

The Shining Loaf

By Isabel Wyatt

Once in the castle of a great kingdom there lived a king and his only daughter. Now it happened that the king became sick and his daughter was afraid that he might die if she did not find help. All the doctors in the kingdom had done their best, but none could make him well again. Not knowing where else to go, the Princess set out to find the Wise Woman who lived down among the people of the town. There she found her beside the hearth in which a fire of wheat straw was burning with clear golden flames. The Wise Woman was kneading shining dough into a golden loaf of bread. The Wise Woman welcomed the Princess in and bade her speak.

"My father is very sick and no one can help him," cried the Princess. "Do you know what might make him well again?" "Yes," said the Wise Woman. "Three crumbs from a shining loaf of bread that is a free gift from the people of his kingdom." "We have brought the finest bakers from all the world to bake in our castle," said the Princess. But the Wise Woman said, "For the King to be well, it must be a gift freely given by the people of his own kingdom."

So the Princess thanked the Wise Woman for her wise words and went off to the town baker. "Please, Baker, can you bake me a shining loaf?" she asked. "If you can bring me some shining flour," the Baker said. So on to the mill went the Princess, where she asked, "Please, Miller, can you grind me some shining flour?" "If you will bring me some shining grain," the Miller told her.

So on to the threshing barn went the Princess, where she asked, "Please, Thresher, will you thresh me some shining grain?" "If you will bring me a shining sheaf," the Thresher told her. So on to the fields went the Princess, where she found the Reaper and asked, "Please, Reaper, will you reap me a shining sheaf?" "If you will sow me some shining seed," said the Reaper.

So on to the ploughland went the Princess, where she found the Sower and asked, "Please, Sower, will you sow me some shining seed?" The Sower was standing beside a young tree listening to the sweet song of a bird. "Surely her song is a gift," said the Sower. "Then let the sowing be a gift too." And as he sowed, he thought, "Why do I feel so happy?"

The young wheat sprang up, grew green and tall, then turned golden and ready for harvest. The Princess went to the Reaper and showed him the golden wheat. "It was a gift from the Sower," she said. "Then let the reaping be a gift too." And as he reaped a shining sheaf, he thought, "Why do I feel so happy?" The Princess took the shining sheaf to the Thresher. "It was a gift from the Reaper," she said. "Then let the threshing be a gift too." And as he threshed the shining grain he thought, "Why do I feel so happy?"

The Princess took the shining grain to the Miller. "It was a gift from the Thresher," she said. "Then let the milling be a gift too." And as he ground the shining flour, he thought, "Why do I feel so happy?" The Princess took the shining flour to the Baker. "It was a gift from the Miller," she said. "Then let the baking be a gift too." And as he mixed it and kneaded it, and shaped it, and put it in to bake, he thought, "Why do I feel so happy?"

With the shining loaf the Princess went to the Wise Woman and together they took it to the King. "Here, father," said the Princess. "Eat some of this golden bread. It is a gift from the people of your kingdom." When the King had eaten but three crumbs, he was no longer sick, but well and strong. And remembering always the gift from the people of his kingdom, he ruled kindly and wisely to the end of his days.