

## THE BLACKSMITH AND THE BAKER

A long time ago in a small village near a forest there lived a Baker. He worked through the night baking cakes and bread for his wife to sell in their little shop at the front of the bakery. They were a kind and friendly couple and were blessed with two delightful children.

Every Sunday the baker rose earlier than usual from his sleep and met his friend the Blacksmith at the village inn, where they drank ale, played cards and dominoes or sang along to an old stringed instrument the blacksmith brought along and played.

Often, as they left the inn to make their way home, the blacksmith would embrace his friend the baker and remark how wonderful it was to enjoy such times as these, of music, laughter and friendship.

And then the baker would walk off in the direction of the village and the blacksmith would climb aboard his old cart and encourage the horse hack to his forge just at the edge of the forest.

The blacksmith lived alone but his days were never empty for he worked hard all day and in the evening played his music

And often he would visit his friend at the bakery and enjoy the company of his wife and children who laughed and played with him as if he were their favourite uncle.

One Sunday, returning from the inn the blacksmith unhitched the old horse from his cart, stabled the old fellow but as he walked across the cobbled courtyard he noticed something shining in his forge.

He picked the gleaming metal from the forge and as he held it in his hand it shone like gold.

With a small hammer he tapped it into a regular shape at the same time knocking off the scrap of impurity at the edge and as he did this he was so amazed at how much like gold it was to work with, he decided to test it.

Again and again he tested it and each time the results were the same .....it was pure gold. He had stumbled upon the alchemist's dream of turning base metal in to gold. All he had to do was remember which metals he had worked with and tossed in to the flames that morning.

He worked through the night, heating, cooling, testing and then in to the next day and the next. He pulled the gates across his cobbled courtyard and when customers called to him he would shout in reply, "Sorry too busy. See the new blacksmith in the village".

And then, at last, he discovered the right formula and was able at every attempt to turn base metal in to gold ....

Over the years he had collected tons of metal and the forest was all around him for firewood and so, feverishly he set about making gold.

Piles and piles of gold, shaped into small bars and stored in a small room beneath a trap door in the kitchen .....

One Sunday when the blacksmith again wasn't at the inn the baker rode to his friend's forge at the edge of the forest and called through the bushes that had grown over the locked gates.

The blacksmith growled "Go away", but the baker persisted. "It's your friend, I've brought you fresh bread".

But now the blacksmith had only one friend and that was gold and he called angrily, "Go away I tell you, go away".

And the flames of the forge roared as he pumped the bellows in anger.

The baker rode home and his wife and children were saddened by the sorry tale and wondered what on earth could be affecting their friend the blacksmith.....

As time went by nobody called at the forest forge anymore which was by now dismal and overgrown. But the baker could not forget his friend and decided that on the approaching Sunday he would not tell anyone but, instead of going to the inn, would try again to speak to the blacksmith.

When Sunday came he kissed his wife, climbed on his horse and set off determined to gain a reply at the forge, but when he arrived at the forge it was strangely silent.

No roaring flames, no anvil ringing, not even an angry cry of, "Go away".

The baker decided to climb the tall gates so worried was he about his friend. He tethered his horse and then after a great effort managed to enter the forge over the gates covered in brambles that had sprung up all around.

The courtyard was deserted and so he tip toed in to the house hoping to find the blacksmith. There was no sign of him anywhere but then he noticed the trap door in the kitchen floor was raised and slowly walked over to it to peer into the opening below. Two of the ladder's rungs had broken and buried beneath the earth and gold bars that had collapsed upon him was his friend .....

The baker scrambled below- and clawed at the earth and bars to reveal his friend's face. Slowly the blacksmith's eyes opened and he lightly smiled as he recognised the baker then his eyes filled with tears as all at once he was ashamed.

The baker helped the blacksmith back in to the kitchen and bathed his wounds then watched him eat the food he had brought.

In turn the blacksmith embraced him and thanked him for all he had done then asked that he leave him until he was ready in his heart to see him again.

His good friend understood and agreed, saying he looked forward to the day they once again sang and played in the village inn and, as he left he promised not to tell a soul of what he had seen that day.

The weeks past and still the blacksmith did not call at the village inn or the baker's house and so again the baker called at the forge and again scaled the gates overgrown with brambles. But this time the blacksmith had gone. He had left a note on the table saying he must go far away and that all the gold was for the baker and his family. The baker was so upset he slammed the trap door shut on the gleaming gold then rode furiously into the forest in pursuit of his friend.

He did not know how long ago the blacksmith had left but lie resolved never to turn back until he had found him.

The full moon had lit the forest when at last he came upon the old horse and cart and barred it's path.

The blacksmith said that shame had driven him away and that he had left the gold for his friend, but the baker told him their friendship was worth more than all the gold in the World and begged him to return

Finally the blacksmith agreed and with the baker's horse walking beside them the two men rode the old cart back through the forest to resume their life and friendship just the way it used to be.

Some while later a magnificent statue was erected in the village square.

It was of two friends standing together, smiling, and everyone congratulated the blacksmith, who made it, for not only was it it wonderful work, they all marvelled that somehow he had given it the appearance or pure gold.

But of course that could never have been.....