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The Four Skillful Brothers

Brothers Grimm

Once upon a time there was a poor man who had four sons. When they grew up, he told them: ‘Dear children, I want you to go see the world, because I have nothing to give you. Learn a trade and find a place in the world.’ The four brothers packed a bag, said goodbye to their father and left. Soon they arrived at a crossing with four directions. ‘We shall part here’, said the oldest brother. ‘But on this day, in four years, we will meet again here and in the meantime we shall all try our luck in our own ways.’

All four of them went their own way and the oldest met a man, who asked him what his plan was and where he was going. ‘I want to learn a trade’, he answered. The man said: ‘Come with me and become a thief.’ ‘No’, said the oldest brother. ‘Nowadays that’s not a proper trade and it always ends in tragedy with me being hung on the gallows.’ ‘O’, said the man, ‘you don’t have worry about that. I will only teach you how to get things no other can get and no one will know.’ The young man got persuaded and with help of his teacher became a villainous thief. So skilled, that nothing was safe from his quick hands.

The second brother met a man who asked him the same question, what he wanted to learn. ‘I don’t know yet’, was his answer. ‘Well then come with me and become a stargazer. There’s nothing better, nothing is hidden from us.’ He was happy with this and became such an adequate stargazer that his teacher told him that he had nothing more to teach him and he had to get on his way. He gave him a glass as a parting gift and said: ‘Through this glass you can see what is happening on earth and in heavens. Nothing shall be hidden from you.’

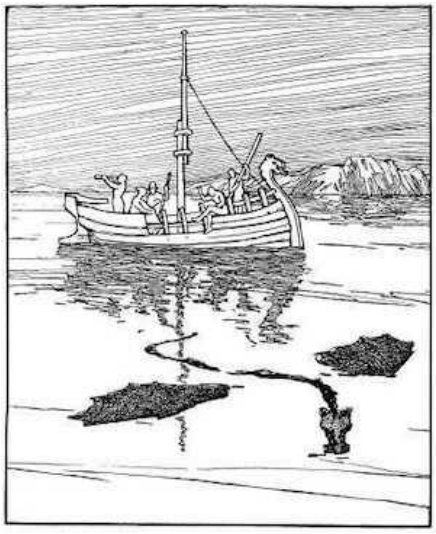
The third brother met a hunter, who took him with him, taught him and turned him into a skilled hunter. When they said goodbye, his teacher gave him a gun and said:’ This gun shall never block and you will always hit what you want with it.’

The fourth and youngest brother also met a man, who asked him about his plans. ‘Maybe you should become a cutter?’ ‘Oh no’, he answered. ‘I don’t like sitting bent over day and night and using a needle and thread.’ ‘With me you will learn a whole different type of cutting art’, the man answered. The youngest brother also got persuaded and learned the trade. When they said goodbye his teacher gave him a needle and said: ‘With this needle, you can sow together anything you want. Even if it’s as weak as an egg or as hard as steel. And so

good that no one will notice the thread.’

After four years passed, the brothers met again at the crossing. They returned home to their father. They told him all about their adventures, upon which their father said: ‘I shall test your skills.’ He looked up and told his second son: ‘At the top of the tree is a sparrow nest. Tell me how many eggs are in there.’ The star gazer took his glass, looked up and said: ‘There are five eggs in the nest.’ Then the father told the eldest son: ‘Take the eggs from the nest, without the bird noticing it.’ The skilled thief climbed up the tree and took the five eggs without the bird noticing anything. The father took the eggs and spread them out on the table and said to the hunter: ‘Shoot all eggs, in one shot, in half.’ The hunter took his gun and did what his father asked him. ‘Now it’s your turn’, said the father to the fourth son. ‘You have to sow the eggs and the little birds in them together again, as if nothing happened.’ The cutter took his needle and did it with pleasure. When he was done, the thief put the eggs back in the nest.

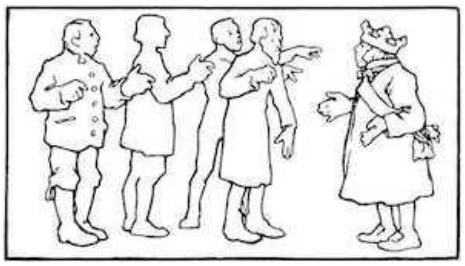
‘Yes’, said the father to his sons. ‘You have learned valuable things and spent your time well. I don’t know who has done the best job. I hope you will soon be able to show the world your capabilities.’



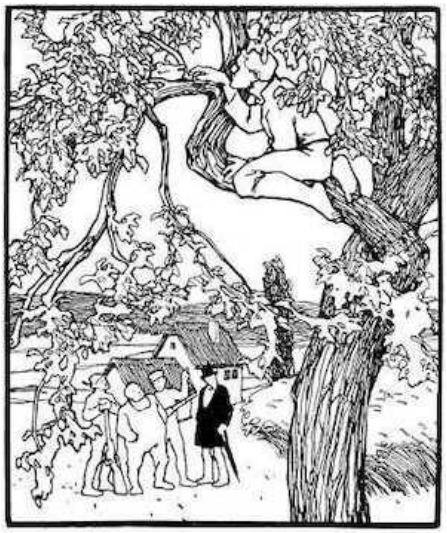
Not long after a huge commotion erupted in the country, because the princess was kidnapped by a dragon. The king was deeply grieved by this and announced that whoever saved her was to marry her. The four brothers said: ‘That is the perfect occasion to show everyone what we can do’, and they decided to rescue the princess.

‘Where she is, I will soon know’, said the star gazer. He looked through his glass and said: ‘I see her. She is far, far away on a rock in the middle of the sea and the dragon is guarding her.’ They went to the king and asked for a ship. When they arrived at the rock, the princess was sitting there and the dragon was sleeping on her lap. The hunter said: ‘I’m scared to shoot him, because I might hit the princess’. ‘Then I will try’, said the thief and he stole her right from under the dragon. He did this so quietly and skilfully that the dragon didn’t notice and kept on snoring. Quickly they sailed away to sea. But the dragon had woken up and in a fury came after them.

When the dragon flew right above the ship and started the attack, the hunter shot him straight in the heart and the dragon started to crash into the sea. But the beast was so big that the whole ship got shattered in the fall, the brothers could just barely hold on to some floating planks.. The cutter took his needle, collected the pieces of the ship and sewed them back together. The ship was whole again and they were able to safely travel home.



The king was overjoyed with the return of his daughter and said: ‘One of you shall marry my daughter, but who, you have to decide yourselves.’ The brothers got into a big fight. The stargazer said: ‘If I hadn’t seen the princess, all of your skills wouldn’t even been necessary. So she belongs to me.’ The thief said: ‘It wouldn’t have been of no use, if I hadn’t stolen her from the dragon. So she belongs to me.’ The hunter said: ‘You would’ve all been dead, if I hadn’t shot the dragon. So she belongs to me.’ The cutter said: ‘You would’ve all drowned if it wasn’t for me sowing the ship together. So she belongs to me.”



The king heard about it and said: ‘You are all right. But my daughter can only marry one of you, so she won’t marry any of you. But I will give all of you a big piece of land as a reward.’ The four brothers answered: ‘That is a great solution, better than us fighting.’

The brothers got their piece of land and, together with their father, they lived happily ever after.

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