



HEY, HO – GROUND, OPEN UP!

There were once two brothers whose father died. He left an inheritance, but they did not split it fairly. The elder one took all the sheep, horses and the whole farm. He made the younger one move to a cottage next door and only left him what he didn't want for himself: a few crumbs, leftovers, and a few lousy oxen. The younger brother didn't want to starve, and so he went to the forest with his oxen and chopped down maple trees. He used the wood to make spoons and plates, and then he sold them at the market. He was doing well while there were still maple trees in the forest, so he could keep making his goods for the market.

Then one day, he came to the forest and he couldn't find a single proper maple tree anywhere. And as he was sadly searching the forest far and wide, he heard footsteps. He quickly hid, and what did he see? Twelve muscly men, bandits, each with a bag full of things over his shoulder. They stopped in front of a rock and one of them called: "Hey, ho – ground, open up!"

The ground rumbled like a thunder and shook, then the rock crackled and opened. They all threw their bags into the opening and that same man called: "Hey, ho – ground, close up!"

The ground shook, the rock crackled and closed, and the men marched to

HEY, HO – GROUND, OPEN UP!

wherever they came from. The woodworker didn't hesitate. He waited for a while for the air to clear, and when there was no one in sight, he stood in front of the rock and called: "Hey, ho – ground, open up!"

The ground shook, then the rock crackled and opened. He entered the opening in the rock and there was a treasure such as he had never seen before. He even found the twelve bags that the bandits had thrown in and by God, they were full of gold coins! He took them all to his wheelbarrow and when he was finished loading, he called: "Hey, ho – ground, close up!"

The ground shook, then the rock crackled and closed. He hurried his oxen and he didn't stop until he was in front of his cottage. At home, his wife was angry because he was late and asked where he had been. But when she saw that instead of wood, he was bringing bags of money, her anger disappeared. She hugged her husband and laughed joyfully.

"Well, you should borrow a scale from your brother, so we know how much money we have," she said.

And so, the younger brother went to ask for a scale.

Until the morning, they were weighing how rich they had become. Then he went to return the scale to his older brother, but as his bad luck would have it, he forgot one gold coin inside one of the bowls.

When they met again the next day, the eldest asked his younger brother: "And so, what were you weighing on my scales?"

"Oooh well, you know... I exchanged some peas for my wooden spoons, so we wanted to know how much we got," he lied.

"Well, you got some large peas indeed. See here, you forgot one!" said the elder brother and pulled out the coin. "Now, let me hear it. Who did you rob? Tell me, or I'll take you to the guards," he insisted.

And so, with his voice shaking, the younger brother had to tell the truth and explain what had happened in the woods.

The elder brother could not wait. He took his oxen and his carriage and he went exactly where his little brother had sent him. He wanted to remember exactly the words he needed, and he kept repeating them to himself.

HEY, HO – GROUND, OPEN UP!

“Hey, ho – ground, open up!” he called when he arrived.

The ground shook, the rock crackled and opened. He had never seen such riches and he was already imagining himself never having to lift a finger again. Until the rest of his days, he would only drink and eat and lie around with his feet up. And so, he ran to the opening to load his carriage full of gold, when suddenly, with a great crack, the rock closed behind him and he was standing frozen in the dark. He was so scared that he even forgot the magic spell to open the rock again.

At that very moment, the twelve bandits were coming to hide their new loot in the rock.

“And what are you looking for?!” shouted one of them when he saw the brother. He didn’t even have time to say a word before they caught him, tied him up and shut him in a barrel, where they left him.

His wife was waiting for him for a whole day and a whole night. When he still didn’t come home, she cried and went to ask her brother-in-law whether he knew something.

“Brother-in-law, something is very wrong. My husband went to the rock last night and he still hasn’t come back. I’m sure something bad happened to him,” she moaned in front of his door.

“And what do I care? I never sent him there,” snapped the younger brother.

But he did have a very kind heart after all. He felt sorry for his brother, even though he was mean and greedy, and so he decided to go help him. He guessed that the bandits caught him stealing their money, and that if he was still alive, he would be trapped inside the rock.

He came up with a plan. He told his sister-in-law to prepare twelve barrels. He took them on his wagon and filled only one of them with strong wine. Then he set off.

When he came to the magic rock, he started shouting: “Giddyup, hey, ho! Move, you lazy horses. We need to take this wine to the royal court.”

The twelve bandits, who were sitting around a fire, heard him and became very excited about their new loot. They came closer and started asking questions: “And who are you?” asked one of them.

HEY, HO – GROUND, OPEN UP!

“I am a wine merchant and I’m taking all these barrels to the royal court. Drink as much as you like, just let me pass,” the young man replied. There was no need to convince the bandits, and so they opened the barrel closest to the edge. It was the one that was actually full. And they drank and drank, until they were all quite drunk.

When they were all fast asleep, the fake merchant stood in front of the rock and called: “Hey, ho – ground, open up!”

The ground shook, then the rock crackled and opened. He immediately heard his greedy brother cheer and celebrate from inside a barrel. When the younger brother set him free, they threw eleven empty barrels down from the barrel, rolled them into the rock and shut all the bandits inside them. Then, with two voices, they called: “Hey, ho – ground, close up!”

The ground shook, then the rock crackled and closed. The brothers went back home to their wives and they were happy to have their husbands back home alive and well. With or without gold coins.

And the bandits? They are probably still inside those barrels to this day unless somebody set them free.