

34. The King of the Golden River



Part I

Long, long ago, in the mountainous part of a country, there was a fertile valley. There were many waterfalls leaping down the mountain tops, but not into the valley. They all ran down the other side of the mountain. One of the falls was very high and shone like gold in the beams of the evening sun. People called it the Golden River.

Now, though there were no streams running down to the valley itself, the wind constantly brought the clouds to the valley. Even when the rest of the country was dry, it always rained in the valley. In the valley, the wind and the clouds made the crops green, the hay high, the apples red, the grapes purple and the honey sweet. People called it the Treasure Valley.

The Treasure Valley belonged to three brothers – Schwartz, Hans and Gluck. The two older brothers were big, ugly and wicked. They were good farmers but they killed everything that was not profitable for them – even little things like blackbirds and hedgehogs and crickets. They did not treat their servants well and gave them only poor wages. They waited till the corn had become very expensive in the market and then sold it for twice its value. They were very rich but they never ever gave even so much as a penny to the poor. People called them the ‘Black Brothers’.

The youngest of the three brothers was only twelve years old. He was just the opposite of his brothers. He was kind to every living thing though his own brothers were cruel to him and made him do all the cooking and the mending and the housework for them.

One evening, the two brothers had gone out. As usual, they had warned Gluck to ‘let nobody in and give nothing out’. Gluck was to get their dinner ready for them.

It was raining very hard outside and the weather was very cold. Just then, there was a double knock on the door. Gluck went to the window and put his head out to see who it was. He saw the most extra-ordinary looking gentleman standing at the door.

The strange visitor was very short, with a large nose, red cheeks, curly moustache and merry, twinkling eyes. He wore a conical cap as high as himself and a cloak four times as long.

"I am wet. Let me in," said the stranger.

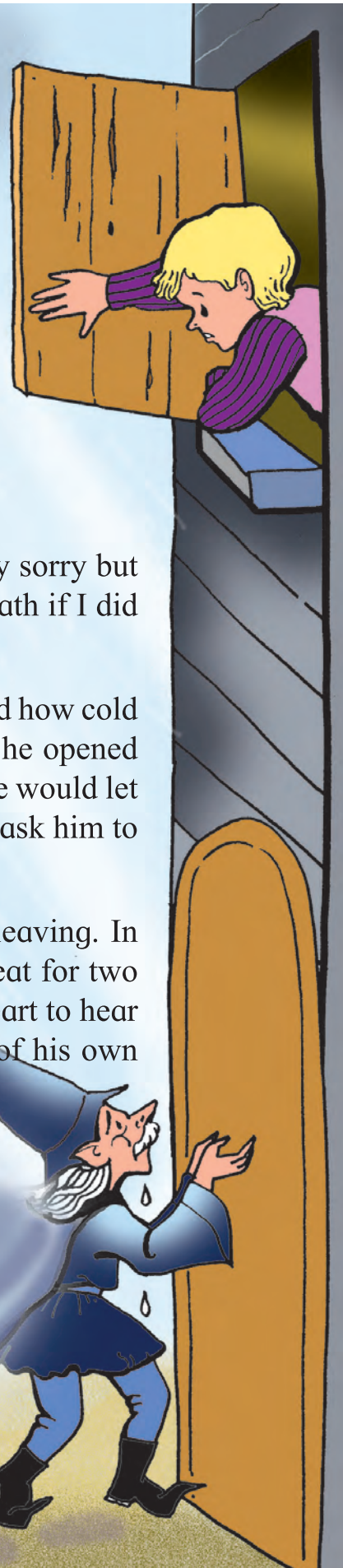
"I beg pardon, Sir," said Gluck. "I'm very sorry but I really can't. My brothers would beat me to death if I did any such thing."

But Gluck saw how hard it was raining and how cold it was, and how wet the gentleman looked. So he opened the door and let the stranger in. Gluck thought he would let the stranger get warm inside for some time and ask him to leave before his brothers came home.

The stranger, however, had no plans of leaving. In fact, he told Gluck that he had had nothing to eat for two days and was very hungry. It melted Gluck's heart to hear this. So he decided to give the stranger a part of his own dinner.

Before the stranger had eaten it, however, the wicked brothers returned. They were shocked to see the little gentleman sitting in the house.

At once, the brothers began to shout at Gluck. Schwartz threw a rolling pin at Gluck. At that instant, the stranger put in his conical cap and the rolling pin went spinning to a corner of the room.



The brothers turned to the visitor and ordered him to get out of the house. The little man asked them humbly to let him stay as it was so cold and wet outside, but the evil brothers wouldn't listen. They rushed at the old man to throw him out of the house. To their surprise, they found that they couldn't touch him. Instead, they were themselves swept into the corner with the rolling pin.

Then the old gentleman gathered his cloak and cap and said, "At twelve o'clock tonight, I'll call again. But since you have treated me so badly, it will be the last visit I pay you." Then he went away like a whirlwind.

That night, a big storm woke the brothers. It shook the house and blew away the roof. Once again, the wicked brothers saw the strange visitor. He was sitting on a cloud bobbing up and down.

"You may go to your brother's room. I have not damaged it," he told Hans and Schwartz. "Remember, this is my last visit. You will find my card on the table." And with those words, he disappeared.

In the morning, the brothers saw from the window that the storm had swept away whole trees and crops from Treasure Valley. Everywhere, they saw only red sand and grey mud. The valley was a picture of ruin. The brothers then crept into the kitchen. On the kitchen table, there was a small, white card.



- **fertile** : able to produce great crops.
- **beams** : rays.
- **wages** : the money that is paid for the work that a person does.
- **mending** : repairing.
- **cloak** : a warm piece of clothing.
- **bobbing** : moving quickly.