



THE FOUR MASTERS

A long time ago, far away in the North, there lived a poor farmer who had four sons. When they had grown up and become young men, he called them to him and said,

“I have grown old, my sons, and I cannot keep feeding you anymore. You must go out into the world and learn a craft.”

The brothers loved and respected their father deeply, and so they packed their things and prepared to travel. The very next morning, they said their goodbyes and set off to explore the world and learn worldly skills.

Soon, they came to a crossroad. The eldest brother pounded his walking stick on the ground and said,

“My brothers! This is where we must go our separate ways. We will go forth and learn a craft to our best abilities, and in exactly four years, we will return to this spot and meet each other once again.”

All the brothers agreed, and they hugged one another, wished each other luck, and each left on a different road.

After a while, the eldest met a strange man standing by the side of the road.

“Where are you going?” asked the stranger.

“I want to learn a craft that I could make a living out of,” replied the eldest brother.

THE FOUR MASTERS

The man nodded, pleased with this answer, and said, “Well, my boy! Why don’t you join me and become my apprentice? I will teach you how to steal masterfully. See, I am a master thief by trade, and a very good one at that!”

The eldest thought for a moment. It wasn’t the best choice to learn such a dishonest craft, he thought, but there was an awful lot of money in thievery and his father hadn’t been specific about what kind of skill he should have! And so he agreed to become the man’s apprentice.

The second brother met a wise man on the road.

“Where are you going, my friend?” asked the scholar.

“I’m following the road and looking for someone who can teach me a skill! I want to learn a craft so I can make a living,” the brother replied.

“If you become my apprentice,” the scholar said, “you can be an astronomer in no time. It is a widely respected profession, and you will learn the stars as well as the gods themselves!”

The young man liked the sound of that and agreed to join the astronomer. After several years, when he had learned everything, the scholar gave him a telescope as a gift.

The third brother had been walking down the road for several hours when he suddenly heard a shot and, soon after, he met a hunter.

“I will teach you to hunt,” the hunter said. “With this skill, you will never be hungry again!” The boy apprenticed with the hunter for several years, and when he was as good a hunter as he could be, the hunter gave him a rifle as a gift.

“This will be your gun,” the hunter told him. “You will always hit your target with it, and as long as you shoot with a pure heart, it will never disappoint you,” said the hunter.

The youngest brother walked for a long, long time, and he didn’t meet anyone on the road. Finally, he reached the edge of a big city and met a kindly tailor. The boy didn’t much like the idea of sitting bent over fabrics for the rest of his life, but he let the tailor persuade him that this would be a good skill and he began to learn from him. A few years passed and he learned to love the skill, and when he was saying goodbye to his master, the tailor gave him a needle as a gift.

THE FOUR MASTERS

“This needle has magical powers,” the tailor said. “It can sew together anything you can think of. And it will make it even stronger than before.”

Four years passed by in the blink of an eye for the brothers, and before they knew it they were meeting at the crossroads. It was a joyous reunion, and they happily turned toward home and went to see their father. At home, they sat down and talked about their experiences all night, explaining what they had learned.

The very next day, a message reached the village that a huge dragon had kidnapped the royal princess. The king, the message said, had promised half his kingdom and the princess’ hand in marriage to anyone who could bring her back safe and sound!

Immediately, the four brothers set off to save the princess. Soon enough they had reached the dragon’s giant lair. Right next to the lair there was a giant lake, where frogs were croaking, and on the other side there was a tall rock. The astronomer brother took out his telescope and focused on the rock.

“Ah! I see the princess. She is sitting in a cave at the bottom of the rock, and the dragon is lounging right next to her.”

Quickly, the brothers rushed to borrow a boat from a nearby fisherman, and as they approached the cave, rowing as quietly as possible, they could see the sleeping dragon and the imprisoned princess as clear as day.

The eldest brother snuck toward the cave quickly and quietly. His apprenticeship had taught him how to be stealthy and get inside anyplace unnoticed. It didn’t take long before the young man had skillfully stolen the princess from under the dragon’s snoring nose. They rushed back to the boat, where the other brothers were waiting, and started to row away as fast as they could, but the dragon woke up before they could escape!

Angry, the dragon spread his wings as wide as he could, snorted angrily, and took off for the lake. As he approached the boat he started breathing fire. The third brother quickly picked up his rifle, took perfect aim and shot the dragon. The dragon crashed down and his tail fell right on the boat, smashing it in half! Suddenly they were all swimming in ice-cold water. The youngest brother took out his magic needle and, with a few swift movements, sewed the boat back

THE FOUR MASTERS

together! He helped the princess and his brothers out of the water and they sailed, triumphant, back to the royal palace.

“As I promised, the saviour of my daughter will get half the kingdom and the princess’ hand in marriage. But which of you will it be?” The king asked.

The brothers couldn’t decide, because they each thought the other deserved the reward. The king, impatient, stepped in and said,

“Well, clearly you are all noble of spirit and deserve equal credit! I will give each of you a part of the kingdom. However, I cannot split my daughter in four, so I will let her choose which of you she likes best, and three more brides for you.”

The brothers were very happy with that idea. The princess had fallen in love with the astronomer, and chose to marry him, and they each were given a piece of the kingdom. For three days and nights, the kingdom celebrated, and the brothers and their wives lived happily ever after.