

Brother Cheerful

Once there was a great war, and when it ended, many soldiers were discharged. Brother Merryfellow too was discharged along with the others, and upon discharge received only a small government loaf of bread and four kreuzers for his departure.

Brother Merryfellow set out along the road and met Saint Peter in the guise of a beggar who asked him for alms. He replied: "Oh, my dear fellow, what can I possibly give you? I was a soldier and have been dismissed with nothing at all: all I have to my name is this government loaf of bread and four kreuzers... And once those are gone, I shall have to beg for alms just as you do... Nevertheless, I will give what I can."

Then he divided the loaf into four parts and gave one of them to Saint Peter, adding to the bread a kreuzer.

Saint Peter thanked him, went further, and in the guise of another beggar sat down on the soldier's path; when the soldier drew level with him, Saint Peter again asked him for alms. Brother Merryfellow repeated the same words and again gave him a quarter of the loaf and a kreuzer.

Saint Peter thanked him, went further, and for the third time, in the guise of a beggar, sat by the roadside, and again made the same request to Merryfellow. For the third time Merryfellow gave him the third quarter of the loaf and the third kreuzer. Saint Peter thanked him, and the kind-hearted man went on, having left in reserve only a quarter of the loaf and one kreuzer.

With this provision he entered an inn, ate his piece of bread, and for the kreuzer ordered himself some beer.

Then he continued further along the road, and again Saint Peter came out to meet him, this time in the guise of a discharged soldier, and spoke to him: "Greetings, comrade! Say, haven't you got a piece of bread in reserve, and at least a kreuzer for a drink?"—"Where am I to get that?" answered Merryfellow. "I was dismissed with nothing at all, and for my service received only a government loaf of bread and four kreuzers! On my way I met three beggars and gave each a quarter of the loaf and a kreuzer. The last quarter I ate myself after entering the inn, and with the last kreuzer I had a drink. Now, brother, I have nothing left, and if you have nothing either, then together we can go begging for alms."—"No," said Saint Peter, "that is not yet necessary; I know something about healing illnesses and can earn by this trade as much as I need."—"Well, I know nothing about that," said

Merryfellow, "so I shall have to go begging alone."—"Oh, come with me!" said Saint Peter. "If I earn anything, I will share it with you."—"Well, that suits me fine!" said Merryfellow.

So they continued their journey together.

Presently they came to a peasant's house and heard wailing and weeping inside; they went in and saw that the master of the house lay dying, with Death standing behind his shoulders, while his wife wailed over him and cried aloud.

"Stop your wailing and crying," said Saint Peter, "I will cure your husband," and with these words he took some ointment from his pocket and healed the sick man instantly, so that he could rise up and became completely well.

The husband and wife were greatly rejoiced at this and asked: "How can we reward you? What can we give you?"

However, Saint Peter would take nothing, and the more they urged him, the more he refused. But Merryfellow nudged him in the side and said: "Take something, after all, we need it."

Finally the mistress brought out a little lamb and told Saint Peter he must take it; but he still refused. And again Merryfellow nudged him in the side: "Do take it, you fool, we need it!"

Then at last Saint Peter said: "Very well! I will take the little lamb, but I will not carry it myself; if you like, brother, you carry it yourself."—"Why shouldn't I carry it!" answered Merryfellow, and he hoisted the lamb onto his shoulder.

So they came into the forest; the lamb weighed heavily on Merryfellow's shoulder, and since he was hungry besides, he said to his companion: "Look here, this is a nice little spot; we could boil the little lamb here and eat it."—"Perhaps," answered Saint Peter, "but I am no cook; you cook it if you wish, here is the pot for you; meanwhile I will walk about until the lamb is boiled. But do not begin eating before my return; I shall come back in good time."—"Go on, go on!" said Merryfellow. "I know how to cook and will manage the job."

Saint Peter departed, and Merryfellow slaughtered the lamb, put the meat into the pot, and began boiling it. Now the lamb was already boiled, but his companion had not returned; so Merryfellow took the lamb out of the pot, cut it open, and found the heart inside. "This must be the tastiest bit in it," he said, and first he tasted just a little of it, and then ate it all up.

At last Saint Peter returned and said: "You may eat the whole lamb if you like, but give me only the heart."

Merryfellow took knife and fork in hand and began diligently searching among the pieces of lamb meat, pretending he could not find the heart anywhere; finally he muttered through his teeth: "There isn't any here at all."—"What does that mean?" asked Saint Peter. "Truly, I don't know," said Merryfellow, "but anyway, what fools we both are! We are looking for the lamb's heart, and neither of us has thought that a lamb has no heart!"—"Well, that is something new! Every animal has a heart; why should a lamb not have one?"—"No, no, truly, brother! Just think it over and you will immediately understand that it really has no heart!"—"Very well, let it be so!" said Saint Peter. "If there is no heart, then I do not need the lamb either; you may eat it all yourself."—"Whatever I do not eat, I will take with me in my knapsack for the road," said Merryfellow, ate half the lamb, and stuffed the rest into his knapsack.

They went on further, and by Saint Peter's will a wide river cut across their path, and they absolutely had to cross it. So Saint Peter said: "You go first."—"No," answered Merryfellow, "better you go first." And he thought to himself: "If it turns out to be deep, I would rather stay on the bank." Saint Peter stepped into the water, and the water reached only to his knees. Merryfellow also intended to cross, but the water had risen and came up to his throat.

And he began shouting: "Brother, help!" And Saint Peter said: "Confess to me that you ate the lamb's heart."—"No," he answered, "I did not eat it."

And the water kept rising and already reached the soldier's lips. "Help me, brother!" he cried. "Will you confess to me that you ate the lamb's heart?"—"No," answered the soldier, "I did not eat it."

Saint Peter did not wish Merryfellow to drown, so he lowered the water and helped him cross over.

They went on further and came into a kingdom where the princess was dying. Our travelers heard about this, and the soldier said: "Say, brother, this is a windfall for us! If we cure her, perhaps we shall be provided for life!" And it seemed to him that his companion was moving too slowly; so he began hurrying him: "Come on, my dear fellow, hurry up! Otherwise we might be too late!"

But Saint Peter deliberately slowed his pace and kept slowing down, no matter how much his companion hurried him, until finally they learned that the princess had died.

"There now!" said the soldier in vexation. "It's all because you dragged your feet so!"—"Better hold your tongue," answered Saint Peter, "for I not only know how to heal the sick, I can also call the dead back to life."—"Yes, if you can do that, it suits me fine; only you must not take less than half the kingdom for bringing her back to life!"

Then they headed toward the royal castle, where everyone was immersed in great sorrow; there Saint Peter told the king that he undertook to bring the princess back to life.

He was led to the deceased princess, and he said: "Bring me a pot full of water," and when the pot was brought, he ordered everyone to leave the room, keeping only Merryfellow with him.

Then he cut the body of the deceased into pieces, threw the pieces into the pot, lit a fire beneath it, and began boiling them. And when all the flesh had separated from the bones, he took from the pot the thin white bones, laid them on the table, and arranged them in their usual, natural order.

Then he stood before the table and three times pronounced: "Deceased one, arise!" And at the third utterance of these words the princess rose up alive, healthy, and beautiful as before.

The king, of course, was unspeakably glad and said to Saint Peter: "Ask of me whatever reward you desire, and even if you wished for half my kingdom, I would gladly give it to you!"

But Saint Peter answered: "I do not

"I desire no reward." — "What a fool!" thought the soldier to himself; he nudged his companion in the side and whispered to him: "Stop this foolishness! If you need nothing, I wouldn't mind receiving something at least."

Saint Peter wished for nothing; however, the king noticed that his companion was not so selfless, and ordered his treasurer to fill the soldier's knapsack with gold coins.

They went on further, and when they reached the forest, Saint Peter said to Veselchak: "Well, now let us divide the gold." — "Very well," replied the other, "let us divide it."

Saint Peter divided the gold—and divided it into three parts. "What new trick is he up to now?" thought the soldier. "There are only two of us, yet he divides it into three shares."

Having divided the gold, Saint Peter said: "I have divided it very correctly into three shares—one share for me, one for you, and one for him who ate the lamb's heart." — "Oh, but it was I who ate it," Veselchak hastened to reply, quickly grabbing the gold for himself; "I ate it, believe me!" — "Can this be so?" continued Saint Peter. "Did you not yourself assert that the lamb had no heart at all?" — "Eh, my dear fellow, is such a thing conceivable? A lamb has a heart just like any other animal... Why should it not have a heart?" — "Very well then," said Saint Peter, "take all the gold for yourself, but I no longer wish to be your companion; I shall go my own way alone." — "As you please, my dear fellow," said the soldier, "farewell on those terms."

And Saint Peter went another way, while Veselchak thought to himself: "It is better that he has left me; he is somehow too cunning—a miracle worker, perhaps?"

Incidentally, he now had enough money; but he did not know how to handle it, scattered it, gave it away, and after some time found himself with nothing again.

So he came to a country where, according to rumors, a princess had just died. "There now!" he thought. "Here is an excellent opportunity! I will bring her back to life, and certainly make them pay me properly for it."

He went to the king and offered to revive the deceased. Now, rumors had already reached the king that some discharged soldier was wandering about the world reviving the dead; so he thought that Veselchak must be that very soldier.

However, since he did not trust him, he first consulted his counselors, and they told him: "Why not try? Your daughter is dead anyway."

Veselchak ordered water to be brought in a cauldron, then sent everyone out of the room, cut the body of the deceased into pieces, threw them into the cauldron, lit a fire beneath it—all exactly as his companion had done.

The water in the cauldron began to boil, and the meat separated from the bones; then he took the bones out of the cauldron and laid them on the table; however, he did not know in what order they should be arranged, and so he put them together all topsy-turvy.

Then he stood before the table and said: "Deceased, arise!"—and repeated it three times, but the bones did not move.

He repeated the same words another three times—with likewise no result. "Come now, get up, rise, madam," he finally shouted, "or it will go badly for you!"

Scarcely had he spoken these words when Saint Peter, still in the guise of a discharged soldier, appeared to him, entering the room through the window, and said: "Ah, you godless man! How dare you undertake this task, not even understanding that the deceased cannot rise from the dead when you have so confused all her bones?" — "My dear fellow, I did as best I could!" pleaded the soldier. "This time I will rescue you from trouble once more, but I warn you that if you dare attempt anything similar again, great misfortune will befall you... Moreover, do not dare to demand or accept from the king any reward whatsoever, even the most trifling." Then Saint Peter arranged the princess's bones in their proper order, pronounced three times: "Deceased, arise!"—and the princess rose up healthy and beautiful as before.

And Saint Peter departed through the window just as he had come; and Veselchak, extremely pleased that everything had turned out so well for him, grieved only that he had been unable to receive any reward.

"I would like to know what is going on in his head," thought the soldier, "for what he gives with one hand, he takes away with the other, and in this there is simply no sense!" The king began offering Veselchak whatever he desired, but the latter dared not take anything openly; nevertheless, by various hints and cunning, he managed to have the king order his knapsack to be filled with gold—with which he then departed.

When he exited the castle, Saint Peter was standing at the gates and said to him: "See what kind of man you are? I forbade you to take anything whatsoever, yet look, your knapsack is brimming with gold!" — "But what was I to do," retorted the soldier, "when they forcibly stuffed it full for me?" — "Well then, I tell you once more not to dare do anything like this again, or it will go badly for you." — "Eh, brother! Do not worry; now I have plenty of gold; why should I bother washing bones again?" — "Yes, indeed!" said Saint Peter. "Do you think your gold will last long? Well, so that you do not again contemplate treading the forbidden path, I shall endow your knapsack with such a property that whatever you may desire, it shall immediately appear within it. Farewell; we shall not see each other again." — "God be with you!" said the soldier, while thinking to himself: "I am glad you are leaving, you odd fellow! I shall not follow after you!" At that moment, he did not even think about the miraculous power bestowed upon his knapsack.

Veselchak went forth into the wide world and scattered his gold just as he had done the first time. Finally, he was left with only four kreuzers, and it happened that he passed by an inn; he thought: "I must get rid of this money," and ordered wine worth three kreuzers and bread worth one kreuzer.

While sitting there finishing his wine, he suddenly smelled the aroma of roasted goose. Veselchak began looking around and spotted two geese placed in the host's chimney flue. Only then did he remember the miraculous property of his knapsack and decided to test it on these geese.

Thus, stepping out of the house and crossing the threshold, he said: "I wish that the roasted geese from the chimney appear in my knapsack." As soon as he said this, he opened the knapsack, peered inside—and there they were! "That's fine!" he said. "Now I can live without worry!" He went out onto the meadow and pulled the roast from his knapsack. He ate and ate to his heart's content, and saw that some apprentices were approaching, looking at the second, untouched goose with greedy, envious eyes. Veselchak thought: "One is enough for me," called both lads over, and gave them the second goose, saying: "Eat to my health!"

They thanked him, carried the goose into the inn, ordered half a bottle of wine and bread to be served, took out the goose, and set upon it.

The landlady observed them and said to her husband: "Those two are eating goose; go check the chimney flue, isn't this goose one of ours?"

The landlord looked into the flue and saw—it was empty. "Ah, you thieving rascals, you planned to enjoy a goose for free! Pay immediately, or I shall treat you to birch porridge!" — "What thieves are we?" pleaded the apprentices. "That goose was given to us out on the meadow by a discharged soldier." — "Why are you trying to deceive me? A soldier was indeed here, but he left honestly through the door, and I watched him; you are the real thieves, and you must pay me for the goose." But since they could not pay, he took up a stick and drove them out of the inn.

Meanwhile, Veselchak walked and walked along his way and came to a town where near a rich castle stood a wretched inn. He asked to spend the night in the inn, but the host refused, saying: "There is no room for you; the inn is completely full of distinguished guests." — "I wonder at this," said Veselchak, "why does everyone stay with you, and not in that splendid castle?" — "Yes, spending a night there costs something," said the host; "whoever has tried to sleep there has never returned alive." — "If others have tried," said Veselchak, "then why should I not try?" — "Nonsense, drop it," said the host, "you will pay for it with your skin." — "Well, not immediately with my skin; just give me the keys to the castle, and plenty to eat and drink."

The host gave him the keys, gave him food and drink, and then Veselchak went into the castle, supped heartily, and when sleep began to overcome him, stretched himself out there on

floor, because there was no bed.

Soon he fell asleep, but in the middle of the night he was awakened by a terrible noise, and when he rubbed his eyes, he saw in his room nine loathsome devils dancing around him in a circle. "Well then," said Veselchak, "dance, if you wish, as much as you like, but let none dare come close to me." But the devils pressed closer and closer upon him, almost touching his face with their feet in their frenzied dance. "Stand still, you demons!" shouted the soldier; yet they continued crawling toward him just the same. Then Veselchak grew angry, cried out: "I'll soon quiet you down!"—broke off a leg from a chair and began beating them with it.

However, nine devils against one soldier were too many, and while he lunged at those in front, those behind dragged him by his hair and mercilessly tore at it. "Just you wait, you devil-spawn! I'll deal with you!" shouted the soldier. "Crawl all nine of you into my knapsack!"

In an instant, all found themselves inside the knapsack, which he fastened tight on every buckle and threw into a corner.

Then everything suddenly grew quiet, and Veselchak lay down again as before and slept until daybreak.

Then came the innkeeper together with the castle owner, wishing to see what had become of him.

When they saw him alive and well, they were astonished and asked: "Did the spirits here cause you no harm whatsoever?" "They tried," answered the soldier, "but I beat them all into my knapsack. You may peacefully settle again in your castle; not one will come to trouble you anymore."

The castle owner thanked him, generously rewarded him, and wished to keep him in his service, promising to provide for him all his life. "No," said the soldier, "I am accustomed to wandering across the wide world and shall go further."

And indeed, he departed, arrived at a forge, placed his knapsack upon the anvil, and asked the blacksmith and his assistants to strike the knapsack hard with their hammers. They began pounding the knapsack with their enormous hammers, and with such force that the devils raised a pitiful wailing.

When afterward he opened the knapsack, it turned out that of the nine devils eight were already dead, while the ninth, who had managed to creep into a fold of the knapsack and remain alive, slipped out of the knapsack and immediately escaped down into the underworld.

And after this, Veselchak wandered still for many years across the wide world, and whoever knew him could tell much about him.