the Emperor!"

The judge then turned to the assembly and continued, "And I want all of you who are gathered here today to know", he boomed, "that I have been a judge for fifty years and during all that time on the bench, I’ve had the privilege of reading countless decrees, but never before has such a one as this been delivered into my hands. This decree, good sir", he said to the beaten man, "will remain in my possession this evening so that its contents can be officially recorded into my private files and stamped with my own personal seal. So, be off with you now, sir. Heal yourself as best you can. An onion and salt plaster is very good for bruises I’ve heard, and just be thankful this kind gentleman left you alive. But I warn you, don’t ever cross words with him again!"

When the beaten man heard the judge’s verdict, he put his tail between his legs and slunk out of the courtroom. The beaten one had truly been beaten, his shame was shameful and he crept off without a word to anyone and life resumed its normal course. The only thing of any real consequence was that his bruised buttocks swelled up rather painfully and his neck was ringed with a nasty red mark!
A certain grandpa was engaged to a certain grandma, and the priest had arrived to marry them. In accordance with custom, the priest asked the question, "Do you wish to be united?" and on hearing 'yes' from both of them, he turned to the old man and rather angrily said:

"Old man! What do you want to get married for now? Why, you're an old man. You don't need a woman!"

"True, holy father", he replied. "I don't need a woman, but I need to be looked after; my clothes have to be washed and mended; my dinner has to be cooked; the house needs to be kept clean! There! That's why I'm marrying the old lady".

When grandma heard that answer from grandpa, she scowled and said to the priest, in fury:

"Go on, gather up all your things and be off with you! Because there's no way I'm going to marry this old creep!"

So, thanks to the priest's meddling, grandma and grandpa's affair was ruined.
There once was a man who had a son who was ripe for marriage. The man was a good soul, but poor, and he didn’t have the time (the money that is) to arrange a match for his son. The youth was very eager to be wed, but despite this, he felt too embarrassed to broach the subject directly with his father.

One night, his father came home, exhausted from working in the vineyards all day. He uttered a deep sigh as he sat down, and said under his breath, “Oh dear, oh dear, chhh”.

His son was quick to snap back with, “Well, at least you’re married, father, so why should you be groaning and moaning so much?”

It became very clear to his father from that comment that his son was impatient to be wed. It also became apparent to him that his son had no idea what he was moaning about - that he was aching all over from working all day.

“So you want to be married, just like me, eh?” asked his father.

“I certainly do. I too am a man, just like you”, replied his son.

“I can understand your wanting a wife, son, but marriage isn’t all milk and honey. Life brings lots of responsibilities and problems”.

“Problems? Because of one woman?” exclaimed his son. “Why, when
I get married, I want two wives, not just one. Listen to you! You're married to only one woman - my mother, and that obviously can't be enough because you're still complaining. When you arrange my marriage for me, I insist that I have two wives and that's all there is to it!"

His father tried his best to dissuade his son from taking two wives, but his son was stubborn as a mule. He refused to listen to a word his father said, so that in the end, his father arranged the two brides.

A few months of joy and happiness passed for the new groom and his wives; that is, their wedded bliss lasted as long as the groom had enough money to buy his wives all they needed. When his money ran out, the young man began to get up extraordinarily early and dash off to the cafe.

One of his friends teased him for going to the cafe so early, but the new groom was quick to reply with: "Well, my friend, how can it be otherwise when I'm married to two women! One of them prepares my bath, the other lays out all my clothes. They wait on me hand and foot, so I'm ready in no time! There, that's why I'm able to get to the cafe so early! And if you're thinking of getting married, take my advice and marry two women as well so that you too can have a lifetime of bliss!"

That seemed very sensible advice, so his friend decided to follow it and he too insisted on taking two wives. For several months, he too, was jubilant, happy; that is for as long as he had the money to provide his wives with what they needed. Once his money ran out, they set to harassing him and cried in anger, "If you knew that you weren't even able to provide for one wife, you had no right to get married at all, much less get married to the two of us!"

They hounded him and flung many an accusation in his face, so that the new groom was ready to burst out of his skin. Even before the sun had risen, he would flee from his house to the safety of the cafe.

"Bravo", said his bigamist friend who had advised him to take two wives that he might pass his life in harmony. "I see you've started coming to the cafe too, and even earlier than me what's more! I see you've found out how quickly the two wives can get you ready and give you a good send-off!"

"I hope you get your due punishment in the next life, friend", he snarled. "How could I have listened to you and got myself into such a mess! Now I know why you arrive at the cafe so early!"

So, now you know what the old folks mean when they say 'He's got two wives - but who wears the pants in the family?'
The Man Who Kept a Written Record of All the Female Wiles

Book 6, Story 394

A dissipated young man bound together some sheets of paper into a notebook, placed them in his breast pocket then attached a pencil firmly to his belt. Having made these preparations, he set to asking every immoral woman he had a liaison with, to explain to him all the crafty tricks she employed to deceive her husband when she had to go out, or when some rake visited her at home. The young man painstakingly noted down all their methods and tricks, and all the devilish ways they fooled their men. For nearly ten years, the young man pursued his wicked ways, studying and writing down all the female wiles. After he had filled his notebook from cover to cover, he took it into his head to get married.

"From now on, even if I get married, I won't have a care in the world", is what he thought to himself, "seeing I have the complete encyclopaedia of female wiles written down in my notebook. My wife won't be able to step one inch out of line with me!"

Figuring thus, the young man got married and took for himself an intelligent and virtuous wife. After some time, his wife asked him for permission to be able to stroll outside as far as their front gate.

"May I go to the main gate, husband, so I can see what's going on
around the town?" she asked.

"Wait, and I'll consult my notebook," he replied. He unearthed it from wherever it was hidden and started to pore through the descriptions of female wiles. He turned page after page, and eventually found a note that explained that with "May I go to the main gate?" some woman had tricked her husband and had come to his own quarters to consummate their lust.

"No, you certainly cannot go to the main gate!" he snapped at his wife. "The notebook absolutely forbids it!"

On another occasion, she asked him if she might visit her father.

"Will you let me go to my father's?" she asked.

"Wait, and I'll consult my notebook," he replied, and opened it. He turned and turned the pages till he discovered written that when some woman had claimed to be out visiting her father, she had in fact joined him so they could frolick and make love.

"No, you definitely cannot go to your father's, wife," he thundered. "I'm appalled by what's written about that in this notebook."

On a third occasion, she asked him if she might go to church.

"Will you let me go to church, at least," she asked.

"Wait, and I'll consult my notebook," was the familiar reply. He removed it from its hiding place and began to leaf through it.

"No! It is impossible for you to go to church," he said in a horrified voice. "The notebook prohibits such a thing."

The poor bride just sat and wondered at what could be written in that blasted notebook her husband kept hidden away. Almost one year passed in which she was not allowed to go anywhere.

"Please husband, I want you to answer me this question. Why won't you let me go out beyond the front door? And why, every time I ask, do you always open your notebook? I must know, because I have the feeling that you don't believe that I will be faithful to you. Well, let me assure you, that if that's what you think, then you are completely wrong. Come on, tell me what on earth you have written in that notebook!"

"In this book" he answered, "I have recorded all the female wiles and devilish tricks. When I was a bachelor, I wrote them all down so that I would be awake to all the tricks my wife would want to play. There, that's why I won't permit you to go out beyond the front door, wife!"

"Ha! So that's the reason, is it!" she exclaimed. "Oh ho husband, so you naively think that if I want to go out and have an affair, you'll be able to stop me? Close your book, and let me go out for a bit, like all the other women do, because your behaviour is shameful and cruel. And remember, as for you keeping watch over me; would that the devil had so many eyes."
They had a fine old quarrel. The wife protested and objected over his
treatment of her; he boasted that he would not let her play around under his
nose; they really reached a stubborn deadlock and his wife concocted a plan
whereby his notebook would be consigned to the fire. She called in a clever
old granny and explained to her what she must do. The next morning, the
wife made a huge fuss about going to the bathhouse.

"Will you let me go to the bathhouse, husband?" she demanded.
"Wait and I’ll consult my notebook", he replied and started to flick
through it. “No! You cannot go”, he snapped.

"Whether the notebook allows it or not, I am going, and that’s all there
is to it, husband", she insisted.

She leapt up and armed herself with all that she needed for the bath; he
refused to let her go; she insisted; so that in the end the young man gave
his consent, but only on condition that he accompany her to the bathhouse
and wait at the door of the building until she finished washing, and then
accompany her back home again. Well, that was perfectly alright with the
wife, as it fitted neatly into her plan.

They set out for the bathhouse and as soon as they arrived alongside a
particular house, where the granny was lying in wait for them, the granny
threw a pot full of the most vile rubbish right over the wife, so that she
presented an appalling spectacle.

“Oh really! How can people be so thoughtless! Look what they’ve
done to me! I’m covered in filth from head to foot”, cried the wife
indignantly to her husband. “Here, hold my towel for a moment so I can slip
into this yard and clean myself up a bit under the tap, because I can’t go
walking through the streets like this!”

The husband took her towel to hold, while she slipped into the yard,
closing the high gate behind her. She washed herself as best she could, then
re-emerged. Together, they proceeded to the bathhouse, then returned
home later that day.

When they got home, she said ironically, “Here, take your notebook,
husband dear, and read it to me”.

The husband couldn’t think of any good reason why he shouldn’t, so
he read the contents out loud from start to finish.

“Ah”, she said, when the end had been reached and she noticed there
was a bit of space left on the last page, “seeing there’s a little space left, you
should write down one other female wife that you’ve missed”.

Her husband took up his pen and began to write down what his wife
dictated.

"Write this down, husband!” she ordered. “There was a man who had
written down all the female wiles, but he was still unable to keep his wife out of mischief. On her way to the bathhouse, she detoured into a yard for a rendezvous with another man, while her husband stood like a feel at the gate holding her towel, oblivious to the fact that he had been tricked...

Before she had even finished the sentence, he hurled down his pen and exclaimed”, So that’s what you did to me, you bussyl So that’s your game! Besmirching my honour! Ruining my reputation!”

“No, as a matter of fact, I didn’t actually do it (even though you deserved it) husband”, she said, “but I merely played a trick on you so that you will realise that you’re not even in the running if I want to be faithless to you! There, that’s why you should throw your notebook into the fire. Let it be consumed by the flames, and let me have my freedom to go where I want, like all the other women do. Be aware, that as long as I choose to remain faithful, you have nothing to worry about as far as your honour goes, but if I wanted to deceive you, then even were you to lock me in a trunk with twelve keys, you still wouldn’t be able to keep watch over me! And another thing you should know, husband: if a bitch does not wag her tail, the dogs won’t run after her! There are many more things I could tell you too, but if what I’ve already said isn’t enough to convince you to throw that notebook in the fire, then you don’t have much sense! Be warned, if you choose to keep it, you will be doing yourself a far greater injury!

After he had heard her out, the husband was persuaded that what she said must be quite true, so he threw the notebook into the fire and watched it as it burnt.

“Shame on all the effort and energy and money I wasted all those years! Fancy trying to write down all the cunning tricks cunning women played, and believing that I succeeded! Well, I couldn’t have been more wrong, as you proved by the trick you played on me! It seems I am not fit to judge this matter, so from now on, and God is my witness, you are free to act as you think is best”.

As a result of her decisive action, the wife finally liberated herself from her stupid husband who had kept her locked up.
A poor man was married to an excellent woman who did all she could to uphold their dignity. What with the admirable way she kept the house in order and received their guests, that couple presented a model household, exactly as it should be.

On one Sunday, her husband happened to invite some friends home for drinks. After they had made themselves comfortable, the wife brought in some brandy and offered it around.

"Listen, dear", said the poor man, "would you please bring us a watermelon that I can cut up to refresh ourselves with, but make sure you choose the nicest one, understand?"

With delight, the woman ran off and took the one and only watermelon there was in the house (there happened to be a paperbag full of mixed grapes as well). She placed it in a bowl and handed it to her husband. He lifted it up and saw that it was rather dusty, so he handed it back to her, saying, "Dear, take this one back. I don't fancy it very much. Have a good look around and select a better one."

His wife took the watermelon and carried it out to the kitchen where she washed it thoroughly, then returned to her husband with the same watermelon. Again he held it up to inspect it, and again he didn't like it.
"I'm sorry to put you to this trouble, dear, but for the sake of our guests, see if you can choose a better one".

The excellent wife took the watermelon and again she carried out to the kitchen where she polished it a little and plucked off its stem, so that it was impossible to tell it was the same watermelon. For the third time, she handed it to her husband.

"Ha, now you've chosen the perfect one, dear! God bless You! Now this is what I call a watermelon - first rate produce! I wonder if you might bring us some grapes as well. Some of each kind would be nice. Some purple ones, some red ones and some green ones please".

The woman ran off and sorted out the bagful of grapes into three separate bowls - one for each type of grape. She placed them before the guests who were impressed with the show of hospitality they had received. The wife also bid them farewell very nicely indeed when they were leaving, so that all said and done, the visitors were left thinking that couple couldn't be better off!
A man led his horse out of its stable to water it. The horse, being a very nervous and excitable creature, took fright, wrenched itself free from his grasp, flicked its tail high in the air and galloped off at a furious pace down the laneways. The man took off after it, running with all his might to catch it. He nearly cornered it here, then there, but the horse kept giving him the slip. The man worked up a terrific sweat; he was wringing wet from his exertions and crazy with rage.

As he was sprinting past some rich woman's gate, she noticed how hot and red he seemed. Being a hopeless busybody, she called him to a halt before her and asked:

"Good heavens man! Won't you tell me where you're coming from in such a state? You're as red as a beetroot, panting and sweating! How did you get like that?"

Because the man was in a furious temper on account of his horse, he let fly at the woman, angrily snarling:

"I'm coming from hell, lady! That's why I'm so hot and bothered. Anyway, what's it to you? What do you want to know for? Answer me quick smart, or you'll be in strife!"

"What! So you're coming from hell are you?" she exclaimed. "Wait! Don't go just yet. I want to ask you, friend, whether you're acquainted with
my husband down there? He died last year. Perhaps you’ve seen him in
hell? Oh, do tell me, how was he? Was he content? Please answer me, I
beg you”, pleaded the not-too-bright lady.

When he heard those questions from that empty-headed woman, and
because he was a cunning chap, the man decided to fool her and perhaps
gain something in the bargain.

“Ha! Are you asking about the squire? Fancy! So he’s your husband,
eh? What a coincidence! You’re precisely the person I’m looking for.
I’ve come all this way to pass on your husband’s greetings. He sent his love
and begged you to forward a little money on to him to pay for a few bills he’s
run up. You know, there were the torments of his judgment and and he
didn’t have a red cent to cover the expenses. His exact message to you was
to keep your eyes open for someone who was headed for hell and send some
money to him with them. You know, it really is quite disgraceful that a man
of his standing should be forced to go begging round hell!” lied the man.

“Oh friend, my friend. God bless you!” cried the woman. “Glory be
that He delivered you to my door and I’ve had some news from my husband!
Please, wait till I fetch some cash that you can take down to him. Do that
good deed for me. I’ll reward you and more than pay for your effort!” she
offered.

“Look, I don’t want any payment, lady. Just give me whatever you
want me to take to your husband and I’ll pass it on to him. A person must
do a little good in this world! Why, if I charged for everything, who knows
what would come of it”, said the man to the gullible lady.

The silly woman scurried off and returned with a fistful of gold coins
and gave them to him to give to her husband to pay for his expenses in hell.

The man pocketed the money and went, not to hell, but to his own
home, leaving the horse to roam wherever it liked, seeing he’d got enough
money to buy 50 horses!

It may be that even now that squire’s wife thinks that the man took the
money to hell for her husband to spend! But what she doesn’t know is that
he is living it up at home with his family!
You Have to Give a Bribe
Before You Can Pay Your Taxes

Book 6, Story 419

One villager went along to the tax collector to ask how much tax he had to pay. After they had exchanged greetings, ("Many years to you, Aga" is what our villagers and townsfolk say to our Turks), the villager said:

"Could you please look in your book, Aga, and tell me how much I owe in taxes, so I can pay it?"

The Aga arranged his spectacles over his nose, took the book in his hands, then asked the villager where he was from.

"Which village are you from, son?"

"I am from Zrze, Aga", answered the villager.

"Ah, so you're from Zrze, are you?" The Aga began to turn over the pages and say with a voice that was very nasal, for the spectacles were pinching his nose, "Zrze, Zrze, Zrze, Zrze...Ah, It's not the village called Lazhani, is it, son?"

"No, Aga, it's not called Lazhani. You've gone miles away!" said the villager. "My village is called Zrze. I am from Zrze".

"Ah, so you're from Zrze! Zrze, Zrze, Zrze...Gosh, your village isn't called Belo Pole, is it son?" asked the Aga.

"No, Aga, No! Heavens above, you're way off course! My village is Zrze, Aga, Zrze", said the villager.
"Aah, so Zrze is your village. Zrze, Zrze...Hey, it's not called Rileo, is it son?" asked the Aga.

"Oh, my village is right nearby to Rileo, Aga. Look for it near that entry", said the villager hopefully.

"Good, I'm glad it's nearby here somewhere", said the Aga, "but which village did you say you were from?"

"But I've already told you, Aga, that I'm from Zrze. From Zrze", said the villager.

"Ah, ah, ah, well why didn't you say so, fool! Why didn't you tell me you were from Zrze!" exclaimed the Aga somewhat angrily. "Wait, let me see now; I'll try and find it. Which village did you say it was, infidel?"

"Oh, from Zrze, Aga! How many times do I have to tell you?" said the villager.

"Aaah, so you're from Zrze. Now I understand", said the Aga. "Zrze, Zrze, Zrze", repeated the Aga as he turned page after page in the book, to all appearances being unable to find the entry 'Zrze' which would enable the villager to pay his taxes on time.

"Well, it's not here, my man" said the Aga. "Your village is not listed here. Go home now, and come back again tomorrow and maybe I'll be able to find where it is written".

Like it or not, the poor villager was dismissed and he went into the town square and told one of his friends that the Aga couldn't find where Zrze was written in the book, and he'd probably be fined for not paying his taxes on time.

"You know why he couldn't find it?" queried his friend. "I'll tell you. It's because you went there empty-handed. Go back again with a pound of coffee for him, and you'll see how quickly he'll find your village and your name in that book!"

The villager did as he was advised and returned to the Aga's office with a pound of coffee. The moment the Aga spied the coffee, he welcomed in the villager with an altogether different tone, and even greeted him by name:

"My, my, do come in Mr Petko! A pleasure to see you. What can I do for you? Do sit down. What's your business then - come to pay some money, perhaps?"

"Yes, Aga, I've come to hand over my money. What else would I come here for?" replied the villager.

"Which village are you from, Mr Petko?" queried the Aga, as he began to leaf through the book.

"I am from Zrze, Aga!"

"Exactly! From Zrze; yes, Zrze, Zrze, Zrze, Zrze, Zrze.....Ha! Here it is!
Zrze! Fine, Mr. Petko, pay your money and everything's as it should be, my good men," concluded the Aga.

So it took all that for the Aga to find the entry to enable the villager to pay his taxes so he wouldn't get fined! The victors call the tune every time!
Caught in the Garlic

Book 6, Story 414

One dark night a man stole into a vegetable garden to snatch some garlic. He had just crept along a furrow in readiness, when he was spied by the keeper, who slowly, slowly crept up behind him. At the same time, the thief bent over and started uprooting a garlic plant from the ground.

"What are you doing here, eh?" roared the keeper.

"The wind blew me here! That's why I'm here", replied the thief.

"And even if the wind did blow you here, why precisely are you holding on to that garlic plant?" demanded the keeper.

"Well, I'm holding on to it, friend, so the wind won't carry me off again!" claimed the thief.

And that's how the thief defended himself against the simple keeper.
Two chaps formed a partnership to become innkeepers. Both of them had sticky fingers, but neither was aware of the other's vice. The first thought the second was the epitomy of virtue when it came to money matters, and the second thought the first to be completely trustworthy in that regard. Seeing they both believed this, each of them thought he would be able to steal a heap of money from the business, quite above and beyond the profit which they would make.

They set to work selling wines and spirits, and the proceeds were enormous. Indeed, but the first kept pinching money from the till and dropping it into an old vinegar barrel, like into a giant moneybox; likewise, the second partner did exactly the same - without either of them realising they were hiding the money in the same place.

They laboured and strove for the whole year with great bustle and ado, after which they prepared to split the profits. Officials were called in, and after the books were checked, it became apparent that there were no profits to be divided. Seeing that was the case, they agreed to end the partnership and split the stock between them.

Together with the officials, they began dividing the property, but when it came to the vinegar barrel, both partners made a huge fuss about wanting to have it. They began to bid for it, placing on it a value far and above what
an old barrel was worth.

As he was bidding, the first one cried, “I insist on having this barrel, that’s all there is to it! It’s absolutely necessary for my home!”

The second said much the same, and matched his partner’s bid. The bids got higher and higher, but the two men were deadlocked. An agreement was impossible.

The officials found the entire proceedings rather difficult to believe. How could these two be prepared to pay such a high price for one old, rusty barrel? But just then, one of the officials was struck by an idea. He reached into the barrel to see what might be inside it. When he felt - it was full of money!

“Hang on, gentlemen, hang on”, he exclaimed. “You can stop quarrelling now, because it seems your profit is in this barrel! Count it out and take half each!”

Both partners felt mortified. Not only was it revealed that they were both thieves, but that they had been stealing from each other!
The Saddler Who Hid His Money in the Saddle

Two saddlers had a business together. One of them was a married man, whilst the other was a bachelor named Petko. Whatever money he earned, Petko would hide in the pocket of one old saddle which he kept hanging from the rafters without his partner's knowledge.

It so happened that Petko had leave for several days. In that time, a client came to the shop to buy a saddle. They selected and selected from the new ones, but not even one would fit the horse properly. The client noticed the old saddle which was hanging from the rafters, the one which held Petko's money, and he took it down. Well, as mischievous fate would have it, the saddle was just right for the horse. The client put in an order to Petko's partner to make a saddle exactly like it, and in the meantime he would use the old one. He explained that he had business in the town of Seres and on his way back he would leave the old saddle and pick up his new one.

After a day or so, Petko, the master craftsman, returned from leave and when he looked up to the rafters - his saddle was gone!

"Oh dear! Oh dear! Poor me!" he sighed. "I've been done for. All that money which I'd been putting away, penny by penny, has gone". He sat down and began to chant to himself, "When it goes - it goes; when it goes - it goes".
Petko asked his partner what he had done with the old saddle, and once he'd heard the story, Petko's heart completely froze. He was quite convinced he'd never see his money again. A week, two passed and Petko just worked on, chanting to himself, "When it goes - it goes, when it goes - it goes".

At the end of the fortnight, the client returned from Seres and exchanged the old saddle for the new one he had ordered. Petko grabbed the old saddle, put it down determinedly and thrust his hand into the pocket - and lo! - there was his money. It was untouched! He sat down to work and began to chant a new song which went like this, "When it comes - it comes; when it comes - it comes".

Even today, the people still quote Petko. When they make money, they say, "When it comes - it comes"; when they lose money, "When it goes - it goes!"
There was a certain man who was a great opportunist. If somebody said as much as a "good morning" to him, he would claim that person as a dear friend and drop in at their house in time for breakfast. Sometimes, he'd hang around so that he'd get lunch too.

One morning, this opportunist went calling on one of his so-called friends for drinks. His host could barely stand the sight of him because he visited so often. Not only that, but this unwelcome visitor made a point of staying for meals, even though he was never invited. Nevertheless, his host felt too embarrassed to say anything, so yet again, the opportunist was served with brandy and coffee. Indeed, but he was a shameless fellow, accustomed to eating for free, so he struck up an animated conversation with his host; he told him about this and about that, solely for the purpose of killing time until lunchtime arrived so he could eat his fill for free, as he had done many times before.

The host realised that his uninvited guest was bargaining on lunch. But because he'd been stung so many times before, and because he too was tight-fisted, he figured on a plan where the visitor would not be fed, even though it meant that he himself would have to remain hungry too.

They fell to talking. They said everything. Then they unsaid it again. They gave; they took; lunchtime came and lunchtime went. The guest's
stomach began to gurgle and rumble from hunger; so did his host's. In the end, the guest, being a shameless fellow, said: "Hey, old mate! What are you waiting for? Lunchtime's been and gone! Why don't you have lunch? When do you plan to eat, or are you fasting today?"

"In fact, my friend" snarled his host, "I'm so hungry I could howl like a wolf, but I'm waiting for you to clear off so I can eat!"

When the guest heard those angry words from his host, he put his tail between his legs and quickly left. The experience did him good, for never again did he go sniffing around there for a free feed.
Nine Meatballs for a Penny

Book 6, Story 441

There was a certain inn on a certain highway, which was managed by a very enterprising chap. You see, his donkey had died a short while before, and instead of burying it, he decided to make it into meatballs, and do some good business from it.

At the same time, a traveller happened to arrive at the inn and the innkeeper served him up a generous plateful of the day’s special meatballs. The traveller gobbled them up, paid for the meal, and resumed his journey. As he walked along, he thought to himself:

“And what a fine fellow that innkeeper proved himself to be. Why! He charged next to nothing for those delicious meatballs - they were virtually free - one penny for nine meatballs! I don’t remember when I’ve been charged such a low price before. He deserves to be congratulated on running such a fine business!”

A year later, the same traveller was making his way back home along the same highway, together with a group of friends from the town where he’d been working for the last twelve months. As they walked along, he told his companions about a wonderful inn down the road, where last year he’d eaten nine delicious meatballs for only one penny.

By evening, they arrived at the inn, where they waited expectantly to
be served a good, cheap meal, preferably meatballs like the ones their friend had been describing. Well, they weren't given meatballs, but they ate up their dinner anyway and went to bed.

Next morning, when it was time to settle the account, they were horrified to see how expensive the meal had been.

The traveller spoke up, "Hey, what's this? Last year when I was here, I ate nine meatballs, and they only cost one penny. Whereas this year you've charged us a fortune for a scummy serving of meat stew!"

"Eh, friends", replied the innkeeper shrugging his shoulders, "my donkey only died once - how else could you get nine meatballs for one penny".*

*Cepenkov writes: Amongst the people from Prilep, the theme from this story has become a byword in various situations and conversations. For example, when somebody boasts that last year they made lots of money; or perhaps they had a good meal for free; but this year their luck has changed, someone is sure to pipe up with "Eh, eh, you're wanting nine meatballs for a penny again, but the innkeeper's donkey only died once".*
A certain lady’s spade broke, so she gave it to her son to take to town to have it welded at the blacksmith’s.

The lad happened to be rather a simpleton. He took the spade to the smith who welded it any old how, seeing he knew his customer couldn’t tell the difference one way or the other. The lad took the mended shovel and started heading back to his village. On his way, a fellow villager bumped into him and had a good look at the spade. Seeing the job had been badly done, he shook his head and said to the lad: “You’ve just wasted your time and effort. Nothing will come of this”.

Those words entered the lad’s mind and stuck there. As he walked along the road, he repeated them over and over to himself. The road took him past a newly dug field where a man was busy sowing melons. The simple lad stopped to watch and as he did, he kept repeating: “You’ve just wasted your time and effort. Nothing will come of it”.

After hearing those words said over and over, my, how the farmer flew into a rage and he seized the lad by the throat and beat him until he’d had enough.

“Please sir!” cried the lad. “What did I do to you? Why are you beating me?”
"What do you mean what did you do, you son of a swine", yelled the farmer. "You've been going on and on about how nothing will come of my work. What sort of a blessing is that?!"

"But what should I say, sir? That's what a man told me to say and that's what I've been saying", said the boy.

"This is what you should say", snapped the farmer. "What a fine job you're doing! There'll be some good eating from that! Bon appetit! There, that's what you should say", declared the farmer. "Have you understood or haven't you? Now get out of my sight in case I give you a few more backhanders!"

The lad kept saying those words over and over to himself as he walked along the road towards the village. And dear, oh dear, yet more misfortune befell him. In a ditch, just off the road, a man had hidden himself and was going to the toilet. He heard the lad saying out aloud: "What a fine job you're doing! There'll be some good eating from that! Bon appetit!" and he thought the boy was making fun of him. Well, he leapt out of the ditch in a fury and got stuck into the boy with his walking stick. With every hit of the stick, he gave him a lashing of words as well:

"Bon appetit indeed! You son of a bitch! This is what you deserve!"

And he struck and scolded the lad for I don't know how long.

"Please, sir! Tell me what I should say and stop hitting me!" protested the lad.

"This is what you should say, you bastard you: 'Aaaah. How very gratifying that must be for you'. There, that's what you should say in the circumstances. Now, get away from here!"

The lad memorised the new words and kept saying them over and over as he walked along. The road took him through another village where a funeral procession was in full swing. The boy stopped to stare at the dead man and the weeping relatives, and kept on saying: "Aaah. How very gratifying".

The members of the funeral party got mightily upset and turned on the boy and beat him to a pulp.

"Please, friends! What have I done to you? Why are you beating me?"

"What do you mean, what have you done, you terror", they hissed, "when you're happy that one of our family is dead. Fancy saying 'Aaaah, how very gratifying!' There, that's why we're beating you. Did you get that or didn't you?"

"Eh, well yes. But what should I say from now on. Tell me!"

When the mourners heard that, they realised the lad wasn't too bright, so they instructed him like this. "From now on, if you see a dead person,
you should say: 'God have mercy; long live his memory'. There, that's
what you should say from now on'.

The lad kept those words in mind and repeated them to himself as he
walked along the road. Passing through another village, he came across a
wedding party escorting the bride to her new home. The lad stopped to
watch and kept saying to himself: “God have mercy on him”.

The wedding party was not at all pleased to hear such a thing and they
fell upon him with punches and curses.

"Please, friends! Why are you beating me? What have I done to you?"

"What do you mean, what have you done to us, you dog. You’ve
insulted the bride and the groom!” they said.

"Oh! Well, what should I say from now on”, asked the lad.

“What should you say? This is what you should say: ‘Congratulations
on your happiness! Good luck for the future!’ There, that’s what you must
say. Have you understood now or haven’t you?”

The new words were duly memorised and the boy kept repeating them
to himself as he went along. Finally, he arrived at his own village. There
in front of him he saw how three of the villagers were brawling and fighting
with one another. He stopped to watch the spectacle and as he stared he said:
"Congratulations on your happiness!”

The villagers left off fighting amongst themselves when they heard
him saying that and instead got stuck into the lad and gave him what for until
they’d had enough. So their quarrel may have ended but the poor lad went
home with his wretched spade, having been beaten in half a dozen places.
A poor woodcutter owned five donkeys. They were scrawny animals indeed and he could barely drive them along with their loads of wood. He asked some acquaintance of his what he could do the donkeys to make them trot along more quickly. The man, for a joke, told him to pop a fiery hot red chilli under the donkeys' tails, and once they were out on the job, they'd fly along as if with wings, without a whip being necessary.

The woodcutter was easily convinced, so each of the donkeys got their chilli. After they had plodded on a little way, the chilli's fiery hotness suddenly ignited them! Dearest reader, my oh my, fire and flames! Despite their scrawnyness, the force of the chillies drove them on so that they burst into a frenzied flight, a crazed canter, tearing along as if with wings! The woodcutter ran after them for all he was worth. They arrived home well before their usual time, all panting and sweating and dripping wet because of their mad dash.

The very next morning, the woodcutter went to see and thank the man who had given him that very effective advice, and to ask him something further: "Please, friend", he said. "It's all very well that now the donkeys gallop along even faster than they need to, but what about me? I can't keep up with them! What can I do? Find some solution for me too!"
"That's easy!" said his friend. "All you need to do is try the chilli treatment on yourself as well. I guarantee that not only will you keep up with the donkeys, but you'll be well ahead of them!"

The woodcutter thanked the man again, and the next time he went out for wood, he did as he'd been advised. The donkeys began their wild flight, when suddenly he too felt as though he was engulfed by flames! He broke out into a run behind them, but from the strength of the chilli, he soon overtook them and fled before them. He sprinted towards his home and as he passed by it, he yelled out to his wife; "Wife, wife, unload the donkeys when they arrive. I've still got miles to run yet!"

God knows, that poor gullible woodcutter might still be running from the effects of that deadly hot chilli!
A certain self-made preacher was overly enthusiastic. He made it his business to preach from the pulpit every single Sunday. Indeed, but once he started, he didn’t know when to stop. The congregation became thoroughly sick of him, to the point you might say, that they would rush out of the church as soon as they saw him. In the end, the caretaker decided to bring him to his senses. After the preacher had climbed up the stairs and had taken his place in the pulpit, the caretaker ascended after him and handed him the keys of the church, saying:

“Here are the keys of the church door, friend. After you finish delivering your sermon, do me a favour and lock up. After all, the entire congregation have gone home, and why should I sit here all alone listening until you decide to finish preaching?”

Then he tripped off down the stairs, reached the bottom and disappeared out of the church, leaving the speaker high and dry in the altar to preach at the ikons.

Only when he realised he was totally alone in the church, did it finally dawn on that vainglorious speaker that the people were anything but happy with his sermonising. He cringed with embarrassment, and from that day onwards he abandoned his custom of earbashing the gathering. So, in this way, the townsfolk won their peace!
The Magistrate Who Planned to Be a Heavenly Judge

Book 6, Story 504

A certain magistrate used to constantly boast to his wife that seeing he passed judgment on people in this world, sentencing some of them to prison and letting others go free, that undoubtedly he would be given the same job in the next world, passing judgment on souls and sentencing some of them to hell and rewarding others with heaven.

His wife sceptically pointed out, "It's all very well that you'll be passing judgment on the souls, dearest, but who is going to pass judgment on you? Where will you end up? In heaven or hell? Tell me that if you can!"

"Why are you such a stupid woman!" exclaimed the judge impatiently. "Don't you know that no-one can pass judgment on a judge! There is no-one with more authority! My advice to you is that you pray for me to die earlier than you, so that when your soul arrives for judgment, I'll already be presiding over the heavenly court and will be able to send you to heaven!"

The woman grew silent after that answer, and took to heart his advice. She prayed and waited for the hour when he would pass into the next world, hoping her turn would be later. Many years passed by and it happened that the magistrate died. A couple of years later, she too died, and when the angel took her soul to heaven, it was set down before God to be judged. God ordered that it be weighed on the Scales of Justice to determine for which
place she was destined - heaven or hell? The scales tipped towards heaven, so that's where she was sent.

"Dear me!" she said to herself, "I wonder why my husband's not in charge of the Scales of Justice? It's very odd seeing he used to say that would be his job! Perhaps I'd better wander round through heaven and see if I can find him, because maybe he's been stationed as a judge in some other spot".

She trekked high and low through heaven, searching for her husband, but she couldn't find him. In desperation, she wandered to the very edges, near hell, when she heard her husband's voice calling to her from the centre of the eternal torment!

"Welcome, my dear, welcome!" he shouted.

She precariously peered over the edge and saw her husband, or rather just his head which was the only thing sticking up out of the boiling tar and pitch. In shock and agitation, she begged him to stand up, so that at least she might see all of him.

"Ha, ha!" he laughed scornfully. "Why, if I wasn't standing on the king's shoulder, who's standing on the prince's shoulders, you wouldn't even be able to see my face! Luckily, they're much worse sinners than me, so they're underneath. But listen carefully, my dear, to what I'm going to tell you. Find some angel who's planning to drop down to earth, and beg him to visit our sons and warn them not to become magistrates like me. Otherwise, they'll wind up here as well! God is in charge of the heavenly court with his Scales of Justice. They'll never be given a job there, and all their past crooked judgments will be uncovered, like mine were!"

His wife was amazed by those words. She hastily crossed herself and rushed back to the heavenly court to plead for her husband's pardon!
A drunken priest, as he was making his way along a narrow cobbled-stone footpath, fell off the path into the mud in a big ditch. He made an attempt to get up out of the mud, but because he was drunk, his mind wouldn’t work and he couldn’t do it. Every person who passed by felt sorry for the priest floundering around in the bog, so would reach out their hand to pull him out.

"Give me your hand, holy father, so I can pull you out of the mud", they would call.

"Get away from here, you fellow. As if I'd give you my hand", is the angry reply they received from the priest.

Lots of people stopped to watch how the priest was wallowing around in the mud. There were some friends of his there as well who wanted to pull him out, but the problem was the priest would not stretch out his hand. The prospect of hopping into the mud themselves to fish him out was hardly inviting. They didn’t want to get covered in filth either. So there they all were, standing and watching because the priest flatly refused to give them his hand so they could haul him out.

It suddenly occurred to one chap, what he should say to the priest that would make him stretch out his hand so they could reach him.
"Here is my hand, father. Take it. Take hold of it so I can pull you out. It's disgraceful for you to be rolling around in the mud like this!" cried the man.

Despite his drunken state, when the priest heard the word 'take', he immediately grew alert, pricked up his ears, and stretched out his hand to take whatever it was that was being offered him. The man grabbed the priest's hand and they all pulled him out of the ditch.

"So that's what has to be said to a priest!" exclaimed the onlookers. "Take my hand, father, but not 'give me your hand!' ...because priests are used to taking, not giving. Don't expect anything when you say 'give', but when you say 'take', a priest will reach out his hand, his empty hand!"
The Master Builder Who Pushed Over the Chimney

Book 6, Story 811

A master builder was building a chimney for some person. Towards evening, when the work was nearly finished, the chimney began to lean and looked as if it might collapse, so the master builder strained his back against it to prop it up so it wouldn't fall. That may have been, but the bricks were heavy and began to lean further and further because they had been laid crookedly. From on top of the house, the master builder hollered down to the householder:

"Hey! Look! I've finished the chimney. Come up here and give me my pay, or I'm warning you, I'll push it over!"

"Good, my man, good! Of course I'll pay you", replied the householder. "Climb down here and I'll not only pay you your fee, I'll give you extra as well!"

"No! You climb up here and pay me, or I'll push it over", called the master builder.

"I can't! Come down and I'll pay you", returned the householder. Despite all the householder's pleading and cajoling and cursing, the master builder flathy refused to come down until he was paid, nothing doing, and in the end when he could barely stand the weight of the leaning bricks, and it was apparent to him that the chimney would fall, he eased away from it and it came tumbling down!
“You good-for-nothing fellow!” cried the householder angrily. “Why did you push the chimney over?”

“Well, I told you to bring my pay up here, but you refused”, returned the master builder with a show of anger as well. “Seeing I’m the one who built it, I’ve got every right to push it over!”

Sometimes a lie can cover up a bad job! Anyway, that’s what the master builder told the other tradesmen when he boasted about how cleverly he had fooled the householder.
The Stepdaughter  
Who Became Queen

Book 5, Story 339

A man's wife died leaving him with a young daughter about ten years old. The girl's beauty and goodness was not to be found in many towns. After living as a widower for a number of months, the man's friends persuaded him to marry a certain widow. This widow happened to be one of the nastiest women there was. She too had a daughter aged about twelve or thirteen. And her girl was one of the ugliest in the town.

Once the man had married the widow and brought her home and after she met her stepdaughter and saw how good, how very, very good she was and equally beautiful, she was struck to her heart with jealousy that her own daughter was not as pretty or as good. The stepmother began to give her all the worst chores in the house.

Once a day she gave her some bread to eat. The stepmother kept her dressed in rags, barefooted, uncombed and unwashed, only hoping that it would make her sick and die, all because of her terrible jealousy. Indeed, but the girl only became healthier and the whole town talked of it.

Once the stepmother realised she could not get rid of her that way, she took to beating her. She beat her today, tomorrow and the day after. But again the girl remained as she was. When the stepmother realised that she couldn't get rid of her that way, she set to nagging her husband: either he
throw the girl out of home never to return or else she would leave, because there was no way she could live with such a wicked stepdaughter, unlike her own. Seeing the man was less intelligent than she, he became convinced by her assortment of lies and tales about what she’d seen and she cursed the girl.

One evening, she inflamed him so much with her lies that he grabbed his daughter, ready to kill her, despite the fact that the girl was totally innocent. The woman set to and calmed him down, convincing him not to kill her and be guilty of such a sin, but instead to take her off to some mountain and leave her there. Early the next morning, the stepmother baked a special memorial bun and farewelled her stepdaughter with her father, who was to abandon her on some mountain.

"Here daughter, take this bun", said her father, "and this container of wine and these candles and incense. Let us go and visit your mother’s grave, for it is nine years since she died”.

With great joy, the poor girl set out after her father like some lamb to the slaughter. On and on they went all day and all night, until they reached some wild place near a spring. Her father took out the bun as if to look at it and pretending it to be an accident, he let it roll down into the dale.

"Run, girl”, he said, “get the bun and bring it back here while I just go over the ridge to the village to ask the priest to come and bless the grave”.

The poor girl ran down and got the bun, then sat down by the spring. She waited, hungry, all day for her father to return with the priest. At dusk, she decided to walk over the ridge where her father had gone, to see if anyone was coming. Indeed, but it had become dark and she was scared, so she made her way back to the spring. Beside the spring there was a hollowed out tree trunk, just big enough for a person to fit inside, so she squeezed inside to sleep, without eating any of the bun because she believed that her father and the priest would come early next morning to bless her mother’s grave and they would need it. The poor girl didn’t sleep all night, but cried and prayed.

The next day dawned and again she waited hungry until evening when she finally had to admit that her father had left her on the mountain in order to do away with her. At nightfall, she broke off some of the bun and ate it, and drank a little of the wine which helped her to forget her fears on that wild mountain, and she climbed into the hollow and slept a little. The next day, she determined to find some path and start for home. Indeed, but seeing it was dark when her father led her there, she could not figure out in the slightest which way to go. All day she walked round and round and at night she returned to the spring to sleep in the hollow. Early one morning, when
the rays of the sun shone directly into the hollow, she was reminded of her father's house, when the sun shone through the window and how she combed her hair and went to church with her mother. Thinking these thoughts, the poor girl started to wail and cry out about her present woes.

Just at the time, the king's son was out hunting on that mountain and he was thirsty so he approached the spring to have a drink of water. When he heard what seemed to be a girl's voice, he was amazed. He came nearer to the spring, and realised that someone was in the hollow tree. Slowly, slowly he neared the hollow and spoke:

"Who is it crying in the hollow? If you are a girl, be my sister; if you are a boy, be my brother; if you are a woman, be my mother. Come out so that I may see you".

When the girl heard those words, she emerged from the hollow, her eyes full of tears and her face wet with crying. The king's son took off his scarf and wiped her face. She shone like the morning sun, and after the king's son had heard her story, he said, "Don't cry, beautiful girl, for I would like you to come and be my wife!"

He took her home and they were married and to this day she is a queen.

And so you see, it is as the old people say - 'Every evil brings good'. If I am born lucky, mother, so what if I'm thrown on a heap of rubbish.