



FORTY BROTHERS AND THEIR BLIND SISTER

Once upon a time, there was a father who had forty sons and one daughter, who was blind. From dawn to dusk, he worked hard to feed his children. He ploughed his big field that gave him bushels of rye. In the middle of his field, there was a young apple tree with white branches and under it, there was cool water bubbling in a spring. Their house was nearby.

There were forty-two beds in one of the rooms in the house. The blind girl made the beds every morning and lit a fire under the cauldron in which she made lunch for the whole family. Then she put forty-two bowls on the table along with forty-two spoons.

The autumn was here. The leaves on the apple trees turned yellow and the first apples on the tree were ripe. The father was working, like every day. He whipped his horse to go faster, he collected the rye and brought it to the storehouse in a big bag, and he hitched wooden ploughs onto his oxen. He was then sowing the seeds and his sons were helping him. In three days, they had tilled the whole field.

But when the father, tired from all that hard work, came home, he fell ill. The blind daughter made him a brew from wild roots, but it didn't bring his health back. When he felt that the end was coming, he called his sons and said:

“My dear children! I'm about to take a long journey and I cannot come back.

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Please come to me, I want to stroke your hair one last time.”

When all the sons had said goodbye to their father, he sat up one last time and said:

“Remember that the crops from our field make the best bread. Till it together and live like brothers. Never fight with each other. And I have one more thing to ask you. I want to wet my lips in my final hour with the water that my ancestors drank. Please bring me a jug of water from the spring in the middle of our field.”

The forty brothers took forty jugs and ran to the field. When they came to the spring, they put the jugs under the apple tree, and they started looking around the field. Each broke off a branch and they started measuring the field.

“Brothers why are you measuring the field?” asked the youngest.

“We will divide it!” said thirty-nine voices at once.

They were measuring, dividing, and arguing over each little piece. They were shouting and arguing so passionately that they spilt all the water out of the jugs. When the old man heard the shouts, he asked his daughter in a thin voice: “What are they doing?”

“They are fighting in the field,” answered the blind girl.

“And did they bring me any water?”

“No, father, they did not,” she replied.

When the old man heard that, he got very sad, sighed deeply and said:

“Damn you, sons of mine, may you change into moles and spend your life digging around in the earth if you cannot get enough of it.”

When he said those words, he breathed his last breath and the sons changed into moles. They went running in all directions, dug forty holes, and disappeared in the ground.

The blind girl buried her father and went out into the field looking for her brothers. She was searching all around the field, shouting their names, but nobody called back. At the end of the day, the poor orphan girl sat down under the apple tree and started crying bitterly.

A little water lizard who lived on the bottom of the spring heard her. It felt sorry for the girl and it took pity on her.

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It came out of the water and said: “Don’t you cry, little girl, your brothers are alive. I will tell you where to find them.

There is a field not far away with a dried-up well. If you stand in a bucket and come down to the bottom, you will find a wooden board. When you lift it, you will find stone stairs leading to the underworld. Go down those stairs until you get all the way down.”

The blind girl came back home, took a basket, and returned to the field. She shook all the apples off the tree and when she counted them, there were exactly forty of them. She put them in her basket – one for each brother. She found the dried-up well, climbed into the bucket and lowered herself to the bottom. She lifted the wooden board and went down the stairs. She walked for twenty weeks. She was tired and hungry, but she never even touched the apples.

On the first day of the twenty-first week, she found herself in the underworld.

“Who are you looking for?” said the voice of an old woman.

“I want to find my forty brothers. Do you know where they are?” replied the girl.

“They’re here. They’re shut in a little house. Three times a day, I give them some salted earth to eat; when they start squealing of thirst, I give them each a cup of water to drink. They take the cup into their front paws, but as soon as it approaches their mouth, the bottom falls off the cups and the water spills out. They can never quench their thirst.”

“Lead me to them, grandma!” asked the blind girl.

The old lady agreed, and they went toward the house. When they entered, the moles squealed sadly.

“Can I give each of them an apple?” asked the girl.

“Give it to them!” nodded the old lady.

The girl went from one to another with her basket and she handed an apple to each one. When the moles bit into the juicy apples a miracle happened. As soon as they swallowed the first bite, they changed back into people. When the blind sister heard that, she started crying with joy.

The youngest brother only ate half of his apple. He gave the other half to his sister because she was also hungry. The girl bit into the apple and then another miracle

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happened! She could suddenly see.

The brothers' joy was endless. They became human again and their sister got her eyesight back.

They set out for home. They walked for twenty weeks and on the first day of the twenty-first week they walked out of the dried-up well. And do you know what they saw? There was a lot of beautiful rye growing on their fields.

The brothers took forty scythes and they harvested the field together. They brought the rye to their father's storehouse and the daughter prepared the dough for bread. She baked one batch of bread that she gave to the poor to honour their poor old father. The second batch she baked was for her brothers who ate it and then they lived happily ever after.