



## THE THREE COINS

There was once a poor man who made his living by digging ditches. One day, when he was digging on the side of the king's road, the king himself passed by. The king stopped to watch the man work for a while and thought, "My goodness, this must be such tiring work, digging in this rocky, hard earth! This man must be very rich, because there's no point doing this for only a few measly coins." After watching for another minute, the king said, "Excuse me, how much money do you get paid for your work?"

"I make three coins a day, sir," the poor man said.

The king was shocked. He couldn't believe his ears.

"How can you possibly live on just three coins?" he asked.

"Oh, I don't live on three coins. If I had three coins, my life would be easy. I have to return one, lend another and live on the third," the man said.

The king was so confused that his head started aching, but he still couldn't see how it was possible for the man to live, so he said, "I don't understand what you mean by that. I can't seem to get my head around it."

"It's very simple, sir," the man said. "I take care of my father, who raised me, and I give one coin back to him because when he was bringing me up, he took care of me and gave me money. I also have a son, so I lend my second coin to him

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and someday, when I am old and unable to work, he'll take care of me in return. And then I live on the one coin I have left."

"Unbelievable," the king muttered to himself, terribly surprised. "I pay twelve advisors who keep asking me for more and more money, because they say they haven't got enough to live on. If they're that wise, let's see if they can prove they deserve more money. I'm going to give them the riddle of the three coins to see if they can understand it. But if they come to you to ask for the answer, don't tell them anything unless you see my face." Then, still deep in his thoughts, he gave the man a satchel full of gold coins and continued on his way.

Later that day, the king called for his twelve advisors. "I met a man today," he told them, "who only gets paid three coins a day, and every day he returns one, lends another, and lives on the last. If you don't explain to me how that's possible in three days, I will fire you all."

The advisors went to their chambers, confused, and spent the rest of the day conferring and debating the riddle. They disagreed so much that they shouted at each other. They suggested one solution after another, but not a single advisor could properly explain how it could be possible to return a coin, lend a coin, and live on the third. The next day passed in the same way, and on the morning of the third day they were at the end of their wits. They decided to find the person who gave the riddle to the king. They searched and searched, but they couldn't find anyone. Finally, as the day was coming to an end, they found a man who was digging on the side of the king's road.

"You, man!" They shouted. "Did you tell the king a riddle?"

"I did," he said.

They insisted he tell them the answer, but he wasn't scared of them and he held his tongue. "Only when I see the king's face, can I tell you the answer. That was the king's order," he said.

"How in the world can we find an image of the king to show you? Pick anything else! We can give you anything!" said one of the advisors. The others nodded in agreement, and they began bringing the man expensive things and promising him all kinds of favours so he would tell them the answer. The digger refused to

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say a word. Finally, one of them brought him a big wooden chest.

“This can be yours. All you have to do is give us the solution to the riddle,” the advisor said, and he opened the chest to show the man that it was full of royal gold coins. As the man looked into the chest, he saw the king’s image on the coins.

“Well,” he said, “Now that I have seen an image of the king, I can give you the answer! It’s very simple. I take care of my father and I give him one of my coins back because he used to take care of me and give me money. I lend my second coin to my son because someday, when I’m old, he’ll take care of me in return. And then I live on the last coin.”

The advisors were very excited and hurried to the king’s chamber, all shouting the answer at the same time. They all felt very wise, now that the man had told them the answer, but the king didn’t believe they had come to the answer on their own and called the man to him.

“How dare you break your word to me?” he asked. “Have you no respect for your king?”

“I did nothing wrong, sir.” The man said. “I was silent as a grave while the advisors promised me the world, brought me their entire fortunes, just to get the answer. The thing that finally loosened my tongue was a chest full of royal coins, because I saw your image on them. Those were your terms, so I gave them the answer.”

“That’s very smart, indeed,” the king said, and suddenly an idea came to him. “How would you like to be my chief advisor?”

The man was humble and hardworking as well as wise, and the king wasted no time in making him the official Chief Advisor. Then, instead of giving his twelve other advisors more money, he dissolved their council entirely and gave them jobs digging ditches.

After that, the man brought his father and son to live with him in the palace, and the twelve men never again went to the king to complain.